

THOMAS BURKE



A

TEA-SHOP

IN

LIMEHOUSE

A TEA-SHOP IN LIMEHOUSE

A TEA-SHOP IN LIMEHOUSE

By
THOMAS BURKE



BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1931

Copyright, 1927, 1929, 1930, 1931,

BY THOMAS BURKE

All rights reserved

Published March, 1931

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

OLD QUONG

THESE are some of the many fables told to me over a space of years by my old friend, Mr. Quong, who lives in that ivory tower of mine which the map of London names Limehouse. He is very old, and has been so long in England that he knows far more about us English than I like any foreigner to know. How he acquired this knowledge I can't bring him to confess, but as he makes close and constant study of those journals most representative of the best of English life and thought — I have often noticed in his room the *News of the World* overlaying the *Spectator*, and the sheets of the *Observer* mixed up with those of the *Daily Mail* — and as so many leaders of the most bright and juvenile movements now visit his tea-shop, and he is an adroit eaves-dropper, the mystery is perhaps no mystery. He told me these fables in the back-room of that tea-shop — a room that is a salad of Kwang Tung village and Cockney slum, and reeks of fried fish, cinnamon, Gold Flake tobacco, *gin-seng* and the sea. They could

have been told in five minutes, but they were not; his narrative method is not yours or mine, but rather that of the after-dinner speaker. Although their narration was in no way interrupted, each of them filled three or four hours of an evening, their narration being itself only a sequence of interruptions to his large and opulent silences. They came out in odd strips, like cuttings from an unseen length of material. They came in phrases that were half-formed, and that bore to English only the likeness that the Scottish dialect bears to the Scandinavian tongues. So that I had to make jumping guesses at the course and points of them, and compound each hiatus as best as I could. If by my infelicity I have misrepresented him, I know he will forgive me, for he has in rich measure that virtue which marks our minor poets and enfranchised citizens — a serene tolerance of misrepresentation.

CONTENTS

OLD QUONG	v
THE SWEET ENEMY	1
THE MINISTERING ANGEL	15
THE FAULTLESS PAINTER	27
THE SHADOW AND THE BONE	43
THE SILVER STAR	57
THE CASE OF VALENTINE THRILL	69
WE ARE THE MUSIC-MAKERS	85
THE YELLOW IMPS	99
THE OBSCENITY OF GLAMIS FLANG	117
THE BEAUTIFUL END	131
JOHN BROWN'S BODY	143
DESIRABLE VILLA	159
THE SECRET OF FRANCESCO SHEDD	177
THE HANDS OF MR. OTTERMOLÉ	193
AN ANGEL UNAWARES	227
HOTEL CÔTE D'AZUR	241

THE SWEET ENEMY

THE SWEET ENEMY

I THINK (said old Quong, as he handed me the weekly paper I had shown him) — I think it may be accepted as a fact — nay, more, as a truth — that you have a secret enemy. But I do not understand why you should allow this to discompose you. After all, when we are presented with a man of whom it is said that nobody has a spiteful word to say against him, we are — are we not? — presented with a man who has failed. The world's smile is almost proof of his ineptitude. Rather than allow yourself to be discomposed, you should rejoice; for there is this great comfort in having an enemy — your friends may desert you, but never your enemy. So long as you have an enemy you have the satisfaction of knowing that there is always one person in the world who is deeply interested in you and your doings. Take the case of Ah Fook.

Some years ago there lived in Limehouse two men — one a poor scholar and teacher of English named Wing Moy; the other a rich gaming-house keeper named Ah Fook. Wing lived in one room in the

Causeway, close to Ho Ling, and Ah lived in the ample circuit of a suite of rooms over his three shops in Pennyfields, which, as you know, is on the other side of West India Dock Road.

Now Ah Fook hated Wing Moy with a hate that bit with a hundred little white teeth, though if anybody had asked him just what cause he had to hate Wing Moy, he would have found it difficult to name a cause that sounded like a cause. But by general circumstance he was ripe for the business of hating this man. To begin with, they had once been friends. That almost goes without saying, for in no other way can true hate be born. Further, in many matters Wing Moy was very much like himself. He came from the same province, and talked in the same way, and walked in the same gait, and had much the same gestures that he had: the same trick of turning up one corner of the mouth after speaking, the same slow and deliberate manner of eating. Similarities of this kind have borne many otherwise unaccountable hates: nothing is so exasperating as to see your own silly little ways in another, just as there are no sins of other people that arouse so fiercely our loathing and indignation as those that are our own secret sins. So that they were well set for trouble, and when Ah Fook became rich and Wing Moy remained poor, it came.

Ah Fook began in a small way with a gaming-

house, and went on in a large way as a money-lender. Both lines prospered exceedingly, and in two years he had so much money that two years before he wouldn't have believed that there was as much in the world. With success he changed, as people before him have been known to do. He wore success like the trappings of a British Field-Marshal. It worked itself into his eyes, his mouth, his voice, his walk, and the whole detail of his life. Its *motif* was repeated so monotonously, and he was so benignly arrogant towards poor creatures who were not successful, that Wing Moy soon found his manners unbearable, and daintily told him so. To which he replied, not so daintily, because his mouth was full of success, that he, for his part, was conscious of no marked desire to be seen about with the shabby and the obscure. Thus were the beans spilt.

And in their spilling two things happened: not only was the friendship ended, but Ah Fook's hate was begun. For, though he no longer desired the friendship of Wing Moy, he did desire his attention. He had always, in their meetings, felt unpleasantly inferior to the suave-mannered and clear-minded scholar, and success made him take the foolish attitude of "You thought me good for nothing. Look at me now!" He wanted Wing Moy's recognition in any form — approval or jealousy or hate. And he got none of them. All he got was indifference. Wing Moy noted his

success, and then turned his eyes to more important things. Not with any intention of slight, but simply because material success was a matter that meant nothing to him. Ah Fook tried to tell himself that Wing Moy was a fool, not worth a moment's consideration by the serious, but his reason wouldn't have it. Wing Moy wasn't a fool; if he were, Ah Fook wouldn't be hating him. It was because he wasn't a fool, but in many ways was like Ah Fook, and in other ways was the kind of man that Ah Fook would like to be, that Ah Fook wanted his respect above all other. But Wing Moy remained indifferent to demonstrated power and glory, and although Ah Fook stretched his ears for a word of jealousy or hate, all that he ever received were a few words that had been delivered, as it were, over the shoulder during an English lesson — something about the distressing spectacle afforded by wealth in the hands of those whose culture was not adequate to its fit use.

The hate grew quickly, and it spread from hate of him for his indifference to Ah Fook, to hate of him for his indifference to being hated. Of any two men fighting in the street one is always a reluctant fighter. So here. Wing Moy had been told that Ah Fook hated him, but, after a few seconds of wondering why, he had forgotten it. He didn't in the least mind being hated, and he went his bland and simple way

in poverty, without rancour to any or resentment of others' rancour.

And now every day that Wing Moy lived was an addition to the sum of Ah Fook's hate of him. So high did this hate grow, that although Ah Fook detested the sight of the placid scholar, detested his clothes, his face, and all those mannerisms that were so like his own, he could not keep away from him. The perversity of the human heart compelled him to gnaw upon this aching tooth. He felt that no matter what fine things he might achieve, this man would never applaud or envy him; and the thought of that made the applause of others flat and without salt; and the thought that he was allowing this man to spoil that applause increased his hate tenfold. Knowing that he would gain only increased irritation, he would walk in his finest clothes the streets that Wing Moy used, trying vainly to sneer at poverty. And he would come back hot and disordered, for Wing Moy's self-sufficient poverty was itself a silent sneer at success. He would wake up in the night and hold long arguments with Wing Moy on the virtue of success, and would confute him as he could never in reality confute him. In the middle of a meal he would think of him, and his gusto for food would be gone, and his head and stomach would become a jungle. No matter how strongly his reason urged

him to shake the man out of his life, his heart would not let him do it: he was bound to him by the firmest of all ties — the tie of antagonism.

His hate grew to be a necessary part of his daily life. Every morning, however his affairs might stand, however empty his interest in other things, there was always his interest in *this*. However dull the streets might be, they were certain to afford one bitter and burning thrill. He thought each morning of a thousand delicately excoriating insults, but his knowledge of Wing Moy showed him their emptiness. He tried to think of ways of humbling him, until he saw the impossibility of humbling the humble. He rehearsed the scene of the creature begging bread of him, of making the *kao-tao*, and of himself having him thrown to the gutter. He tried to perceive ways of ruining him, but there was no way by which a wealthy man could use his power upon a teacher of English who was already nine-tenths ruined. He thought of all manner of foolish ways of ridding the streets of him. The creature was a blot upon the agreeable landscape garden he had laid around himself, and he would know no full joy of his wealth until it was removed. But all he could do was to wish, and to burn prayer-papers to his fathers for the swift obliteration of the blot; and to go on hating him.

This he did; and then, when he had given up all hope, and had come to see the hated thing as a lasting

punishment that some unnoted misdeed had earned, his wishes were granted.

Upon a morning of summer, when the blue-misty furlongs of West India Dock Road had become a channel of dreaming gold, Wing Moy crept out of the mouth of Limehouse Causeway and, with the downcast head of studious abstraction, started to cross the road. At the same moment a motor-bus from the Isle of Dogs curved into the straight and made a headlong acceleration, and the next moment saw Wing Moy and the motor-bus in an unhappy and unequal marriage. The motor-bus skidded for a few yards and pulled up on the pavement with its bonnet in a shop-window. Wing Moy lay on the spot where it had divorced him. The swiftest helpers saw at once that he was dead.

In this little quarter news has means of spreading that make Ariel and beam radio look like an express delivery messenger. Almost in the moment that Wing Moy knew that he was dead, Ah Fook knew it; and at the news the sun shone out from golden mist to yellow blaze, and the white clouds rose higher in the sky, and the streets became wider and lengthened their prospects. The world relaxed and opened out, as at the sudden removal of intolerable pressure. Every pulse in his body was a chuckle. For two years he had lived in fog, and fog had clouded the play of

his nerves. Now, at last, the air was sparkling; one could see about one, and one could walk anywhere without fear of hateful collisions. He was rich and successful, and though he had tasted all that wealth gave, he had not been able, until now, to achieve its ultimate relish. Now, there was no shadow to come between him and the savour of the cup, no spectre of a cold mind withholding approval, no corner of his heart that would see his success and its honouring canopies with the eyes of another; no fumes of his own hate to cloud his scented garden. All those around him — all of them — acknowledged him, some with friendly respect, others with envy or fear, which are synonyms for respect, and sweeter to the mind's palate. In one moment life was cleansed, and a motor-bus had set mind and body all in tune with the world. Now that the object of his hate was gone, he saw how ridiculous his hate had been, and how ridiculous he had been to allow a poor nobody to obtrude upon his glory. He could laugh now; he could enter into everything with a whole mind.

Such a feeling of freedom the news gave that he felt he must celebrate it, and he left his accounts and went out to the streets. He walked with airy feet, and his face glowed upon all he met. Certain of these he invited to five-o'clock dinner, naming a good stroke of business as the occasion, and the rest of the morning he spent in lordly discussion with his cook. It would be

the Dinner of Limehouse; it should go into history — the unapproachable feast. All his past inhibitions were gone; he could now take the first full possession of his magnificence, and could indulge display to the extent of his whim with no fear of a sub-conscious voice hinting that Wing Moy would despise it if he heard of it.

At five o'clock twenty guests were assembled, and thirty-two courses were dressed for the appropriate minute. Sharp on his call, dinner was served, and twenty golden suns made lustrous homage around the supreme sun. It was effectually the Dinner of Limehouse, and if there was any hesitation in approval, it arose only from the embarrassment of selecting the final and imperial epithet that should express it.

But how is this? Ah Fook could see no radiance in those suns; his mouth could perceive no bliss in those transcendent dishes; his mind could borrow no joy from the splendid profusion about him. Something — he could not tell what — was wrong. He could not enter into the spirit of the feast, nor even work up interest in it. His attention kept missing a beat. He tried to respond to the encircling enthusiasm by glasses of *sam-shu*, a liquor he usually passed; but even that gave no help; and as the thirty-two courses wound their eructating way through the dinner, he sank

more and more within himself, and wished urgently that the guests would remember that they had homes.

Not before midnight could he rid himself of them, and by that time his depression was so acute that he shrank from taking it to bed with him, and took it into the dark streets and tried to lose it there. But it wouldn't be lost. Life seemed all at once as empty of purpose as the streets. He had a queer sense of being alone in the world, and as he came to different corners where he was used to meet Wing Moy, and either freeze or burn, he was aware of a nakedness in their appearance, or a dryness, as though their essential virtue had gone out of them. They were bricks and paving, where once they had been part of a living idea. Through Amoy Place he walked, and into Commercial Road, and down to the Poplar Hippodrome, and through the High Street; and in every yard he was aware of loss and the silencing of some throbbing noise. The world of flesh had become a skeleton. The thing that had shadowed his happiness in life was haunting him in death. It was haunting him so intimately that a little later he found himself, without intent, drifting towards Limehouse Causeway, and then he found himself in the Causeway, and then he found himself, still without intent, standing outside Wing Moy's lodging. And then he knocked at the door. He did this with intent — perhaps the actual

sight of the hated one for ever silent and still would restore his morning mood.

The old man who kept the house bowed to his request, and admired the beautiful act of the rich man paying his respects to his old poor friend. He took him upstairs, and there showed him the body of Wing Moy, and Ah Fook bent over it and looked down at the face of indifference. He looked down for some seconds with an elegant and superior smile. Then the old man, with a swift movement, set down the lamp he was carrying and went towards him. It appeared that Ah Fook was going to be ill, for, though he was still smiling, the smile had changed its key, and his hands had gone to his breast, and he was standing rigid. It was not illness, though: it was only that his whole being in that moment was thrilled with a rush of feeling. And it wasn't triumph or satisfaction or relief; it was a feeling he had never known before: new, it was, and strangely sweet and sad, like a town-child's first sight of the sea. For, as he bent over that face, he learned something. He learned that the bond that had held him bound in hate to his indifferent friend had been the only bond that *can* bind people together. He learned in that moment that his hate of Wing Moy had been, like all human hate, nothing but earth-corrupted love.

THE MINISTERING ANGEL

THE MINISTERING ANGEL

WHEN I first came to this country (said old Quong, as he sat enthroned on a tea-chest behind the counter of his tea-shop) — when I first came to this country I was for a long time puzzled by many of your manners and customs. Not because they were strange to me, but because I had always heard that the white people — more notably the English — were a reasonable people, and I failed to see in a number of these customs any inspiring reason. I particularly failed to see the reason behind the white man's slavish adoration of his women. I learned that your poets made profound phrases and sweet-smelling verses about them, hailing them as the perfection of the world of living creatures; but when I observed the ungainliness of the bodies of your women, whether clothed or unclothed, their empty faces, their cretinous conduct, and the dull clatter of their conversation — oh, chase me!

But, like most casual observers, I was wrong, and I had been here scarcely a year when my closer observation taught me that the men of your country have every reason for their slavish obeisances. Yes, every

reason; many of them based upon the first instincts of human nature. I saw that in the character of the white woman live many admirable qualities, such as persistence, endurance, fortitude under adversity, loyalty, fidelity to one idea; and this I noted in the highest as in the humblest.

And the story that I was about to tell you, when you interrupted with your unseemly remark about the bandy-legged Duchess, is concerned with a woman who displayed these qualities on behalf of a worthless man in such profusion that even a wholesale fur-dealer's display of furs after the loss of his stock in a fire scarcely affords an adequate simile.

Constance Strood was her name, and she lived with her husband in a street that turns off the bottom of the Causeway. When I say that she lived with her husband, I speak, of course, in terms of social usage, for her husband was seldom available to be lived with, and when he was, it was scarcely possible for any normal person to live with him. (The English language is as finely expressive as a drum, and as musical.) Even breathing with him was at times difficult, so powerful and ready were his hands, and talking with him was as agreeable an entertainment as patting a lioness robbed of her whelps. But she had married him, and she maintained a home for him, and meekly endured, for many years, both his active and his passive cruelty. He lived a life, if it can be called

that, that accorded solely with his own whims and fancies. Sometimes he would stay in their poor little house for four days at a time, and sometimes he would be away for three weeks. To any questions he gave only coarse interjections and orders to shut her mouth.

Her days and nights with this man were such as to make one wonder whether the English priesthood have not derived their ideas of their religion's hell from personal observation of the earthly life about them. They had married, on her side, for something near to affection, but from the man's behaviour it appeared that he had married her as a lifelong enemy upon whom he desired to work the uttermost vengeance. He gave her just as much money as he thought he would, and often left her for weeks without any. He drank, and returned home with the drink within him and flames around him. He cultivated the society of other women, and spent money upon them. He frequented the lowest company. And he beat her. Not in the intimate, considered, personal way — which women can stand — but with the casual ferocity of the brute; with punches and kicks and throttlings that just did not kill her.

He was not a jungle brute, for jungle brutes are clean and simple, and employ their brute powers only to the honest end of getting food. He was of the lowest order of the world of created things — a man who was not a man.

Yet, so marvellous and unsearchable is the heart of woman, this Constance Strood endured her travesty of life with him for twelve years. She complained often, cursed often, threatened often, but there was no change in her life; and although she could, by applying to your wise and humane justices, have secured a separation from him, she did not do so. Something impelled her to endure. It may have been personal pride, or an unwillingness to make public her wrongs, or it may have been something else. I only know that she did endure his desertions, his returns, his evil words and his evil treatment. Perhaps she hoped that by constant submission she might tame him and make him into a man. Perhaps she was merely weak — though I do not think so. Perhaps — for all things are possible with women — perhaps she still loved him and still wished to serve him. I do not know.

But I do know that, so far as one could see, she had no breaking-point; and her husband took full advantage of this. He treated her as though she were a woman of the streets, and used her with far less ceremony than he used in his dealings with these women.

But by his behaviour he came at last to a bad end — to that bad end which all moralists foresee and which life, every now and then, makes fact. Year by year he went from base company to still baser company. In time, each group wearied of his abominable

ways — even that group known as The Boys, among whom to eat peas with the knife is to mark oneself as what you call a Sissy — and at last he fell into association with the lowest criminal class. What business he had pursued in the past, or what department of ill-doing he was then engaged in, she did not know, for, as I say, he had always refused to talk with her about his affairs, or about anything else, and spoke only to order her to do what he wanted done.

It was clear to her, however, that he was engaged in dark and lawless enterprises, so furtive had his manner become, so secret and nocturnal his arrivals and departures. She was not therefore surprised when, one evening, a police officer knocked at her door, and, on being admitted, announced to her that her husband had been arrested on a charge of burglary with violence. In a casual word he added that he had been arrested at a house in the next street; had, indeed, been taken out of bed, where he lay in company with a woman.

She heard the news quietly. Then, you will not be surprised to hear, she put on her hat and coat and accompanied the officer to the station, to visit her husband in the cells and to do what she could to comfort him.

But he was ill-tempered, and he waved aside her gentle words and sympathy, and abruptly dismissed her, ordering the officers to see that he was not

pestered by any —— women. None the less, she con-
doled with him and begged him to be of good cheer.

Next morning he was charged at the police-court
with his crime, and six weeks later he was charged
in another court, and rewarded with two years' hard
labour.

And now the woman showed herself a very woman.
Once a week there arrived at the prison where he was
serving his sentence a letter for him — such a letter
as only women know how to write. In her first letters
she asked his pardon if their uneasy life together had
been due to any fault of hers. The later letters were
purely love-letters. In each of them she begged him
not to lose heart under his cruel sentence, but to re-
member that whatever happened there was always
one who would stand by him to the end — one to
whom he could always return, assured of her love
and of such help as she could give. When he came out,
perhaps they might start life again. She would be
all that she could to him, and, in the time of waiting,
she would get work, and save what money she could,
and try to have a nice home and a little cash waiting
for him.

The Governor of the prison, who had read many
moving letters from the women of his prisoners, said
that he had never read such pitiful and beautiful
letters. He had heard of the life they had led together,
and he marvelled again at the devotion of women.

He urged the husband to profit by them; to keep up his heart for the sake of this strong and splendid woman, and to try to be a better man and to be worthy of her. And the husband, markedly docile by his first taste of prison, said that he would. And he said it sincerely. Prison was giving him time to think, and time to look clearly at this woman; time to re-cast the life she had led with him, and to see it from her side, and to wonder at the unselfish and untiring affection that she still had for him.

Prison had made him docile; the letters made him humble. He began to be what he had never been before — something like a man. The Governor noted the change, and on one of the wife's permitted visits to her husband he complimented her on her attitude, and urged her to continue the letters, since they were working wonders on what at first had been regarded as a bad case. She did. Each week there was a letter for him — a letter full of protestations of boundless love for him and belief in his natural goodness. In each she spoke of the time drawing near when he should be free. She spoke of the changes she was making in their home, of the work she was doing, of the wonderful dinner she would have ready for him that morning; and always she urged him to keep up his heart and to remember that he need only be himself to be a better man than most, and that somebody was waiting to help him to do it.

They had their effect. He became a model prisoner and a likeable man, and his ferocious bravado was changed into quiet courage and a sort of bemused gentleness. He was obedient to the most trivial law of the prison, and was always seeking occasion to do little services for other prisoners. The warders liked him, and took an interest in him, and treated him as man to man — and that tells you what I might otherwise take an hour to tell.

Well, he served his term, and upon a certain morning he was passed through the prison gates. Immediately outside the gates stood his wife. She came towards him with a smile, holding out a little sprig of white flowers for his button-hole. He greeted her awkwardly, yet with some touch of a dignity he had never before had. They went away together, to the home she had been keeping neat and clean for him. They spoke little on the way. She had said all she had to say in her letters, and he could find no words for what he wanted to say. They reached home, and she welcomed him into it, and set a chair by the fire, and asked if he was hungry. He said he was, and she set about preparing the meal.

While she was preparing it, she set herself to interest him by bright chatter of trivialities of the day. She kept away from the deep matters of her letters, and from any reference to their separation, speaking only of this and of that — of the sunshine,

and the flowers in the window-box, and of the dog that belonged to the people next door, and of the price of sausages, and of a horse that people said was to win that year's Derby.

Then the meal was ready, and she told him to pull his chair to the table. He did, and sniffed at the savoury odour of the dishes she had made for them, and his eye glistened. And here she made the first intimate gesture she had made since meeting him at the prison-gates. She stood over his chair, and bent to him, and said: "Are you happy?" And he looked up and said "Yes, gel. Yes." And she looked down and said: "Well, I never was."

And then, looking into her eyes, he knew why men make so much of their women. And if the eyes didn't tell him, her next words did.

"I never was. You had two years. I had twelve. And then . . . in bed with that woman. That's why I wrote those letters — to be sure that you'd come to me when you came out. There's yer nice dinner. Look at it — 'cos you're never going to eat it." Her voice became a scream. "You're never going to eat it, you dirty, black-hearted swine!"

And then he saw a carving-knife in the air. It was the last thing he was allowed to see.

THE FAULTLESS PAINTER

THE FAULTLESS PAINTER

THIS is the tale of the faultless painter, more or less as old Quong told it to me.

The tale (he said) concerns a shy and retiring painter, whose name escapes me for the moment; and as the only daily paper at hand is one of the two that do not hire the less particular members of our impoverished nobility to sweep up social pickings in the more vulgar of the London houses, I have no means of recalling it. Not that it matters. It is the tale itself, I think, that is interesting, since it shows how the artist and the aristocrat are one in the dignity of their attitude towards their high estate and towards the allurements of gold. For, as this artist ultimately behaved, so, we know from secret social history, have the most upright aristocrats always behaved. Only by so behaving can they, in the biological struggle, retain the one thing they have got.

Well, this painter, from the age of twenty to forty, had devoted all his time to painting and painting and painting. So busy was he in painting, and so spiritually indentured to his art, that he never found opportunity

for engaging in the trivial pastime of making money. He would seldom see business men, and openly denied himself to the three who, in those twenty years, called upon him, saying that to talk to people who were in a hurry meant the wasting of more time than he could spare. So, at forty, he was resigned to poverty and to pride in his art.

He knew that maxim which says that the man who hasn't made money at forty never will make money, and he believed it. Wherefore, at that age, he turned his back upon money and set his face towards the true art and towards dinner at two shillings, *vin non compris*; not because he had read Murger, but because he had to. He continued to paint and to paint and to paint.

Every year, when his work was shown in the Hoo Galleries and the Ho Ha Salon, other artists said: "Here, indeed, is the Big Man. Lo! the Master of the Neo-Expressionists"; and they hovered about him, and even so far forgot their virility as to lift their hats to him in the street. But sincere and long-continued as were their panegyrics, they in no way helped the Master to increase the price of his dinners or to drink vintage claret instead of chemical beer; because every year, against the panegyrics of the artists, came the harsh murmur of the public: "Why is not this man duly certified and put away?" Nothing can withstand the corrosion of that harsh murmur; noth-

ing, that is, save real estate and well-secured investments — things alien to the artist, the poet and the musician.

But in dignity and in silence he went on, living in two rooms and tasting such of the world's graces as an irregular income of two or three hundred pounds a year could buy. For I forgot to say that although he persisted in painting life as his mental myopia thought it, and although the public and the dealers turned from it with simulated expressions of colic, and thought wistfully of the old-fashioned homeliness of Cezanne and Matisse and Modigliani, there were, here and there, a few people who desired to have pictures on their walls and who, unable to afford the work of recognised painters, would sometimes buy a thing of his. Provided, that is, that they could argue the manager of the gallery into a picture-postcard mood.

In places where other painters met he was reverently spoken of as the one known and genuine case of an artist who did indeed — as the ladies who make the other pictures say they do — live for his art; and often was in grave danger of dying for it. In places where artists of the comic papers and the advertising offices met, he was spoken of in terms that coarsely questioned his motive and explained it finally as one of two things — sheer idiocy, or what, in their gracious language, is named Publicity Stunt.

But our painter denied them by continuing to live in poverty without visible signs of a weak mind, neither seeking fame nor shrinking from it; neither desiring to know what others thought of him, nor affecting, when opinions were offered, to be indifferent. He lived on and painted, unmoved by critic's praise or public's jeers. For although he was a painter, he happened to be an artist.

A rare case. More rare than ladies who write agreeable fictions about painters imagine. Few painters of to-day consider it beneath their dignity to design posters. Expressionists, Emotionists, Palpitationists, Urgists, Dynamists — they all do it. But our artist never did. One of the many stories by which his admirers pointed his integrity was the story of his flat refusal of a commission, carrying a fee of two hundred guineas, for a signed poster in his highest astigmatic manner, to be used for the purpose of drawing attention to the merits of Sigismund Volsunga's "Break o' Day" Health Saline. His answer to the offer — I cannot bring myself to repeat it — was for many years a familiar quotation among the younger artists when they were offered twenty-two shillings for a biscuit-box design; and even the more experienced artists freely quoted it to their wives and to the people with whom they had no business connections.

Through it all pride alone sustained him, as we

know that it sustains Our Old Nobility. Deeply as those who called him Master wished to help him, they were held back by that barrier of pride. Willingly, for his sustenance, they would have pawned their easels, if the pawnbroker had not been glutted with easels, but they knew the reception that awaited any helper who recognised his poverty. In no way was it possible to lend him canvas or colours or small sums of money, and even leaving these things about his rooms — which was often done — was an enterprise that demanded the utmost exercise of those faculties that bring success in parlour games.

And then, at about the time when he had almost ceased to be a living force; when, in fact, he was beginning to accept the position of the Grand Old Man of the very young, he took on a new increment of vigour and work. Popular recognition came to him so rapidly, English and American society women struggled so hard to get their portraits done by him, that within two years he only escaped by the skin of his teeth from being elected President of the Neo-Revolutionary Group, which, a week before, had been outmoded by the Post-Neo-Subversists.

The way of it was this — and I may interject that there was no Publicity Stunt about it. Indeed, he preserved, and still preserves, a frigid silence upon this sudden change in his fortune.

There came one morning a knock upon the door of one of the two rooms in which he lived, and when he cried "Come in!" his landlady came in, and said that a gentleman desired to speak with him. And when he asked what manner of gentleman — whether it looked like a dealer or an advertisement-agent or another artist — the landlady could only answer that it was too good-looking to be any of these. Whereupon he asked her to demand the visitor's name and business. This she did, and returned with the news that the visitor begged to be excused from giving his name, and that his business was of a personal nature which would occupy only a brief minute of the distinguished artist's time. As our artist was in no fear of writs — living always within the small circle of his income — he did what few artists would have done: he ordered the anonymous visitor to be shown up, and mentally devised means of sending him swiftly about his next business.

A few moments later the door again opened, and the anonymous visitor entered; and who should it be but the young, eccentric, and stupendously wealthy Lord Ferlootah. One glance was enough to give our artist his visitor's identity, for the portrait of Lord Ferlootah was as frequently displayed in newspapers and society journals as the portraits of unsuccessful criminals and over-successful actresses.

The family of Lord Ferlootah, I may interject,

had not always been stupendously wealthy. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, indeed, his ancestors could scarcely command from the Jews more than a miserable fifteen-thousand loan on the estates; but by the third quarter of the century they were once again as wealthy as they had been in the days of that Lord Ferlootah who derived so large an income from his industry in attending to the everyday wants of a certain Stuart sovereign — the first Lord Ferlootah, whose portrait hangs in the Humdrum Collection, and who is affectionately known as Old Pimp Ferlootah.

The second harvest of wealth was due to two obscure persons named James Watt and George Stephenson. Without them there might have been no young Lord Ferlootah to patronise art and no occasion for this story. With them there arose in England a Railway Boom, and during this boom the grandfather of our Lord Ferlootah permitted himself to join the board of a company that proposed to build a railway across the marshes of East Essex to the Goodwin Sands. After two years of financial activity, however, the company decided that it would be better not to build a railway. The meeting at which this announcement was made broke up in some disorder, and the directors, with a striking display of wounded honour, sent in their resignations, and went home and bought a lot of yachts and added new wings

to their homes and gave swimming-baths to their townspeople and endowed half a dozen hospitals.

Hence the young Lord Ferlootah's amiable existence as a patron of art and a backer of Sunday evening theatre societies. So catholic was his taste that not only did he back sombre plays by that dramatist known as the Swedish Raven, but also plays of such inferior intellectual quality that they could only be suitably performed by companies of golden-haired school-girls and graceful youths of the unemployed Public School class. His was no selfish nature. He realised that numbers of people found pleasure in such things, and while he produced the Swedish Raven for himself, he was happy to produce these trifles for lighter minds. In the matter of pictures he was equally catholic: not only did he possess a large collection of works of art, but also the best examples of the work of British painters. I need not add that there was no studio in London where his face was not more than welcome.

But stay — welcome was not perhaps expressed upon the face of our artist as he gazed upon the young Lord Ferlootah.

"To what, my Lord," said he, "do I owe the honour of this visit?"

"Sir," said the young Lord Ferlootah, "you see before you a life-long admirer of your art."

“Yes?” said our artist, as one who has occasion to say it every day.

“Yes, indeed. I did not give my name because I wished this visit to remain anonymous, but I perceive — ”

“Anonymous,” said our artist, “it could not be. If such were Lord Ferlootah’s desire, he should have taken the precaution of visiting Mr. William Clarkson, or some astute member of the Big Four.”

“I perceive, as I was saying, that I am known; and therefore I come at once to my business. Which is simply this.” He thrust a hand into his overcoat pocket and placed on the table a small packet. He then prepared to leave.

As the folded packet, lying in release on the table, began to unfold itself, our artist stared at it. Then he touched it. Then he picked it up. Then he carefully examined it. Then he ran his fingers through it. Five hundred, five hundred, five hundred — Ten thousand pounds. In one second the full meaning of ten thousand pounds flashed through his mind — good clothes, fine wines, an elegant studio, travel in the East, unlimited canvas, beautiful furniture. . . . Then it was gone, and he was himself again.

“A small tribute to genius,” said Lord Ferlootah, “which I beg — ”

Our artist yelped. “A *what?*”

Lord Ferlootah stepped back, as though fearing an assault. "A small tribute from a humble admirer of genius."

Our artist placed his hands on his hips and glared across the table. "A small tribute — eh? So *that's* your idea of a small tribute, is it? Yes," he went on, somewhat coarsely, "it would be. Just what people of your kind — gentlemen, I believe you call yourselves — would call a tribute. Shall I tell you what I call it, my Lord? I call it a damned and monstrous insult. That's what I call it." And he folded his arms and glared.

"Sir," said Lord Ferlootah, with that courtesy which had enabled his grandfather to induce exasperated shareholders to vote increased fees to directors, "sir, I beg you to hear me."

"Rubbish!" said our artist, somewhat inconsequently. "Had you wished to make a tribute to my art you could have bought my pictures."

And then the young, eccentric and stupendously wealthy Lord Ferlootah put his foot even deeper into it.

"Yes. Quite. But — I mean — I did not wish to *buy* your pictures. Not the pictures of your present manner. But I saw in them all the signs of a genius, which, if allowed to go its own way unhampered by petty cares and worries, will undoubtedly produce truly great works which I should be honoured to

possess. Therefore — selfishly, perhaps — I wished to assist that genius by removing those cares.”

“Very pretty,” sneered our artist. “Very pretty. So! My present manner isn’t good enough for you, isn’t it? Isn’t good enough for *you*? And who,” he cried, forgetting the deference due to rank, “and who the hell are *you*, you cod-fish? Really, there is no limit to the impudence of the peerage. You — a nobody, a mere name in Debrett, who didn’t have enough ability to earn your title, or even the guts to buy it, like your dirty ancestor, out of the profits of a bagnio. And *you* think my pictures are not good enough for you. *You* offer *me* money. You, an obscure marquess, with no place in the world, try to creep in through a side-door, and make a place for yourself by linking yourself up with me. *Buying* yourself a share in my fame. Bah! Woof!” He shook his head at the young Lord Ferlootah like an irritated sheep-dog.

Under this attack Lord Ferlootah winced. The back of his neck went hot. He looked at the floor. For the first time in his young life he began to know the meaning of Inferiority Complex. He looked round the bare and dilapidated studio-sitting-room, and tried to recover his superiority by noting its poverty. But he couldn’t; the poverty of the studio seemed to be right, and his own wealth seemed to be wrong. He was abashed. He turned to go, and dropped his stick.

Stooping to pick it up he dropped his hat. Rising from the recovery of his hat, he knocked his elbow on a corner of the table. It hurt. "I — I — I mean —"

"Lord Ferlootah, this interview has already lasted too long. Without the slightest cause, you have given me two deadly insults. You have insulted my poverty, and you have insulted my work." He reached to the table, and gathered in his hands the sheaf of bank-notes. He gave them one twist; then flung them into the face of Lord Ferlootah. They broke upon his face and scattered about the floor. "That, Lord Ferlootah, is my answer to your insult."

Lord Ferlootah took the moment with dignity. "Sir, you are perhaps justified. My method was clumsy. But believe me, my intention was pure. I see that I have offended. I will go."

Our artist pointed to the floor. "And this — litter?"

Lord Ferlootah looked at it. "I came to make my tribute to genius in the only way I could. I have made it, and I have been rebuffed. I will have no more to do with it. Burn it. Give it to a hospital. Do what you will with it. I have blundered. I am deeply grieved. Before this, I admired your genius. Now, despite the harsh things that you have said of me, it has my profound respect. Good-day, sir."

He went out, leaving our artist standing rigid in the centre of the room. On the stairs he hesitated, thinking of some further points by which he might

bring our artist to see his action in a softer light. He turned back. Then he decided that explanations seldom explained, and that it was best to leave the matter as it was. He went downstairs and out of the house.

Had he gone back he would have seen the faultless painter scrambling feverishly on hands and knees, grabbing notes from under the sofa and from under the chair and from under the table, and piling them together with an ecstatic grin.

And the moral is (said old Quong) take an example from our artist and from our Old Nobility. Be as honest as you can afford to be, but at all costs Maintain Your Attitude.

THE SHADOW AND THE BONE

THE SHADOW AND THE BONE

. . . AND this young man (said Quong) knew nothing of green hills or orchards or harvest-fields. He was a slave, and he could see but one of two things — either the chains of his slavery, or a world of legend and imagination where slavery was not. He could see the bald buildings of the world of commerce, and an office and a desk, and the pavements that led him to the desk; and he could see that other world. But he could see nothing between them — nothing of the changing sky or of the sublime mystery of the life that streamed about his daily day. He was a slave.

He lived in Poplar, and twice each day, upon six days of the week, he walked the Commercial Road to reach his work at Aldgate, and to return from his work to his lodging in Poplar. He knew the pattern of the whole of this two miles of pavement. The cracks in its stones, and the hollows in the wood-blocks of the road, were as familiar to him as the lines of the loathsome book in which he daily wrote columns of figures; as familiar to him as the hills and the stars to the shepherd. But beyond these lines

his eyes jumped the immediate splendours about him into a world that lay a million leagues beyond the ocean at the edge of this planet. For that world nowhere touched his world of chains, and only in that world, he felt, could one be happy. (Slaves always feel like that.) In it lived people gracious of soul and body, neither slaves nor the masters of slaves. It was a world where the sea was kind, and the breezes were opulent with spice, and life was vibrant with hours that were each a garden of white-winged thoughts. A world, I need not tell you, that does not exist until you are dead. And perhaps not then.

But one morning he lifted his eyes from the stones that led to the wood of his desk, and his heart said "Oh!" It was a winter morning, and London was slowly revealing its features in the light of a wan sun, and its streets — even the streets of commerce — were thrilling with impetuous morning life. Great regiments poured through the gorges and the defiles. Doors of offices swallowed them, and as they disappeared reinforcements came from nowhere, and they too were swallowed. Motion, the essence of life, was flowing through the veins of the city until it came into a life as fully charged with grace and glory as any heaven our young man had imagined.

He said "Oh!" because, in lifting his eyes from the stones, he was vouchsafed a vision, and the vision told him that beauty does not dwell only in heaven.

Beauty smiled upon him from an advertisement hoarding; a beauty that made all slaves free, and healed their wounds, and blessed them with understanding. It was not the beauty of green hills, or of seacoast, or of pastures. It was the beauty of a human creature that held all this other beauty distilled in its own human beauty.

The intention of the picture was to proclaim the merits of a certain cigarette, though why the face of a beautiful young girl is expected to arouse in men a desire to smoke cheap cigarettes, no man outside an advertising office can say. Certainly in this case the picture failed in its intended effect. Not only did the young man fail to buy cigarettes; he had no thought of cigarettes, and did not even notice the name of the exceptional cigarette. (Another example of the elephant of business defeating itself by emulating the subtlety of the artist.) But he did notice the picture, and he noticed it with his whole being, so that he stood dumb before the flower whose perfume had pervaded all his dreams. Here was beauty, not of the unattainable world, but of this world. For the poster was not made from a drawing or a painting: it was no work of a questing imagination like his own; it was made from a photograph. By this the young man knew that somewhere in the world that girl was living, and this knowledge made the world suddenly desirable, and made Fenchurch Street as cool and

green as any avenue of the countries behind the moon.

For the rest of that day, after two minutes' adoration of the picture, his mind was a conflict of extreme misery and extreme rapture — for so does all true beauty affect us. The stain and decay of his daily world were at once intensified and eased: he felt their horror more sharply because of that picture, and yet, because of it, he was solaced and strengthened to face them. He carried it away in his eye, and he saw it on the walls of the office where he hung his coat, and he saw it on his desk, and on the pages of his ledger; and from whatever angle he saw it the eyes smiled tenderly upon him.

He spent half of his lunch-hour in walking up and down before the picture, and the afternoon — a waste space to be trudged through before he could again drink at the cooling spring — he spent in imagining the girl in her marvellous home; imagining her at her marvellous tea; imagining her marvellous bed-room; imagining the foolish people about her who were blind to the miracle of her; imagining her in different dresses. He even tortured himself by imagining confident clods making love to her.

I need not descant upon the ensuing state of this young man. His life was given to a picture: every breath, every thought, every movement centred on it. If the cigarette company had not increased their sales

they had at least achieved something. They had brought a young man out of the blasphemy of dreams into the blessed state of perceiving the beauty of this present paradise.

He began to spend his evenings walking around those streets of London where posters were displayed. He developed a friendly feeling for those streets where this picture was displayed, and a distaste for those where it was not. One day he found it in the advertisement pages of a newspaper, and he cut it out. And he found it in another newspaper, and he cut it out. And he found it in a weekly journal, and he cut it out. And one of these cuttings he pinned over his bed, and one he pinned over his mirror, and the third he pinned over his fireplace.

Sad and foolish and glorious was the state of that young man. He did not know how happy he was. He thought he was miserable. Thinking thus, he sought for the cause of his misery, and found that it came from a desire to stand face to face with this beauty. Wondering how he could appease that desire, he came to a matter-of-fact solution which seemed to his disordered mind to be an inspiration. If that picture was a photograph, the cigarette company must have bought it from a photographer. If they bought it from a photographer, the photographer must at some time have been in contact with the original. Therefore, he had only to find the photographer, and . . .

then he would throw up his job, and work his way around the world until he tracked this supernal beauty. And when he had found her he would go to her and say: "Lady, you are beautiful. I worship you!" and then retire for ever into his galley, his gesture made, his destiny fulfilled; himself a tragic figure among the world's tragic figures.

So he bought some good note-paper, and wrote to the cigarette company, stating that he had observed with interest the picture by which they were then advertising their goods — which was fact — and proceeding with the fiction that the photograph was so good that he desired to have some pictures of his wife made by the same photographer. Could they supply him with the name of the photographer?

The cigarette company, with that courtesy which distinguishes those who have anything to sell, expressed their regret that they were not in a position to supply the name of the photographer of the picture in question: they had purchased it from the well-known advertising agency, Slogan and Associates, whose address was such-and-such. They had no doubt that Slogan and Associates would be happy to supply him with the name of the photographer, and They Were, His Faithfully.

So, on the same good note-paper, he wrote to Slogan and Associates, and Slogan and Associates,

whose offices were spotted with white cards that flamed red-lettered exhortations to their staff to "Do It Now," answered, sixteen days later, that they had purchased the picture in question from a photographer in Blackfriars Road.

That day, during his lunch-hour, to Blackfriars Road he went, heartened on his journey by many a sight of the world's essence of beauty. But at Blackfriars Road he learned that the photographer had left there some time ago, and was now to be found at an address in Camden Town. He devoted the evening to the Camden Town journey, found the photographer at home, and, again using fiction out of its true purpose of entertainment, announced that he was connected with a West End theatre which sought to dress its new show with London's Loveliest Chorus, and that the lady of the cigarette-poster had caught the manager's eye. Where could she be found?

The photographer, whose name, incredible as it may appear, was Anastasius Herrick, was an affable and unaffected young man, although he wore a velvet coat and silken hair and the rest of the make-up which marks the camera-artist from the common artist. He received his visitor with a friendly and honest smile. And after the smile he said "Blimey!" And then "Blimey — now you've done me. I took that picture — lemme see — coupler years ago. Friend o' mine — City man — brought her along.

I only dug it up about three months ago. Occurred to me that it might suit the Poo-Jah cigarette people. They was using girls just then. So I bunged it along to my agents. They took it like a shot. Nice price, too. But where she is now — ah! One thing I can tell you. She *used* to live at Kensington — 89, Grummant Road. Whether she's there now. . . . Might be, o' course. Might not. Still, it's worth trying. Nice girl, she was. Iris Lone was her name."

So the next night he made long and serious preparation for a meeting with his goddess, and was as particular about his toilet as the Messrs. Ricordi are about the use of two bars of Puccini's music. When he was as near to satisfaction with the toilet as a young lover can hope to be, he put on his best suit and his best hat, which made him look slightly ridiculous, and went to Grummant Road, which is not one of the best roads of Kensington. He knocked at the door of the house to which he had been directed, and when it was answered he took off his ridiculous hat, and asked for Miss Iris Lone. The agreeable person who answered the door told him that Mrs. Lone and her daughter had lived there as paying-guests, but had left a year ago. When he asked if the agreeable person knew the address to which they had moved, she said she did not; and when he pressed for clues she had none to give, save that Mrs. Lone had had an account at the local branch of the Imperial Bank,

whose manager would surely know her present address.

So the next day, by an unconvincing excuse of illness, he contrived to leave the office after lunch, and to reach the Kensington branch of the Imperial Bank before closing time. He asked to see the manager, and, after some minutes spent in a glass cage, he was conducted to the manager. He took off his ridiculous hat, and placed it on the manager's desk, and asked for the present address of a client of the bank, Mrs. Lone. You need not be troubled with his adventures in this office, for we are all aware that there are two things which can seldom be extracted from bank managers, and the other one is information. The manager fixed his eyes on the ridiculous hat, and while his lips said that he regretted that his position debarred him from giving information concerning his clients, his eyes sang loudly: "Where *did* you get that hat?"

So the ridiculous hat went away, and went back to Grummant Road, Kensington, and knocked again at the house that had once sheltered the world's beauty. This time our young man made a rapid pass of his hand to the hand of the agreeable person who answered the door, and besought her to ransack her memory for some clue to the present whereabouts of Mrs. Lone. Whereupon the agreeable person recalled that Mrs. Lone had removed her goods to

an address unknown by the aid of a firm of furniture removers whose premises were to be found in a street near Olympia.

Well, the young man went from Grummant Road to the premises of the furniture removers, and there, in the cause of romance, which is the world's first and best lie, he lied again. He represented himself as a nephew of the family returned from the colonies — to which the ridiculous hat was confirmation — and begged them to search their records for the address to which the family moved.

Very courteously — being a commercial house — they searched their records; and within twenty minutes they gave him the new address of the family. The new address of the centre of the world. The address where he might see glory and loveliness face to face. They remarked on the address. They said that families often moved from that place to Kensington, in the natural course of progress, but seldom from Kensington to that place.

“What place?” said our young man.

“That place,” they said, indicating the paper which, such was his excitement, he had not even looked at.

When he looked at it, although, when in company, he was a young man of sober deportment, he said “Good God!” The address was 16 Jasmine Terrace, Poplar. His own address was 22 Jasmine Terrace, Poplar. For the last twelve months she had been living

in his own street. There would be no need for him to battle round the world in quest of beauty. She was in his own street.

Which is where (said old Quong, reaching for the jar of rice-spirit) beauty always lives.

At least (he added, reaching for a glass), so they tell me. But he never saw her beauty again. He married her, and the rest of his life he spent in looking for more advertisement-posters.

THE SILVER STAR

THE SILVER STAR

“**I** DON'T agree with you,” I said. “I don't see that he has the slightest chance. It's a perfectly clear case. The circumstantial evidence against him is absolute and unassailable.”

“I am prepared to admit,” said old Quong, as we took midnight tea together, “that he has not the slightest chance, but I do not admit that it is a perfectly clear case. He has not the slightest chance because, although men may make some small and faint-voiced attempts at the complex craft of lying, they have never yet done it aptly and convincingly. It can be better done, and is. But not by man. The greatest and most convincing liar under the sun is the hoary and honoured liar who is never even asked to step into the witness-box. His name is Circumstantial Evidence. Take the case of our late friend Red Fargus, who lived comfortably about these streets until that luckless day when circumstantial evidence made an example of him.”

I made myself some more tea, and in the space of about a packet of cigarettes, I received the story of Red Fargus. Something like this.

When (said Quong) the American Singer of Inescapable Truths noted how easily things go wrong, she was right. She usually was. That was what her rivals and unsuccessful superiors found most exasperating about her. A poet who is usually right is like a husband who never stays out late, a subaltern who does not want war, a business man who talks about Profits instead of Service.

She was so right that much of her crystallized rightness has been printed on little cards which one may pin over one's desk or one's bed or one's bath; and it would have been well for Red Fargus and Mosey Rubens if they had bought a score of the alas-how-easily cards, and hung them wherever their not-too-keen eyes might see them. But although neither Red nor Mosey was ignorant of the common truths of life, they knew nothing of these cards, and did not know that the American singer exercised the function of the true poet in pointing out things that everybody knows and nobody realises. They were like most of us — positive knowers and negative realisers, and, being that, they bought a prize-packet.

It began with Mosey Rubens getting his hands upon the Carshalton diamonds. Enforced meetings of this kind should not be hastily followed up. This much Mosey knew and although Amsterdam was eventually indicated by the spirits who direct these matters, Mosey saw that, for the time being, he should

refrain from Amsterdam. It had been his custom to work alone, but in a matter of the magnitude of this present he perceived that he should need help. He therefore cast about him and made examination of the possible help that could be had.

Now Mosey, like many of his kind, had a habit of thinking that he thought, and yet another habit — very widespread — of putting himself into other people's places and seeing things through their eyes, forgetting that he was still seeing things with his own brain. Fatal habit. So, needing help, he saw his situation as he thought it would appear to one who was, like himself, a square-dealer. Looking around for square-dealers, he finally selected Spike Arabin — the youngest and cleanest of those in a similar line of business — and went to Spike Arabin and offered him a notably generous rake-off if Spike could find him a soft and safe corner where he might lie for the next few weeks. Spike listened to the proposal, and said, in his large way, that it could be left to him.

Mosey left it to him. He thought he knew Spike through and through, and saw nothing ridiculous in one human creature's making so reckless a claim about another. Had he known the American singer's message, and kept it carefully before him, he would have realised in advance that nothing and nobody in this world is certain, and that the best of men, as well as things, easily go wrong. He would have

perceived that when twelve thousand pounds are lying about, it is foolish to trust anybody — even people you don't know. The result is always distressful. It was so here.

Spike Arabin, under such a trust as had never before been committed to him — a human life with twelve thousand pounds trailing to it — found the trust too heavy. He felt that he must dispose of some of it; so, without a spot of the compunction he would have felt at stealing Mosey's watch, he disposed of his trust to Red Fergus, landlord of the "Silver Star."

The "Silver Star" stands upon the farther side of the river, and in those days — it is many years since I entered it — it was an affable house. Affable, that is, when you were fully admitted to it. In its outward demeanour it was anything but affable. It stood at the end of a narrow passage running parallel with a deep cut that gave entrance from the river to the docks. Shrouded on one side by a high wall, and open to the hollow cut on the other, the passage was a haunt of many echoes; and all footsteps approaching the "Silver Star" rang upon the cobbles the news of their coming. This was sometimes useful. So were the "Star's" back windows, which gave directly on to the vast curve of the river. Seen from the land end of the passage, it had a reticent, even furtive air. It was low-pitched, and its brown plaster front was so

dilapidated that it seemed to falter and cringe. At night it gave no high greeting of windows. One pale gleam that threw less light to the passage than the silver star of eve throws to the earth, was the only hint that the passage held anything but a blank wall. But for favoured customers its frigid bearing was eased. Like some men, it had a warmth of feeling for those it accepted as strong as the frost in which it locked itself against others. It was like its owner, too. In appearance Red Fargus was a sack, and as non-committal as a sack. At first glance his whole being seemed a blur of insignificance. At second glance the essential Fargus burst into self-betrayal through the large, drooping and jutting lips.

Well, it was to this ambiguous house that Spike carried Mosey, as to a spot where he could safely rest until the signs and portents were favourable to a trip to Amsterdam. Before carrying Mosey there, however, he had visited Red Fargus, and, with his sharp bird eyes and sharp bird nose close to Red's blunt ear, he had made a proposal. The proposal involved much talk of fifty-fifty. Also of twelve thousand pounds. Also of the convenience of Mr. Fargus' back-door to the river. Also of iron or leaden weights. Mr. Fargus had listened attentively, and when, after much discussion back and forth, he had been asked what he had to say, he said it.

Wherefore, upon a suitably wet and misty evening,

Spike and Mosey and twelve thousand pounds passed unseen down the dark passage and into the "Silver Star."

At midnight Mosey and the twelve thousand pounds were in bed. He had shared freely in the hospitality and loving-kindness that lived behind the deceptive front of the "Silver Star," and he was at peace. He had found friends — as the wealthy always can if they are as ready as Mosey was to acknowledge friendship in the apt way — and he had the feeling of being well guarded and cared for. He was. Mr. Fargus downstairs was keeping guard over him as a mother keeps guard over a wakeful baby.

Mr. Fargus sat in the interior and private parlour of the house, silent and without movement. He was alone. On his instructions Spike had left soon after their guest had retired, Mr. Fargus holding that these things were always done most effectively when done singly, without confusion of counsel — or witnesses. He was alone. So enclosed was this room, between the back and front of the house, that it was not only noiseless itself, but it comprehended no foreign noise. No sound of road-traffic; no sluck of waters against the moored boats and barges; no hoot of outbound steamer or wail of syren came there. No sound at all. He sat before the fire, and the fire and the room and all its furniture seemed to be waiting, as he himself was, upon some sharp event.

He sat like that until half an hour past midnight. Then he got up and made an ungainly creep to the door. He opened it, and stood just beyond it. His arms drooped from his shoulders like trunks. His hands opened slowly. His head was thrust forward. A faint noise came from above, and he crept back to the room. His guest must have made a momentary waking. For fifteen minutes he stood by the fire; then he went again to the door, and this time went out and crept halfway up the stairs. Being fully outside the room, he was now in the river world, among its midnight braying and hooting. These distant noises, coming suddenly, broke upon his ears like a storm, and the ticking of the clock in the dead bar was like a hammer-stroke. Then he became accustomed to it, and listened for house noises. But there was none to hear, and on this assurance he went, with as light a plod as he could, up the stairs.

In the bedroom Mosey was lying in the sanctity of peace. His tattered head was still; his nimble fingers idle; and he saw nothing and heard nothing. The thing that was walking up the stairs was nothing to him. The whisper of its feet came nearer, never hesitating, never changing beat, but mounting with a tolling regularity; the funeral march of a human marionette. But Mosey never heard it.

Outside the door Mr. Fargus stood with ears cocked. No sound came from the room. He turned

the handle, ready with an excuse if Mosey should be roused. The handle made a little click, and he drew back. But there was no stir in the room. He went in. He knew the distribution of its furniture, and moved heavily but cleanly round it. In the darkness he could not see Mosey's face: he could see only the very dim bulk of the bed. He went softly towards it. From his trousers pocket he took an electric torch. From his coat pocket he took something short and heavy. It was not going to be violently used. Just one good tap on the side of the head, sufficient to ensure a long night's rest; and then a canvas sack, and some weights, and a boat out to mid-stream. He moved behind the head of the bed. He raised the bar in his right hand. He switched on the torch.

But the bar did not fall where it should have fallen. It fell to the floor. There was the bed and there was Mosey. But Mosey was lying half out of bed, his head drooping to the carpet. The head had been battered in with an iron bar.

For more seconds than he knew Mr. Fargus stood and looked at this affrighting display. He stood and stared and stared at it, until the intensity of his staring almost sent him to sleep. Indeed, he was at the point of sleep when he was awakened by a loud noise below. The silent house was filled with knockings and crashings; then with one large crash and a chorus of voices, and the trample of feet. This trampling

for a moment scattered itself ; then came up the stairs. Before he could hide or move from the room, or even think of moving, they found him there. They found him standing over the body, with blood on his hands, and blood on the iron bar, which lay in a pool of it on the floor.

By that time, Spike Arabin, who had passed an alarm to a small boy, with instructions that it be passed to the police, was a long way away and Mosey's wash-leather bag was in his pocket. He died two years ago somewhere in Africa, I think, and I am pleased to say that before he died he showed that he was sensible of some dissatisfaction with his conduct. On his death-bed he cleared the outraged memory of Mr. Fergus and paid tribute to the power of Circumstantial Evidence by making a full confession.

THE CASE OF VALENTINE THRILL

THE CASE OF VALENTINE THRILL

THE compliment you make to me (observed my Martin Tupper, as we sat in the July dusk of my back room) — the compliment you make to me (I had made it in the morning, and it was then late evening) — the compliment you make to me (patience; we're just starting) is a charming one. Nevertheless, I suggest that you guard yourself against the habit. It is one that can have disagreeable repercussions, as it did in the case of my young friend, Valentine Thrill, who lived near here in West India Dock Road.

Whereupon, in the space of two or three hours, he unfolded the sad tale of the Poet Thrill.

Valentine Thrill lodged in one room in West India Dock Road, over a fried-fish shop. He lodged in this street because he was poor, and over a fried-fish shop for the same reason: he had not far to go for his meals, and by taking them at his landlord's shop, he secured a faintly perceptible reduction of rent. He was further influenced in his choice of this particular lodging by a memory of a medical dic-

tum to the effect that a fish diet was calculated to nourish and intensify the mental powers. As he deeply desired, and recognised that he needed, to nourish and intensify his mental powers, he found the lodging eminently suitable both to his wishes and his purse.

For, instead of pursuing the fecund avocations of the state into which he was born — which was somewhat below the kerbstone of life — Mr. Valentine had rudely turned his back upon them (making still ruder noises at them over his shoulder) and had dedicated his hot youth to the service of that frigid deity, Poetry. Yes; Mr. Valentine was, or was going to be, a poet.

But either the accredited powers of a fish-diet are based on nothing more trustworthy than scientific fact, or the fish supplied by his landlord was of a quality that ruled it out of any category recognised by the academies (or the fishery-advertising offices) where the discovery of its cerebral value was made. Certainly no sign of its powers could or would be perceived by the editors to whom he offered the first-fish of the stream of his genius. Having looked at them, they obeyed the etiquette of angling, and threw them back to their native waters.

But Mr. Valentine was not dismayed. He continued to eat what his landlord said was fish, and to write what he said was poetry. It may be that had he

stood by his poetry he would, in time, have come to be accepted, since many writers with no higher gifts than Mr. Valentine have, by persistence and bulk of production, compelled the modern reader to accept them as leaders of the poetry of to-day. But the spirits of his ancestors were watching over him; and our Mr. Valentine, who might to-day be taking tea with the Poet Sitwell, the Poet Eliot, and the Poet Wolfe, is lying safe and scatheless in that convict prison which so perfectly announces the Epstein formula to the formless seas of the South Coast.

And all because of a compliment. The fact that the compliment was sincere increases rather than diminishes its folly. Sincerity has its place, but not among compliments. The danger of any compliment can be well illustrated by recalling the last time you paid a compliment to a woman. As you remember, you were compelled to remain in her company for a further two hours. If the compliment happened to be sincere — and if you were very young it probably was — then you are doubtless married.

The compliment that caused Mr. Valentine's trouble was, as I say, a sincere one. And it was not paid to Mr. Valentine, for there was nobody around him capable of such infirmity. No; it was paid to his Uncle by a business acquaintance. Did I say he had an Uncle? He had. An Uncle Moses. An Uncle Moses who was so much like the business-man of the novel

and the drama, with the added value that he was a breathing business-man, that the most advanced novelists and dramatists were so pleased with this material reflection of the true world of fiction, that they used to quarrel with each other in their efforts to get him to dinner and study him and "use" him for their next novel or drama.

Uncle Moses had begun business in the Ghetto. No more than a three-minutes' walk separates the London Ghetto from the City — many of the more ardent spirits of Judea have done it in less than that — so it was not surprising that after a year's business in the Ghetto, Uncle Moses took a short walk and established himself in the City, with offices of nine rooms alongside the Royal Exchange. It is more than a three-minutes' walk from the City to the West End, but Uncle Moses made it. He made it in four years, via Norwood, Hampstead and Regent's Park.

Having settled himself in Charles Street, Mayfair, with the reticent opulence that Mayfair so appreciates in the new arrival from the old country in which most of its inhabitants began, he turned to considering what he could do, without spending too much, to elevate the condition of those members of his family who were still disgracing him by being poor. And of course he thought of his nephew, Valentine Thrill, the insane one.

He began by offering to buy Mr. Valentine a decent

suit of clothes, and then to take him into his nine-room, parquet-floor offices. Mr. Valentine, being a poet, may be excused from not knowing the gentle attitude proper to great wealth. Had he not been a poet, there could have been no possible excuse for that postcard. I mean the postcard he sent to his Uncle's Mayfair address. A postcard without a stamp, bearing, on the correspondence side, a brief order to his highly-respected Uncle to go to hell, and to bung his suits and his parquet-floor offices where the soldier bunged the pudding. (It will be perceived from his epistolary style what a place he might have held in modern poetry.)

His Uncle's rejoinder to this was to drive down to West India Dock Road in his latest Silver Phantom, with chauffeur and footman, and to spend a recriminatory hour with his nephew: an hour in which the poet was made to realise the poverty of his style as well as of his room. (His landlord still remembers the interview, and has often expressed a wish that he had known shorthand.) The visit, I regret to say, was unproductive of anything except heat, and they parted on terms of mutual disapproval.

But Uncle Moses was entirely without malice. (He knew its futility in business.) Strongly desirous of lifting his talented nephew out of his poverty, and thus removing a blot upon his 'scutcheon, he waited a few weeks, and then wrote his nephew a friendly

man-to-man letter in which the word bastard was only once spelt with three r's. In this letter he made him another offer of a position — no less a position than that of private secretary to himself. To this the nephew sent a lengthy answer, showing, if it showed nothing else, that his style had profited in force and fluence from his Uncle's visit. After reading this letter, Uncle Moses was still more desirous to engage him as secretary, since there were exigent occasions in his business when the services of a secretary with a ready command of the armoury of odium, anathema and reprisal could not be put at too high a value.

But Mr. Valentine was like concrete against the pricking of a pin. Even when Uncle Moses, in a last desperate effort, offered to pay for the publication of his poems, in the best form known to Mr. Crosby Gaige, Mr. Bruce Rogers and Mr. Mosher, even then he was immovable. He retorted that he would stand or fall by himself, without any help from old iron, or bucket shop, or fake balance-sheets; though Uncle Moses had to read the letter three times before he discovered that it digested itself to that sense.

Thereafter the relations between them were strained, and most likely would have snapped asunder but for the ill-guided flatterer who here enters the story. Let us call him James Joyce. James Joyce, too, was in business, and he, too, had a suite of offices with parquet floors. He was acquainted with Uncle

Moses, and they nodded amiably to each other when they met in public places, and often exchanged greetings. They had never done business together.

Well, James Joyce was lunching one day at that West End restaurant which is so popular among rich City men that it has been named the 'Thieves' Kitchen, when whom should he espy at a neighbouring table but Uncle Moses. He at once rose and went across to him, not because he was surprised to see him there — for Uncle Moses helped the reputation of the place, and its name, by lunching there every day — but because he had something to say to him that bore upon business matters. Uncle Moses, you should know (I fear that in this story I have completely lost track of the Eighteen Laws of Pure Story-telling, as laid down by the Correspondence Schools) — Uncle Moses had among his creditors one who was deeply involved with him and was unable to meet his obligations. This man was another business man, who, besides being a business man, was a true and ancient member of the Old Mayfair. Since this man could not meet his obligations, it was within the power of Uncle Moses to make him bankrupt. This, Uncle Moses had not done, and was not doing. (The countenance of this man, I may add, was as a key to all the best houses of political London, and most of the second-best houses of social London — which some embittered people say are the same houses. Let it

suffice that Uncle Moses could have put this man into the Bankruptcy Court, and did not.) Somehow, the news of his quixotic forbearance had leaked out, as such confidential news will; and when James Joyce stepped across to Uncle Moses' table, he came with such a light in his eyes as that kind of man wears when he sees an athlete refrain from taking advantage of a mishap to his opponent. He put his hand upon the shoulder of Uncle Moses, and spoke these words:

"I say, old man, it's damn fine of you to have held back on poor old Walt Whitman. Damn fine. Don't know when I've heard of anything finer. It's good to know we have people like you in the City. Makes life worth while. Jolly sporting of you, old man."

Alas, our James Joyce had not considered the power of the spoken word. Could he have foreseen that he was sending this jolly old sportsman to his death, I feel sure that he never would have uttered those few kind words. Kind words, we are told, can never die; but often they have the power to kill, and their power was exercised in this case. Even if the honest James Joyce had regretted uttering them (and as he never knew their effect, he didn't), his regret would have been unavailing. The thing was done. He went back to his table, and left Uncle Moses well on the way to disaster.

For Uncle Moses, like so many big business men,

was sentimental: it is one of the secrets of their success; and this spontaneous recognition of the true gold of his inner character deeply moved him. Nobody had ever called him a sportsman before; many other things, but never sportsman. And it was a name that he much desired to be called, because in his social adventurings he had perceived that it was the ultimate laudation, the hall-mark of rightness, among the Gentiles. Once that label was affixed to you, everything was open to you. And he had got it. It had been delivered by one of the Right People in full view and hearing of his world. He was overcome.

So overcome that, although he had taken a quart of champagne, and had ended his meal with liqueur brandy, he felt that the occasion could not pass without a private toast. He felt so good that — as men do when they feel good — he wanted to feel even better. So he ordered another bottle of dry champagne, and went a step further towards destruction.

The compliment had aroused all that was best in him. The champagne gave it a spark. He felt that he must *express* his best, and after some hazy search for means, his mind lit upon his grossly-offensive nephew. I have said that he had no malice in him, and at this moment he was prepared to love his nephew, for there, ready-made, was somebody with whom he could go on being a sportsman. Casting about for

means of being a sportsman without further offending the young man, he decided that he would send him a tactful and useful present. Not the Useful Present that the shops display at Christmas-time, but a useful present. In a few moments he had settled what that present should be. The poet had no typewriter. He had heard that editors would never consider handwritten manuscripts, and he guessed that the cost of typewritten copies of his poems must be a grave handicap upon one whose sole resources were the thirty shillings a week inherited from his mother. So he settled that the present should be a typewriter. There could be no offence in that; it would serve as a sign that all was forgiven and that Mr. Valentine's chosen career was approved.

Upon this he left the restaurant, and went wandering in search of a typewriter shop, feeling, as he walked, far more like Father Christmas than Uncle Moses. He wandered for some distance without noticing where he was going, and without seeing any shop that displayed typewriters. It was not until he was half-way up Tottenham Court Road (though he had no notion of being in that road) that he saw what his lunch told him was the shop he wanted. He entered, and to the agreeable assistant he said: "I wan wunner — wunnerththings."

"Certainly, sir. What model?"

"Moll?"

"Yes, sir. We have them in six ranges. That, on the left, is the largest."

"Zlarges? Zennim zlarges. Zgood lad. Zervza best. Zennit ritaway. Zafternoon. Zennim card with it. *All forgiven. Bes wish sugsez f'm Uncle Moses. Got that?*"

"Yes, sir."

"Ri. Give y'address zin minute. Zennit ritaway, see?"

"Certainly, sir."

Now when the carrier arrived at Mr. Valentine's fish-shop lodging in West India Dock Road, and delivered into his hands one of the largest and most modern of cash-registers, the poet was annoyed. He took it as a coarse hint from his coarse Uncle that he should cease to serve his barren mistress and turn to something more fruitful — if only the multiplication table. His first thought was to refuse to take it in. His second thought was that he would take it in and sell it, and send his Uncle such a letter as would be certain of a place in any anthology of ironic invective. His third thought arrived later. Acting on his second thought, he unpacked it, and, as he stood staring at it, while weighing the terms of the proposed letter, the thing — so insidious is the appeal of the commercial spirit — slowly began to fascinate him, as it would fascinate any modern poet. It was so new and bright and gadgety; so expressive of

fitness-for-purpose; so potent of prosperity. He wanted to play with it, and did. He began fingering its levers, and touching its surface. Then he began to play upon its keys, and before he could realise what he was doing, he had rung up £282 19s. 7d.

The intelligent listener can well imagine what effect that silent song had upon a poet. Before he could master himself, he was seized by the third thought — by an overwhelming desire to do in seriousness what he had done in play. Before he could snatch himself from the lure of its dope, he had decided to keep it. To keep it and to use it as an additional affront to his Uncle by showing him that the jeer had misfired. He would show him that one who had the intelligence — and endurance — to be a modern poet could play this baby's game of business in a way that would make the regular business man look like a street-hawker. He would show him what he could do with a cash-register.

He sat down and began to think. The cash-register was, as it were, the soul of commercial enterprise. Clearly he must provide it with a body, and the suitable body was clearly a shop. Therefore, he must find a shop. So he went out to find a shop. Here the spirits of his ancestors came to his assistance, for, within four hours, they allowed him to find a shop; a shop whose owner, solely for reasons of health, was unwillingly retiring from one of the most lucrative

businesses in the whole of East London; none other than the fried-fish shop over which he had his lodging. In a dazzle of poetic fury, he signed a tentative contract, calling for payment of the purchase price by quarterly instalments within three years, and a week later he signed the contract proper and moved his cash-register into the fish-shop. Under the inspiration of the cash-register he began work in the fried-fish business, convinced that by the application of modern-poetic methods he could put the fried-fish business into the Big Six.

And that is really the end of the story. The rest is merely a string of facts which the listener doubtless foresees. There was the fact of the complete failure of the fish-shop within six months; the putting in of the bailiffs to seize the shop and its effects; the abortive fire by which the poet hoped to make a recovery on the insurance money, but which failed to convince the insurance company, while it succeeded in burning the whole of the poet's manuscripts which he had forgotten to secure; and the final and overwhelming rage of the poet against his well-intentioned (but to him diabolical) Uncle. Not only had he caused him, by his idiotic gift, to waste six months and land himself in worse poverty than before; not only had he caused him to lose all his priceless manuscripts; it was even impossible for him ever to start again. For, after six months in the fried-fish business,

his nose had become so deadened to all other bad smells that he was now beyond the smallest chance of making a figure in modern poetry.

The final fact is of his tumultuous visit to his Uncle in Mayfair, his wild charge that his Uncle had brought him to ruin, a difference of opinion as to how long the interview should last, a struggle, and the obliteration of his Uncle by a too-well-directed blow with a statuette of the Wingless Psyche.

And so, by the agency of a well-turned compliment, Uncle Moses came to his death and the poet came to fifteen years' imprisonment for manslaughter.

But this(said old Quong) could only have happened in the West. In my country we understand the precise worth of a compliment. That is why we exchange so many of them.

WE ARE THE MUSIC-MAKERS

WE ARE THE MUSIC-MAKERS

“**Y**ES,” said old Quong, breaking the almost-continuous silence of that back-room of his — “yes, as a youth he started out from these streets, full of hope, to make that long journey to the West End of London, where success lives. Geographically, it is no more than four miles, but by all other computations it often takes a lifetime to accomplish. He started with a fixed aim and determination, and he did actually reach the West End. But his journey, like so many others, ended in failure.”

“Failure!” I said, with a note of exclamation. “But ——”

Old Quong blinked. “I said Failure. And if you could contrive to restrain yourself from these tiresome interruptions, I might be able to tell you the story.”

I made a humble promise of silence, and dutifully kept it for four hours, at the end of which time I had heard the sad story of Master Winkeldonck.

The Winkeldonck youth (said old Quong) lived not far from this insane experiment which I call my shop; he lived, indeed, in Three Colt Street; and he

would often come and sit here, as you are sitting now, and tell me, as you, before you had become so self-sufficient, were wont to do, of his hopes and his fears. He was one of the most interesting and promising of the lads of these parts. So interesting and promising, and of such agreeable manners, that a schoolmaster, a doctor, a parson, and a bespoke tailor (who happened to be his uncle) almost came to blows in their individual insistence that the boy should follow this or that career. Their discussions, however, held little interest for Master Winkeldonck (the men never really came to a fight), and he gave gracious acquiescence to whatever it pleased them, week by week, to arrange for him. He was able to do this the more graciously because he had already decided upon his career. The decision had been reached upon a night when he was just twelve years old. Upon that night the light had fallen from heaven, and had shown him the way that he must take.

He was returning home one misty evening of October from the night school, or the Band of Hope, or the Young People's Mission, or the Church Lads Brigade, or the Games Club, or the University Settlement — I forget which: we have so many of these estimable activities in this quarter that the winter weeks of the children of the poor are a social whirl of such intensity that only the hardiest constitutions can reach the Spring without breaking down — well,

he was returning home in the height of the Season, when, at the corner of a side-street, he heard the sound of music. Seeking its source, he perceived that it came from the one spot of light in that ebony-dark street. The spot of light was a small public-house, and, just in the doorway of the house, where the amber haze of the window fell upon him, so that among the moving shadows of that street he seemed to be of the company of Shining Ones, just in the doorway stood the minstrel. He was of no very distinguished appearance, but the boy was interested not in his person, but in his music. This music, which was no more remarkable than the musician's appearance, for some reason held the boy's senses bound as in a trance, and he was at once lifted into the middle air. All through the twelve years of his life he had been hearing music and had found nothing in it but a noise; but at this moment he realised that he was hearing music for the first time. Never in his young life had he been so moved. It may have been that the occasion, the hour, the scene — the isolated musician, the music flowing from the orb of light into the thick-shadowed and otherwise silent street, the light thrown back by the wet mud of the roadway — it may have been that these things fused with his mood and produced that moment which all creators recognise as the moment that must at all costs be seized and used. Or it may have been that the spirits about him hap-

hazardly chose this conjunction to force upon him the message that they had for him, so that the mere strength of its impact dressed all the circumstances of its coming with significance.

Certainly for him it *was* significant, and however long he may live he will never forget the corner of that street, or the fall of the light from the public-house, or the figure of the musician, or the silver wail of his music. From that evening, though he had never before thought of, or felt the smallest interest in music, he hesitated no more in his choice of his life's occupation.

The nondescript minstrel was making his music upon a violin, and if he was the minstrel whom I often heard at that time about these parts he was making it upon a ten-shilling violin with a two-shilling bow which had never known resin. But that is beside the point. The spirits, as I say, move us as they will, through whatever means they will, and in their omnipotence they have no need to wait upon the perfect instrument. This is well known to those who receive their messages through the means of organised spiritualism. If the spirits were concerned with employing the perfect instrument for their revelations, they would send them through those lovely of countenance and limb; magnificent of eye, and rare and lofty of mind; and we should receive messages only at long intervals. But they do not wait upon such

slender means. Instead, they employ mediums, and those who have seen portraits of mediums. . . .

Well, for some twenty minutes the boy stood upon the corner of that dark street, outwardly transfixed, but shaken to his innermost being, by the music that poured upon him. The violinist was playing (and, at the same time, endeavouring, with no great success, to sing) the best songs of that day. The titles of these songs, if my memory of what the young Winkeldonck told me can be trusted, were: "Let's all go down the Strand," "All the Nice Girls Love a Sailor," "Has Anybody here seen Kelly?" "Beautiful Garden of Roses," "Love Me and the World is Mine," and "Two Eyes of Grey." He had heard all these songs before, but he had not heard them gushing from a spot of light in a dark street on an October evening, when the air was still, and London, unheard, was all about him, and he himself was hungry for his tea. He must, I think, have been meant to hear them like that, so that his wandering desires for a career should be crystallised for the world's benefit, or the sport of the spirits — as the case may be. Because, as he walked sadly but ecstatically away at the end of the recital, they *were* crystallised.

In that moment there came into his mind a phrase from his school reading-book by an author who had wisely remained anonymous; and it was suddenly granted to him to perceive the nobility of the office

foreshadowed in that supplicatory phrase. It echoed in his heart like a cry from himself — “Let me make a nation’s songs, and I care not who makes its laws.” At my age it would appear that this phrase was not so much the positive cry of a poet, but rather the negative sneer of a disappointed candidate for Parliament, since, although the one office may have an impalpable nobility, the nobility of the other is so much more widely recognised. However, as often happens with the ironical sneers of the elderly and disappointed, the cry was taken literally by our youth — so literally that it coloured every mood of his active and his contemplative life.

“*That*,” his mind said, as he walked slowly home, “that is what I am going to do. If I cannot do that, I don’t want to do anything. I will be a famous writer of songs like those. Songs that every organ will play. Songs that every seaside band will play. Songs that wandering and beggared men, who know nothing about me, will honour by playing outside public-houses. I am going to write the people’s songs.”

These sentences were not formed in his mind, but they express his attitude of that evening and of many years to come. From that evening he thought of no other career, and within two days he had set himself steadily to prepare for it. He first murmured his dream to his clergyman friend, who seemed to have a sharper understanding and quicker sympathy than

the school-master, the doctor or the bespoke tailor. The clergyman pointed out that before he could even begin to translate his dream into reality it would be necessary that he should have some little working knowledge of music, and that he had better begin by learning the piano. This was his first setback, of which he was to have many. He had not foreseen this necessity, and for a moment he was dismayed. He had no interest in music itself, and no desire whatever to study that tinkling instrument, the piano, or any other instrument. He wanted only to compose the people's songs. But the next moment his dream strengthened him, and when he understood that it really was necessary that a composer of popular songs should have some knowledge of music (twenty years of progress has shown this to be a fallacy), he readily set himself to the required drudgery. Whereupon the clergyman, in the kindness of his heart, told him that he could have the use of his piano four evenings a week for practice, and that he himself would be his tutor.

Together they set to work, and the boy proved himself such an eager and apt pupil that at the end of six months he could give not only finished renderings of the lighter pieces of Chopin, Schumann and Liszt, but brilliant sight-readings of the rag-time melodies that were then beginning to be fashionable. Within two years his progress had been so remarkable that, so far as a knowledge of music is required for the

business of composing popular songs, he was already equipped six times over. But the clergyman, carried away by enthusiasm at the lad's prowess, would not let him rest upon that, but forced upon him continual practice of the most difficult and subtle masters, and compelled him to widen both his scholarship and his technique. The lad saw no necessity for this, but since he owed it to the clergyman that he had any knowledge of music at all, he could not be ungrateful enough to demur to the old man's wishes. He therefore humoured him by continuing to practise, and by entertaining the old man's friends with the best masters when called upon; and in the meantime he attended to his own affairs and studied the technique of the popular song by visiting all the music-halls, listening to every street-organ, and hanging about those public-houses that were on the beat of wandering minstrels.

At the end of three years he knew more about the structure of the popular song than the most successful writer of popular songs has ever known, and he felt, justifiably, that his course of study was at an end, and that the time had come to begin his work. He began.

Need I trouble you with his early adventures in Charing Cross Road? I thought not. Day by day he went from publisher to publisher. Some of them would not even permit him to play over his sheaf of

songs; those who did invariably answered that if he had brought those songs last year they would have been winners. When he took in dances they wanted comic songs. When he took in comic songs, they wanted songs about roses. When he took in songs about roses they wanted dances. When he took in the dances he had previously taken in, they wanted some other kind of dance. When he took in another kind of dance, they wanted still, yet, and again some other kind of dance. Until, weary and broken in spirit, he faced the fact of failure. He had dreamed of writing the people's songs — songs that every boy would whistle, every girl would dance to; songs that strong men would sing in their baths; songs that gramophones in a million homes would play on Sunday evenings; songs that would be sung on ships and in barracks, and in all those distant corners of the earth where hardy Englishmen hardily toil while thinking sentimentally of home. He had got, he was sure, those songs in his music-case; but he was forced to realise that street-boys and strong men would never sing them. Charing Cross Road would not permit it.

One small success alone was granted him. At a time when a publisher, who had listened to his Roses songs and his comic songs, had expressed an urgent need of a good Mother song, he had been able, by the blessing of the spirits, to produce from his case a good Mother song. It was called "My Mother's Silver

Curls in the Firelight.” You may have heard it, and may have wondered how it is that young composers of twenty-six, alone among all other young men of twenty-six, possess mothers of such advanced age. But I feel sure that you cannot have heard it, since it was his only child, and it was still-born. It was this, rather than the constant refusal of his work, that finally crushed him. It was this that made him realise that he had failed. He had set a goal before him, and he knew then that he would never reach it. A few months afterwards he retired for ever from Charing Cross Road, and at thirty-two he faced the world in the gnawing self-knowledge of failure.

“But look here,” I said at the end of the four hours, “you’re talking nonsense. Failure? Why, his picture’s in *The Times* to-day. And in two or three other papers. He’s one of the ——”

“I don’t see,” said old Quong, “what that has to do with it. I know as well as you that he is now the darling of Mayfair drawing-rooms, that his name is the talisman by which members of the musical intelligentsia recognise each other, that he receives two hundred guineas for attending a private party. As to how he fell to that, I omitted to tell you that somebody of importance happened to be in a music publisher’s when he was playing over his popular airs; that this person noted his hands; and that this person

suggested that he put himself under the care of a friend of the person's. Perceiving that this person of importance might be of use in bringing his comic songs and sentimental songs before the public, the young Winkeldonck fell in with the suggestion, and four years later —. The rest you know from those pictures.

“But what about it? I cannot see that his present position in any way obliterates or glosses his failure. His failure is a fact. He was here last week, and he told me how, whenever he adjusts the piano-stool in the music-room of Lady Glob's little place, and looks over the heads of those assembled in righteous superiority to listen to the latest virtuoso — he told me how he suffers then that sickness of the soul known to saints and artists when the face of God is turned from them and the chasm of futility and extinction opens before them. Over their heads he sees a vision of what might have been — a vision of the one thing that would have given him the content that only comes when one is fulfilling oneself. He sees the packed tiers of a popular vaudeville house, and himself conducting a band and playing to nodding heads and shuffling feet his latest popular airs.”

THE YELLOW IMPS

THE YELLOW IMPS

I HAVE heard many times (said old Quong) that conscience makes cowards of us all, but I have never had an authenticated case brought to my knowledge. What is undoubtedly true, and each of us can prove it from his own observation, is that conscience can and does make fools of us all. As it did in the tale of the yellow imps, which I have not, I believe, told you before. Indeed, I am sure I have not, because I only thought of it this morning; so I need not employ that disarming stroke of the polite English entertainer and request you to stop me if you have heard it.

(I had never at any time been under the necessity of stopping old Quong. My chief trouble was in starting him and keeping him in progress. The tale of the yellow imps seemed to work itself out like this.)

There was a high wind in London one October evening, and among others who struggled under it was a man in a blue macintosh. It made hats fly and frocks dance. It set the lamplight fluttering as a bird flutters when an alien hand approaches its cage. The

pavements were glistening with recent rain, and it made them shiver. The roadways were lakes of ebony, and it set broken pieces of the lamplight skating upon them. It whipped columns of chimney smoke into one maelstrom. Only the houses stood rigid before it; they acknowledged it as a man acknowledges a buzzing fly.

But to man himself it was no mere fly: it was unloosed power; and to the man in the blue macintosh, with whom we are concerned, it was destiny. Dead bricks it could not move, but the man in the blue macintosh, symbol of the immortal, was its toy; and it was now driving him, against half his will, to commit the sin that the other half wanted to commit. It first pestered his face, and stung his eyes, and chilled his hands, and filled his heart with its own rage: then it drove him out of his path into Bayswater.

He was faintly aware that he was grateful to the wind. By assuming the function of destiny it made his half-purpose a purpose. He hadn't really meant to turn into that road; he believed that he had meant to go past it; but while he stood at the corner, thinking the thing over, a sudden gust caught him under his macintosh and sent him running some paces down it. When the gust eased he found that he was actually in Leinster Gardens, and that to get out of it he would have to turn and battle again with the wind; and he was tired of battling. Here, clearly, was the hand-

push of destiny. Useless to resist that. Being in Leinster Gardens, he felt that he was meant to go on. The affair had been decided for him by the wind. His infirmity of purpose now became upright, and he allowed that wind, which could not move the houses, to whirl him to disaster.

In the lavender dusk the interlocked squares and terraces of Bayswater made a map of the land of nightmare. The lines of tall dark houses looming upward and stretching forward to infinity; the lines of lamps that waited like a frozen guard for a procession that never came; the deep hush; the sudden enclosed spaces of whispering trees, and the insane repetition of terrace upon terrace — all this made this bourgeois quarter the apt setting for a tale of horror. Horror seldom grows among horror; almost always it springs up in the incongruous air of pastoral beauty or urban decorum; but if ever horror should outstrip itself in London, Bayswater should be its setting.

Now that he had got into Leinster Gardens, he began to walk up and down, and for half-an-hour he went up and down, pad-pad-pad, eye and mind directed to one house. By the disposition of the street lights he was sometimes energy and sometimes reverie. Now, as he crossed the amber radius of the lamplight, he lived as a man; now, as he passed into the interspaces of purple, he was an impalpable

organism. That flickering march was a miniature of his life. Pad-pad-pad he went, fixed like a shuttle in a groove of two hundred yards, while all around him beat the life of this city of glittering distances.

At six o'clock he was in the house. He was standing behind a velvet hanging that draped the connecting door of the smoking-room and the study. He was on the study side, and was peering through the opening of the hanging into its dusky depths. He saw a large room strewn with rugs of Daghestan and Kerman and Coulas, and set with appointments that confirmed the rugs. Clearly the study of a rich man of over-opulent tastes. There were deep divan chairs in glowing yellow hide. The dark yellow walls were dressed with Oriental banners and curved weapons. On brackets and tables stood Buddhas and Sivas, large and small. On the mantel-shelf and on other shelves were idols with movable heads; with the passing of heavy traffic, their shaven crowns nodded in various rhythms, as at some secret thought. These figures nodding out of the shadows fascinated the man: he had the feeling of being spied upon. Elsewhere were great vases of the Sung and Ming period, and carvings in coral and rock-crystal; and on the desk in the centre of the room, scattered among ink-stand and cigar-box and lamp-standard, were a number of small figures and netsukes in old ivory.

The dominant note of the room, struck by the rugs and taken up by the wall-paper, the vases, the idols, the chairs and the ivory, was gold; and this note expressed its owner.

At the moment when the man behind the curtain, no longer beaten by the wind, was relaxing in his purpose under the hush and warmth of the room, it received three bursts of light from its electric lamps, and his victim stood within his reach. Gold, or hues verging upon gold, was about his person as well as about his room. There was the hard bronze face, the amber-coloured waistcoat, the amber cigar-holder, the watch-chain, and the russet tie; and as he stood for a second or two by one of the rugs he had the appearance of a golden god in a setting of gold receiving the homage of his nodding priests. That was his last appearance in magnificence, and it was an appearance of four seconds only, for at the fifth second he was on his back across the desk, and the floor was littered with cigars and the little ivory figures.

With one spring the man in the macintosh fell upon him. With fingers at throat, he forced the head back and back. But it was an uncalculated spring; it was taken in the moment when resolution was weakening; and there was no certainty behind it. Even with his fingers at that throat he couldn't be sure that he was going to do it. Even in the next few ticks of the clock, when he had in his hand a gold dagger snatched from

the desk — even then he wasn't sure that he was going to do it. He could still, if he wished, drop the dagger and take his fingers from the throat, and try to laugh it away as an insane joke, or a rough-and-tumble assault. But he didn't know whether he *did* wish to do that; he didn't know what he wished to do; the room had softened and bewildered him; and he was trying to make a firm decision this way or that when the gold man made it for him.

The gold man wrenched his neck aside, and through closed jaws spluttered one word. On that word down came the dagger into the neck, and down it came again into the side just below the arm. As it was drawn back for a third stroke, and the pressure on the throat a little loosened, the gold man made a death-heave and broke away. They fell, and on the floor, among the litter of ivories, they struggled softly. The vibration set the solemn idols nodding to each other — Look, look, look! There were slow gasps and hot panting. They spluttered. The gold man could make no words, but the blue macintosh was crisp. "There — that's shut *your* mouth. *You* won't talk much more. How's *that*?"

A third time the dagger came down, this time full into the throat. There was a gurgle, a sigh, and then peace. The blue macintosh got up. It was done. After months of approaching it and retreating from it, of nursing it and dismissing it, it was done. He had tried

to frighten himself out of it by visualising himself as a murderer in the dock and in the condemned cell and on the scaffold. He had tried to laugh himself out of it by imagining himself doing it — a ludicrous picture. He had tried to kill the idea by observing it from the outside as the silly antics of a fool. And now he had done it. Well, he must see about fixing things.

He stood over the body and bent himself to a question-mark, listening. But the great house was silent and still. Nobody had seen him enter, nobody, it seemed, had heard their struggle, and, by familiarity with the man's habits, he knew that nobody would come to the study until the dinner-gong was sounded. He looked down at the body and the blood-stained carpet and ivories, and then at his own clothes. No marks or stains that he could see. The dagger was still in the body, and could stay there; by his precaution of wearing gloves the haft could hold no clue. To assure himself that he had missed no danger-points he made a quick glance round the room, and in the moment of that glance his forehead froze. At every point of the room was something that grinned and nodded at him. Then he remembered the idols and laughed. But the moment was useful; it showed that he hadn't yet come to himself. He must wake up and be wary. One must be specially wary in matters like this — much more wary than in his ordinary business. He found himself shaking a little, and his

thoughts had a tendency to stray from the immediate business. That wouldn't do. His eye caught the glint of a series of decanters and glasses. Perhaps they would help. He never touched anything like that when on his regular business; but this was different. It was a new crisis for him, and a little slowing-down of his nerves might be useful.

He stepped through the litter of ivories and cigars, and opened the first decanter and poured himself a drunkard's draught. It was brandy. He drank it in quick sips, neat, keeping his ears tightened for the tiniest sound. When it was done he found that he was still trembling, still unable to fix his mind on the best way of meeting the situation. He turned to the next decanter and took a liberal one from that — whisky. In a few seconds he felt more at ease. A goods van went past the house, and the idols, which had recovered from the vibrations of the struggle, were set nodding again. With ferocious geniality he nodded back at them. One more peg — then he would be ready for a clean exit. He took it, this time in one gulp; then went across to the switches and turned off the light.

And here came another spot of panic. The sudden plunge of darkness gave him the shock of an unexpected plunge downstairs. He could have screamed. It was so complete a darkness that it came with a burning pain upon his hot eyes, and in the sudden

void of black he staggered and almost fell. Staring into it, seeking his way to the window, he could see the projected aureole of his own eyes just beyond the temples; and as he looked past that glow into the pit of darkness he saw it filled not with bloody faces or nodding idols, but with amorphous bodies of fear. The corners of the black room were breeding grey shadows, and the grey shadows bred purple shadows, and the purple shadows bred other shadows blacker even than the blackness of the room. Each shadow was a growth of new and stronger fear.

Never before had he been afraid, and he did not know how to handle himself. The knowledge that he was afraid surprised him. He made a gesture of bewilderment. Putting his hands to his face, he found that they were damp with sweat, and that his heart was a dynamo. The hostile mixture of brandy and whisky was working, and as the realisation of that went slowly into his brain and showed him his danger, instead of sobering him, it made him laugh. He told himself that he was too old a hand to be flustered by accidents. He was drunk. That's what it was — drunk. Just that. Those shadows were whisky and brandy shadows. They weren't there at all. Funny one should feel afraid of nothing just because one had killed a brute.

Still, it would be wise to get away, and to get away as tactfully as he had come. He went to the window,

swaying across the rug and turning his ankle on the scattered ivories. In the middle of the room he stopped and listened, wondering whether his drunken self might not have made some noise that his other self had not heard. But the whole house seemed as stark and dumb as the corpse on the floor. Only the ticking of the clock, for sound, and the nodding of the idols, for motion. Nothing else.

He put his gloved fingers to the window, raised it without noise, and looked out. He waited for a lorry to pass; then slid to the sill. He pulled the window down behind him. He reached forward from a kneeling position, and with one hand grasped a gutter-pipe that ran down the front of the house to the area. With the animal grace of a dancer he swung himself clear of the kitchen windows and landed on his toes by the entrance-porch of the next house. Some half-minute he stood there with the air of one waiting for the bell to be answered. This was his method of proving whether an exit had been "clean." It seemed that it was. He heard no stir anywhere, and met no curious eyes. With a glance of apparent disappointment he went down the steps and walked casually away. The wind was behind him, as it had been behind him at half-past five.

Once out and free, he was conscious of the wild air, and discovered that in the last half-hour he had not taken one full breath. Breathing was a momentary

luxury, and he breathed deep. He filled his lungs with the rushing air, breathing in time with his long steps. He was making for the canal, where he had planned to sink his macintosh and soft hat, and he was almost upon it when his long breathing defeated him. He was feeling once again master of himself and of the occasion when, without warning, earth and sky were twisted into one, and the moon came reeling and crashing through the wind into a chaos of nausea and vomit.

When, some minutes later, he came up from this collapse, he found himself clinging to the railings of Porchester Square. His legs were weak and his ears were buzzing and his eyes were blocked by a picture of the gold man's face as he last saw it when they lay wrestling on the floor. A popular dance-melody came into his head. He tried to drive it away by thinking of other melodies and of conversational phrases, but it came back and danced upon his brain. He began to be afraid that he would sing it or whistle it. That would never do. Mustn't attract attention. Must be careful. With a jerk he pulled himself up, loosened his collar and prepared to walk on.

It was at this moment of moving away that he first became clearly aware of a noise that had been troubling his ear under the dance-melody: a little clittering as of fairy castanets. He looked about

him, into the square, along the railings, and then at the pavement, and as he saw how the noise was being made a frozen wire went down his spine. He was nearly a mile from the house in Leinster Gardens, but there they were. They had trotted after him, and they were now trotting round him — the little golden blood-stained netsukes. His brain was still slumbering under the drink, but at this sight it came to a kind of cloudy awakening that deceived him into thinking it was a true awakening. There they were, clearly enough, running around his feet, jumping, curvetting in the frightful contortions of Oriental carpets. They were making arabesques all round him.

He did not attempt to imagine how the thing had happened. It *had* happened; and he was sensible enough to see the danger of the situation. If people passed and saw him like this, they might come and ask awkward questions. Certainly they would remember having seen him with these things all round him; and they would make a guess that he had stolen them and dropped them in running; and they might speak to the next policeman. He must pick them up and hide them. He bent towards them, toppled, and fell on his hands. In that position he groped for them and snatched at them; but in his nervous haste he was clumsy, and they were too quick for him. They dodged and doubled, and danced under and over his hand. Not one could he hold, and meantime they

pestered him and leapt about him, and vexed his eyes with their dartings. He felt one of them warm and wet against his cheek.

Well, if he couldn't pick them up he must get away. He had forgotten now about the canal and his macintosh. The important matter was to get way from these blood-stained things, and he clambered up and turned his back on them, and went with a quick lurch through the square. He kept as much out of the light as he could. To deceive them he made two or three crossings and recrossings of the road. In Gloucester Terrace he could see nothing of them, and was applauding himself at having shaken them off, when in Cleveland Square his ear told him that his stratagem had failed. Close behind him came the sound of castanets. Soon they caught up with him and encircled him. He broke through them, and they again encircled him. He kicked at them, but still they made their undisciplined ballet between his feet. Some of them leapt at him in Lilliput anger. The faces of these held the features of the dead man on the floor. He tried to turn back towards the stir and glare of Harrow Road, where he might lose them, but they buzzed and twisted about his knees with the infuriating pester of mosquitoes. For peace he was compelled to go forward.

He went at a half-running pace, and all the time they were with him. They kept about him, before

and behind, in a sort of open order. When he ran, they ran; when he trotted, they trotted; and when he kicked at them he kicked only the air. He was sobbing now, striking with arms and legs. As he stumbled on through the lamplit dusk of Craven Road he was aware that the few people who passed looked curiously at him. No wonder. A man being chased by little golden men.

But he was not now so concerned with the figure he cut. He was mainly concerned with dodging these damnable things. They filled him with the crawling horror of necromancy. He felt that they had Satanic powers drawn from all the objects of that room, and from their owner. Whichever way he turned they were with him, sometimes driving him, sometimes impeding him. Some of them settled on his trousers. With inward gasps, he struck them off. Some of them jumped high in the air and pattered elfin clog-dances on the crown of his hat. They played about him with the intimate deviltry of afreets. As they pattered and buzzed, it seemed to him that they called on other little golden things to join them. Coming into a half-lit square, he was met by a new host. He turned right and left, but only when he went straight on did they suspend their pestering. Even at those dark corners where he could not see them he could still hear them and feel them.

He went forward at a shamble, and as he went he thought again of the canal. If he could get there he might elude them. If he could get into the water they couldn't follow him there. He could swim across or stay in the water; they surely couldn't walk on water.

He turned for the canal, but as he turned they made a cloud about him, and he lost his direction. He could only go blindly forward.

Then, as he came out of the square into a side-street, they seemed to turn aside to his right, the whole host of them. He was fighting them with both arms when he saw that there was a clear space on his left, and that they had dropped behind him. Before him he saw an open door and a lighted hall. If he could get in there.

He got in. In the hall a man met him. He addressed the man in whimpering indignation. "I say — look here — all these things following me. Can't get along the street for them. Perfect pest."

"Oh? What's the trouble? What things?"

"Those things out there. Little golden men. Followed me from Leinster Gardens. Worse'n mosquitoes. All round one's face."

"Followed you from Leinster Gardens? Let's have a look at 'em. Here — hold up."

He swayed, and supported himself with an arm on

the wall. "Ah — all the way from Leinster Gardens."

"I see. You better sit down a bit. Little golden men, eh? Leinster Gardens? Come and sit down."

The Inspector led him to a farther room, and spoke to two men in the room. "Just look after this man. He's a bit faint." The two men got up, and as one of them caught the Inspector's eye, he closed the door and stood against it. The Inspector went to the telephone at the desk in the hall, and the October gale continued to rush down the street and fill the hall with companies of yellow leaves.

THE OBSCENITY OF GLAMIS FLANG

THE OBSCENITY OF GLAMIS FLANG

IF you (said old Quong, meaning me) will remove your feet from that tea-chest, I shall be able to sit down, which I much desire to do; and when I am seated I will requite your courtesy with a story. If (he went on in his high, thin tones) — if I can think of one.

Whereupon I removed my feet, and he sat down, and there was a pause in the conversation for about the space of five hours. At the end of the five hours he said: "There is a certain newspaper in London which is owned by a journalist and in which all the articles are written by journalists. Now ——"

"Pardon me," I interrupted. "Pardon me, Mr. Quong, but that is a bald and glossy lie."

Without looking at me he said: "Indeed it is. But are we not telling lies? Did you not tell me this morning how last night you met an intelligent actor? However . . . if it is your desire to hear a true story, here is one that a young customer of mine told me many years ago. It seems to me to show, as your politicians often point out, how necessary it is that

we should each and all remember something or other."

He then relapsed into a silence that went far beyond his closing-time, while I read three evening papers and made a close study of the features of Lord Roberts which illuminated an otherwise bourgeois almanack for 1901.

The young Glamis Flang (he began, so suddenly that I was surprised to find myself still in his shop) — the young Glamis Flang was a black-and-white artist who worked for one of those comic papers which are intended for the amusement of those not endowed with the finer perceptions of comedy — telegraph-boys, choir-boys, the sons of the higher aristocracy and the editors of such papers. His occupation, I trust, may be held to excuse all that follows. It certainly needs some excuse, but I feel that the mere mention of his occupation will be sufficient.

Glamis Flang was not, in the material sense, oppressed by his employment. He earned by it the comfortable sum of fifteen pounds a week, and though, when he began his artistic career, he was living in one well-lighted room on the water-side just here, he was soon able to move to the less light and airy, but socially more honourable quarter of Fitzroy Square. Here he lived in an adequate studio-flat, and spent what he wished to spend, and set the remainder aside in preparation for his marriage to

the only charming girl that the crowded art-world of Charlotte Street and Fitzroy Square could produce.

Yes; I said marriage. I know that he was an artist, but he had never been a bohemian — there are quite a lot of artists who haven't — and all his thoughts concerning this girl were linked, by some curious atavism, with the ceremony called marriage. His friends, I must say, did their best to make him see reason, both by pleading and objurgation; but when a man has become dazzled by two starry eyes, what use to warn him of folly, or to plead with him to remember what is due to his profession? We have all, I think, been faced with such situations, and have done our best to recall a bemused young man to his senses, and we have all failed. So with the friends of Glamis Flang. He had set himself upon marriage, and it was useless to hold up to him the dignity of social usage and convention, and the scorn and obloquy that are the lot of those who defy it. Marry he would, and he was so far lost to all sense of professional decency that he sank to the lowest Victorian depths. He announced his engagement to the girl, and presented her with a ring.

When a friend asked why all this ritual and flummery over a simple matter, when the bed in his studio was already large enough for two, he turned upon that friend with the single exclamation of "*George!*" pronounced in such a tone that the friend, who was

a smaller man than Glamis, went hastily away. And Glamis went on saving money in preparation for his marriage.

As I have said, he had no complaints on the material side against his employment as a comic draughtsman for Lord Pennioncan's papers. The only irk was that he had a sense of wit and humour, and we all know that the possession of a sense of wit and humour, unless it is given full play, has the pathological effect on a man of an in-growing nail or a blind rash. You see the young man's predicament? But somehow or other it had to come out, and it did. His employment made no great demands upon his time. One page a week was all that he had to supply — one page consisting of eight little drawings presenting the adventures, often incredible and always lacking in verisimilitude, of two men named, for some obscure reason known only to the editor, Oliss Moke and Lord Elpus. He could usually do these drawings in two days, and therefore he had ample leisure for the release of his sense of the comic. Unfortunately — or fortunately; I am not yet sure which — as so often happens with a long-suppressed disorder, it came out in the wrong place. His labours for Lord Pennioncan's popular weekly left him with a marked, even morbid, distaste for the more ordinary manifestations of the comic, and this distaste sent him roving into alien pastures.

So, when he had done his week's work in accordance with the ideas dictated by his editor, it was his habit to sit at his table, and, with some sheets of his best Whatman Board before him — which he never used for his weekly drawings — he would allow his fancy and his pen to cover these sheets without licence. It was his particular pleasure to depict the Messrs. Moke and Elpus in situations in which he had often imagined them, and often desired to draw them; the said situations being, by a strange coincidence, such as would have sent Lord Pennioncan, who was a devout Pentecostal, into a series of convulsions which might easily have lasted through the entire Feast of Passover. The situations around which the fancy of Mr. Flang played demanded, as additional company to the Messrs. Oliss Moke and Elpus, not, as usual, tramps, policemen and hot-tempered old gentlemen, but female companions in the sunrise of beauty, youth, and happiness.

It would be unfitting to my age, and to your youth, were I to attempt to describe these drawings, some of which Mr. Flang showed to me. I will only say that whereas in his regular drawings the Messrs. Moke and Elpus and the rest of the characters — with the exception of the tramps — were agreeably clothed, in the spare-time drawings the characters were not clothed at all. Possibly the situations in which his exuberant fancy depicted them made clothes rather a

handicap than otherwise; but I am not seeking reasons for his artistic method; I am only stating facts. I will further say that of all the works of graphic wit and humour which have been displayed to these eyes on their wanderings and occasional halts at such resorts as Aden, Suez, Colombo, Buenos Aires, San Francisco and Yokohama, they have seen none in which fancy was given freer rein, or inspiration served it more aptly. All of us, at times, permit our imaginations to play around the pivot of existence, but few of us, I think, can be so gifted as Mr. Glamis Flang, so rich in invention, so prolific of novelty. From a glance at his drawings one felt that Ovid had much to learn, and that his art is, even in the most sophisticated quarters, still in its infancy.

Comic, perhaps, they were not, unless one regards the aberrations and abnormalities of his fellows as comic: they were rather the outpouring of a mind which had, at the moment of doing them, a savage hatred of something — of Lord Pennioncan, perhaps; certainly of all the qualities that the artist himself, in his daily life, practised in high degree, and really held in high esteem.

I think he must have recognized that they were a blasphemy against the things he really believed, an outbreak of the pig that lives in all of us, because, after he had done them, and the fit had worn off, he was disgusted with them and with himself for doing

them. He was particularly disgusted, even to the point of loathing, if he happened, in the minute of finishing them, to think of his wonderful Cynthia. To him she was the one pure thing in the world of Fitzroy Square — the one thing that upheld the eternal verities; and her simplicity, her wholesome outlook, and the fearless decency with which she faced the smirking bravado of her world were to him something that must not be soiled by the dull stain of his everyday life. Much less must it have even the remotest contact with the horrors that he wrought upon his sheets of Whatman Board in these moments of revolt.

Wherefore it was his custom, when the fit had passed, to attend most carefully to the destruction of these horrors; to burn them one by one, and to watch each until it was wholly consumed. This he did almost immediately upon completing them, and the only group that was not destroyed was the group that he displayed to these eyes. There was no special reason why this group *should* be destroyed. And the lack of a reason came about in this manner.

He had one afternoon completed a series of these unpublishable adventures of Oliss Moke and Lord Elpus, when there came a knock at his door. Hastily disposing somehow of the unholy sidelights upon humanity — he did not, a moment later, remember how he had disposed of them — he opened the door, and discovered his Cynthia. This was not one of her

days for calling, but it appeared that she had made this unexpected call because a friend of hers, despairing of making a serious livelihood, urgently desired an introduction to the chief editor of the publications of Lord Pennioncan. He was none the less delighted to see her, and, drawing her into the studio, he settled her in a comfortable chair, and set about making tea for her.

It was while he was engaged in making tea that his spirit was immersed in a pool of icy water. Where had he put those drawings? Where? Where? Did he leave them on the desk? Were they sticking out of a drawer? Had he dropped them on the floor? Under a creeping of the skin he realised that he didn't know what he *had* done with them. They might be lying on his settee under her eye. From the tiny kitchen, where he was making the tea, he looked into his studio, seeking some sign of them; but he could see nothing. He tried to cast himself back to the moment when the knock sounded on the door, but though he could recapture that moment, he could not recapture the movements of his hands. Something he had done with them, he knew, but what? Probably something useless, as people did in moments of panic; no doubt he had put them in the most conspicuous place, where they would shriek his infamy to anybody who came into the room. Oh, what *had* he done with them?

But though he tortured his memory, it refused to speak, and when he brought the tea into the studio his pre-occupation was such as to attract remark. The young lady's remark was: "Bothered about work, old boy?" "No." "Lost anything?" "Yes — I was looking — looking for my pipe." "It's in your hand." "I mean tobacco." "It's on the table." "Oh, yes. Yes." For ten minutes the atmosphere was somewhat constrained. He found it difficult to follow what she was saying, and still more difficult to give intelligent comment. His eyes and attention were constantly roving. But after ten minutes he became easier; the scrutiny that he had made of the room from the centre of the hearth-rug convinced him that wherever he had put the drawings he had put them well out of the way of any casual eye.

And then the young lady, responding to his warming manner, settled herself more comfortably in her chair, and something rustled. She turned to see what it was that rustled, and drew out some stiff sheets of paper. At the same moment the young man almost leapt upon her, and tried to tear the sheets of paper from her. But she held on. He said: "No, no, no!" She said: "I shall. I shall. What are they? Let me see." "No, no. You mustn't. They're not — I mean ——" She said: "Don't be silly. Why shouldn't I see them? I'm interested in everything you do." "Yes, but not those. They're not — I mean ——"

She held him off with one arm, and turned away to examine the papers. By this time the young man's heart and lungs had moved from their correct position and were careering into corners of his interior where they did not fit. He made one more attempt to snatch them from her, but he was too late. She had already seen enough to show her the kind of thing that they were, and as she shuffled them through her hands he turned away in misery. It was all over. By one half-hour of idiotic indulgence he had thrown away his happiness. She would no longer see him as a third-rate artist who was a good friend and an adoring lover. She would see him as a stampeding beast; nay, something far below the beasts, a ghoul, a satyr, a what-d'ye-call-it.

He walked to the farther wall of the studio and awaited her scorn. It was some time in coming, and he turned to see what was delaying it. He turned, and saw her bent over the drawings, examining them one by one in detail. And then he saw her shoulders shaking. And then he heard a chuckle. And then he heard a long, helpless laugh that ended in a gurgle. And then she swung round to him and spoke.

"Oh, Glam. . . . Oh, Glam. Oh — oh. . . . Who *ever* would think from your other stuff that you had this kind of stuff in you? You too stabbingly clever boy!" And she collapsed in sweet laughter.

And now, upon those words and that laughter, the

young man's misery vanished, and his heart leapt up. His first thought was: "What an escape! Fancy her taking it like that. How splendid of her — how sporting! *Some* girls. . . . But she's different. There aren't many girls like that — girls who are decent themselves and yet can understand a man's little twists. How wonderful of her! And oh, what an escape!"

A minute later, amid uncontrollable spurts of laughter, she went on her way, and the artist was alone again. He picked up the drawings which she had set on the desk, and looked at them from the outside, as at the work of another man. He looked closely at them. Then he looked at the door. Then he passed his hand across his face, and raised his head as if coming out of sleep. And as he looked at the door he said to himself: "My God, what an escape! Why, she must be just as foulminded a cat as the rest of the bunch. And I was pretty near marrying her. What an escape!"

And the moral (said old Quong), now I come to think of it, has nothing to do with tradition. It is that one should never work for an employer with a Pentecostal Conscience. It is so infectious.

THE BEAUTIFUL END

THE BEAUTIFUL END

IT is a reflection (said my friend) causing deep distress to the unphilosophical that we human creatures can direct neither our beginnings nor our ends. All of us, I think, whether born high or low, wish that we might have had some other manner of beginning; and there can be few who are wholly satisfied with the manner of their ending. But I do know of one case in which I think satisfaction was granted; at least, by all the calculable factors it should have been. Shall I relate it to you?

(He reached for his water-pipe, and after he had cleaned it, and filled the water-bowl, and charged it with tobacco, and lit it — that is to say, forty-five minutes later — he began to tell the story.)

You will remember (he said) the noise made by your newspapers a few years ago concerning the disappearance of a once well-known actress. Like all noises made by newspapers, it was at first very loud. After two days it sank to a non-committal murmur, and on the fourth day a somewhat louder noise —

caused by the elopement of a noble-family trollop with the proprietor of one of those chemist's shops which you call beauty parlours — completely drowned it. That is why the public that had once acclaimed her knows nothing of the ending of their one-time favourite, Drina Kromeskie — the editors, acting under the inspiration of the nine points of newspaper wisdom, knowing full well that their readers would be much more interested in the doings of an obscure trollop who happened to live in Mayfair, than in the possibly tragic fate which had overtaken one who was really known to them and whose talent had so often delighted them.

But I witnessed her ending. Drina Kromeskie came to it in this street and before this window. She came to it splendidly, with all the accent and appointment of drama. She came to it as every actress would wish to come to it, with an audience about her and with approbation ringing in her ears. She must, I think, have died happily, though nobody but myself knew that it was Drina Kromeskie who had died.

In the course of my sojourn on the face of this earth many disturbances have conspired against my serenity. I have ignored the salute of the important Ah Fook, whom my defective sight mistook for the keeper of the laundry at the corner. I have suffered fools gladly. I have talked to the full extent of my charm to a possible customer, and then discovered

that he had come to collect a debt. I have given credit to swindlers and refused it to the honest, and invariably when I go to my food-cupboard in the dark my hands find the syrup-dish. Indeed, for many days of my life, notably in my youth, my state has been such that I could never see a silver lining without thinking of the cloud that it lined. Yet the memory of these distresses would be wholly assuaged if I could look to an end as fitting for me as Drina Kromeskie's was for her.

What it was, when fortune turned its back upon her, that made her pick upon this quarter to live in, I cannot say. Possibly she had been reading some of your ludicrous inventions about us — no other reason occurs to me. But it is the fact that she did come here. Deprived of the stir and gleam of public worship in the West End, she found it impossible to live in that world without it. Equally impossible was it for a once-celebrity to live in a modest villa in one of the agreeable suburbs, since the public of the theatre is mainly drawn from the agreeable suburbs, and she would there have been exposed to the danger of being recognized — recognized and pitied. Still more impossible was it for one of her vibrant nature to retire to the social anæmia and mental stagnation of provincial town or country village. She decided therefore that she would hide herself in some strange place where she might still find some stir of life, and yet be

unrecognized; and, as I say, for reasons unknown, she picked upon this place.

She took up her lodging in this street, and often visited this shop. After a few visits she made me — again I cannot say why — the repository of her sorrows. She lived here less than a year, and from what I learned of her story she had little perceptible motive for living that long. It is so sad a story that one can only treat it lightly.

The cause of her decline in public favour goes back to the old matter that fills the Western world with so much unrest — the matter of love. She fell in love, and, unhappily for her, she fell in love with a drunkard. He was an open and confessed drunkard — there was no twelfth-hour discovery about it — but she loved him and he loved her; and, in the vain hope that mutual love might work a cure upon him, she married him. The excitement of love and marriage, however, so far from supplanting his appetite for drink, only re-kindled it. His habit had already lost him two positions as general manager of theatres, and although her name secured for him another and better post, it was clear to all his friends that he would not long hold it. They were right. He was drunk at the wedding-breakfast, and he continued to be drunk, and developed more and more unpleasant habits. Instead of attempting to live up to his famous and talented and loving wife, he seemed, after

marriage, to abandon even a show of discipline. It may be that, knowing his failing and his position, he was aware of his inferiority to his wife, and this sense of inferiority went sour. He knew that people spoke of him as Drina Kromeskie's husband, and compared them, and, knowing this and knowing himself, he may, in his state of moral weakness, have said "All right. As I *am* inferior, I'll *be* inferior." Certainly he seemed to act upon this surrender, for, although he had always been bohemian, after his marriage he became so bohemian that all his fellow-bohemians dropped him, and even the brighter set of Mayfair began to be chary of asking him to their parties. Very soon he was dropped out of all invitations. His wife continued to be asked out, but, without a word being said, it was understood that she would not bring Charles. She was still able to receive entertainment from her friends, but she herself could entertain only in restaurants — never in her own home. She could never be sure what Charles might do or say, or what shocking appearance he might make. A pleasant marriage.

But at last, when life was becoming almost impossible, and he was urging her, in all kindness, to leave him before he wrecked her career as well as his own, she made one desperate effort. She knew that her name and career were being soiled by him, but she could not bring herself to abandon such a helpless child. She therefore made her last throw. In a foolish

attempt to shock him and shame him into climbing out of his slough, she began to drink with him. And not only to drink with him, but to get drunk, so that he might see, as she had seen, what it meant to live with a drunken person. A hopeless attempt, you will say; but in this case it succeeded.

Its success was not immediate. It took some time for the thing to penetrate his dulled wits. At first he thought it extremely jolly that his dignified wife should become human, and they sat up late together, many nights, opening bottles and telling stories of a kind that are usually told only in the lower kind of public-house. Then, one night, he came home sober, and saw the beautiful Drina Kromeskie drunk on the settee.

He had seen her drunk before, but then he, too, had been drunk. This time he was not drunk, and he saw her clearly for the first time in that state. The effect on the careless broken bohemian was all that she had desired. In that moment he saw her as (he realized) she had so long been seeing him; and that night he resolved, quietly and without flourish, that they would never drink again. If his example had produced this horrid moment, he would see that it did so no more. What he had been doing to himself did not greatly matter; but when he saw what he had done to Drina, when he saw how his behaviour had been

imitated by one whom he cherished, he received a new draught of moral purpose. He would not drink again.

Strange as it may seem, he never did. But he was not of the type that has a constitutional craving for drink; he had really no positive desire for it, but drank rather from habit and from love of company. He had often before made casual resolves to have no more to do with it, but he had never been able to see any sound reason why he *should* do without it, and the resolve had been ignored. Now that he had that reason, his fight was easy.

Well, his wife did what she had set out to do: she cured him. She cured him, but she ruined the career of Drina Kromeskie. For, in the space of time that had been given to her object-lesson, Drina Kromeskie had acquired not only the habit, but the craving. She became careless in keeping her time at the theatre. She became careless in her work. There were four nights during the run of a play in which she was leading lady when the understudy had to appear. And there was one night when her behaviour on the stage aroused murmurs of consternation among the audience. The end of that play was the end of Drina Kromeskie. Her friends tried to help her, but she did not want their help. Stories were being told about her, and, in a chivalrous effort to kill these stories and reinstate her with the public, a leading playwright wrote his

new play specially for her. But her appearance at rehearsals could not be counted upon, and at last she was dropped.

She had saved her husband and wrecked herself. But the wreckage was not yet rounded and completed. Her husband effected this. For some time he fought the hard fight of living as a sober man with a drunken wife; but masculine virtue is not so pliant as feminine virtue, and after a year, when she was no longer wanted either in the theatre or by her friends, he gave in. He did what she had not been able to bring herself to do. He ran away. He left her and went to South Africa, or somewhere, with a young actress who had no failings — at least, no unsocial and unfashionable failings.

And that is how the once-famous actress disappeared from the theatre and from her world, and sought refuge here, and ended her days here.

Yet I like to think that her sacrifice had its reward. All the time she was here, lonely and neglected, she was thinking of the past, of the theatre and its bustle and applause; and every evening around seven o'clock, and every Wednesday and Saturday around one o'clock, she would become restless. She wanted the theatre; she was lost without the theatre; and at the end one moment of the theatre was given to her.

What it was that brought her to death, I do not know. It may have been that a slow accumulation of

distress suddenly reached the breaking-point, or it may have been that some one thing loaded the superlative upon what she had already endured. It may have been, so perverse is human nature, that some trifle such as a creaking door, or a landlady who hummed hymns all day, drove her to it. I do not know. I only know that I was sitting at my window one Saturday afternoon, when she appeared in the street. She came hastily, stumbling, as though seeking the open air. But scarcely had I seen her when she lifted her hand and pressed it to her head, and there was a sharp report, and she fell.

The street was empty at the time, and I was the first to arrive at her side. I and a little boy, who came running round the corner. I bent over her and lifted her head. Her eyes opened, and they held a flicker of life. She seemed to recognize me, and I feel sure that she heard the words of the little boy, because at those words the flicker lightened, and in the moment of her passing her lips held the faintest shred of smile. The little boy came running round the corner, and cried: "What is it? What's happened?" I answered him over my shoulder: "A lady has shot herself," and the little boy clasped his hands, and said: "O-oh! I wish she'd do it again. I never saw it!"

JOHN BROWN'S BODY

JOHN BROWN'S BODY

REVENGE (said old Quong, shaking a few chrysanthemum buds into his tea) affords an interesting study, and I am surprised that nobody has yet given us a book exploring this human passion. It is fully as interesting as the passion of love, upon whose technique thoughtful and other writers have lavished so many thousand volumes; and it offers so many sidelights on the human character that in these days of industrious book-making it is really surprising that it has been overlooked. The writer could penetrate the soul of the passion itself, and examine its many inter-locking cells and chambers, and could then go on to study the thousand and one modes of its expression. Fascinating, this; for ever since the world began it has been a dominant passion in human relationships, and the desire for its gratification has revealed unusual felicity of invention.

From that very earliest revenge of an unknown avenger, whose act has passed into a proverbial warning against cutting off the nose to spite the face, down to that which is recalled to me by a paragraph in this evening's paper, human wit has shown itself

unfailing in developing and extending the technique of revenge, both in form and style. We have the revenge plain and the revenge coloured. The revenge impulsive and the revenge meditative. The revenge crude and the revenge fastidious. The revenge heroic and the revenge cowardly. The revenge brutal and the revenge witty. We have the revenge of compelling the enemy to die, and the revenge of refusing to let him die. We have the revenge of imprisoning the enemy, and the revenge of setting him at liberty. We have the revenge of dying in circumstances which will put the enemy under great suspicion, and the revenge of continuing to live after impending death has been announced. We have the revenge of frustrating desire, and the revenge of assisting its fulfilment. We have the revenge of those who cut their throats upon the enemy's doorstep, and of those who set up house opposite the enemy, in superior style. We have the revenge of working social and financial ruin upon the enemy, and the revenge of elevating him to prominent positions for which he is inadequate. We have the revenge of publishing, and the revenge of suppressing. We have the revenge of saying poisonous things, and the revenge of saying subtly agreeable things. We have the revenge of doing what the enemy fears you will do, and the revenge of doing something else. And we have the revenge, sometimes the most acid of all, of turning the other cheek.

It was the paragraph in this evening's paper, announcing the death in a lunatic asylum of John Brown, that moved me to make this comment.

You remember John Brown, who had that large business — at least a very large building housed it — on the other side of the river? . . . Well, perhaps I could hardly expect you to. You are still young, and I suppose it is natural that you should hold indifference, even a weary contempt, towards men who own large businesses. When poets reach the age of fifty. . . .

This John Brown, then, controlled a business, of what nature I forget, which had been controlled by his father. It was one of those businesses — there are few of them to-day — which are conducted with dignity and genuine courtesy, not because dignity and courtesy have been found to pay, but because the partners know no other way of conducting business. It was a personal business, and John Brown and his partner shared the same room, and John Brown maintained both business and social contact with his clients. His clients never saw a manager or a secretary; they saw John Brown. And John Brown never saw other people's managers or secretaries; he saw the principals. He met his clients daily at his club, and he dined at their houses, and they dined at his, and, so far as John Brown was concerned, the business was going very well, and maintaining both the pros-

perity and the ideals which had been the aim of his father.

But John Brown had a young partner. You know nothing of business, but if you did you would know that a young partner in an old-established business is something like a bluebottle fly in the reading-room of a well-conducted club. And so John Brown found it. The young partner was full of what he called ideas, but to John Brown these ideas bore as much relation to serious business as the philosophical writings of the young Mr. Tood bear to philosophy. He refused to listen to them, and when the young partner, whose name was Harold Skimpole, insisted that something must be done to bring the firm within a mile of the tail-end of the procession, and that his ideas would do it, he reminded him that he (John Brown) was the senior partner. Whereupon the young man took note of the remonstrance and reminded himself that he, Harold Skimpole, was the bright and thrusting and intensely junior partner; and went elsewhere for encouragement and comfort.

He went to a friend of his — Mrs. Brown.

In accordance with the traditions of the firm, the junior partner had dined frequently at the house of the senior partner, and had spent many week-ends at their river-side cottage. It had taken no more than the first four visits to show Mrs. Brown how much she and the young Harold Skimpole had in common, and

on the fifth visit she perceived that they had almost everything in common, short of some physical characteristics. It was to Mrs. Brown, therefore, that Harold Skimpole turned for comfort under his repeated rebuffs and for encouragement in his schemes for furthering the prosperity and prestige of the old firm.

Now one of the great troubles of the Western world — greater far than the trouble of surplus population, or the decay of agriculture — is that it has so few women and so many females, such as bitches, vixens, hens, cows and so on. It was, unhappily, to one of these that John Brown was married, and it is due to this fact that the ancient and honourable firm of John Brown no longer exists, and that John Brown died in the lunatic asylum to which his female had consigned him.

It happened in this way. Mrs. Brown and Mr. Skimpole wanted more money than they had. They always had wanted more money than they had, but since their meeting with each other they had a definite purpose in wanting it. They wanted to be happy together, and they could not be properly and modernly happy without money, and they could not get money unless the business produced increased profits. So long as old John Brown showed no sign of dying, and flatly refused to retire, it was not likely to do this; accordingly, they began to cast

about for means of making it do it, and at last Mrs. Brown evolved a scheme under which the control of the business passed into the hands of Mr. Skimpole.

Consideration of their case (and of others like them) makes it clear to me why the institution of marriage, against which the English are constantly making objurgation, remains still so popular in this country. It is so much less costly, and so much less nerve-racking, than the other kind of relationship.

Well, as I say, Mrs. Brown evolved a scheme whereby the firm should be speeded-up, and the large profits then passing it by and entering the accounts of other firms should be attracted to their firm. Mr. John Brown unconsciously gave her some assistance in her scheme. He had just then been working long hours at his office — longer than was good for him. The business was sound enough, and it brought him what he considered a more than sufficient income for two people of their rank with no children. He had no fears for it, but he was none the less worried by the constant urgings of his junior partner that the thing would collapse unless more — I think he called it Zip — were put into it, and by the constant demands of his wife for more money and new cars. Although he was convinced of the soundness of the concern, these constant whisperings of imminent failure began to have their effect upon a man of his age, and soon he began to show signs of it. He became absent-

mined. He said the same thing three times. He failed to remember his appointments. When he was asked one question, he replied to another.

In short, he jumped into Mrs. Brown's hands.

She sent for a mental specialist, and told him about her husband. The mental specialist came to dinner — as the father of a school-days friend of Mrs. Brown — and observed Mr. Brown through the course of an evening. He paid two more visits. On the third visit he brought with him a friend, who also observed Mr. Brown. Two days later they went through that process which you call "certifying," and the completely sane Mr. Brown was taken away from his home and away from his business, and carried to a large country house.

And now Mrs. Brown was free to enjoy Mr. Skimpole's company, and Mr. Skimpole was free to enjoy the reconstruction of the old firm. All the ideas which had been bubbling within him were now released. He modernised the tone and accent of the firm, and he modernised its clothes. He re-decorated the offices, and bought modern letter-paper, and employed modern artists for its catalogue, and ultra-modern printing for its circulars. He advertised in papers which Mr. John Brown would have shuddered to touch. He gave elaborate luncheons to "useful" people in smart restaurants, and he so moved the staff with his own thrust and drive that if they had not all

been too old to hope to find positions elsewhere they would have resigned on the first day.

But Mr. Skimpole over-stepped himself. His ideas were undoubtedly bright ideas, but bright ideas only flourish in their right soil, and the business of John Brown was not the soil for these ideas. New wine lives best in new bottles. He was a young man who followed the modern gospel of looking ahead, forgetting that one of the dangers of looking ahead is that one is so apt to trip over the pebbles immediately beneath one's feet. He was like that young magazine editor who looked so far ahead that, in the hope of saving his firm money, he bought in 1900 the serial rights of a novel by Theodore Dreiser, with the result that the grand-children of the readers of the editor's day have ceased to take the magazine because they cannot pick up the thread of the story. His thrust and drive lost the firm the business of its old clients, and did not win any new business. The old clients were disgusted with his vulgar display, and other people seemed to remain ignorant of it and to continue to associate the name John Brown with out-of-date methods. Within a year the firm of John Brown actually was in those difficulties which Mr. Skimpole had foretold for it.

Meanwhile, Mr. John Brown rested quietly in the garden and sitting-rooms of the country house, saying nothing and doing nothing. After the first week

he had made no more protestations of his sanity. He had accepted the situation, and had devoted most of his time to the study of the works of J. H. Fabre, which he had always wanted to read and had never had time to read.

He made no appeals for his liberty, gave very little trouble, and seemed wholly uninterested in what was happening in the outer world. He wrote no letters and received none. The only signs of any disorder that he ever revealed were a sudden brusqueness and a gleaming eye, symptoms which only appeared when any of the doctors attempted to discuss his disorder with him. He made no objection to their observing him, but he bluntly refused to answer questions or to talk to them at all. Only once did he have a visitor. This was when an old business acquaintance came down to see him, and, noting with surprise and pleasure his easy demeanour and rational conversation, thought it wise to tell him what was happening to the firm. His good business brain might see how to save it. But the news evoked from John Brown not the smallest flicker of interest; indeed, he changed the subject, and left the friend convinced that if business did not interest him, his disorder was too deep-seated to allow of any cure.

But at the end of the year the outer world, and business, compelled his attention. Mrs. Brown and Harold Skimpole began to realise that they were in

a situation wholly disagreeable to them. It seemed to be certain that without John Brown the business would go utterly down, and they would be faced with poverty. It has been known, I believe — at least there are a few cases here and there in proof — that married people have been able to face and to endure poverty; but my records show no cases of illicit or adulterous lovers facing, let alone enduring, poverty. To face poverty was to face the end of their affair. As they had not yet, by the normal course of time, reached that stage, they realised that something immediate must be done if they were to disarm the threat of poverty. The more they thought about it, the more clear it became — distasteful as the idea was to them — that they could be rescued only by John Brown. John Brown was not so alert in business as Harold Skimpole, but he did not make mistakes. John Brown might yet be able to save the old firm; he had pulled it through other crises before; therefore they must turn again to John Brown for his sound advice and his shrewd activity. Unfortunately, the business needed not only the direction of John Brown's mind, but also — such was the obtuseness of the firm's clients — the presence of John Brown's body. Without himself in the office his advice would be like the directions on a packet of medicine without the medicine. This would mean that their raptures which had lately been free must once again

become furtive. But there was no help for it, and at last they set about the business of getting back John Brown's mind and John Brown's body. They got a piece of his mind. They never got his body.

They arranged that the mental specialist who had first examined him should visit the country house and again examine him. The mental specialist did so, and reported that he was mentally and physically sound. The doctors of the country house agreed with the mental specialist. Whereupon it was arranged that Mrs. Brown should, on a certain day, remove her husband from the country house and take him home. Her husband, when told of this decision, quietly fell in with it, and expressed a desire to see his wife again and a deep satisfaction in being able to see her as a normal creature. He thanked the doctors and the attendants for the cure of his disorder that they had effected by their sympathy and their understanding of the needs of his case — namely, that he should be left alone — and added that although he had known himself to have been suffering from delusions, he could not recall any incident of his life as their patient which gave him cause for complaint. The doctors then thanked *him*, and he went to prepare himself for his wife's arrival.

He made a careful toilet — neatness and cleanliness of person had marked him throughout his year at the country house — and, on a given summons,

he went to the private room where his wife awaited him. He greeted her affectionately. On her side, she was a little constrained, but the warmth of his greeting and his casual and intelligent remarks on matters of the day — the weather, the dress she was wearing, his new ideas for pushing the firm forward now that he was again able to take charge — he supposed that Pangloss, the head clerk, had been doing as well as he could, and his wife hastily agreed — his genial and at the same time business-like manner restored her poise.

After a few minutes of this general conversation, the head doctor came in, and, with an affable arrangement of his face, indicated that nothing need now delay the departure of Mr. Brown. There was just a small formality. If Mr. Brown would just sign the book, which an attendant was bringing.

The attendant brought the book, placed it on the table, dipped a pen into an ink-pot, and handed the pen to Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown took the pen, and bent over the book to sign. For a moment he hesitated, and looked from his bent position at his wife. The moment was so long that the attendant put his finger to the book, and said: "Just here, sir. This line." Mr. Brown said: "Yes, I know," and signed. The attendant picked up a piece of blotting-paper to blot the signature; then he held the blotting-paper in mid-air, and made a discreet signal to the doctor.

The doctor, without appearing to move, moved two paces, and looked over the attendant's shoulder. He made a slight movement of the head to the attendant, and the attendant touched Mr. Brown on the shoulder. Mr. Brown turned. The attendant took his arm, and indicated the door, and the two of them went quietly out.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Brown," the doctor said, "but I fear it will be a long time before Mr. Brown can return to you or to his business. A long time."

Mrs. Brown, who had been puzzled by the departure of her husband, and now saw, on the doctor's words, the crashing of her hopes, said feebly: "Why? Why?"

The doctor raised a finger. She went to him. He indicated the book. John Brown had endorsed his discharge in his usual firm handwriting, but the signature read — *Jesus Christ*.

DESIRABLE VILLA

DESIRABLE VILLA

I DO not for a moment (said old Quong) doubt it. You say the young lady claims to be psychic. She certainly is. She was filled all day, you tell me, with a sense of impending disaster and doom, of earthquakes and pestilence and the end of the world, and although you smile when you tell me that that very evening her lip-stick gave out at a critical moment of the dance, I see no cause for the smile. She had received her warning, and it was fulfilled. (With this pawn I now retrieve my queen.)

No; I have never doubted that coming events cast their shadows before, particularly those of an unpleasant nature. This is not entirely because these events take pleasure in obscuring our view of the sun, but because events, being static, are perceived by us before we reach them, and we perceive more particularly the unpleasant because in the dim light of the not-yet-reached the unpleasant looms far more heavily than the pleasant. But dim light is deceptive; it holds the essence of the event, but gives it vague or fanciful form; a first draft of what the thing is going to be — and we all know what poets do with their

first drafts when they begin work upon them. In such a light twisted trees take the form of wounded soldiers, little hills take the form of fighting galleons; and, to the mental sight, exhausted lip-sticks take the form of earthquakes, and ill-made coffee takes the form of pestilence. That light is never to be trusted, because by the time we actually reach the event it is quite likely that the event will have changed its mind.

Take the case of that suburban villa, the story of which was related to me by a young schoolmaster of these parts. (Your move, I think.)

I made my move, and the game of chess, which had been begun that afternoon, went on and on into the long night, like the Vanderbilt family or the Fulham Road. Between moves he told me the story of the desirable villa.

All through one grey-skied afternoon of Autumn the young schoolmaster, whose name was Shafe, had been wandering round the northern rim of that cup which holds London, and he had come at twilight into the bleak and chilblain country of the north-east. He was then beyond Walthamstow and beyond that chain of reservoirs which makes the sudden bulge in the course of the River Lea. On what speck of the map he was he didn't know, but he was in a land that some dark corner of his soul told him was very much like

hell. It was neither town nor country nor suburb, but something that blasphemed all three. There were bits of field and wood, and bits of paved street, and bits of marshy land. Here and there were some nakedly new shops, and a few houses that were occupied but were not yet blest with the gracious air that belongs to a house that is lived in. There were a hundred half-finished houses. The grass of the fields was sore with eruptions of brick and pole and toolshed. The unweathered hue of the bricks made them red-hot to the eye. The unmade roads clutched at the feet like satanic hands.

At all points of the outer circle you may come upon these spots of horror. They are not of the stuff or the spirit of horror — merely a part of the necessary business of “developing” a residential estate; yet, though we all live in houses, the sight of this business of making houses affects most of us as an hour in a slaughter-house would affect a lover of pork. This place, the young man could see, was to be the estate agent’s realisation of The Ideal Home for people of small means — the unplaced people just above the self-sufficient dignity of the labouring class. There would be rows and rows of uniform six-roomed houses, with scullery, bathroom and electric light. Newly-married couples of that unplaced class would furnish their first little homes there. They would found their obscure families, and make pretty gar-

dens, and live out their ignobly decent days in unwondering content. It stood for all that is simple and domestic and petty. His reason and observation told him this. But as that cadaverous light fell upon its litter, his reason was, he says, frozen, and his spirits were pressed into vapour. He could not see it as Kettering Park, N.E. He could only see it as a grouping of horror waiting upon horror.

And then, he says, as though his mind had launched horror into it, horror was born in it and took shape and substance to his eyes.

The workmen were just knocking off when he arrived, dropping their tool-bags in the night-watchman's shed, and slouching in twos and threes towards the station. But the little caravan "office" of the estate was still open, and potential tenants of the houses were still moving about the estate, and asking questions of the two clerks who were there to answer them. They went in and out of the shells of houses, peering and probing, and Shafe watched them with sympathy.

A small river bordered one side of the estate, and to get to the main road leading back to London he had to cross this river by a stone bridge some two hundred yards north of the estate. He crossed it, and turned southward again, on an uphill road, and had a clear view of the houses on the far side. It was then that he noticed — not because they were noticeable,

but because they were there — a man and a woman coming towards a house on the limits of the property. They came awkwardly through the wet clay, and their trim town clothes and urban deportment made a queer vibration against the welter of country mire and the shrill newness of the houses. The man carried an umbrella, tightly rolled, and a newspaper. He had small features and a yellow moustache out of proportion to them. His overcoat, trousers and bowler hat were neither fresh nor shabby; just adequate. A clerk or accountant, Shafe thought, who had succeeded no farther than the point of making ends meet. The woman's face, what he could see of it, was the face of a woman of forty, and the droop of her mouth and her movements in walking suggested that this was a woman who felt that life owed her something. There are thousands of her in her rank of life.

Eminently respectable, both of them; eminently typical of the future residents of the estate; eminently negative.

The steep ascent of his path compelled him to walk slowly, and he had them in view until they entered the half-finished house at the end of the road-that-was-to-be. At this point his path turned inward to the river, and brought him closer to the house by sight, though the distance he had walked from the bridge had put it — because of the river — so much

the farther from him. He could see into it, but he could not reach it.

He was at the nearest possible line to it when he heard the man's voice. It called: "Where are you?" The woman answered: "Upstairs. Back room." He could hear the man's boots on the uncovered stairs — he says he can hear quite sharply that gritty clumping now — and then, through the unglazed windows of the upper back room, he saw them together. At that moment his throat surprised him by making a queer noise. It was an unsuccessful cry; unsuccessful because it came from the physical without direction from the mental. It was a muscular explosion, and the detonator was the simple fact that this eminently negative couple had become in that moment eminently positive.

The woman was standing near the window. The man was approaching her from behind. It all happened swiftly, in a group of seconds, but it was in the fraction of the second in which Shafe realised the man's intention and the woman's danger that he delivered that abortive cry. Before that second had passed into time the man's hands were around her throat, and he was dragging her backwards from the window and downwards. Shafe cried then, he says, with intent and clearly, but if the man heard him he did not let the cry disturb the business. From his point on the crest of the hill Shafe had to see the completed dreadfulness of the affair. He was an

eye-witness and a possible saviour, and he was as useful as if he had been at Tilbury. It was not a matter of distance, but of time, and between him and them was the time needed to flounder through six yards of running river. He saw him drag her back and down. He could see the knuckles tightening. Her hat fell off, and her hands made aimless pawings at the air. The man's hands pressed into her throat, and forced the neck back, and worried it from side to side. He was like a dog with a rat, and the great yellow moustache gave him an air of insipid geniality that was as dreadful as the business he was doing. The thing was accomplished in silence. The woman made no cry, and the man's movements were small and tense. A few more wrenches to right and left, and then the body jerked three times and was still. The man got up. He smoothed his clothes and eased his collar. His attitude and expression were as casual as if he really had killed nothing more than a rat. He looked down at the floor and around the bare room as one looks before locking up for a holiday. Then he picked up his newspaper and umbrella from the floor, made a movement of dusting his hands, and turned to go.

By these commonplace gestures Shafe's tension was so suddenly eased that he let out a series of large directed cries toward the office of the estate, and began to run back to the bridge. He hoped to get to

the office in time to stop the man from getting off the property, but, though he cried as he ran, his cries created no answer nor movement anywhere. Once or twice in his run he looked back to note the path the man was taking, but he could see nothing of him. He guessed that he was making a sly course through the scattered houses and trying to reach the road by some other way than the main entrance to the estate; and he made a spurt for it. He tore across the bridge, and reached it in a time that surprised himself. He caught one of the clerks, but his want of practice in running found him breathless, and some moments were wasted before he could get the story out. His first effort was almost a coded telegram: "That end house. Down there. Something happened. Send someone — stop man — brown overcoat."

The clerk looked at him with a sort of alert stupidity. Shafe saw that he understood nothing. "Something happened? Where? *What's* happened?"

"Comansee. But send someone stop brown overcoat."

The clerk walked a pace or two with him, a little moved by his vigour, but still withholding attention. When Shafe had achieved coherence he was still without interest. "A man and a woman went into that end house. About three minutes ago. A man in a bowler hat and a brown overcoat. Carrying a rolled umbrella and a newspaper. About five foot nine.

Woman about the same height wearing a grey coat. He attacked her in there. Didn't you hear me yell?" The clerk stopped and looked at him with what used to be called a quiz. "Look here — what's all this? I don't know what you're talking about at all. Nobody's been down to that house. I been here all the time. There *was* a man and woman like you say went to look at it, but they went out past my office half an hour ago. At five."

"Then they must have come back another way. Because I *saw* them. Saw them and heard them in the house. I saw him do it. Anyway, come and see. But do something about the man first."

The clerk was clearly annoyed, and Schafe could see that he had eight or nine different and confused ideas about his visitor. But he called to his fellow, who stood by one of the brick dumps, and went over to him, and muttered and jerked his head backward to Shafe. They grinned. Then the other went perfunctorily through scaffold poles and granite kerbs towards the path that the man might have taken, and Shafe's young man came back to him. He came strolling, hands in trousers pockets, whistling. "Which house you say — the end one? I'll just come and have a look at it. But you can take it from me those parties left here at five o'clock. And they couldn't a-come back without my seeing 'em."

"Well, they did come back. You'll see when you

get there. He brought her back and murdered her."

"Eh?" The clerk looked at him sideways and even more insolently. He was either a lunatic or drunk — a nuisance in any case, and possibly a dangerous nuisance. He called across to his fellow. "Don't go too far, Morton." Shafe could see Morton from where they stood, and he had had the house in full view while telling his story. Despite the quivering approach of the dusk, the light was still sharp and cold, and he was certain that nobody had come from the house since he reached the bridge, and it was certain that nobody had passed Morton. They went to it without secrecy, and walked straight to the front entrance. "Listen, now. If he hasn't got right away he's probably still in the house. So be careful."

Inside the house the light was not so good, but as the rooms were bare, only a glance here and there was necessary. He was not on the ground floor. "Now, then. Upstairs. It was the back room. You'll see something *there*; and you may see him in one of the others. Carefully." They went up, and Shafe looked first into the front rooms and the bathroom. Nothing there. Then he pointed to the back room. Despite the horror and pathos of the occasion, he says that he was aware of a detached interest in the prospect of seeing his cocksure clerk jump. He was guilty of the what-did-I-tell-you posture. "Now look in there." The clerk went in. Shafe gave him a few seconds to

himself; then followed him. He looked round at Shafe with "Well?"

The room was empty.

If you have ever pulled a fire-alarm, and then found that the "fire" was a private bonfire, or tried to save a drowning man and found that he was a professor of swimming, giving an exhibition, you will understand how Shafe felt. The room was empty. All the rooms were empty. There was no corpse and no murderer. The clerk looked at him without any concealment of his grin. "Haven't made a mistake in the house, I suppose? Perhaps we'd better look over all of 'em."

"Perhaps you had. He might have carried it away while I was running. But this was the house. I was standing there — on the road just across the river. *I saw it in this house.*"

"Well, well, well. All I can say is, I've had a clear view of this house all the afternoon. Nobody's been in it except the two people you mentioned. And they went at five o'clock. And nothing's been near that house or come out of it in the last half-hour. Nothing *could* have come out without me seeing it — not out of any point of it — 'cos it's in a corner. Certainly not a man carrying a bundle. No, sir. If you'll excuse me, I've got some things to clear up at the office." He turned towards the office with an air of conducting Shafe off the estate; and as there seemed nothing

else to do Shafe went with him. On the way he made three firm attempts at stating that he had definitely seen the thing; then his voice refused to back him, and he gave it up. He made apologies for putting the clerk to purposeless trouble, and walked away, he says, with what air of normal behaviour he could summon. As he moved away he heard a grinning mutter, "Up the loop, I reckon."

He came away disgusted and distressed. Disgusted with himself for exposing himself to the clerk's gibes; distressed because if that thing hadn't happened, then nothing was happening. He wasn't walking, and the night wasn't coming on, and there wasn't any estate or any bridge. He had a foreboding of a nervous breakdown. He was certain that he was wearing boots and trousers, and he was equally certain that that thing had happened. But there was the fact that it hadn't happened, and if it hadn't happened, then he wasn't wearing trousers, and the world was skidding sideways from him. He thought of the usual explanation of ghosts, but it couldn't, he thought, have been a ghostly haunting, because ghosts don't haunt a house before it has been fully built and lived in, and they don't wear the fashions of to-day. He went home puzzled, disgusted, irritated and a little apprehensive; and it was three or four weeks, he says, before he shook off the damp memory of that afternoon.

Eight months later he came out of his school at mid-day and saw the contents bill of a special edition of one of the evening papers: "North London Murder." He saw it and noted it, but only as he noted other things that didn't interest him, such as "Test Match Result" and "Latest from Gatwick." The bill gave it no excited epithet, and he assumed that it had nothing to distinguish it from any other murder — it would be just one of those sordid affairs that happen in London four or five times a year. But while he was having his meal in a small eating-house near the school, he picked up a copy of the paper left by a previous customer, and found that most of its front page was given to the murder — a murder at Kettering Park, a suburb of North London. As you will guess, the combination of the words "murder" and "Kettering Park" started a mnemonic shuttle in his mind, and he began to read. Besides full details, the paper carried pictures of the victim and of the prisoner, who had been arrested and charged early that morning; and of course the pictures were what you were expecting them to be. He would have recognised anywhere the severe droop of the woman's mouth, or the fluffy moustache that was too big for the face. They were as familiar to him as the face of his dog or of the head master of his school, and he turned to the story with a feeling almost of relief.

That goblin memory, which at odd times of day

and night had perched upon his brain, was now pulverised. The thing had happened; the idea had washed itself out in fact and was done with for ever. What he had seen had indeed been a haunting, but with a difference. It had been, not, as usually, a re-visitation of the event, but a ghostly approach to it. He had not been suffering from nerves; he had simply seen something before it happened; and when he understood that that was the solution of his afternoon at Kettering Park he felt easy, and knew what the story would be.

It was all there. The very villa of Kettering Park, bordering the river, which the couple had occupied for about six months; the newspaper; the umbrella; the hour (half-past five) it was all there, just as in the ——

And then, he says, he dropped the paper. For, though all the details were there, the keypoint of the thing was not. He picked up the paper and studied it again, and, as he read, that one missing thing brought the goblin back, and he felt again the damp and insubstantial sense of living in a world behind the moon. He felt as he had felt when the clerk called from the back room.

The body had been found in the upper back room of the villa. (Right.) An umbrella and a newspaper were lying beside it. (Right.) The hat was off and the coat was torn open. (Right.) Death was by

strangulation. (Right.) A neighbour had heard the man come home, and had heard him call: "Where are you?" and had heard the answer: "Upstairs. Back room." (Right.) And then the thing went all wrong. The picture of the victim was the picture of the man. The picture of the arrested murderer was the picture of the woman.

But that (said Old Quong) is quite understandable. You see that something had happened in the interval between the approach to the event and the arrival at it, and, given all the circumstances of the first enactment of the affair, you can see what that something was. Intentions, good or bad, should be put into practice. Otherwise, they may float in the air and. . . . Your move, I think.

THE SECRET OF FRANCESCO SHEDD

THE SECRET OF FRANCESCO SHEDD

THE story in to-night's paper (said old Quong, as we sat on tea-chests opposite each other) — the story of the young inventor who claimed to have crossed the North Sea in his new collapsible coat-pocket boat, and was suspected of having crossed by liner, and then was convicted of having swum the entire distance in heroic time — that is an interesting story. We are so used to financiers masquerading as statesmen, confidence tricksters masquerading as philanthropists, clerks masquerading as Counts, that when we find that one whom we have admired as a rogue is really more honest than he has ever claimed to be, we naturally turn from him with contempt. He has dragged the human comedy down to the level of everyday.

Have I ever told you the story of Francesco Shedd? No? I wonder why I haven't. It reflects upon so many aspects of English religious, political and social life, and has such a pointed moral, that I ought to have told it to you when you were quite young. Let me repair the omission. But first let us make some more tea.

Well, the young Francesco Shedd was a London warehouse clerk in the West India Dock, and not a very good warehouse clerk. Not only was he without interest in his job, but he was often guilty of completely withdrawing himself from it. He would be sitting at his desk, apparently at work, but when his superiors asked him a question, they had to ask it four times, and the fourth time they had to shout it, and reinforce the shout with a punch. "Hey! Wake up, there, you!" Mr. Shedd would then wake up with a jerk and a blink, and look at the questioner as though he had not before seen him. "What's the idea, Shedd — sitting there mooning like that?" "I wasn't mooning. I was watching something." "What can you watch on a bare wall?" "Lots of things." "Well, watch that ledger for a change. And stop throwing pens about when I speak to you." "I didn't throw a pen about." "You did. There it is on the floor."

Whether Mr. Shedd did throw pens at his superior I do not know; but I do know that he often wanted to. Warehouse-clerking affected him like that. He found it monotonous and irksome, and demonstrably inadequate as a stepping-stone to the pleasures of life. And he yearned for the pleasures of life. He wanted good clothes, and good food and drink, and bright surroundings and company — of which at present he had none. He wanted to move about from

place to place instead of moving as shuttles move. Also he wanted to be admired.

Determined at last to escape from the warehouse, he looked about for some career that should fulfil his requirements. He thought at first of the career of commercial traveller, but this he abruptly dismissed. It fulfilled the desire to move about, but he doubted gravely the possibility of its fulfilling his other desires. His second thought showed him the way. The career that he was visualising was, of course, though he had not consciously known it, the stage. It was his visits to the theatre that had stirred him to unrest and desire. It was the people of the theatre whom he envied and admired for the colour and movement of their lives, the glitter of their society, and the interest of their work. It was one of them that he wanted to be; and now that he knew what it was he wanted he set about getting it.

He debated for some time the particular phase of stage work to which he should dedicate himself, and found great difficulty in bringing his conflicting selves into unanimity. When he attended a polite society comedy he felt that the polite society comedian was most to be envied. When he attended a romantic drama he felt that the romantic actor stood far above the drawing-room comedian. When he attended a knock-about farce he felt that the clown was surely the most popular of all types of entertainer. When

he attended a musical comedy he felt that the singing and dancing hero was the figure he would most like to be.

However, as matters turned out, he became none of these. His indecision was settled for him by a friend. The friend took him one night to a music-hall, and there they saw the gorgeous and astounding entertainment of a Chinese conjuror. It chanced that the friend knew this Chinese conjuror, whose name, I regret to say, was Joe Clacton, and the friend took Mr. Shedd round to the conjuror's dressing-room. This actual meeting with a popular performer — the first performer Mr. Shedd had ever been privileged to meet — coming on top of the astounding entertainment, settled all Mr. Shedd's doubts. He would be a conjuror. It was the stage; it was moving about; it was admiration; it was fascinating labour; it was intelligent labour; and it was highly-paid. He could see no other form of labour that even merited comparison, and without delay he began to train himself as a conjuror.

The way, I need not tell you, was hard. It is hard for all conjurors, but it is notably and blasphemously hard for those who are not conjurors.

I will leave you to imagine Mr. Shedd's struggles and sufferings during the next two years. At the end of a year he could palm coins and could perform the less elaborate card-tricks. At the eighteen months he

could cause flowers and the flags of all nations to disappear up his sleeve, and was just able to produce bowls of gold-fish out of gentlemen's hats. But when he presented himself to music-hall managers, and they commanded him to do his stuff — which I believe is their customary way of granting an audition — they viewed his performance with a cold eye. They told him that when he had some tricks of a more provocative kind than those used by court jesters of the Middle Ages for the entertainment of unsophisticated kings, they might be willing to look at him, but at present . . .

Well, Mr. Shedd went home from each of these interviews hot and sad, but none the less determined to succeed. For weeks after each interview he would practise and practise, but, no matter how he practised, the nice professional touch always eluded him. With the assistance of his landlady's daughter he tried to perform Mr. Clacton's trick of the vanishing lady, and had to seek fresh lodgings. At his new lodgings he tried Mr. Clacton's trick of sitting, strapped hand and foot, in a chair, and setting fire to pieces of wood which had been selected by members of the audience and placed ten feet away from him; and again he had to find other lodgings.

At last, at the end of two years, he was frankly downcast and despairing; and it was while he was sitting one night in a back-room of Shoreditch, with

his head bowed to the table, that he decided he would try no more. His dream was hopeless. He could not invent tricks, and he could not even master the tricks that were already in use. He would give up and go back to clerking.

And then, while he was sitting in that bowed position, brooding upon his futility, something happened. When that something happened Mr. Shedd jumped up and gave a loud cry; then sat down again.

More things now began to happen, one upon the other — things that at first astonished and unnerved him, and then delighted him. Without warning, it had in that moment been revealed to him that he was a master, and those below heard him cry, “I can! I can! I can beat ’em all!” He, the man who bungled even the bowl-of-goldfish trick, was suddenly become proficient at far more difficult tricks — tricks that no other conjuror had thought of — tricks, he was honest enough to admit, that he himself had not thought of. They came to him, as it were, ready-made in perfection, without the slightest effort from himself.

He was in the middle of one of them when his landlady, disturbed by the queer bumps and bangs that were coming from his room, opened the door to investigate. She jumped back with a squeal — just in time to allow a cane chair to shoot past her head and down the stairs.

"God-a-mercy, Mr. Shedd! Whatever you up to? Throwing chairs at people. Might a-killed me. Gone off your head, I should think."

"I — I — I didn't throw it. I was just — just —"

"I know. Practising your silly old conjuring again. Why don't you give it up and get some work? Else you really will go off your head."

"That's all right, Mrs. Gammon. I sha'n't need to practise much more. I can do it now." Mr. Shedd had some difficulty in breathing, and he looked pale; but he found enough breath to add, "You wait a week or two. You'll see then. Don't you worry."

Well, in a week or two she did see. So did we all. We have all, I suppose, seen Francesco Shedd, and marvelled at him. We have all seen him sitting bowed and tense and pale in the centre of the stage, and, without moving from his chair or manipulating any properties, doing those tricks which placed him at the top of the bill and spread consternation and dismay among all other conjurors. We have all seen his Indian rope-trick, which not only set his rivals thinking that it was time for them to buy themselves annuities, but was the cause of intense political feeling in our Indian Empire. We have all seen his trick of bringing to view a woman whom the stage hands could swear had never entered the theatre, and then making her disappear without any help from screens, veils, boxes, or trap-doors. We have all heard his

orchestra of visible instruments played by invisible musicians.

But only a few people know the secret of his success, and those few had to wrest it from him under duress. I know it because he told me freely, but he was deeply sensitive about it, and if I tell it now it is because he is no longer with us, and cannot be harmed by its disclosure.

It is the custom, as you may know, for all conjurors and illusionists to meet together every month or so, and discuss their craft and exhibit their new mysteries and the mechanism of them. Immediately, then, following his first sensational appearance, which took place soon after his decision to abandon all hope — most of the best efforts are made in that mood — Francesco Shedd was cordially invited to become a member of this guild. To the surprise and extreme resentment of the group, he politely but firmly declined. Their resentment cooled, however, when the secretary pointed out that Mr. Shedd's reply was possibly based on a misunderstanding, and that he would write again. He therefore wrote again to Mr. Shedd, suggesting that Mr. Shedd had not fully understood the purpose of their meetings, and insisting that Mr. Shedd would be perfectly safe in revealing the secret of his marvellous tricks, since it was a point of honour among them that no member should make use of another member's tricks. None the

less, Mr. Shedd made the same reply; he would not join them, and he would not reveal the secrets of his tricks to anyone.

And now they were really and justly resentful. Mr. Shedd's majestic attitude of refusing to associate with them was nothing short of an insult, and certain of the younger men spoke of reprisals. This was frowned upon; if Mr. Shedd wanted to wear the high hat, let him. Public entertainers did not retain their hold upon the public for ever, and there would probably come a time when Mr. Shedd, without engagements and without money, would be deeply sorry that he had refused the friendly hand held out to him. This was roughly agreed to, but two of the younger members agreed with unspoken reservations. Mr. Shedd had insulted the craft, and as Mr. Shedd was at the moment the most popular and successful and — of course — highly-paid illusionist in the Western world, it was not to be borne. If Mr. Shedd would not reveal his secrets to his fellow-workers, he should be made to do so.

Mr. Shedd was then appearing at a West End hall, where half the bill was given up to his entertainment. He was playing to full houses, and was sending each audience away deeply mystified. Nothing so perfect and technically clean in the way of illusion had been seen before, and although sceptics could be found here and there — most of them in

seats at the greatest distance from the stage — who told their fellows that they could see the wires, the majority of the audience were satisfied that they had witnessed sheer illusion. They were satisfied that they had seen the boy climb the rope, and that they had seen the boy's arms and the boy's legs and the boy's trunk fall down separately on the stage, and then meet, and get up and walk away. Trickery, of course, but marvellous trickery; no mere matter of wires.

Well, upon a Saturday night Mr. Shedd left the stage-door and climbed into his car. Without looking at the chauffeur, he spoke the one word "Home"; then leaned back and gave a deep sigh. He was thinking of his warehouse days, and of his old desire for a life of colour and movement. His mind turned agreeably upon the more than adequate fulfilment of his desire, and upon that moment when he had been bowed over the table. "There is a tide in the affairs ——" he mused, but he was not permitted to finish the quotation; for at that moment, out of the darkness of the car, came a thick woollen scarf, which was pressed against his face, and two strong arms which flung him to the floor. For some seconds he struggled, but the sweetness of the scarf was overpowering, and after a few movements he went to sleep and was once again a warehouse clerk.

When he awoke he found himself in a bare room,

lighted by two lamps. He was lying on the floor, and standing over him were two young men. His ankles were strapped, and his arms were bound behind him. He was aware of a slight headache, but his mind was clear enough to perceive his situation. One of the young men said: "Ah — he's all right now. Now we can get on with it." To which Mr. Shedd responded: "Get on with what? What is this — common theft, or blackmail, or what?"

"God forbid," said the young man piously, "that either of us should fall to anything criminal. We are the sons of good mothers, and we ask nothing more than that you should answer a few questions."

"There are other ways," said Mr. Shedd, "of asking questions, without attacking a man, drugging him and binding him. You could take him to lunch. You could take him out for a drink. You could call at his house."

"Quite," said one of the young men. "But we knew very well that you would not answer questions in the ordinary conditions of polite intercourse. We, too, are conjurors, Mr. Shedd, and we just want to know, purely as a matter of professional interest, what you have consistently refused to tell us — how you do your tricks."

"I shall not answer."

"I expected that. Pray suit yourself. Only, if you do not answer, I fear that Francesco Shedd will com-

mit the grave professional offence of breaking his engagements. You are billed for next week all over Birmingham. If you do not answer you will not appear at Birmingham, and your value will drop. The week after that, I believe, you are at Glasgow. You will not appear at Glasgow."

"Do you threaten me?" asked Mr. Shedd.

"Oh, certainly," said the young man. "By all means. Nothing would induce either my friend or me to do anything criminal, but there is nothing criminal in entertaining a non-paying guest on an island off the South Essex coast. It is regrettable that after we get there we shall have no boat, nor any other means of communicating with the mainland, but remembering the life that we public entertainers have to lead, such solitude has its attractions. What do you say, Mr. Shedd? If I were you, I would not break your engagements. It does one such damage with the public. And I can assure you that anything you may now say will never be used against you. We respect each other's secrets. We only want to know."

"It appears to me," said Mr. Shedd, "that you have me at a disadvantage. The cards are in your hands. I cannot judge, from this unwarranted assault upon me, what value can be placed upon your assurances, but it seems to me that I have no alternative but to trust you. If I speak, do you swear that you will not give my humbug away?"

The young men raised their right hands. "We swear!"

"Then I will tell all, and trust to your youthful decency. The truth is, young men, I could not give your society the secrets of my tricks, for the simple reason that I do not know how I do them."

"You don't *know*? Come, sir — you trifle with us."

"It is the truth, I do not know. I never could learn conjuring, and I myself am not a conjuror."

"Not a conjuror!"

"No," said Mr. Shedd sadly. "No. If by my trickery I have brought discredit upon an honourable and serious profession, I crave your forgiveness. But . . . I had somehow to earn my living, and I have but one gift — a gift which cannot be used for mercenary purposes in its proper sphere. I therefore used it in another sphere. Gentlemen — I trust my secret to your keeping — I am not one of you. I am an imposter. I am nothing more than an extraordinarily gifted spiritualistic medium."

THE HANDS OF MR. OTTERMOLE

THE HANDS OF MR. OTTERMOLE

MURDER (said old Quong) — oblige me by passing my pipe — murder is one of the simplest things in the world to do. Killing a man is a much simpler matter than killing a duck. Not always so safe, perhaps, but simpler. But to certain gifted people it is both simple and entirely safe. Many minds of finer complexion than my own have discoloured themselves in seeking to name the identity of the author of those wholesale murders which took place last year. Who that man or woman really was, I know no more than you do, but I have a theory of the person it could have been; and if you are not pressed for time I will elaborate that theory into a little tale.

As I had the rest of that evening and the whole of the next day for dalliance in my ivory tower, I desired that he would tell me the story; and, having reckoned up his cash register and closed the ivory gate, he told me — between then and the dawn — his story of the Mallon End murders. Paraphrased and condensed, it came out something like this.

At six o'clock of a January evening Mr. Whybrow was walking home through the cobweb alleys of London's East End. He had left the golden clamour of the great High Street to which the tram had brought him from the river and his daily work, and was now in the chess-board of byways that is called Mallon End. None of the rush and gleam of the High Street trickled into these byways. A few paces south — a flood-tide of life, foaming and beating. Here — only slow shuffling figures and muffled pulses. He was in the sink of London, the last refuge of European vagrants.

As though in tune with the street's spirit, he too walked slowly, with head down. It seemed that he was pondering some pressing trouble, but he was not. He had no trouble. He was walking slowly because he had been on his feet all day, and he was bent in abstraction because he was wondering whether the Missis would have herrings for his tea, or haddock; and he was trying to decide which would be the more tasty on a night like this. A wretched night it was, of damp and mist, and the mist wandered into his throat and his eyes, and the damp had settled on pavement and roadway, and where the sparse lamp-light fell it sent up a greasy sparkle that chilled one to look at. By contrast it made his speculations more agreeable, and made him ready for that tea — whether herring or haddock. His eye turned from

the glum bricks that made his horizon, and went forward half a mile. He saw a gas-lit kitchen, a flamy fire and a spread tea-table. There was toast in the hearth and a singing kettle on the side and a piquant effusion of herrings, or maybe of haddock, or perhaps sausages. The vision gave his aching feet a throb of energy. He shook imperceptible damp from his shoulders, and hastened towards its reality.

But Mr. Whybrow wasn't going to get any tea that evening — or any other evening. Mr. Whybrow was going to die. Somewhere within a hundred yards of him another man was walking: a man much like Mr. Whybrow and much like any other man, but without the only quality that enables mankind to live peaceably together and not as madmen in a jungle. A man with a dead heart eating into itself and bringing forth the foul organisms that arise from death and corruption. And that thing in man's shape, on a whim or a settled idea — one cannot know — had said within himself that Mr. Whybrow should never taste another herring. Not that Mr. Whybrow had injured him. Not that he had any dislike of Mr. Whybrow. Indeed, he knew nothing of him save as a familiar figure about the streets. But, moved by a force that had taken possession of his empty cells, he had picked on Mr. Whybrow with that blind choice that makes us pick one restaurant table that has nothing to mark it from four or five other tables, or one apple from

a dish of half-a-dozen equal apples; or that drives Nature to send a cyclone upon one corner of this planet, and destroy five hundred lives in that corner, and leave another five hundred in the same corner unharmed. So this man had picked on Mr. Whybrow, as he might have picked on you or me, had we been within his daily observation; and even now he was creeping through the blue-toned streets, nursing his large white hands, moving ever closer to Mr. Whybrow's tea-table, and so closer to Mr. Whybrow himself.

He wasn't, this man, a bad man. Indeed, he had many of the social and amiable qualities, and passed as a respectable man, as most successful criminals do. But the thought had come into his mouldering mind that he would like to murder somebody, and, as he held no fear of God or man, he was going to do it, and would then go home to *his* tea. I don't say that flippantly, but as a statement of fact. Strange as it may seem to the humane, murderers must and do sit down to meals after a murder. There is no reason why they shouldn't, and many reasons why they should. For one thing, they need to keep their physical and mental vitality at full beat for the business of covering their crime. For another, the strain of their effort makes them hungry, and satisfaction at the accomplishment of a desired thing brings a feeling of relaxation towards human pleasures. It is accepted

among non-murderers that the murderer is always overcome by fear for his safety and horror at his act; but this type is rare. His own safety is, of course, his immediate concern, but vanity is a marked quality of most murderers, and that, together with the thrill of conquest, makes him confident that he can secure it, and when he has restored his strength with food he goes about securing it as a young hostess goes about the arranging of her first big dinner — a little anxious, but no more. Criminologists and detectives tell us that *every* murderer, however intelligent or cunning, always makes one slip in his tactics — one little slip that brings the affair home to him. But that is only half-true. It is true only of the murderers who are caught. Scores of murderers are not caught: therefore scores of murderers do not make any mistake at all. This man didn't.

As for horror or remorse, prison chaplains, doctors and lawyers have told us that of murderers they have interviewed under condemnation and the shadow of death, only one here and there has expressed any contrition for his act, or shown any sign of mental misery. Most of them display only exasperation at having been caught when so many have gone undiscovered, or indignation at being condemned for a perfectly reasonable act. However normal and humane they may have been before the murder, they are utterly without conscience after it. For what is

conscience? Simply a polite nickname for superstition, which is a polite nickname for fear. Those who associate remorse with murder are, no doubt, basing their ideas on the world-legend of the remorse of Cain, or are projecting their own frail minds into the mind of the murderer, and getting false reactions. Peaceable folk cannot hope to make contact with this mind, for they are not merely different in mental type from the murderer: they are different in their personal chemistry and construction. Some men can and do kill, not one man, but two or three, and go calmly about their daily affairs. Other men could not, under the most agonising provocation, bring themselves even to wound. It is men of this sort who imagine the murderer in torments of remorse and fear of the law, whereas he is actually sitting down to his tea.

The man with the large white hands was as ready for his tea as Mr. Whybrow was, but he had something to do before he went to it. When he had done that something, and made no mistake about it, he would be even more ready for it, and would go to it as comfortably as he went to it the day before, when his hands were stainless.

Walk on, then, Mr. Whybrow, walk on; and as you walk, look your last upon the familiar features of your nightly journey. Follow your jack-o'-lantern

tea-table. Look well upon its warmth and colour and kindness; feed your eyes with it, and tease your nose with its gentle domestic odours; for you will never sit down to it. Within ten minutes' pacing of you a pursuing phantom has spoken in his heart, and you are doomed. There you go — you and phantom — two nebulous dabs of mortality, moving through green air along pavements of powder-blue, the one to kill, the other to be killed. Walk on. Don't annoy your burning feet by hurrying, for the more slowly you walk, the longer you will breathe the green air of this January dusk, and see the dreamy lamplight and the little shops, and hear the agreeable commerce of the London crowd and the haunting pathos of the street-organ. These things are dear to you, Mr. Whybrow. You don't know it now, but in fifteen minutes you will have two seconds in which to realise how inexpressibly dear they are.

Walk on, then, across this crazy chess-board. You are in Lagos Street now, among the tents of the wanderers of Eastern Europe. A minute or so, and you are in Loyal Lane, among the lodging-houses that shelter the useless and the beaten of London's camp-followers. The lane holds the smell of them, and its soft darkness seems heavy with the wail of the futile. But you are not sensitive to impalpable things, and you plod through it, unseeing, as you do every evening, and come to Blean Street, and plod through

that. From basement to sky rise the tenements of an alien colony. Their windows slot the ebony of their walls with lemon. Behind those windows strange life is moving, dressed with forms that are not of London or of England, yet, in essence, the same agreeable life that you have been living, and to-night will live no more. From high above you comes a voice crooning *The Song of Katta*. Through a window you see a family keeping a religious rite. Through another you see a woman pouring out tea for her husband. You see a man mending a pair of boots; a mother bathing her baby. You have seen all these things before, and never noticed them. You do not notice them now, but if you knew that you were never going to see them again, you would notice them. You never *will* see them again, not because your life has run its natural course, but because a man whom you have often passed in the street has at his own solitary pleasure decided to usurp the awful authority of nature, and destroy you. So perhaps it's as well that you don't notice them, for your part in them is ended. No more for you these pretty moments of our earthly travail: only one moment of terror, and then a plunging darkness.

Closer to you this shadow of massacre moves, and now he is twenty yards behind you. You can hear his footfall, but you do not turn your head. You are familiar with footfalls. You are in London,

in the easy security of your daily territory, and footfalls behind you, your instinct tells you, are no more than a message of human company.

But can't you hear something in those footfalls — something that goes with a widdershins beat? Something that says: *Look out, look out. Beware, beware.* Can't you hear the very syllables of *murd-er-er, murd-er-er*? No; there is nothing in footfalls. They are neutral. The foot of villainy falls with the same quiet note as the foot of honesty. But those footfalls, Mr. Whybrow, are bearing on to you a pair of hands, and there is something in hands. Behind you that pair of hands is even now stretching its muscles in preparation for your end. Every minute of your days you have been seeing human hands. Have you ever realised the sheer horror of hands — those appendages that are a symbol for our moments of trust and affection and salutation? Have you thought of the sickening potentialities that lie within the scope of that five-tentacled member? No, you never have; for all the human hands that you have seen have been stretched to you in kindness or fellowship. Yet, though the eyes can hate, and the lips can sting, it is only that dangling member that can gather the accumulated essence of evil, and electrify it into currents of destruction. Satan may enter into man by many doors, but in the hands alone can he find the servants of his will.

Another minute, Mr. Whybrow, and you will know all about the horror of human hands.

You are nearly home now. You have turned into your street — Caspar Street — and you are in the centre of the chess-board. You can see the front window of your little four-roomed house. The street is dark, and its three lamps give only a smut of light that is more confusing than darkness. It is dark — empty, too. Nobody about; no lights in the front parlours of the houses, for the families are at tea in their kitchens; and only a random glow in a few upper rooms occupied by lodgers. Nobody about but you and your following companion, and you don't notice him. You see him so often that he is never seen. Even if you turned your head and saw him, you would only say "Good-evening" to him, and walk on. A suggestion that he was a possible murderer would not even make you laugh. It would be too silly.

And now you are at your gate. And now you have found your door-key. And now you are in, and hanging up your hat and coat. The Missis has just called a greeting from the kitchen, whose smell is an echo of that greeting (herrings!) and you have answered it, when the door shakes under a sharp knock.

Go away, Mr. Whybrow. Go away from that door. Don't touch it. Get right away from it. Get out of the house. Run with the Missis to the back garden, and over the fence. Or call the neighbours. But don't

touch that door. Don't, Mr. Whybrow, don't open . . .

Mr. Whybrow opened the door.

That was the beginning of what became known as London's Strangling Horrors. Horrors they were called because they were something more than murders: they were motiveless, and there was an air of black magic about them. Each murder was committed at a time when the street where the bodies were found was empty of any perceptible or possible murderer. There would be an empty alley. There would be a policeman at its end. He would turn his back on the empty alley for less than a minute. Then he would look round and run into the night with news of another strangling. And in any direction he looked nobody to be seen and no report to be had of anybody being seen. Or he would be on duty in a long quiet street, and suddenly be called to a house of dead people whom a few seconds earlier he had seen alive. And, again, whichever way he looked nobody to be seen; and although police whistles put an immediate cordon around the area, and searched all houses, no possible murderer to be found.

The first news of the murder of Mr. and Mrs. Whybrow was brought by the station sergeant. He had been walking through Caspar Street on his way to the station for duty, when he noticed the open door

of No. 98. Glancing in, he saw by the gaslight of the passage a motionless body on the floor. After a second look he blew his whistle, and when the constables answered him he took one to join him in a search of the house, and sent others to watch all neighbouring streets, and make inquiries at adjoining houses. But neither in the house nor in the streets was anything found to indicate the murderer. Neighbours on either side, and opposite, were questioned, but they had seen nobody about, and had heard nothing. One had heard Mr. Whybrow come home — the scrape of his latch-key in the door was so regular an evening sound, he said, that you could set your watch by it for half-past six — but he had heard nothing more than the sound of the opening door until the sergeant's whistle. Nobody had been seen to enter the house or leave it, by front or back, and the necks of the dead people carried no finger-prints or other traces. A nephew was called in to go over the house, but he could find nothing missing; and anyway his uncle possessed nothing worth stealing. The little money in the house was untouched, and there were no signs of any disturbance of the property, or even of struggle. No signs of anything but brutal and wanton murder.

Mr. Whybrow was known to neighbours and work-mates as a quiet, likeable, home-loving man; such a man as could not have any enemies. But, then, murdered men seldom have. A relentless enemy who

hates a man to the point of wanting to hurt him seldom wants to murder him, since to do that puts him beyond suffering. So the police were left with an impossible situation: no clue to the murderer and no motive for the murders; only the fact that they had been done.

The first news of the affair sent a tremor through London generally, and an electric thrill through all Mallon End. Here was a murder of two inoffensive people, not for gain and not for revenge; and the murderer, to whom, apparently, killing was a casual impulse, was at large. He had left no traces, and, provided he had no companions, there seemed no reason why he should not remain at large. Any clear-headed man who stands alone, and has no fear of God or man, can, if he chooses, hold a city, even a nation, in subjection; but your everyday criminal is seldom clear-headed, and dislikes being lonely. He needs, if not the support of confederates, at least somebody to talk to; his vanity needs the satisfaction of perceiving at first hand the effect of his work. For this he will frequent bars and coffee-shops and other public places. Then, sooner or later, in a glow of comradeship, he will utter the one word too much; and the nark, who is everywhere, has an easy job.

But though the doss-houses and saloons and other places were "combed" and set with watches, and it

was made known by whispers that good money and protection were assured to those with information, nothing attaching to the Whybrow case could be found. The murderer clearly had no friends and kept no company. Known men of this type were called up and questioned, but each was able to give a good account of himself; and in a few days the police were at a dead end. Against the constant public gibe that the thing had been done almost under their noses, they became restive, and for four days each man of the force was working his daily beat under a strain. On the fifth day they became still more restive.

It was the season of annual teas and entertainments for the children of the Sunday Schools, and on an evening of fog, when London was a world of groping phantoms, a small girl, in the bravery of best Sunday frock and shoes, shining face and new-washed hair, set out from Logan Passage for St. Michael's Parish Hall. She never got there. She was not actually dead until half-past six, but she was as good as dead from the moment she left her mother's door. Somebody like a man, pacing the street from which the Passage led, saw her come out; and from that moment she was dead. Through the fog somebody's large white hands reached after her, and in fifteen minutes they were about her.

At half-past six a whistle screamed trouble, and those answering it found the body of little Nellie

Vrinoff in a warehouse entry in Minnow Street. The sergeant was first among them, and he posted his men to useful points, ordering them here and there in the tart tones of repressed rage, and be-rating the officer whose beat the street was. "I saw you, Magson, at the end of the lane. What were you up to there? You were there ten minutes before you turned." Magson began an explanation about keeping an eye on a suspicious-looking character at that end, but the sergeant cut him short: "Suspicious characters be damned. You don't want to look for suspicious characters. You want to look for *murderers*. Messing about . . . and then this happens right where you ought to be. Now think what they'll say."

With the speed of ill news came the crowd, pale and perturbed; and on the story that the unknown monster had appeared again, and this time to a child, their faces streaked the fog with spots of hate and horror. But then came the ambulance and more police, and swiftly they broke up the crowd; and as it broke the sergeant's thought was thickened into words, and from all sides came low murmurs of "Right under their noses." Later inquiries showed that four people of the district, above suspicion, had passed that entry at intervals of seconds before the murder, and seen nothing and heard nothing. None of them had passed the child alive or seen her dead. None of them had seen anybody in the street except

themselves. Again the police were left with no motive and with no clue.

And now the district, as you will remember, was given over, not to panic, for the London public never yields to that, but to apprehension and dismay. If these things were happening in their familiar streets, then anything might happen. Wherever people met — in the streets, the markets and the shops — they debated the one topic. Women took to bolting their windows and doors at the first fall of dusk. They kept their children closely under their eye. They did their shopping before dark, and watched anxiously, while pretending they weren't watching, for the return of their husbands from work. Under the Cockney's semi-humorous resignation to disaster, they hid an hourly foreboding. By the whim of one man with a pair of hands the structure and tenour of their daily life were shaken, as they always can be shaken by any man contemptuous of humanity and fearless of its laws. They began to realise that the pillars that supported the peaceable society in which they lived were mere straws that anybody could snap; that laws were powerful only so long as they were obeyed; that the police were potent only so long as they were feared. By the power of his hands this one man had made a whole community do something new: he had made it think, and left it gasping at the obvious.

And then, while it was yet gasping under his first

two strokes, he made his third. Conscious of the horror that his hands had created, and hungry as an actor who has once tasted the thrill of the multitude, he made fresh advertisement of his presence; and on Wednesday morning, three days after the murder of the child, the papers carried to the breakfast-tables of England the story of a still more shocking outrage.

At 9.32 on Tuesday night a constable was on duty in Jarnigan Road, and at that time spoke to a fellow-officer named Petersen at the top of Clemming Street. He had seen this officer walk down that street. He could swear that the street was empty at that time, except for a lame boot-black whom he knew by sight, and who passed him and entered a tenement on the side opposite that on which his fellow-officer was walking. He had the habit, as all constables had just then, of looking constantly behind him and around him, whichever way he was walking, and he was certain that the street was empty. He passed his sergeant at 9.33, saluted him, and answered his inquiry for anything seen. He reported that he had seen nothing, and passed on. His beat ended at a short distance from Clemming Street, and, having paced it, he turned and came again at 9.34 to the top of the street. He had scarcely reached it before he heard the hoarse voice of the sergeant: "Gregory! You there? Quick. Here's another. My God, it's Petersen! Garotted. Quick, call 'em up!"

That was the third of the Strangling Horrors, of which there were to be a fourth and a fifth; and the five horrors were to pass into the unknown and unknowable. That is, unknown as far as authority and the public were concerned. The identity of the murderer *was* known, but to two men only. One was the murderer himself; the other was a young journalist.

This young man, who was covering the affairs for his paper, the *Daily Torch*, was no smarter than the other zealous newspaper men who were hanging about these byways in the hope of a sudden story. But he was patient, and he hung a little closer to the case than the other fellows, and by continually staring at it he at last raised the figure of the murderer like a genie from the stones on which he had stood to do his murders.

After the first few days the men had given up any attempt at exclusive stories, for there was none to be had. They met regularly at the police-station, and what little information there was they shared. The officials were agreeable to them, but no more. The sergeant discussed with them the details of each murder; suggested possible explanations of the man's methods; recalled from the past those cases that had some similarity; and on the matter of motive reminded them of the motiveless Neil Cream and the wanton John Williams, and hinted that work was

being done which would soon bring the business to an end; but about that work he would not say a word. The Inspector, too, was gracefully garrulous on the thesis of Murder, but whenever one of the party edged the talk towards what was being done in this immediate matter, he glided past it. Whatever the officials knew, they were not giving it to newspaper men. The business had fallen heavily upon them, and only by a capture made by their own efforts could they rehabilitate themselves in official and public esteem. Scotland Yard, of course, was at work, and had all the station's material; but the station's hope was that they themselves would have the honour of settling the affair; and however useful the co-operation of the Press might be in other cases, they did not want to risk a defeat by a premature disclosure of their theories and plans.

So the sergeant talked at large, and propounded one interesting theory after another, all of which the newspaper men had thought of themselves.

The young man soon gave up these morning lectures on the Philosophy of Crime, and took to wandering about the streets and making bright stories out of the effect of the murders on the normal life of the people. A melancholy job made more melancholy by the district. The littered roadways, the crestfallen houses, the bleared windows — all held the acid misery that evokes no sympathy: the misery of the

frustrated poet. The misery was the creation of the aliens, who were living in this makeshift fashion because they had no settled homes, and would neither take the trouble to make a home where they *could* settle, nor get on with their wandering.

There was little to be picked up. All he saw and heard were indignant faces, and wild conjectures of the murderer's identity and of the secret of his trick of appearing and disappearing unseen. Since a policeman himself had fallen a victim, denunciations of the force had ceased, and the unknown was now invested with a cloak of legend. Men eyed other men, as though thinking: It might be *him*. It might be *him*. They were no longer looking for a man who had the air of a Madame Tussaud murderer; they were looking for a man, or perhaps some harridan woman, who had done these particular murders. Their thoughts ran mainly on the foreign set. Such ruffianism could scarcely belong to England, nor could the bewildering cleverness of the thing. So they turned to Roumanian gipsies and Turkish carpet-sellers. There, clearly, would be found the "warm" spot. These Eastern fellows — they knew all sorts of tricks, and they had no real religion — nothing to hold them within bounds. Sailors returning from those parts had told tales of conjurors who made themselves invisible; and there were tales of Egyptian and Arab potions that were used for abysmally queer purposes. Per-

haps it *was* possible to them; you never knew. They were so slick and cunning, and they had such gliding movements; no Englishman could melt away as they could. Almost certainly the murderer would be found to be one of that sort — with some dark trick of his own — and just because they were sure that he *was* a magician, they felt that it was useless to look for him. He was a power, able to hold them in subjection and to hold himself untouchable. Superstition, which so easily cracks the frail shell of reason, had got into them. He could do anything he chose: he would never be discovered. These two points they settled, and they went about the streets in a mood of resentful fatalism.

They talked of their ideas to the journalist in half-tones, looking right and left, as though *HE* might overhear them and visit them. And though all the district was thinking of him and ready to pounce upon him, yet, so strongly had he worked upon them, that if any man in the street — say, a small man of commonplace features and form — had cried “*I am the Monster!*” would their stifled fury have broken into flood and have borne him down and engulfed him? Or would they not suddenly have seen something unearthly in that everyday face and figure, something unearthly in his everyday boots, something unearthly about his hat, something that marked him as one whom none of their weapons could alarm or pierce? And would they not momentarily have fallen back

from this devil, as the devil fell back from the Cross made by the sword of Faust, and so have given him time to escape? I do not know; but so fixed was their belief in his invincibility that it is at least likely that they would have made this hesitation, had such an occasion arisen. But it never did. To-day this commonplace fellow, his murder lust glutted, is still seen and observed among them as he was seen and observed all the time; but because nobody then dreamt, or now dreams, that he was what he was, they observed him then, and observe him now, as people observe a lamp-post.

Almost was their belief in his invincibility justified; for, five days after the murder of the policeman Petersen, when the experience and inspiration of the whole detective force of London were turned towards his identification and capture, he made his fourth and fifth strokes.

At nine o'clock that evening, the young newspaper man, who hung about every night until his paper was away, was strolling along Richards Lane. Richards Lane is a narrow street, partly a stall-market, and partly residential. The young man was in the residential section, which carries on one side small working-class cottages, and on the other the wall of a railway goods-yard. The great wall hung a blanket of shadow over the lane, and the shadow and the cadaverous outline of the now deserted market stalls

gave it the appearance of a living lane that had been turned to frost in the moment between breath and death. The very lamps, that elsewhere were nimbuses of gold, had here the rigidity of gems. The journalist, feeling this message of frozen eternity, was telling himself that he was tired of the whole thing, when in one stroke the frost was broken. In the moment between one pace and another silence and darkness were racked by a high scream and through the scream a voice: "Help! help! *He's here!*"

Before he could think what movement to make, the lane came to life. As though its invisible populace had been waiting on that cry, the door of every cottage was flung open, and from them and from the alleys poured shadowy figures bent in question-mark form. For a second or so they stood as rigid as the lamps; then a police whistle gave them direction, and the flock of shadows sloped up the street. The journalist followed them, and others followed him. From the main street and from surrounding streets they came, some risen from unfinished suppers, some disturbed in their ease of slippers and shirt-sleeves, some stumbling on infirm limbs, and some upright, and armed with pokers or the tools of their trade. Here and there above the wavering cloud of heads moved the bold helmets of policemen. In one dim mass they surged upon a cottage whose doorway was marked by the sergeant and two constables; and voices of

those behind urged them on with "Get in! Find him! Run round the back! Over the wall!" and those in front cried: "Keep back! Keep back!"

And now the fury of a mob held in thrall by unknown peril broke loose. He was here — on the spot. Surely this time he *could not* escape. All minds were bent upon the cottage; all energies thrust towards its doors and windows and roof; all thought was turned upon one unknown man and his extermination. So that no one man saw any other man. No man saw the narrow, packed lane and the mass of struggling shadows, and all forgot to look among themselves for the monster who never lingered upon his victims. All forgot, indeed, that they, by their mass crusade of vengeance, were affording him the perfect hiding-place. They saw only the house, and they heard only the rending of woodwork and the smash of glass at back and front, and the police giving orders or crying with the chase; and they pressed on.

But they found no murderer. All they found was news of murder and a glimpse of the ambulance, and for their fury there was no other object than the police themselves, who fought against this hampering of their work.

The journalist managed to struggle through to the cottage door, and to get the story from the constable stationed there. The cottage was the home of a

pensioned sailor and his wife and daughter. They had been at supper, and at first it appeared that some noxious gas had smitten all three in mid-action. The daughter lay dead on the hearth-rug, with a piece of bread-and-butter in her hand. The father had fallen sideways from his chair, leaving on his plate a filled spoon of rice-pudding. The mother lay half under the table, her lap filled with the pieces of a broken cup and splashes of cocoa. But in three seconds the idea of gas was dismissed. One glance at their necks showed that this was the Strangler again; and the police stood and looked at the room and momentarily shared the fatalism of the public. They were helpless.

This was his fourth visit, making seven murders in all. He was to do, as you know, one more — and to do it that night; and then he was to pass into history as the unknown London horror, and return to the decent life that he had always led, remembering little of what he had done, and worried not at all by the memory. Why did he stop? Impossible to say. Why did he begin? Impossible again. It just happened like that; and if he thinks at all of those days and nights, I surmise that he thinks of them as we think of foolish or dirty little sins that we committed in childhood. We say that they were not really sins, because we were not then consciously ourselves: we had not come to realisation; and we look back at that

foolish little creature that we once were, and forgive him because he didn't know. So, I think, with this man.

There are plenty like him. Eugene Aram, after the murder of Daniel Clarke, lived a quiet, contented life for fourteen years, unhaunted by his crime and unshaken in his self-esteem. Dr. Crippen murdered his wife, and then lived pleasantly with his mistress in the house under whose floor he had buried the wife. Constance Kent, found Not Guilty of the murder of her young brother, led a peaceful life for five years before she confessed. George Joseph Smith and William Palmer lived amiably among their fellows untroubled by fear or by remorse for their poisonings and drownings. Charles Peace, at the time he made his one unfortunate essay, had settled down into a respectable citizen with an interest in antiques. It happened that, after a lapse of time, these men were discovered, but more murderers than we guess are living decent lives to-day, and will die in decency, undiscovered and unsuspected. As this man will.

But he had a narrow escape, and it was perhaps this narrow escape that brought him to a stop. The escape was due to an error of judgment on the part of the journalist.

As soon as he had the full story of the affair, which took some time, he spent fifteen minutes on the telephone, sending the story through, and at the end

of the fifteen minutes, when the stimulus of the business had left him, he felt physically tired and mentally dishevelled. He was not yet free to go home; the paper would not go away for another hour; so he turned into a bar for a drink and some sandwiches.

It was then, when he had dismissed the whole business from his mind, and was looking about the bar and admiring the landlord's taste in watch-chains and his air of domination, and was thinking that the landlord of a well-conducted tavern had a more comfortable life than a newspaper man, that his mind received from nowhere a spark of light. He was not thinking about the Strangling Horrors; his mind was on his sandwich. As a public-house sandwich, it was a curiosity. The bread had been thinly cut, it was buttered, and the ham was not two months stale; it was ham as it should be. His mind turned to the inventor of this refreshment, the Earl of Sandwich, and then to George the Fourth, and then to the Georges, and to the legend of that George who was worried to know how the apple got into the apple-dumpling. He wondered whether George would have been equally puzzled to know how the ham got into the ham sandwich, and how long it would have been before it occurred to him that the ham could not have got there unless somebody had put it there. He got up to order another sandwich, and in that

moment a little active corner of his mind settled the affair. If there was ham in his sandwich, somebody must have put it there. If seven people had been murdered, somebody must have been there to murder them. There was no aeroplane or automobile that would go into a man's pocket; therefore that somebody must have escaped either by running away or standing still; and again therefore ——

He was visualising the front-page story that his paper would carry if his theory were correct, and if — a matter of conjecture — his editor had the necessary nerve to make a bold stroke, when a cry of "Time, gentlemen, please! All out!" reminded him of the hour. He got up and went out into a world of mist, broken by the ragged discs of roadside puddles and the streaming lightning of motor-buses. He was certain that he had *the* story, but, even if it were proved, he was doubtful whether the policy of his paper would permit him to print it. It had one great fault. It was truth, but it was impossible truth. It rocked the foundations of everything that newspaper readers believed and that newspaper editors helped them to believe. They might believe that Turkish carpet-sellers had the gift of making themselves invisible. They would not believe this.

As it happened, they were not asked to, for the story was never written. As his paper had by now gone away, and as he was nourished by his refresh-

ment and stimulated by his theory, he thought he might put in an extra half-hour by testing that theory. So he began to look about for the man he had in mind — a man with white hair, and large white hands; otherwise an everyday figure whom nobody would look twice at. He wanted to spring his idea on this man without warning, and he was going to place himself within reach of a man armoured in legends of dreadfulness and grue. This might appear to be an act of supreme courage — that one man, with no hope of immediate outside support, should place himself at the mercy of one who was holding a whole parish in terror. But it wasn't. He didn't think about the risk. He didn't think about his duty to his employers or loyalty to his paper. He was moved simply by an instinct to follow a story to its end.

He walked slowly from the tavern and crossed into Fingal Street, making for Deever Market, where he had hope of finding his man. But his journey was shortened. At the corner of Lotus Street he saw him — or a man who looked like him. This street was poorly lit, and he could see little of the man: but he *could* see white hands. For some twenty paces he stalked him; then drew level with him; and at a point where the arch of a railway crossed the street, he saw that this was his man. He approached him with the current conversational phrase of the district: "Well, seen anything of the murderer?" The man stopped

to look sharply at him; then, satisfied that the journalist was not the murderer, said:

“Eh? No, nor’s anybody else, curse it. Doubt if they ever will.”

“I don’t know. I’ve been thinking about them, and I’ve got an idea.”

“So?”

“Yes. Came to me all of a sudden. Quarter of an hour ago. And I’d felt that we’d all been blind. It’s been staring us in the face.”

The man turned again to look at him, and the look and the movement held suspicion of this man who seemed to know so much. “Oh? Has it? Well, if you’re so sure, why not give us the benefit of it?”

“I’m going to.” They walked level, and were nearly at the end of the little street where it meets Deever Market, when the journalist turned casually to the man. He put a finger on his arm. “Yes, it seems to me quite simple now. But there’s still one point I don’t understand. One little thing I’d like to clear up. I mean the motive. Now, as man to man, tell me, Sergeant Ottermole, just *why* did you kill all those inoffensive people?”

The sergeant stopped, and the journalist stopped. There was just enough light from the sky, which held the reflected light of the continent of London, to give him a sight of the sergeant’s face, and the sergeant’s face was turned to him with a wide smile of such

urbanity and charm that the journalist's eyes were frozen as they met it. The smile stayed for some seconds. Then said the sergeant: "Well, to tell you the truth, Mister Newspaper Man, I don't know. I really don't know. In fact, I've been worried about it myself. But I've got an idea — just like you. Everybody knows that we can't control the workings of our minds. Don't they? Ideas come into our minds without asking. But everybody's supposed to be able to control his body. Why? Eh? We get our minds from lord-knows-where — from people who were dead hundreds of years before we were born. Mayn't we get our bodies in the same way? Our faces — our legs — our heads — they aren't completely ours. We don't make 'em. They come to us. And couldn't ideas come into our bodies like ideas come into our minds? Eh? Can't ideas live in nerve and muscle as well as in brain? Couldn't it be that parts of our bodies aren't really us, and couldn't ideas come into those parts all of a sudden, like ideas come into — into" — he shot his arms out, showing the great white-gloved hands and hairy wrists; shot them out so swiftly to the journalist's throat that his eyes never saw them — "*into my hands!*"

AN ANGEL UNAWARES

AN ANGEL UNAWARES

AS the loud-mouthed creature stamped out of old Quong's shop, after releasing a spate of blasphemy upon his prices, I turned to old Quong, and said: "If this had been my shop, I'd have kicked that baboon out long before."

Old Quong made that blink of the eyes which is his expression of reproof. "I never," he said — "I never, my son, kick anybody out. It is not wise to kick people out. Not even millionaires or princes. Certainly not baboons. You see, one never knows. . . . Take the case of Mr. and Mrs. Ponderby Looping."

I sat back and prepared to take it; and at the end of about two hours I had taken it. (What a journalist old Quong would have made! With him as news editor, the publication of an evening newspaper would be an event like Leap Year or Halley's Comet.) It went something like this.

Mr. and Mrs. Ponderby Looping had been married so long that at the time of this tale they were talking in monosyllables, or by nods, by eye-

brows, by glances. And did not often do that — they lived such a mutual life. They were seldom apart, and their joint lives had no *forte* or *piano*, no *crescendi* or *diminuendi*. They wandered from their country house to their town house and from their town house to one European resort after the other; reaching it at the “right” season and leaving it at the “right” time. They met the same weary and wearisome people at each place, and, though they were unconsciously bored by meeting the same weary and wearisome people, they would have been shocked if they had met any other. It was part of their temporal religion always to mix with the Right people; people of their Set.

Sometimes, looking out from their ivory tower, they perceived, in their hotel, or at the next table in some restaurant, people who were clearly not Right; people who did not Belong. And they noted that these Awful People seemed to be extracting a great deal of enjoyment from life. But if, for a foolish moment, they were tempted to make contact with these people, and discover what it was that filled every hour of their day with laughter and light steps, reason and tradition compelled them to brush the temptation aside as a whimsy. There were some things that Couldn't Be Done. If the days of the Ponderby Loopings were not filled with that same laughter and light step, it was because laughter and

light step were so obviously a mere Woolworth version of the genuine happiness that filled the lives of the Ponderby Loopings.

The happiness of the Ponderby Loopings was as certain and as solid as their country home, and more solid than their town house. They were as happy as only the well-bred Englishman and woman know how to be — and you are familiar with the quiet, independent and strictly individual happiness of London Society. They were as happy as their cows and their horses. Indeed, audacious young people, such as film-stars on holiday, had been known, on observing them, to make use of these similes.

They were happy before they met Mr. Hannibal Hatt, and they continued to be happy afterwards. But life is always throwing up little tragedies of that sort, and perhaps of all sad things the saddest are those which are perceived only by the onlooker.

They were at Cannes. They had to be. Antibes had become the resort of shrieking actresses. Madeira had been taken from them by cotton-spinners. Brioni was occupied by impossible Americans. Monte Carlo was unthinkable. Aix was no longer an unknown quantity, and for the moment the Right People had not discovered any new enclosure where they might gaze upon and talk to each other without fear of eavesdropping by creatures of the theatrical, commercial, journalistic or labour-political worlds.

So they were at Cannes, and there they met Mr. Hannibal Hatt.

When I say they met Mr. Hannibal Hatt, I use a manner of speech. It was rather an impact than a meeting. Mr. Hannibal Hatt's meetings usually were. He was a young man of uncertain birth and uncertain income, but Fortune had granted him the one gift which makes all royal roads to success look like desert trails. It had given him Good Looks, and it follows naturally that, though his income was probably that of a barber's assistant, he lived the life of a minor prince whose mother has carefully invested her money in the industries of a republic. Not content with this, it had given him other gifts — so many, that he made the mistake (often made by the young) of assuming that he possessed them all, and was capable of anything.

At the time that immediately concerns us he thought that because he could drive his own two-seater, when it was in good order, he could therefore take a friend's racing-car, which had a defective carburettor and two deflated tyres, to the repairer's at Nice. He was the type of young man who is always offering to do little services for his friends, whether competent to do them or not; and experience had never taught him that service implies a certain amount of self, rather than a large amount of absent-mindedness. In driving the racing-car, or, I should say, in

taking charge of its steering wheel, he forgot, after the first ten seconds, that it was a racing-car; and thereby he achieved a little more damage to his friend's car, and something that the ordinary routine of life would never have permitted him to achieve — the acquaintance of the Ponderby Loopings.

So far as my informant knows, he did not actually injure, or even knock down, the Ponderby Loopings. After the car had, with scarcely any help from Mr. Hatt, achieved a speed of what is called, I think, 75 m.p.h., it turned on one of its deflated tyres and headed straight for the not imponderable middle of Mrs. Ponderby Looping, who was standing on the sidewalk. But when its bonnet was two inches from her skirt, the car, again with little help from Mr. Hatt, and possibly from a friendly contempt of his frantic efforts to stop it — stopped.

Mr. Hatt alighted, removed his hat, and bowed. He offered the usual thousand apologies which even the rudest feel compelled to offer when on French soil and added a gratuitous two thousand and five hundred. Mrs. Ponderby Looping assured him it was of no consequence — without a hat his good looks were in full revelation — and Mr. Ponderby Looping urged him, not harshly, to take a few lessons — from an English, rather than a French, instructor. He again expressed his deep chagrin at the incident, and his sincere concern for the shock that it must have

caused to Mrs. Ponderby Looping, and begged permission to call at their hotel to-morrow, so that he might set his mind at rest as to any possible ill-effects. He then re-entered the car, and drove off toward Nice and the repairer, who, late that night, dug the car from the front window of a café on the Place Massena.

Well, Mr. Hannibal Hatt called at the hotel, and was shown to their sitting-room. They took a dislike to him. His very entrance set them against him. (Mr. Ponderby Looping observed that the fellow must at some time have been a waiter.) Certainly it was afternoon, but if fauns want to have afternoons they ought to know — if they are any decent kind of faun — that one simply doesn't have them in drawing-rooms. At least, only figuratively, through the hands of a two-hundred-guinea pianist. This one didn't know. He bowed to Mr. Ponderby Looping. He curvetted before Mrs. Ponderby Looping and — yes, he did — the bounder blew her two kisses. He asked three thousand more forgivenesses for the unforgivable and putrid behaviour of his car, and when he understood that all was forgiven, he looked about the room. Then he began to pirouette. A vase filled with garden lilies caught his eye. He sent a long kiss to the vase and a cascade of kisses to the lilies. He turned to the window, and blew a kiss to the Mediterranean. He turned back to the room, and it

seemed almost that he was going to blow a kiss to Mr. Ponderby Looping, when Mrs. Ponderby Looping said: "We're just going to have tea. Do you take tea?"

"Lady, I follow all charming customs. When in Rome I am romantic. When in Deauville I am devilish. When in Berlin I am usually bilious. When I am with the English, I feel that nothing in the world is so necessary and desirable as a cup of tea. China. With the exquisite sandwiches which the English love — and which make me love them."

"But are you not English yourself, Mr. — er — Tatt?"

"Madam, I am everything. I am an exile from all countries, and a citizen — thank heaven — of none. Citizen — the very word!" He shuddered. "I have no country — no flag — no bloodthirsty patriotism. Everybody else is bound and registered to one country. Lady Glute says I am the only really free man there is." He rattled on through sandwiches and tea. He ignored all interruptions; only nodded when Mr. Ponderby Looping made a remark, and cut clean across any sentence from his hostess. He got up. He pirouetted. He sat down. He made trilling laughter at his own phrases. He beamed upon them under his black curls. His smile and his gestures said that he had fallen in love with them, and found their company delicious. He had the air of one willing to do anything

in the world for them — to take them under his wing, and buy them a new town house, and give them two or three new cars, and a pearl necklace or so. Mr. Ponderby Looping didn't like it.

Mrs. Ponderby Looping couldn't make it out. She had a feeling of being taken charge of by a creature unworthy to take charge of a Ponderby Looping who had been a Cleash, and yet she found herself not wholly affronted.

When some of his phrases drew from her a polite smile, he was encouraged to go farther, and while his later conversation did not definitely place the country of his birth, but rather confused any attempt to place it, it threw a good deal of light on the sphere of that birth. Living up to the first impression he thought he had created — that of a witty Adonis — he stood by the window in a graceful attitude and told them a limerick. This limerick — the one about "the last time I dined with the King" — suggested that his birthplace was Camden Town, London. Then he told them a story — the one about the melon — which suggested that his birthplace was the Belleville quarter of Paris. And then he told another story — the one about the music-hall artist and the listless audience — which suggested that his birthplace was the dockside of Marseilles. Other stories suggested the Ghetto of Warsaw, Grand Street, Manhattan, and the more odorous villages of the Levant.

Under this stream of stories, Mr. Ponderby Looping, who had realised in the first moment that the fellow was not a gentleman, was being polite — the ultimate insult he knew — and all might have been well had not the lady, trying to escape from the happy but embarrassing laughter which the stories caused her, drawn his attention again to the lilies.

“Ah, yes, lady — the lilies. The adorable lilies — the white and virginal rapture of them. How beautifully they stand — like the stately homes of England, but, oh, how different! They remind me of exquisite maidens of fifteen in their night-dresses, whereas the stately homes of England always remind me of Eliza Cook. Or is it Felicia Hemans? That is why I so seldom go to England. Your young maidens are the most beautiful in the world, but, alas! they are never in their proper setting. One can never detach them from the pressing atmosphere of the stately homes of England and the mittens of Eliza Cook. They are imprisoned in schools when they should be leaping through sun-dappled forest-glades. They are walloping the air with hockey-clubs when their white bodies should be flashing across moonlit greenswards for the delight of our eyes and the filling of our hands. They should be lying on silver sands in the robeless beauty of their exquisite years. Instead of which, after their imprisonment in schools, they are again more rigidly imprisoned in a jail from which

there is no escape. They become Englishwomen. Ugh!

“Oh, Mrs. Ponderby Looping, you at fifteen, I am sure, were one of those who longed to dance and love in Grecian woodlands. You have felt, I am sure, the dew on your feet and the wind in your hair, if only in imagination. You, I know, have felt how true and good is the Pagan life — I see it in your eyes.”

He stopped short and beamed upon her, and, with a Ponderby Looping shock, she found that she was beaming back. By an unseen flash she changed the beam into lifted eyebrows. Those lifted eyebrows had never been known to fail as quellers of ill-breeding, but they failed then. Mr. Hatt continued to beam, as though the lifted eyebrows expressed sympathetic union, and went blandly on:

“Yes, you, too, were of us. You, too, must have dreamed of Messalinan revels in old Rome. You, in all the white wonder of your ——”

At this point Mr. Ponderby Looping coughed and rose. “Well, Mr. — Tapp — your visit has been extremely pleasant, but now you must excuse us. I am expecting a business caller from London.”

“Ah — business. The Eliza Cook of modern life. How cruelly it breaks the fall of the sun on our roses! There is not a great deal of ugliness in life, but the little there is can stain the whole of it. The beef of life can take away all the ecstasy of the mustard.”

He smiled a gentle, comprehending smile which approved everybody, and even forgave business. "But perhaps to-morrow — if you and Mrs. Ponderby Looping would give me the pleasure — lunch — there is a restaurant which visitors have not yet discovered. The omelettes — ah, the omelettes! How can one be bored while such omelettes exist? Omelettes and lovely young girls and wine and coffee and songs and funny stories and soft beds — what more can one ask? And yet, when one thinks of the thousands of lovely girls there are in the world, and how few of them one — oh, and the thousands of perfect omelettes that one will never live to eat — But I ramble. If you will but permit me the pleasure, I will do what I seldom do: I will be unselfish and introduce you to a good restaurant before it has been spoiled by success. And you must meet some of my friends, and ——"

Mr. Ponderby Looping was suave and firm. "I am sorry, Mr. — Matt — but we are leaving early to-morrow morning. Perhaps on another occasion ——"

"Ah, too bad! Too bad! But I shall live for the occasion. Au 'voir, lady. Au' voir, Ponderby Looping. It has been delightful, this meeting. You will not forget the story about the melon. Your London clubs, I think, will like it. I will think up some better ones before our next meeting. Au 'voir."

When he was gone, Mr. Ponderby Looping went to the window. Mrs. Ponderby Looping said: "What a disgusting little creature!" Mr. Ponderby Looping said: "What a foul fellow! But these places are full of that sort. If we run against him again while we're here I shall know how to deal with him." He threw up the window. "Lord! One wants to air the place after having a thing like that in it." But Mrs. Ponderby Looping shivered. "Don't do that, dear. Don't do that. Room's got quite chilly all of a sudden."

HOTEL CÔTE D'AZUR

HOTEL CÔTE D'AZUR

IT is a great relief," I said to old Quong, after we had greeted each other by sitting face to face for forty minutes — "it is a great relief to be sitting in your back room. There is dirt here, but it is agreeable dirt. There is silence, but it is beneficent silence. It smells, but the smells are not taunting and lascivious. Last night (I went on) I was sitting in a sad and solemn parlour at the western end, and I had to listen to a tale from one with even less fault of brevity than yourself — a tale that had some odour of the miserable dust of the parlour itself. Instead of my listening to you, suppose, by way of a change, you listen to me? I'll be as long as I can."

Without comment, old Quong reached for his jar of rice-spirit, and I told him the tale I had heard in the hotel parlour. I forget how I told it, but I wrote it down some time afterwards, and here it is.

As I sat in the brown dusk of that parlour, the rain fell with impotent hisses upon the window-pane, and out of the stillness which was not quite silence, but rather a muffling of the world's pulse — out of this

stillness into my mind stalked a company of crippled images.

I thought of ex-soldiers selling matches. Of Rosherville Gardens on its last night of life. Of Oscar Wilde in fetters on Clapham Junction platform. Of street-organs playing old tunes on yellow afternoons in the back streets. Of elderly pensioned book-keepers wandering listlessly in suburban parks. Of streets in South London that adumbrate the direst hell that man can conceive — the something that does not begin and does not end. Of people getting run over by buses on wet days. Of tired charwomen having their pockets picked of their week's wages. Of unloved women who lie late in bed reading novels or novelettes. It was that kind of room.

I had been drawn into the place one Autumn evening, when taking the Hungerford Bridge way, by steps and dark arches, to Waterloo. I had passed it many times before, but while I had felt that there was something queer about it, it had not, until that evening, moved me to ask it a question. Outside, it was like the rest of the dim and discreet "private" hotels that make silent solicitation round the big railway centres; but it was marked from the others by its name — Hotel Côte d'Azur — and by an illuminated sign bearing that name and announcing "Lounge Open to All." Each time I had passed it I had carried, for the next fifty paces, pictures of the

Mediterranean and memories of Eze and La Turbie and Cagnes and Roquebrune; sunshine and vibrant dawns; things that made discord with the alleys of Lambeth and with that kind of private hotel.

That evening, with the mist of Autumn filling the narrow street, it seemed to be isolated; the central figure for whom the mist was made; and it definitely caught my wandering attention and made me question it. Perhaps (I thought, as I approached it), perhaps one ought, seeing that its Lounge is Open to All, to investigate and find out how these shabby imitations manage to live in the shadow of real hotels, and what sort of custom they catch when, within sight and walking distance, are a dozen hotels proper. Surely even guests temporarily coupled would want backgrounds less drab for their drab intercourse? And why did this place take that name, and why, among a group of similar places, was it alone in Opening its Lounge to All?

Perhaps, though, it *was* different. Perhaps its drab exterior was merely an economical accident. Perhaps it really had nothing to do with its fellows, but did carry something of the Blue Coast. Perhaps it was run by charming people from the South who were not as their neighbours were — furtive with masked law-breaking — but were cleanly and ingenuously pagan. Perhaps what was elsewhere drab intercourse was here made gracious and sunny. Perhaps I should find

in it the true Latin atmosphere: a Theocritan attitude to life and that essential goodness of spirit that finds goodness in many things that the English condemn as "horrid." There might be delicate cooking, too. If my first perhapses were right, there would be. Anyway, I would investigate.

I did, and I found no confirmation of my perhapses. I found the Lounge that was Open to All, took a swift look and smell at it, turned to run out — and collided with a forlorn, slip-slop chambermaid. Before I could recover my wits to the point of ordering myself out of the place I had ordered from the spectral creature a drink. Having given the order, I had to stay, and I sat down in a parlour where, I felt, most company would be silent and all would be damned.

The windows were closed. From one gas-jet with a torn incandescent mantle came a faint glimmer of light. The gas bubbled and gave the light the ague. There was a massive dinner-wagon, carrying nothing but a cloudy cruet. There were prints of "The Stag at Bay" and "Dignity and Impudence." There was a writing-table with soiled blotting-pad, encrusted pen and open ink-well — dry. The grate held a heap of black coals. They gave out a faint glow and now and then a diffident thrust of flame. In the alcoves on either side of the fire-place stood two cabinets. They might have been book-cases, but as they had blind mahogany doors one could only wonder what they

held, and imagine such horrors as dirty linen. There was a "presentation" clock whose hands hung in dejected arrest at 7.25. There was a rosewood piano; an 1878 model.

On each of the three uneasy chairs of slippery leather lay leaflets advertising the miraculous cures of an Irish doctor by the absent-treatment method. Over the room hung a smell of that morning's lunch and a month of breakfasts. In the far part of the room, looking on to the street, three tables were half-heartedly laid for dinner or supper. They stood with white faces upturned to the ceiling, mutely praying, I felt, that somebody would be sent to dine at them, and knowing that nobody would.

The house was hushed; nothing but the slip-slop of the chambermaid and sometimes the tinkle of a distant telephone-bell. From the kitchen of the railway restaurant came a drone of clattered plates that never developed and never paused; and the noise of those plates dropped through the hush on to the brain with the screaming monotony of the Chinese water-torture. I wondered — and so cut off from the world did I feel that I murmured the wonder on my lips — I wondered: "Why the hell did I come in here, and how'm I going to get out?" There was nothing to stop my going. The parlour door was open, and the passage reached the street-entrance in ten paces. Yet five minutes of that room had so affected

me that the act of getting up and breaking the dusty hush with footsteps needed a decision that I could not achieve.

To think, I murmured, that this abomination dares to call itself a hotel. The "Côte d'Azur" can be forgiven, as showman's license, but "Hotel" . . . To think that right outside a great station by which Americans and many Europeans first enter London there stands a trap like this to catch the unknowledgeable foreigner and give him libellous notions of English hotels. In Bootle, perhaps; in Reading; in Ashton-in-Makerfield, one would visualise such a place, not as an obscene joke, but as suitable to the landscape. But here, in the centre of London, within three minutes' walk of the Strand, to find this bit of Sunday-afternoon-in-Galashiels! To walk from the magnificence of the main hall of Waterloo on to this panting corpse of 1878! An idiotic music-hall song came to me, and I wanted to sing it — "*The body is upstairs.*"

As I sat there I could feel the air of the place descending upon me with the impact of wet dough. I wanted to sing that song, or to yell or stamp. If only those whispering footsteps would stop. If only that husky voice would stop using the telephone. If only there wasn't a feeling of being spied upon through the "dispense" shutter. If only someone would come in and roar for supper, or smash the walnut over-

mantel, or in any form kick up hell's delight. I had an insane thought of bringing some ghastly life to the place by ringing the bell, and mortifying flesh and spirit by ordering an ashen dinner on one of the tables stained by the summer's flies. At any moment I could have gone out; yet I could not get up and walk out. I could only sit and think of all those dim, rainy images.

And then came something definite. Feet descending the stairs. Awkward, slow feet, but feet that came down with good round thumps. The feet banged along the half-lit passage and stopped outside the door. For some seconds they were still. There was a noise of heavy breathing.

Then he swung round the door, swayed a little, and came in. He was past middle-age, shapelessly stout, with a half-bald head and depressed moustache. His clothes had the appearance of being flung off at night and flung on in the morning. Provincial, plainly. Commercial traveller, probably. And losing pace and slipping down in his job. As he came under the shivering gas-jet, I knew how this hotel lived. I saw in a glance that this ungainly provincial was the perfect guest for the Hotel Côte d'Azur and for this room and for those fly-blown tables. His face was heavy and steamy. The cheeks sagged. The eyes were lustreless.

He went to one of the uneasy chairs as though he

were making a journey to it. He sank into it; made noises; inspected his boots with an air of seeing boots for the first time. He looked at the fire; at the ceiling; then into the shadow by the 1878 piano where I sat. I was grateful for his coming, because, though he confirmed the key and tempo of the place, his coming had broken its spell upon me. I got up. He waved a hand at me. Waved it twice. Then said:

“Di’n see you there. Don’ run ’way, mister. Rotten night. Hope not intrudin’. Don’ want intrude anybody. Don’ lemme disturb. . . .”

I saw that I must get away. But in sinking into the chair he had moved it, and it now stood athwart me and the door. “No need run ’way. Jus’ ’cos I come in. Rotten ’ole —eh? Jus’ place for summer holiday —eh? Ha! May I ’ave pleasure ordering drink?”

I thanked him and spoke of a train, and edged round him. His voice changed. It broke a little, and the tone was entreating. “O-oh, *don’* run ’way. Now don’ you run ’way.” He made a prayer of it, with aimless waves of a large hand. “Like a bit of a chat now’n then, ’f you understand me. Don’ see much company this place. You staying ’ere? Ah! thought not. Di’n s’pose you was. Got more sense. On’y fool’d stay ’ere.”

To engage his attention while I finessed round his chair, I said: “Well, why stay here? Plenty of decent hotels in the Strand. Good-night.”

"Ah! don' understand. I *got* to stay 'ere. 'Ave to. Tell yeh. . . . (That is, if not boring yeh?) Known this hotel fer years. Thir'y-two years. Come 'ere every year. Filthy 'Ole. Don't go, mister — er — Did'n catch-the-name."

"I didn't give it. Good-night."

"Ah! Ah! No. Did'n give it. Wise man. Don' matter. But don' go. Not in 'urry ten minutes, surely. Plenny o' trains. Far too many."

Beseechingly he put a fat arm across the door. It was clear that I could not pass without deliberately taking hold of his hand and moving it; and for no reason at all I felt that I couldn't touch that hand. His presence was the climax to the hotel; his threat of conversation was its anti-climax. It was exasperating, but I saw that I must surrender. I must go back and sit down and try to make myself interested in hearing why this fat man had come every year for thirty-two years to a Filthy Hole.

I sat down. He reached across the arm of the chair to a bell-push. In reaching it he heaved himself half out of the chair. He fell back like a pillow. Before he had removed his finger the slip-slop was there. "Double, Jessie. And this gennelman, my frien' — jus' take his order."

When the order was filled he took a long drink, sat back, and made noises of "Rrhmm. Chrrmm." He folded his hands and looked at The Stag at Bay.

Looked at the fire-place. Looked across the room, and saw me. "Ha! . . . Ah! Goin' tell yeh. Ah! Filthy 'Ole. But every year — thir'y-two years — never missed. Tell yeh. (That is, if not borin' yeh?) Jew know why I come this Filthy 'Ole? Tell yeh. Rrhmm!

"I was twenny-two then. Portsmouth I come from. I was living there at the time. There was a girl . . ."

I squirmed in my chair. I felt again the wet dough dropping on me. The hushed room, the frowsty hotel, and a fuddled old man who was about to tell me the story of his life and his silly love-affairs. I thought with an exile's longing of the shops and the lights of the Strand and the bells of St. Martin's. I think he noted the squirm.

"Wunner why I say that to stranger, eh? Think it not quite decent, p'raps, tell things like that to stranger? Ah! don' unnerstand. Tell it stranger any day. Never tole it to frien'. Never. See? D'you know what love is, mister? *Real* love? When you're not jus' man and woman, male and female. But two creatures — something bigger'n any life you know? Eh?"

He was sitting upright now, leaning forward. He seemed in half a minute to be sobered. His voice was firmer and the syllables were clearer. "Know anything about that?"

"I think we all have it once in our lives. Usually when we're schoolboys."

“Ah! Yes. Well, I was twenty-two. She was twenty.” He repeated to himself: “She was twenty. Met her at a friend’s house. I was on the road, then. Not much money, but going well and good prospects. Her people — the old man — her brother — parson. Had no mother. Poor as misery, he was, but proud. *Proud?* It stuck out so you could a-cut bits off it. Well, I come along, and he heard about our meetings. Would he look at me? Would he look at Judas Iscariot? Me — a young commercial — meeting his daughter! And then piling on the infernal impudence by wanting to marry her. His daughter was *his* daughter, and she’d marry a Gentleman or nobody. If I’d had ten thousand a year, and been established on my own estate, and accepted everywhere, he wouldn’t a-looked at me. Because I wasn’t what he called *born*. I was alright, mind yeh. He said so. Nothing against me, only — I wasn’t a gentleman. That was enough. I was straight and decent and clean and intelligent, *but* — He ended up by saying that he was sure I had enough delicacy and enough of the *instincts* of a gentleman to realise that the matter was what he called Closed. But it wasn’t. Not by any means.”

Before this intimate confidence I could not bring myself to look at the man. I stared into the black grate, and, with my eyes turned from him, my mind took impressions of him; and out of this fat soft

mass peeped something as slim and wistful as that figure which Charles Chaplin has created for us; something that, before we became self-conscious, used to be called the Good and the True. Something horribly alien to that room.

“No, it certainly wasn’t closed. My delicacy was alright, but, y’see, we were young. And whether she knew what the old man meant by a Gentleman, or not, or whether she thought me more interesting than her father’s Gentlemen, I don’t know. I only know we took no notice of him, and we went on meeting. Evening after evening. Sometimes in the shrubbery. Sometimes among the rhododendrons at the back of the churchyard. Sometimes right outside on the hills. Summer nights. Winter nights. September, when you could smell damp leaves, and the Hunter’s Moon was up. In the Spring, in May, she’d slip out on Sunday nights, and come scuttering round the vicarage wall in her white frock — I could see her yards away in the dusk like a big butterfly. Night after night — and me waiting there. *You* know how it is, when you’re waiting like that — eh? — and the smell of grass round you, and the night and all, and . . .”

His voice dropped again to the fuddled sing-song; and all the time above it rode the restaurant’s unending accompaniment of plates and dishes, making a concerto for Voice and Crockery. He paused. I lit a cigarette.

He blinked, sat up straight, and coughed.

"Ah. Summer and Winter nights. For a year and a half. Eighteen wonderful months. Sometimes for an hour at a time. Sometimes only for ten minutes. But we met. Yes, by God, we met." He dropped his head and stared at the carpet. I thought the anecdote was ended, but with the uncanny perception of the drunkard he looked up. "Not boring yeh, am I? Yes, we met alright. She was — she was — she was one o' them serious-laughing ones, 'f you understand me. You know — steady, quiet, but eyes always laughing. See a joke as quick as I would. If I saw anything funny, I'd just flick an eye at *it* and at her, and she'd see it in a second. Even those that didn't feel as I felt about her were always glad to meet her and see her go along the street. I can't describe her. No hand at that sort o' thing. But perhaps you know what I mean. She was like — like getting up on a sunny morning after a real night's sleep. Know how you feel then? That's reely nowhere near it. But something like that was the way she made you feel when you looked at her."

His voice marked another change. The accent was no longer frayed and provincial. He spoke as I imagine he spoke in his days of success. He dropped his illiteracies and used reasonably correct English.

"Well, after a time the old man found out about these secret meetings. He would. He was one of those

who're always poking into other people's affairs. He went for her then. Tried to make her take an oath never to see me again. But she wouldn't. Then he kept her to the house and lectured her every half-hour. Called her meeting me Indecent, and used a lot of other foul words. At least, the words themselves were alright, but using the word Indecent about her was just as foul as swearing.

"Well, as I say, I wasn't doing badly then. Matter o' fact, doing quite well as money went then for young men. So whatever I couldn't give her in the Gentleman way, I *could* give her other things. Food, for one thing. They never really got enough to eat at the Vicarage. And warmer clothes and a better home. And I think a *happier* home. We were in love — both of us. There was nothing else in the world for either of us.

"Well, we planned it. Friends of hers — a girl — used to smuggle letters in and out. And we arranged just the sort of little place we'd have, and the kind of book-cases we'd have — we were both Readers — and the sort of kitchen she'd want — one with plenty of windows and room to turn in. And that we'd have wonderful lunches and dinners instead of the lumps of hot beef and cold scraps she'd lived on in the Vicarage, and — and all that."

He paused, and again that elf peeped from the big damp face. He stared at the carpet, muttering. I

was interested now, and recalled him with: "You were saying ——?"

"Eh? Oh — ur — yes. What about another drink?"

"Not for me. You were saying ——"

"Ah, yes. We'd got it all planned after a week or two. She was to slip out in the morning — the old man couldn't keep her shut up all the time — and first we'd go to London. Get married there. Then look round. I stood well with my firm. They were big people in their business and they had a big London depot. Living anywhere near the old man when we were married would a-been uncomfortable — not to say indelicate — so I asked my people to transfer me to the London depot. They did.

"So then everything was just right. Next week or two we just lived looking forward. *You* know. And for me everything was lit up. Streets and tram-cars and shops and my everyday work. All seemed different, as though they'd been kind of — kind of — er — if you know what I mean — as though they'd been *purified*." He whispered the word. "Sure I'm not boring you?"

Because I was really interested I could only give him a fatuous "Not at all. Go on."

"Well, the morning came — morning we'd arranged. April it was, I remember. Chrrmm! Well, I picked her up outside the town. I'd hired a trap to

take us twelve miles up the line, where we could pick up a train at a station where nobody knew us. Yes. Half-past nine it was, when we met. April. Out in the country. She was wearing one of those little fur hats, and her hair — that dark brown hair that goes with serious natures — her hair was sort of blown about her forehead and ears. And her eyes were bright. And she'd got a colour from hurrying. There she was, waiting for me. And the morning — soft and sparkly and — sort of water-colour morning — all pinks and greys. It sort of soaked right into me. Seemed as though I'd jumped into it and was bathing in it. Ever felt like that? What you might call a Poetry morning. I mean it made you think of Herrick's songs and the songs in *The Complete Angler*. Perhaps that's not clear to you. Perhaps you're not much of a Reader. Doesn't matter.

“My God, it *was* a morning! Mmmmm. . . . Rrhmm.

“Well, we got the train alright. It was a junction, and it was the last stop for fast trains. Wasn't very full, so I fixed it with the guard to shove a Reserved slip on our carriage. And then for the first time since we'd met we were together without having to think how the clock was going. You know what that means for the first time — eh? Eh?

“We had lunch on the train. She'd never had a meal

on the train before. She was as excited as . . . Wasn't used to eating with the sway of the train, and spilt her soup, and laughed like anything about it. All up the railway line was flowers. I don't know the names of them — just flowers, blue and yellow and white and pink. All fresh, like. And I felt just like the flowers. As though I'd been born again and was seeing 'em for the first time. She was twenty and I was twenty-two. You'll know what that means when you get to my age.

“Well, I brought her here. Surprises you, perhaps? Filthy Hole like this. But I brought her here because I didn't know any other place, and I didn't quite realise the kind of place it was. I'd found it some time before. Found it on a foggy night. Night like this. Got lost wandering round here — all these arches and little passages. I'd got to stay the night in town, so when I saw its sign I thought I might as well make it my place. It looked cheap, and it was near the theatres and business-places. And I liked the name. I'd read a bit about the Mediterranean, and seen pictures of places there, and was always promising to take myself there when I got on a bit. I was going to take her there, too, when I could. I'd often talked to her about it, and about the sun and the songs and the peaches and the olives, and the sort of ease of everything and the freedom. *You* know — I've forgotten the French word for it. Sitting outside

the cafés in the gardens, and the colour of the sea and the hills against the sky. And doing as you liked and nobody saying anything or asking questions. Just the sort of places, they looked, for living life and loving every minute of it. Just as we were meant to. If only our damned long-faced round-headed consciences 'd damn well let us!" He shouted this. And then, reverting to his civil tone — "Would you mind pushing that bell?"

I pushed the bell. He sat back. In distant parts below the telephone rang like a telephone of elf-land.

Slip-slop brought another double, and he drank from it.

"Well, I was telling you. This was the only place I knew. I could have afforded to go to one of the decent ones, but I was young, and seeing the business we were on, I was a bit nervous. Not quite sure of myself. Not quite sure what power they had to ask questions and all that. So as I knew this place I thought it'd do for us just for two or three nights, until I'd looked round. So we came here.

"We had a meal, and then went across the bridge and had a walk along the Embankment and into the Strand and up Haymarket to Piccadilly. And then through Park Lane to Oxford Street and back again. I go the same walk every year I come here. I could do it blindfold.

"Well, then we came home. I mean, we came back

here, and sat in this room. We had a bit of supper over there — that table by the window — not the first one, the middle one. And then she had this chair where I'm sitting now, and I sat in the other, over there. From nine o'clock we sat here, just saying a word or two, but most time sitting quiet. We didn't need words. It was all so — so wonderful. Just sitting there together was enough. *You* know. We had the room to ourselves all the evening. Nobody came in at all. I daresay you think this room's a dirty stinking hole that wants the air let into it. So it is. And yet . . .

“It's just the same to look at now, as it was then. Same furniture. Same arrangements.. Never altered it. Don't think they've ever cleaned it. And yet . . .” His eyes stared at nothing, and as I sat waiting for him to resume, the room seemed to shed its musty despair and to take on the perfumed sadness of past happiness. “Well, here we sat, all lifted up, like. In two days we'd be married. Even special licences keep you hanging about a bit. But we felt already as though we were. Signing a register was just a bit of business.

“Well, it came to nearly twelve, and I could see that she was tired. So we got up. I'd booked two rooms for us, and told her her number, and we said good-night. Said good-night for about five minutes right there by the piano. Then we went up. My room

was near the top of the stairs — her's was farther down the passage. As we got to my door I stopped a second to give her a last look. I saw that she'd stopped, too — just a little way off. A gas-jet lit half her face, and she seemed sort of — all dazed. Just standing and staring, with her hands hanging, as though not sure which way to go. (Chrrmm!) We stopped like that for some seconds. P'raps half a minute. Then she smiled, blew me a kiss, and went down the passage into the dark part."

He stopped and leaned forward, elbows on knees. He scowled at the fire. His head nodded. He gave two grunts. Then he sat back and stretched himself full length in the chair. I waited. From the passage came the husky whisper of list slippers on oil-cloth. "And then?" I asked. His eyes were closed. "And then?"

He looked up sleepily. "Eh?"

"What then?"

He looked at the ceiling. For many seconds the room was still. Then a lump of coal fell from the fire. As it fell it started a flame. He started at it. The flame spurted and passed to some small cinders and set them glowing. There was promise of a fire. Then flame and glow faded. I repeated "And what then?" He seemed to jerk himself back to his story "Eh? What's that? Eh? Oh. . . . Oh, there wasn't any then. That was the end of it."

"The end of it? She went back then? Her father ——"

"Went back? No. No; she never went back." He finished his drink in a gulp. "Would yeh mind pushing that bell? No. She never went back. She went on down the passage to her room, and I stood looking after her. And that was the end of her. I murdered her."

"Murdered her?"

He glared at the carpet and spat his answer. "Ah. Damp sheets. Pneumonia." His lips closed as though he had said his last word.

Then he banged the arm of his chair. "Yes, and the hell of it is, it was me that done it. Look here, mister, you're young yet. Take a bit of advice. As you grow older you'll learn that the things you'll be most sorry for in life aren't the things you've done, but the little tempting things you hadn't got the pluck to do. Any weak fool — like me — can say No to temptation. I was brought up to do that and to be Respectable. But it's the wrong thing to say. Because life's hard on cowards. If I'd only had a bit o' pluck when she stopped on the landing. . . . But I'd only got blasted round-headed respectability. And so I murdered her.

"Y' see, *my* room was alright. My bed *wasn't* damp."

THE END

