



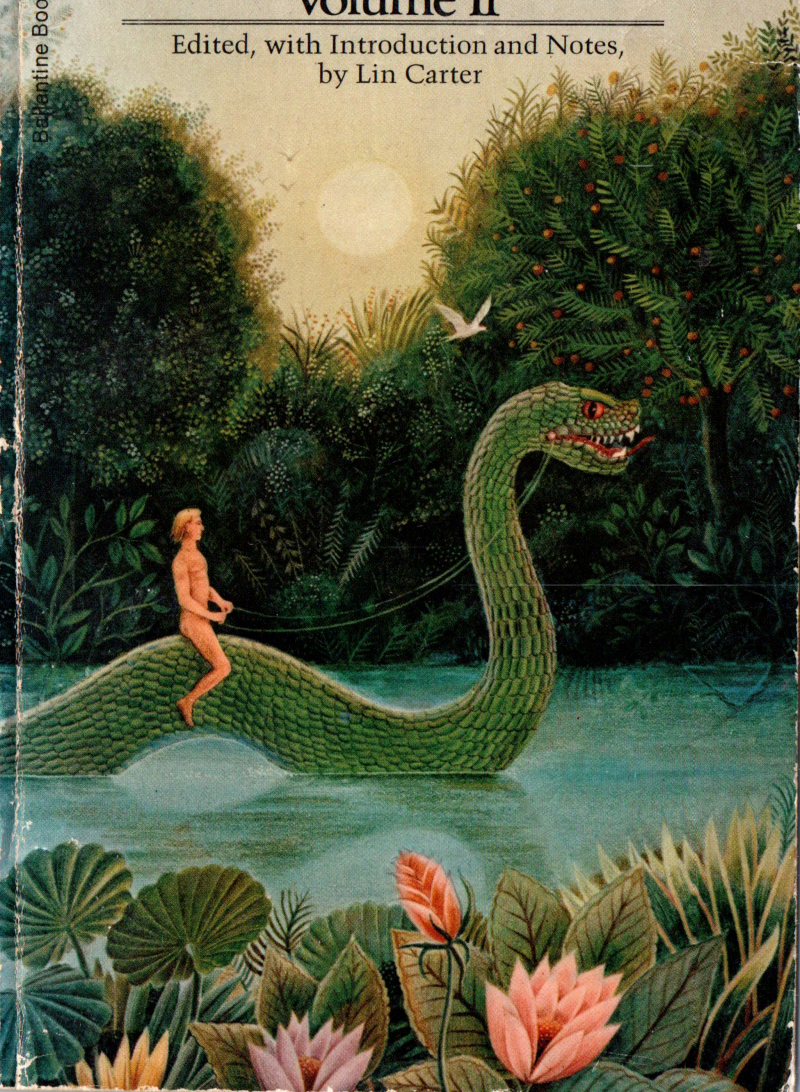
Ballantine Books 03162-8•125

\$1.25



Great Short Novels of Adult Fantasy Volume II

Edited, with Introduction and Notes,
by Lin Carter



George Macdonald

A nineteenth century Scot, George Macdonald was originally ordained a minister but resigned his position in the church in order to till the rich fields of his own imagination. In time he became a robust Victorian *pater familias*, but his work always reflected a strange, often morbid duality—as in “The Woman in the Mirror.”

Robert W. Chambers

The reputation of Robert W. Chambers was founded, in his time, on the popular, romantic novels of which he produced a vast number. His more lasting literary reputation rests on one extraordinary, brooding, weird fantasy, “The King in Yellow,” from which we excerpt a story, titled, appropriately enough, “The Repairer of Reputations.”

Ernest Bramah

Ernest Bramah, almost pathologically shy, as a person remained virtually unknown to the generation that ate up his much admired mysteries featuring Max Carrados. But the books that deserve lasting recognition are his tales of Kai Lung, sharp, witty, elegantly sophisticated fantasies, the creation of a mind that loved the English language, stories which enable one to savor every word with a leisurely delight that makes reading a new experience.

Eden Phillpotts

Phillpotts, an author of serious reputation, clearly also thoroughly enjoyed a sense of humor which he happily indulged in ironic and gentle fantasies such as “The Lavender Dragon.”

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Lin Carter has written:***

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"CTHULHU MYTHOS"
TOLKIEN: A LOOK BEHIND "THE LORD OF
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FIELDS WE KNOW / DISCOVERIES IN FAN-
TASY / THE DOOM THAT CAME TO SARNATH
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DREAM-QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH /
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SHORT NOVELS OF ADULT FANTASY #1 /
HYPERBOREA / NEW WORLDS FOR OLD /
THE SPAWN OF CTHULHU / XICCARPH / THE
YOUNG MAGICIANS,
and
ZOTHIQUE.

GREAT SHORT NOVELS OF ADULT FANTASY

Volume II

*Edited,
with Introduction and Notes, by*

Lin Carter

BALLANTINE BOOKS • NEW YORK
An ~~Intex~~ Publisher

For Roger Zelazny,
who has created some
wonderful worlds of
his own.

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"The Woman in the Mirror" by George Macdonald was first published in 1858. Its appearance in the present edition represents the first time the tale has been excerpted from the longer work wherein it appeared.

"The Repairer of Reputations" by Robert W. Chambers first appeared in the book, *The King in Yellow*, published by the F. Tennyson Neely Company of New York in 1895.

"The Transmutation of Ling" by Ernest Bramah was first published in Great Britain in 1900 and by the George H. Doran Company of New York in 1900.

"The Lavender Dragon" by Eden Phillpotts was first published by the Macmillan Company of New York in 1923.

SBN 345-03162-8-125

First Printing: March, 1973

Printed in the United States of America

Cover art by Gervasio Gallardo

BALLANTINE BOOKS, INC.

101 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10003

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FOUR WORLDS OF WONDER

In the five years since we launched the Adult Fantasy Series on an unsuspecting world, I've had a lot of fun guiding you to some of the greatest fantasy classics ever written. Most of these books were neglected, even forgotten, before we revived them under the aegis of the Unicorn's Head; all of them were rare, hard to find, and long out of print.

The trouble has been that an extraordinary number of imaginative classics are difficult to print because of their awkward word-length. I refer to tales which range between 15,000 and 30,000 words—variously called novellas or novelettes or short novels. A story averaging 20,000 words is just too short to make a paperback book all by itself, because these generally total 60,000 words. And, at the same time, it's really too *long* to put in an ordinary fantasy anthology—there wouldn't be enough space left for the wide range of short stories and fantasy poems I would like to include therein.

So we came up with a compromise solution: an anthology, entitled *Great Short Novels of Adult Fantasy #1*, devoted to nothing else but stories of this awkward length. That first collection demonstrated the not-inconsiderable range and diversity of plots and styles and moods and milieus thus opened up to the Adult Fantasy Series. The four authors represented therein varied across the literary spectrum from the famous Nobel-prizewinning French author, Anatole France, to the pioneer British fantasist, William Morris, and strayed to this side of the Atlantic to include the modern pulp-magazine fantasy-writing team

George Macdonald

THE WOMAN IN THE MIRROR

(1858)

We don't very often think of George Macdonald as anything else but a novelist. I suppose this is because his greatest work consists of the two fantastic romances, *Lilith* and *Phantastes*, which are both very long stories, and such novel-length fairy stories for children as the immortal *At the Back of the North Wind* and *The Princess and the Goblin*.

But the great Scots fantasist was, in fact, a very gifted writer of short fiction, and, to the taste of many, including Roger Lancelyn Green and W. H. Auden and myself, his brilliant talent was really seen at its finest in shorter works, such as those Ballantine has recently published in the collection we called *Evenor*.

One thing that keeps many of his readers from recognizing his genius for short fiction is his rather annoying trick of burying a superb little gem of a story in the middle of a novel, where it becomes lost and frequently goes unnoticed. This, in fact, is the case of the tale that follows, to which I have given the title *The Woman in the Mirror*.

I have admired this tale ever since I first read it. Unlike most of Macdonald's fiction, which reads like an improbable but delicious blending of Franz Kafka and the Brothers Grimm as edited by Sigmund Freud and Lewis

Carroll, he turned this seldom noticed tale into a Gothic fantasy in the Continental tradition, as exemplified by the brilliant German story-teller, E.T.A. Hoffmann. And, in so doing, he crafted a shadowy, miraculous little narrative of dreamlike and haunting beauty.

I excerpt the tale here, in its complete form, for your enjoyment. Insofar as I have been able to discover, this is the *first* time anyone has ever thought to publish *The Woman in the Mirror* all by itself.

Since the story is one hundred and fifteen years old this year, I'd say it's about time *somebody* noticed it!

THE WOMAN IN THE MIRROR

As through the hard rock go the branching silver veins; as into the solid land run the creeks and gulfs from the unresting sea; as the lights and influences of the upper worlds sink silently through the earth's atmosphere; so does Faerie invade the world of men, and sometimes startles the common eye with an association as of cause and effect, when between the two no connecting links can be traced.

Cosmo von Wehrstahl was a student at the University of Prague. Though of a noble family, he was poor, and prided himself upon the independence that poverty gives; for what will not a man pride himself upon, when he cannot get rid of it? A favorite with his fellow-students, he yet had no companions; and none of them had ever crossed the threshold of his lodgings in the top of one of the highest houses in the old town. Indeed, the secret of much of that complaisance which recommended him to his fellows was the thought of his unknown retreat, whither in the evening he could betake himself, and indulge undisturbed in his own studies and reveries. These studies, besides those subjects necessary to his courses at the University, embraced some less commonly known and approved; for in a secret drawer lay the works of Albertus Magnus and Cornelius Agrippa, along with others less read and even more abstruse. As yet, however, he had followed these researches only from curiosity, and had turned them to no practical purpose.

His lodgings consisted of one large, low-ceilinged room, singularly bare of furniture; for besides a couple of

wooden chairs, a couch which served for dreaming on both by day and night, and a great press of black oak, there was very little in the room that could be called furniture. But curious instruments were heaped in the corners; and in one stood a skeleton, half-leaning against the wall, half-supported by a string about its neck. One of its hands, all of fingers, rested on the heavy pommel of a great sword that stood beside it. Various weapons were scattered about over the floor. The walls were utterly bare of adornment; for the few strange things, such as a large dried bat with its wings outspread, the skin of a porcupine, and a stuffed seamouse, could hardly be reckoned as such. But, although his fancy delighted in vagaries like these, he indulged his imagination with far different fare. His mind had never yet been filled with an absorbing passion; but it lay like a still twilight open to any wind, whether the low breath that wafts but odors, or the storm that bows the great trees till they strain and creak. He saw everything as through a rose-colored glass. When he looked from his window on the street below, not a maiden passed but she moved as in a story, and drew his thoughts after her till she disappeared in the vista. When he walked in the streets, he always felt as if reading a tale, into which he sought to weave every face of interest that went by; and every sweet voice swept his soul as with the wing of a passing angel. He was in fact a poet without words; the more absorbed and endangered, that the springing waters were dammed back into his soul, where, finding no utterance, they grew, and swelled, and undermined. He used to lie on his hard couch, and read a tale or a poem till the book dropped from his hand; but he dreamed on, he knew not whether awake or asleep, until the opposite roof grew upon his sense, and turned golden in the sunrise. Then he arose too; and the impulses of vigorous youth kept him ever active, either in study or in sport, until again the close of the day left him free, and the world of night, which had lain drowned in the cataract of the day, rose up in his soul, with all its

stars and dim-seen phantom shapes. But this could hardly last long. Some one form must sooner or later step within the charmed circle, enter the house of life, and compel the bewildered magician to kneel and worship.

One afternoon, towards dusk, he was wandering dreamily in one of the principal streets, when a fellow-student roused him by a slap on the shoulder, and asked him to accompany him into a little back alley to look at some old armor which he had taken a fancy to possess. Cosmo was considered an authority in every matter pertaining to arms, ancient or modern. In the use of weapons, none of the students could come near him; and his practical acquaintance with some had principally contributed to establish his authority in reference to all. He accompanied him willingly. They entered a narrow alley, and thence a dirty little court, where a low arched door admitted them into a heterogeneous assemblage of everything musty, and dusty, and old, that could well be imagined. His verdict on the armor was satisfactory, and his companion at once concluded the purchase. As they were leaving the place, Cosmo's eye was attracted by an old mirror, or an elliptical shape, which leaned against the wall, covered with dust. Around it was some curious carving, which he could see but very indistinctly by the glimmering light which the owner of the shop carried in his hand. It was this carving that attracted his attention; at least so it appeared to him. He left the place, however, with his friend, taking no further notice of it. They walked together to the main street, where they parted and took opposite directions.

No sooner was Cosmo left alone than the thought of the curious old mirror returned to him. A strong desire to see it more plainly arose within him, and he directed his steps once more towards the shop. The owner opened the door when he knocked, as if he had expected him. He was a little, old, withered man, with a hooked nose, and burning eyes constantly in a slow, restless motion, and looking here and there as if after something that eluded them.

Pretending to examine several other articles, Cosmo at last approached the mirror, and requested to have it taken down.

"Take it down yourself, master; I cannot reach it," said the old man.

Cosmo took it down carefully, when he saw that the carving was indeed delicate and costly, being both of admirable design and execution, containing withal many devices which seemed to embody some meaning to which he had no clue. This, naturally, in one of his tastes and temperament, increased the interest he felt in the old mirror; so much, indeed, that he now longed to possess it, in order to study its frame at his leisure. He pretended, however, to want it only for use; and saying he feared the plate could be of little service, as it was rather old, he brushed away a little of the dust from its face, expecting to see a dull reflection within. His surprise was great when he found the reflection brilliant, revealing a glass not only uninjured by age, but wondrously clear and perfect (should the whole correspond to this part), even for one newly from the hands of the maker. He asked carelessly what the owner wanted for the thing. The old man replied by mentioning a sum of money far beyond the reach of poor Cosmo, who proceeded to replace the mirror where it had stood before.

"You think the price too high?" said the old man.

"I do not know that it is too much for you to ask," replied Cosmo; "but it is far too much for me to give."

The old man held up his light towards Cosmo's face. "I like your look," said he.

Cosmo could not return the compliment. In fact, now he looked closely at him for the first time, he felt a kind of repugnance to him, mingled with a strange feeling of doubt whether a man or a woman stood before him.

"What is your name?" he continued.

"Cosmo von Wehrstahl."

"Ah, ah! I thought as much. I see your father in you. I knew your father very well, young sir. I dare say, in some odd corners of my house, you might find some old

things with his crest and cipher upon them still. Well, I like you; you shall have the mirror at the fourth part of what I asked for it; but upon one condition."

"What is that?" said Cosmo; for, although the price was still a great deal for him to give, he could just manage it; and the desire to possess the mirror had increased to an altogether unaccountable degree since it had seemed beyond his reach.

"That if you should ever want to get rid of it again, you will let me have the first offer."

"Certainly," replied Cosmo, with a smile; adding, "a moderate condition indeed."

"On your honor?" insisted the seller.

"On my honor!" said the buyer; and the bargain was concluded.

"I will carry it home for you," said the old man, as Cosmo took it in his hands.

"No, no; I will carry it myself," said he; for he had a peculiar dislike to revealing his residence to any one, and more especially to this person, to whom he felt every moment a greater antipathy.

"Just as you please," said the old creature, and muttered to himself as he held his light at the door to show him out of the court: "Sold for the sixth time! I wonder what will be the upshot of it this time. I should think my lady had enough of it by now!"

Cosmo carried his prize carefully home. But all the way he had an uncomfortable feeling that he was watched and dogged. Repeatedly he looked about, but saw nothing to justify his suspicions. Indeed, the streets were too ill-lighted to expose very readily a careful spy, if such there should be at his heels. He reached his lodging in safety, and leaned his purchase against the wall, rather relieved, strong as he was, to be rid of its weight; then, lighting his pipe, threw himself on the couch, and was soon lapped in the folds of his haunting dreams.

He returned home earlier than usual the next day, and fixed the mirror to the wall, over the hearth, at one end of his long room. He then carefully wiped away the dust

from its face, and, clear as the water of a sunny spring, the mirror shone out from beneath the envious covering. But his interest was chiefly occupied with the curious carving of the frame. This he cleaned as well as he could with a brush; and then he proceeded to a minute examination of its various parts, in the hope of discovering some index to the intention of the carver. In this, however, he was unsuccessful; and, at length, pausing with some weariness and disappointment, he gazed vacantly for a few moments into the depth of the reflected room. But ere long he said, half aloud, "What a strange thing a mirror is! and what a wondrous affinity exists between it and a man's imagination! For this room of mine, as I behold it in the glass, is the same, and yet not the same. It is not the mere representation of the room I live in, but it looks just as if I were reading about it in a story I like. All its commonness has disappeared. The mirror has lifted it out of the region of fact into the realm of art; and the very representing of it to me has clothed with interest that which was otherwise hard and bare; just as one sees with delight upon the stage the representation of a character from which one would escape in life as from something unendurably wearisome. But is it not rather that art rescues nature from the weary and sated regards of our senses, and the degrading injustice of our anxious every-day life, and, appealing to the imagination, which dwells apart, reveals nature in some degree as she really is, and as she represents herself to the eye of the child, whose every-day life, fearless and unambitious, meets the true import of the wonder-teeming world around him, and rejoices therein without questioning? That skeleton, now—I almost fear it, standing there so still, with eyes only for the unseen, like a watch-tower looking across all the waste of this busy world into the quiet regions of rest beyond. And yet I know every bone and every joint in it as well as my own fist. And that old battle-axe looks as if any moment it might be caught up by a mailed hand, and borne forth by the mighty arm, go crushing through casque, and skull, and brain, invading the Unknown with

yet another bewildered ghost. I should like to live in *that* room if I could only get into it."

Scarcely had the half-molded words floated from him, as he stood gazing into the mirror, when, striking him as with a flash of amazement that fixed him in his posture, noiseless and unannounced, glided suddenly through the door into the reflected room, with stately motion, yet reluctant and faltering step, the graceful form of a woman, clothed all in white. Her back only was visible as she walked slowly up to the couch in the further end of the room, on which she laid herself wearily, turning towards him a face of unutterable loveliness, in which suffering, and dislike, and a sense of compulsion, strangely mingled with the beauty. He stood without the power of motion for some moments, with his eyes irrecoverably fixed upon her; and, even after he was conscious of the ability to move, he could not summon up courage to turn and look on her, face to face, in the veritable chamber in which he stood. At length, with a sudden effort, in which the exercise of the will was so pure that it seemed involuntary, he turned his face to the couch. It was vacant. In bewilderment, mingled with terror, he turned again to the mirror; there, on the reflected couch, lay the exquisite lady-form. She lay with closed eyes, whence two large tears were just welling from beneath the veiling lids; still as death, save for the convulsive motion of her bosom.

Cosmo himself could not have described what he felt. His emotions were of a kind that destroyed consciousness, and could never be clearly recalled. He could not help standing yet by the mirror, and keeping his eyes fixed on the lady, though he was painfully aware of his rudeness, and feared every moment that she would open hers and meet his fixed regard. But he was before long a little relieved; for after a while her eyelids slowly rose, and her eyes remained uncovered, but unemployed for a time; and when, at length, they began to wander about the room, as if languidly seeking to make some acquaintance with her environment, they were never directed toward him: it seemed nothing but what was in the mirror could

affect her vision; and, therefore, if she saw him at all, it could only be his back, which of necessity was turned toward her in the glass. The two figurés in the mirror could not meet face to face, except he turned and looked at her, present in his room; and, as she was not there, he concluded that if he were to turn toward the part in his room corresponding to that in which she lay, his reflection would either be invisible to her altogether, or at least it must appear to her to gaze vacantly toward her, and no meeting of the eyes would produce the impression of spiritual proximity. By and by her eyes fell upon the skeleton, and he saw her shudder and close them. She did not open them again, but signs of repugnance continued evident on her countenance. Cosmo would have removed the obnoxious thing at once, but he feared to discompose her yet more by the assertion of his presence, which the act would involve. So he stood and watched her. The eyelids yet shrouded the eyes, as a costly case the jewels within; the troubled expression gradually faded from the countenance, leaving only a faint sorrow behind; the features settled into an unchanging expression of rest; and by these signs, and the slow, regular motion of her breathing, Cosmo knew that she slept. He could now gaze on her without embarrassment. He saw that her figure, dressed in the simplest robe of white, was worthy of her face; and so harmonious, that either the delicately molded foot, or any finger of the equally delicate hand, was an index to the whole. As she lay, her whole form manifested the relaxation of perfect repose. He gazed till he was weary, and at last seated himself near the new-found shrine, and mechanically took up a book, like one who watches by a sick-bed. But his eyes gathered no thoughts from the page before him. His intellect had been stunned by the bold contradiction, to its face, of all its experience, and now lay passive, without assertion, or speculation, or even conscious astonishment; while his imagination sent one wild dream of blessedness after another coursing through his soul. How long he sat, he did not know; but at length he roused himself, rose, and, trembling in every

portion of his frame, looked again into the mirror. She was gone. The mirror reflected faithfully what his room presented, and nothing more. It stood there like a golden setting whence the central jewel has been stolen away; like a night-sky without the glory of its stars. She had carried with her all the strangeness of the reflected room. It had sunk to the level of the one without. But when the first pangs of his disappointment had passed Cosmo began to comfort himself with the hope that she might return, perhaps the next evening, at the same hour. Resolving that, if she did, she should not at least be scared by the hateful skeleton, he removed that, and several other articles of questionable appearance, into a recess by the side of the hearth, whence they could not possibly cast any reflection into the mirror; and, having made his poor room as tidy as he could, sought the solace of the open sky and of a night wind that had begun to blow; for he could not rest where he was. When he returned, somewhat composed, he could hardly prevail with himself to lie down on his bed; for he could not help feeling as if she had lain upon it; and for him to lie there now would be something like sacrilege. However, weariness prevailed; and, laying himself on the couch, dressed as he was, he slept till day.

With a beating heart, beating till he could hardly breathe, he stood in dumb hope before the mirror, on the following evening. Again the reflected room shone as through a purple vapor in the gathering twilight. Everything seemed waiting like himself for a coming splendor to glorify its poor earthliness with the presence of a heavenly joy. And just as the room vibrated with the strokes of the neighboring church-bell, announcing the hour of six, in glided the pale beauty, and again laid herself on the couch. Poor Cosmo nearly lost his senses with delight. She was there once more! Her eyes sought the corner where the skeleton had stood, and a faint gleam of satisfaction crossed her face, apparently at seeing it empty. She looked suffering still, but there was less of discomfort expressed in her countenance than there had been the

night before. She took more notice of the things about her, and seemed to gaze with some curiosity on the strange apparatus standing here and there in her room. At length, however, drowsiness seemed to overtake her, and again she fell asleep. Resolved not to lose sight of her this time, Cosmo watched the sleeping form. Her slumber was so deep and absorbing that a fascinating repose seemed to pass contagiously from her to him as he gazed upon her; and he started, as if awaking from a dream, when the lady moved, and, without opening her eyes, rose, and passed from the room with the gait of a somnambulist.

Cosmo was now in a state of extravagant delight. Most men have a secret treasure somewhere. The miser has his golden hoard; the virtuoso his pet ring; the student his rare book; the poet his favorite haunt; the lover his secret drawer; but Cosmo had a mirror with a lovely lady in it. And now that he knew by the skeleton that she was affected by the things around her, he had a new object in life: he would turn the bare chamber in the mirror into a room such as no lady need disdain to call her own. This he could effect only by furnishing and adorning his. And Cosmo was poor. Yet he possessed accomplishments that could be turned to account; although, hitherto, he had preferred living on his slender allowance to increasing his means by what his pride considered unworthy of his rank. He was the best swordsman in the University; and now he offered to give lessons in fencing and similar exercises to such as chose to pay him well for the trouble. His proposal was heard with surprise by the students, but it was eagerly accepted by many; and soon his instructions were not confined to the richer students, but were anxiously sought by many of the young nobility of Prague and its neighborhood; so that very soon he had a good deal of money at his command. The first thing he did was to remove his apparatus and oddities into a closet in the room. Then he placed his bed and a few other necessities on each side of the hearth, and parted them from the rest of the room by two screens of Indian fabric. Then he put an elegant couch for the lady to lie upon,

in the corner where his bed had formerly stood; and, by degrees, every day adding some article of luxury, converted it, at length, into a rich boudoir.

Every night, about the same time, the lady entered. The first time she saw the new couch she started with a half-smile; then her face grew very sad, the tears came to her eyes, and she laid herself upon the couch, and pressed her face into the silken cushions, as if to hide from everything. She took notice of each addition and each change as the work proceeded; and a look of acknowledgment, as if she knew that some one was ministering to her, and was grateful for it, mingled with the constant look of suffering. At length, after she had lain down as usual one evening, her eyes fell upon some paintings with which Cosmo had just finished adorning the walls. She rose, and, to his great delight, walked across the room, and proceeded to examine them carefully, testifying much pleasure in her looks as she did so. But again the sorrowful, tearful expression returned, and again she buried her face in the pillows of her couch. Gradually, however, her countenance had grown more composed; much of the suffering manifest on her first appearance had vanished, and a kind of quiet, hopeful expression had taken its place; which, however, frequently gave way to an anxious, troubled look, mingled with something of sympathetic pity.

Meantime, how fared Cosmo? As might be expected, in one of his temperament, his interest had blossomed into love, and his love—shall I call it *ripened*, or—*withered* into passion? But, alas! he loved a shadow. He could not come near her, could not speak to her, could not hear a sound from those sweet lips, to which his longing eyes would cling like bees to their honey-founts. Ever and again he sang to himself:—

“I shall die for love of the maiden”;

and ever he looked again, and died not, though his heart seemed ready to break with intensity of life and longing; and the more he did for her, the more he loved her; and he hoped that although she never appeared to see him, yet

she was pleased to think that one unknown would give his life to her. He tried to comfort himself over his separation from her, by thinking that perhaps some day she would see him, and make signs to him, and that would satisfy him; "for," thought he, "is not this all that a loving soul can do to enter into communion with another? No, how many who love never come nearer than to behold each other as in a mirror; seem to know and yet never know the inward life; never enter the other soul; and part at last with but the vaguest notion of the universe on the borders of which they have been hovering for years? If I could only speak to her, and knew that she heard me, I should be satisfied." Once he contemplated painting a picture on the wall, which should of necessity convey to the lady a thought of himself; but, though he had some skill with the pencil, he found his hand trembled so much, when he began the attempt, that he was forced to give it up.

One evening, as he stood gazing on his treasure, he thought he saw a faint expression of self-consciousness on her countenance, as if she surmised that passionate eyes were fixed upon her. This grew, till at last the red blood rose over her neck, and cheek, and brow. Cosmo's longing to approach her became almost delirious. This night she was dressed in an evening costume, resplendent with diamonds. This could add nothing to her beauty, but it presented it in a new aspect; enabled her loveliness to make a new manifestation of itself in a new embodiment. For essential beauty is infinite; and, as the soul of Nature needs an endless succession of varied forms to embody her loveliness, countless faces of beauty springing forth, not any two the same, at every one of her heart-throbs; so the individual form needs an infinite change of its environments, to enable it to uncover all the phases of its loveliness. Diamonds glittered from amidst her hair, half-hidden in its luxuriance, like stars through dark rain-clouds; and the bracelets on her white arms flashed all the colors of a rainbow of lightnings, as she lifted her snowy hands to cover her burning face. But her beauty

shone down all its adornment. "If I might have only one of her feet to kiss," thought Cosmo, "I should be content." Alas! he deceived himself, for passion is never content. Nor did he know that there are *two* ways out of her enchanted house. But, suddenly, as if the pang had been driven into his heart from without, revealing itself first in pain, and afterwards in definite form, the thought darted into his mind, "She has a lover somewhere. Remembered words of his bring the color on her face now. I am nowhere to her. She lives in another world all day, and all night, after she leaves me. Why does she come and make me love her, till I, a strong man, am too faint to look upon her more?" He looked again, and her face was pale as a lily. A sorrowful compassion seemed to rebuke the glitter of the restless jewels, and the slow tears rose in her eyes. She left her room sooner this evening than was her wont. Cosmo remained alone, with a feeling as if his bosom had been suddenly left empty and hollow, and the weight of the whole world was crushing in its walls. The next evening, for the first time since she began to come, she did not appear.

And now Cosmo was in wretched plight. Since the thought of a rival had occurred to him he could not rest for a moment. More than ever he longed to see the lady face to face. He persuaded himself that if he simply knew the worst he would be satisfied; for then he could abandon Prague, and find that relief in constant motion which is the hope of all active minds when invaded by distress. Meantime he waited with unspeakable anxiety for the next night, hoping she would return; but she did not appear. And now he fell really ill. Rallied by his fellow-students on his wretched looks, he ceased to attend the lectures. His engagements were neglected. He cared for nothing. The sky, with the great sun in it, was to him a heartless, burning desert. The men and women in the streets were mere puppets, without motives in themselves, or interest to him. He saw them all as on the ever-changing field of a *camera obscura*. She—she alone and altogether—was his universe, his well of life, his incarnate good. For six eve-

nings she did not come. Let his absorbing passion, and the slow fever that was consuming his brain, be his excuse for the resolution which he had taken and begun to execute before that time had expired.

Reasoning with himself that it must be by some enchantment connected with the mirror that the form of the lady was to be seen in it, he determined to attempt to turn to account what he had hitherto studied principally from curiosity. "For," said he to himself, "if a spell can force her presence in that glass (and she came unwillingly at first), may not a stronger spell, such as I know, especially with the aid of her half-presence in the mirror, if ever she appears again, compel her living form to come to me here? If I do her wrong, let love be my excuse. I want only to know my doom from her own lips." He never doubted all the time that she was a real, earthly woman; or, rather, that there was a woman, who, somehow or other, threw this reflection of her form into the magic mirror.

He opened his secret drawer, took out his books of magic, lighted his lamp, and read and made notes from midnight till three in the morning, for three successive nights. Then he replaced his books, and the next night went out in quest of the materials necessary for the conjuration. These were not easy to find; for, in love-charms and all incantations of this nature, ingredients are employed scarcely fit to be mentioned, and for the thought even of which, in connection with her, he could only excuse himself on the score of his bitter need. At length he succeeded in procuring all he required, and on the seventh evening from that on which she had last appeared he found himself prepared for the exercise of unlawful and tyrannical power.

He cleared the center of the room; stooped and drew a circle of red on the floor around the spot where he stood; wrote in the four quarters mystical signs, and numbers which were all powers of seven or nine; examined the whole ring carefully, to see that no smallest break had occurred in the circumference; and then rose from his

bending posture. As he rose, the church clock struck seven, and just as she had appeared the first time, reluctant, slow, and stately, glided in the lady. Cosmo trembled; and when, turning, she revealed a countenance worn and wan, as with sickness or inward trouble, he grew faint, and felt as if he dared not proceed. But as he gazed on the face and form, which now possessed his whole soul to the exclusion of all other joys and griefs, the longing to speak to her, to know that she heard him, to hear from her one word in return, became so unendurable, that he suddenly and hastily resumed his preparations. Stepping carefully from the circle, he put a small brazier into its center. He then set fire to its contents of charcoal, and while it burned up, opened his window and seated himself, waiting beside it.

It was a sultry evening. The air was full of thunder. A sense of luxurious depression filled the brain. The sky seemed to have grown heavy, and to compress the air beneath it. A kind of purplish tinge pervaded the atmosphere, and through the open window came the scents of the distant fields, which all the vapors of the city could not quench. Soon the charcoal glowed. Cosmo sprinkled upon it the incense and other substances which he had compounded, and, stepping within the circle, turned his face from the brazier and towards the mirror. Then, fixing his eyes upon the face of the lady, he began with a trembling voice to repeat a powerful incantation. He had not gone far, before the lady grew pale; and then, like a returning wave, the blood washed all its banks with its crimson tide, and she hid her face in her hands. Then he passed to a conjuration stronger yet. The lady rose and walked uneasily to and fro in her room. Another spell; and she seemed seeking with her eyes for some object on which they wished to rest. At length it seemed as if she suddenly espied him; for her eyes fixed themselves full and wide upon his, and she drew gradually, and somewhat unwillingly, close to her side of the mirror, just as if his eyes had fascinated her. Cosmo had never seen her so near before. Now, at least, eyes met eyes; but he could not

quite understand the expression of hers. They were full of tender entreaty, but there was something more that he could not interpret. Though his heart seemed to labor in his throat, he would allow no delight or agitation to turn him from his task. Looking still in her face, he passed on to the mightiest charm he knew. Suddenly the lady turned and walked out of the door of her reflected chamber. A moment after, she entered his room with veritable presence; and, forgetting all his precautions, he sprang from the charmed circle, and knelt before her. There she stood, the living lady of his passionate visions, alone beside him, in a thundery twilight, and the glow of a magic fire.

"Why," said the lady, with a trembling voice, "did you bring a poor maiden through the rainy streets alone?"

"Because I am dying for love of you; but I only brought you from the mirror there."

"Ah, the mirror!" and she looked up at it, and shuddered. "Alas! I am just a slave while that mirror exists. But do not think it was the power of your spell that drew me; it was your longing desire to see me that beat at the door of my heart till I was forced to yield."

"Can you love me then?" said Cosmo, in a voice calm as death, but almost inarticulate with emotion.

"I do not know," she replied sadly; "that I cannot tell, so long as I am bewildered with enchantments. It would be indeed a joy too great, to lay my head on your bosom and weep to death; for I think you love me, though I do not know; but—"

Cosmo rose from his knees.

"I love you as—no, I know not what; for since I loved you, there is nothing else."

He seized her hand: she withdrew it.

"No, better not; I am in your power, and therefore I may not."

She burst into tears, and, kneeling before him in her turn, said:—

"Cosmo, if you love me, set me free, even from your self; break the mirror."

"And shall I see you instead?"

"That I cannot tell. I will not deceive you; we may never meet again."

A fierce struggle arose in Cosmo's bosom. Now she was in his power. She did not dislike him at least, and he could see her when he would. To break the mirror would be to destroy his very life, to banish out of his universe the only glory it possessed. The whole world would be but a prison, if he annihilated the one window that looked into the paradise of love. Not yet pure in love, he hesitated.

With a wail of sorrow, the lady rose to her feet. "Ah! he loves me not; he loves me not even as I love him; and, alas! I care more for his love than even for the freedom I ask."

"I will not wait to be willing," cried Cosmo, and sprang to the corner where the great sword stood.

Meantime it had grown very dark; only the embers cast a red glow through the room. He seized the sword by the steel scabbard, and stood before the mirror; but as he heaved a great blow at it with the heavy pommel, the blade slipped half-way out of the scabbard, and the pommel struck the wall above the mirror. At that moment a terrible clap of thunder seemed to burst in the very room beside them; and before Cosmo could repeat the blow he fell senseless on the hearth. When he came to himself he found that the lady and the mirror had both disappeared. He was seized with a brain fever, which kept him to his couch for weeks.

When he recovered his reason, he began to think what could have become of the mirror. For the lady, he hoped she had found her way back as she came; but as the mirror involved her fate with its own he was more immediately anxious about that. He could not think she had carried it away. It was much too heavy, even if it had not been too firmly fixed in the wall, for her to remove it. Then, again, he remembered the thunder, which made him believe that it was not the lightning, but some other blow, that had struck him down. He concluded that, either by super-natural agency, he having exposed himself to

the vengeance of the demons in leaving the circle of safety, or in some other mode, the mirror had probably found its way back to its former owner; and, horrible to think of, might have been by this time once more disposed of, delivering up the lady into the power of another man, who, if he used his power no worse than he himself had done, might yet give Cosmo abundant cause to curse the selfish indecision which prevented him from shattering the mirror at once. Indeed, to think that she whom he loved, and who had prayed to him for freedom, should be still at the mercy, in some degree, of the possessor of the mirror, and was at least exposed to his constant observation, was in itself enough to madden a chary lover.

Anxiety to be well retarded his recovery; but at length he was able to creep abroad. He first made his way to the old broker's, pretending to be in search of something else. A laughing sneer on the creature's face convinced him that he knew all about it; but he could not see it among his furniture, or get any information out of him as to what had become of it. He expressed the utmost surprise at hearing it had been stolen,—a surprise which Cosmo saw at once to be counterfeited; while, at the same time, he fancied that the old wretch was not at all anxious to have it mistaken for genuine. Full of distress, which he concealed as well as he could, he made many searches, but with no avail. Of course he could ask no questions; but he kept his ears awake for any remotest hint that might set him in a direction of search. He never went out without a short, heavy hammer of steel about him, that he might shatter the mirror the moment he was made happy by the sight of his lost treasure, if ever that blessed moment should arrive. Whether he should see the lady again was now a thought altogether secondary, and postponed to the achievement of her freedom. He wandered here and there, like an anxious ghost, pale and haggard, gnawed ever at the heart by the thought of what she might be suffering—all from his fault.

One night he mingled with a crowd that filled the rooms

of one of the most distinguished mansions in the city; for he accepted every invitation, that he might lose no chance, however poor, of obtaining some information that might expedite his discovery. Here he wandered about, listening to every stray word that he could catch, in the hope of a revelation. As he approached some ladies who were talking quietly in a corner, one said to another, "Have you heard of the strange illness of the Princess von Hohenweiss?"

"Yes; she has been ill for more than a year now. It is very sad for so fine a creature to have such a terrible malady. She was better for some weeks lately; but within the last few days the same attacks have returned, apparently accompanied with more suffering than ever. It is altogether an inexplicable story."

"Is there a story connected with her illness?"

"I have only heard imperfect reports of it; but it is said that she gave offense some eighteen months ago to an old woman who had held an office of trust in the family, and who, after some incoherent threats, disappeared. This peculiar affection followed soon after. But the strangest part of the story is its association with the loss of an antique mirror, which stood in her dressing-room, and of which she constantly made use."

Here the speaker's voice sank to a whisper; and Cosmo, although his very soul sat listening in his ears, could hear no more. He trembled too much to dare to address the ladies, even if it had been advisable to expose himself to their curiosity. The name of the princess was well known to him, but he had never seen her; except indeed it was she, which now he hardly doubted, who had knelt before him on that dreadful night. Fearful of attracting attention, for, from the weak state of his health, he could not recover an appearance of calmness, he made his way to the open air, and reached his lodgings; glad in this, that he at least knew where she lived, although he never dreamed of approaching her openly, even if he should be happy enough to free her from her hateful bondage. He

hoped, too, that, as he had unexpectedly learned so much, the other and far more important part might be revealed to him ere long.

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“Have you seen Steinwald lately?”

“No, I have not seen him for some time. He is almost a match for me at the rapier, and I suppose he thinks he needs no more lessons.”

“I wonder what has become of him. I want to see him very much. Let me see: the last time I saw him, he was coming out of that old broker’s den, to which, if you remember, you accompanied me once, to look at some armor. That is fully three weeks ago.”

This hint was enough for Cosmo. Von Steinwald was a man of influence in the court, well known for his reckless habits and fierce passions. The very possibility that the mirror should be in his possession was hell itself to Cosmo. But violent or hasty measures of any sort were most unlikely to succeed. All that he wanted was an opportunity of breaking the fatal glass; and, to obtain this, he must bide his time. He revolved many plans in his mind, but without being able to fix upon any.

At length, one evening, as he was passing the house of Von Steinwald, he saw the windows more than usually brilliant. He watched for a while, and seeing that company began to arrive, hastened home, and dressed as richly as he could, in the hope of mingling with the guests unquestioned; in effecting which, there could be no difficulty for a man of his carriage.

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In a lofty, silent chamber, in another part of the city, lay a form more like marble than a living woman. The loveliness of death seemed frozen upon her face, for her lips were rigid, and her eyelids closed. Her long white hands were crossed over her breast, and no breathing disturbed their repose. Beside the dead, men speak in whis-

pers, as if the deepest rest of all could be broken by the sound of a living voice. Just so, though the soul was evidently beyond the reach of all intimations from the senses, the two ladies, who sat beside her, spoke in the gentlest tones of subdued sorrow.

"She has lain so for an hour."

"This cannot last long, I fear."

"How much thinner she has grown within the last few weeks! If she would only speak, and explain what she suffers, it would be better for her. I think she has visions in her trances; but nothing can induce her to refer to them when she is awake."

"Does she ever speak in these trances?"

"I have never heard her; but they say she walks sometimes, and once put the whole household in a terrible fright by disappearing for a whole hour, and returning drenched with rain, and almost dead with exhaustion and fright. But even then she would give no account of what had happened."

A scarce audible murmur from the yet motionless lips of the lady here startled her attendants. After several ineffectual attempts at articulation, the word "*Cosmo!*" burst from her. Then she lay still as before; but only for a moment. With a wild cry, she sprang from the couch erect on the floor, flung her arms above her head, with clasped and straining hands, and, her wide eyes flashing with light, called aloud, with a voice exultant as that of a spirit bursting from a sepulchre, "I am free! I am free! I thank you!" Then she flung herself on the couch, and sobbed; then rose, and paced wildly up and down the room, with gestures of mingled delight and anxiety; then turning to her motionless attendants: "Quick, Lisa, my cloak and hood!" Then lower: "I must go to him. Make haste, Lisa! You may come with me, if you will."

In another moment they were in the street, hurrying along towards one of the bridges over the Moldau. The moon was near the zenith, and the streets were almost empty. The princess soon outstripped her attendant, and was half-way over the bridge before the other reached it.

"Are you free, lady? The mirror is broken; are you free?"

The words were spoken close beside her, as she hurried on. She turned, and there, leaning on the parapet in a recess of the bridge, stood Cosmo, in a splendid dress, but with a white and quivering face.

"Cosmo!—I am free—and your servant forever. I was coming to you now."

"And I to you, for death made me bold; but I could get no further. Have I atoned at all? Do I love you a little—truly?"

"Ah, I know now that you love me, my Cosmo; but what do you say about death?"

He did not reply. His hand was pressed against his side. She looked more closely; the blood was welling from between the fingers. She flung her arms around him with a faint, bitter wail.

When Lisa came up, she found her mistress kneeling above a wan, dead face, which smiled on in the spectral moonbeams.

Robert W. Chambers

THE REPAIRER OF REPUTATIONS

(1895)

The superlative story-telling powers of the immensely popular American novelist, Robert W. Chambers, won him the enthusiastic acclaim of a vast audience of general readers. The era of his fame has long passed by, but, rather surprisingly, as his popularity as a writer of exciting romances ebbed, his reputation as an artist of rare fantasies grew, until today he is remembered as one of the most brilliant of modern fantasists.

Clark Ashton Smith and H. P. Lovecraft praised his extraordinary talent; A. Merritt paid him the ultimate compliment of imitation; and writers who contributed to the "Cthulhu Mythos," such as August Derleth, learned much from his early fantasies and borrowed names and symbols therefrom.

His contribution to the literature of adult fantasy consists of one stirring and suspenseful occult thriller, a novel called *The Slayer of Souls*, and two book-length collections of more-or-less related short narratives, *The King in Yellow* and *The Maker of Moons*. I included the title novella from *The Maker of Moons* in *Great Short Novels of Adult Fantasy #1*; now, for this second anthology, I cannot resist reprinting one of the major tales from his greatest book, *The King in Yellow*.

The King in Yellow is an absolute masterpiece, probably the greatest single book of weird fantasy written in this country between the death of Poe and the rise of Lovecraft. Of the stories in that masterpiece, the long novella, *The Repairer of Reputations*, rather suffers by being submerged among other brilliant gem-like tales of uncanny beauty. As was the case with the preceding tale by George MacDonald, it is almost impossible to appreciate the singularly haunting and suggestive power of *The Repairer of Reputations* unless it is read by itself, divorced from the sequence of stories in which it is a part. Hence, this printing—the first time in more than twenty years that this long tale of Chambers' has been reprinted separately.

Those fantasy connoisseurs who, like myself, admire the strange and beautiful artistry of Robert W. Chambers find it hard to forgive him the great success he enjoyed as an author of colorful and exciting, but essentially empty and trivial, popular romances. If only (we say to ourselves, quite selfishly) he had starved in a garret, like Poe, ignoring a huge general audience, and written more fantasies like *The Repairer of Reputations*, purely for his own pleasure!

Yes, it's frightfully selfish of us to feel this way; but read the short novel that follows next, and see for yourself whether you don't agree with us. . . .

*"Along the shore the cloud waves break,
The twin suns sink behind the lake,
The shadows lengthen*

In Carcosa.

*"Strange is the night where black stars rise
And strange moons circle through the skies,
But stranger still is*

Lost Carcosa.

*"Songs that the Hyades shall sing,
Where flap the tatters of the King,
Must die unheard in*

Dim Carcosa.

*"Song of my soul, my voice is dead,
Die thou, unsung, as tears unshed
Shall dry and die in*

Lost Carcosa."

—Cassilda's song in "The King in Yellow,"
ACT I., SCENE 2.

THE REPAIRER OF REPUTATIONS

I

“Ne raillons pas les fous; leur folie dure plus longtemps que la nôtre. . . . Voilà toute la différence.”

Towards the end of the year 1920 the government of the United States had practically completed the programme adopted during the last months of President Winthrop's administration. The country was apparently tranquil. Everybody knows how the Tariff and Labor questions were settled. The war with Germany, incident on that country's seizure of the Samoan Islands, had left no visible scars upon the republic, and the temporary occupation of Norfolk by the invading army had been forgotten in the joy over repeated naval victories and the subsequent ridiculous plight of General Von Gartenlaube's forces in the State of New Jersey. The Cuban and Hawaiian investments had paid one hundred per cent., and the territory of Samoa was well worth its cost as a coaling station. The country was in a superb state of defense. Every coast city had been well supplied with land fortifications; the army, under the parental eye of the general staff, organized according to the Prussian system, had been increased to three hundred thousand men, with a territorial reserve of a million; and six magnificent squadrons of cruisers and battle-ships patrolled the six stations of the navigable seas, leaving a steam reserve amply fitted to control home waters. The gentlemen from the West had at last been constrained to acknowledge that a college

for the training of diplomats was as necessary as law schools are for the training of barristers; consequently we were no longer represented abroad by incompetent patriots. The nation was prosperous. Chicago, for a moment paralyzed after a second great fire, had risen from its ruins, white and imperial, and more beautiful than the white city which had been built for its plaything in 1893. Everywhere good architecture was replacing bad, and even in New York a sudden craving for decency had swept away a great portion of the existing horrors. Streets had been widened, properly paved, and lighted, trees had been planted, squares laid out, elevated structures demolished, and underground roads built to replace them. The new government buildings and barracks were fine bits of architecture, and the long system of stone quays which completely surrounded the island had been turned into parks, which proved a godsend to the population. The subsidizing of the state theatre and state opera brought its own reward. The United States National Academy of Design was much like European institutions of the same kind. Nobody envied the Secretary of Fine Arts either his cabinet position or his portfolio. The Secretary of Forestry and Game Preservation had a much easier time, thanks to the new system of National Mounted Police. We had profited well by the latest treaties with France and England; the exclusion of foreign-born Jews as a measure of national self-preservation, the settlement of the new independent negro state of Suanee, the checking of immigration, the new laws concerning naturalization, and the gradual centralization of power in the executive all contributed to national calm and prosperity. When the government solved the Indian problem and squadrons of Indian cavalry scouts in native costume were substituted for the pitiable organizations tacked on to the tail of skeletonized regiments by a former Secretary of War, the nation drew a long sigh of relief. When, after the colossal Congress of Religions, bigotry and intolerance were laid in their graves, and kindness and charity began to draw warring sects together, many thought the millen-

nium had arrived, at least in the new world, which, after all, is a world by itself.

But self-preservation is the first law, and the United States had to look on in helpless sorrow as Germany, Italy, Spain, and Belgium writhed in the throes of anarchy, while Russia, watching from the Caucasus, stooped and bound them one by one.

In the city of New York the summer of 1910 was signalized by the dismantling of the Elevated Railroads. The summer of 1911 will live in the memories of New York people for many a cycle; the Dodge statue was removed in that year. In the following winter began that agitation for the repeal of the laws prohibiting suicide, which bore its final fruit in the month of April, 1920, when the first Government Lethal Chamber was opened on Washington Square.

I had walked down that day from Dr. Archer's house on Madison Avenue, where I had been as a mere formality. Ever since that fall from my horse, four years before, I had been troubled at times with pains in the back of my head and neck, but now for months they had been absent, and the doctor sent me away that day saying there was nothing more to be cured in me. It was hardly worth his fee to be told that; I knew it myself. Still I did not grudge him the money. What I minded was the mistake which he made at first. When they picked me up from the pavement where I lay unconscious, and somebody had mercifully sent a bullet through my horse's head, I was carried to Dr. Archer, and he, pronouncing my brain affected, placed me in his private asylum, where I was obliged to endure treatment for insanity. At last he decided that I was well, and I, knowing that my mind had always been as sound as his, if not sounder, "paid my tuition," as he jokingly called it, and left. I told him, smiling, that I would get even with him for his mistake, and he laughed heartily, and asked me to call once in a while. I did so, hoping for a chance to even up accounts, but he gave me none, and I told him I would wait.

The fall from my horse had fortunately left no evil results; on the contrary, it had changed my whole character for the better. From a lazy young man about town, I had become active, energetic, temperate, and, above all—oh, above all else—ambitious. There was only one thing which troubled me: I laughed at my own uneasiness, and yet it troubled me.

During my convalescence I had bought and read for the first time "The King in Yellow." I remember after finishing the first act that it occurred to me that I had better stop. I started up and flung the book into the fireplace; the volume struck the barred grate and fell open on the hearth in the fire-light. If I had not caught a glimpse of the opening words in the second act I should never have finished it, but as I stooped to pick it up my eyes became riveted to the open page, and with a cry of terror, or perhaps it was of joy so poignant that I suffered in every nerve, I snatched the thing from the hearth and crept shaking to my bedroom, where I read it and reread it, and wept and laughed and trembled with a horror which at times assails me yet. This is the thing that troubles me, for I cannot forget Carcosa, where black stars hang in the heavens, where the shadows of men's thoughts lengthen in the afternoon, when the twin suns sink into the Lake of Hali, and my mind will bear forever the memory of the Pallid Mask. I pray God will curse the writer, as the writer has cursed the world with this beautiful, stupendous creation, terrible in its simplicity, irresistible in its truth—a world which now trembles before the King in Yellow. When the French government seized the translated copies which had just arrived in Paris, London, of course, became eager to read it. It is well known how the book spread like an infectious disease, from city to city, from continent to continent, barred out here, confiscated there, denounced by press and pulpit, censured even by the most advanced of literary anarchists. No definite principles had been violated in those wicked pages, no doctrine promulgated, no convictions outraged. It could not be judged by any known

standard, yet, although it was acknowledged that the supreme note of art had been struck in "The King in Yellow," all felt that human nature could not bear the strain nor thrive on words in which the essence of purest poison lurked. The very banality and innocence of the first act only allowed the blow to fall afterwards with more awful effect.

It was, I remember, the 13th day of April, 1920, that the first Government Lethal Chamber was established on the south side of Washington Square, between Wooster Street and South Fifth Avenue. The block, which had formerly consisted of a lot of shabby old buildings, used as cafés and restaurants for foreigners, had been acquired by the government in the winter of 1913. The French and Italian cafés and restaurants were torn down; the whole block was enclosed by a gilded iron railing, and converted into a lovely garden, with lawns, flowers, and fountains. In the centre of the garden stood a small, white building, severely classical in architecture, and surrounded by thickets of flowers. Six Ionic columns supported the roof, and the single door was of bronze. A splendid marble group of "The Fates" stood before the door, the work of a young American sculptor, Boris Yvain, who had died in Paris when only twenty-three years old.

The inauguration ceremonies were in progress as I crossed University Place and entered the square. I threaded my way through the silent throng of spectators, but was stopped at Fourth Street by a cordon of police. A regiment of United States Lancers were drawn up in a hollow square around the Lethal Chamber. On a raised tribune facing Washington Park stood the Governor of New York, and behind him were grouped the Mayor of Greater New York, the Inspector-General of Police, the commandant of the State troops, Colonel Livingston (military aid to the President of the United States), General Blount (commanding at Governor's Island), Major-General Hamilton (commanding the garrison of Greater New York), Admiral Buffby (of the fleet in the North River), Surgeon-General Lanceford, the staff of the National Free

Hospital, Senators Wyse and Franklin, of New York, and the Commissioner of Public Works. The tribune was surrounded by a squadron of hussars of the National Guard.

The Governor was finishing his reply to the short speech of the Surgeon-General. I heard him say: "The laws prohibiting suicide and providing punishment for any attempt at self-destruction have been repealed. The government has seen fit to acknowledge the right of man to end an existence which may have become intolerable to him, through physical suffering or mental despair. It is believed that the community will be benefited by the removal of such people from their midst. Since the passage of this law, the number of suicides in the United States has not increased. Now that the government has determined to establish a Lethal Chamber in every city, town, and village in the country, it remains to be seen whether or not that class of human creatures from whose desponding ranks new victims of self-destruction fall daily will accept the relief thus provided." He paused, and turned to the white Lethal Chamber. The silence in the street was absolute. "There a painless death awaits him who can no longer bear the sorrows of this life. If death is welcome, let him seek it there." Then, quickly turning to the military aid of the President's household, he said, "I declare the Lethal Chamber open"; and again facing the vast crowd, he cried, in a clear voice: "Citizens of New York and of the United States of America, through me the government declares the Lethal Chamber to be open."

The solemn hush was broken by a sharp cry of command, the squadron of hussars filed after the Governor's carriage, the lancers wheeled and formed along Fifth Avenue to wait for the commandant of the garrison, and the mounted police followed them. I left the crowd to gape and stare at the white marble death-chamber, and, crossing South Fifth Avenue, walked along the western side of that thoroughfare to Bleecker Street. Then I turned to the right and stopped before a dingy shop which bore the sign,

HAWBERK, ARMORER.

I glanced in at the door-way and saw Hawberk busy in his little shop at the end of the hall. He looked up, and, catching sight of me, cried, in his deep, hearty voice, "Come in, Mr. Castaigne!" Constance, his daughter, rose to meet me as I crossed the threshold, and held out her pretty hand, but I saw the blush of disappointment on her cheeks, and knew that it was another Castaigne she had expected, my cousin Louis. I smiled at her confusion and complimented her on the banner which she was embroidering from a colored plate. Old Hawberk sat riveting the worn greaves of some ancient suit of armor, and the ting! ting! ting! of his little hammer sounded pleasantly in the quaint shop. Presently he dropped his hammer and fussed about for a moment with a tiny wrench. The soft clash of the mail sent a thrill of pleasure through me. I loved to hear the music of steel brushing against steel, the mellow shock of the mallet on thigh-pieces, and the jingle of chain armor. That was the only reason I went to see Hawberk. He had never interested me personally, nor did Constance, except for the fact of her being in love with Louis. This did occupy my attention, and sometimes even kept me awake at night. But I knew in my heart that all would come right, and that I should arrange their future as I expected to arrange that of my kind doctor, John Archer. However, I should never have troubled myself about visiting them just then had it not been, as I say, that the music of the tinkling hammer had for me this strong fascination. I would sit for hours, listening and listening, and when a stray sunbeam struck the inlaid steel, the sensation it gave me was almost too keen to endure. My eyes would become fixed, dilating with a pleasure that stretched every nerve almost to breaking, until some movement of the old armorer cut off the ray of sunlight, then, still thrilling secretly, I leaned back and listened again to the sound of the polishing rag—swish! swish!—rubbing rust from the rivets.

Constance worked with the embroidery over her knees, now and then pausing to examine more closely the pattern in the colored plate from the Metropolitan Museum.

"Who is this for?" I asked.

Hawberk explained that in addition to the treasures of armor in the Metropolitan Museum, of which he had been appointed armorer, he also had charge of several collections belonging to rich amateurs. This was the missing greave of a famous suit which a client of his had traced to a little shop in Paris on the Quai d'Orsay. He, Hawberk, had negotiated for and secured the greave, and now the suit was complete. He laid down his hammer and read me the history of the suit, traced since 1450 from owner to owner until it was acquired by Thomas Stainbridge. When his superb collection was sold, this client of Hawberk's bought the suit, and since then the search for the missing greave had been pushed until it was, almost by accident, located in Paris.

"Did you continue the search so persistently without any certainty of the greave being still in existence?" I demanded.

"Of course," he replied, coolly.

Then for the first time I took a personal interest in Hawberk.

"It was worth something to you," I ventured.

"No," he replied, laughing, "my pleasure in finding it was my reward."

"Have you no ambition to be rich?" I asked, smiling.

"My one ambition is to be the best armorer in the world," he answered, gravely.

Constance asked me if I had seen the ceremonies at the Lethal Chamber. She herself had noticed cavalry passing up Broadway that morning, and had wished to see the inauguration, but her father wanted the banner finished, and she had stayed at his request.

"Did you see your cousin, Mr. Castaigne, there?" she asked, with the slightest tremor of her soft eyelashes.

"No," I replied, carelessly. "Louis' regiment is ma-

noeuving out in Westchester County." I rose and picked up my hat and cane.

"Are you going up-stairs to see the lunatic again?" laughed old Hawberk. If Hawberk knew how I loathe that word "lunatic," he would never use it in my presence. It rouses certain feelings within me which I do not care to explain. However, I answered him quietly:

"I think I shall drop in and see Mr. Wilde for a moment or two."

"Poor fellow," said Constance, with a shake of her head, "it must be hard to live alone year after year, poor, crippled, and almost demented. It is very good of you, Mr. Castaigne, to visit him as often as you do."

"I think he is vicious," observed Hawberk, beginning again with his hammer. I listened to the golden tinkle on the greave-plates; when he had finished I replied:

"No, he is not vicious, nor is he in the least demented. His mind is a wonder chamber, from which he can extract treasures that you and I would give years of our lives to acquire."

Hawberk laughed.

I continued, a little impatiently: "He knows history as no one else could know it. Nothing, however trivial, escapes his search, and his memory is so absolute, so precise in details, that were it known in New York that such a man existed the people could not honor him enough."

"Nonsense!" muttered Hawberk, searching on the floor for a fallen rivet.

"Is it nonsense," I asked, managing to suppress what I felt—"is it nonsense when he says that the tassets and cuissards of the enamelled suit of armor commonly known as the 'Prince's Emblazoned' can be found among a mass of rusty theatrical properties, broken stoves, and rag-picker's refuse in a garret in Pell Street?"

Hawberk's hammer fell to the ground, but he picked it up and asked, with a great deal of calm, how I knew that the tassets and left cuissard were missing from the "Prince's Emblazoned."

"I did not know until Mr. Wilde mentioned it to me the other day. He said they were in the garret of 998 Pell Street."

"Nonsense!" he cried; but I noticed his hand trembling under his leathern apron.

"Is this nonsense, too?" I asked, pleasantly. "Is it nonsense when Mr. Wilde continually speaks of you as the Marquis of Avonshire, and of Miss Constance—"

I did not finish, for Constance had started to her feet with terror written on every feature. Hawberk looked at me and slowly smoothed his leathern apron. "That is impossible," he observed. "Mr. Wilde may know a great many things—"

"About armor, for instance, and the 'Prince's Emblazoned,' " I interposed, smiling.

"Yes," he continued, slowly, "about armor also—maybe—but he is wrong in regard to the Marquis of Avonshire, who, as you know, killed his wife's traducer years ago, and went to Australia, where he did not long survive his wife."

"Mr. Wilde is wrong," murmured Constance. Her lips were blanched, but her voice was sweet and calm.

"Let us agree, if you please, that in this one circumstance Mr. Wilde is wrong," I said.

II

I climbed the three dilapidated flights of stairs which I had so often climbed before, and knocked at a small door at the end of the corridor. Mr. Wilde opened the door and I walked in.

When he had double-locked the door and pushed a heavy chest against it, he came and sat down beside me, peering up into my face with his little, light-colored eyes. Half a dozen new scratches covered his nose and cheeks, and the silver wires which supported his artificial ears had become displaced. I thought I had never seen him so hideously fascinating. He had no ears. The artificial ones,

which now stood out at an angle from the fine wire, were his one weakness. They were made of wax and painted a shell pink; but the rest of his face was yellow. He might better have revelled in the luxury of some artificial fingers for his left hand, which was absolutely fingerless, but it seemed to cause him no inconvenience, and he was satisfied with his wax ears. He was very small, scarcely higher than a child of ten, but his arms were magnificently developed, and his thighs as thick as any athlete's. Still, the most remarkable thing about Mr. Wilde was that a man of his marvellous intelligence and knowledge should have such a head. It was flat and pointed, like the heads of many of those unfortunates whom people imprison in asylums for the weak-minded. Many called him insane, but I knew him to be as sane as I was.

I do not deny that he was eccentric; the mania he had for keeping that cat and teasing her until she flew at his face like a demon was certainly eccentric. I never could understand why he kept the creature, nor what pleasure he found in shutting himself up in his room with the surly, vicious beast. I remember once glancing up from the manuscript I was studying by the light of some tallow dips and seeing Mr. Wilde squatting motionless on his high chair, his eyes fairly blazing with excitement, while the cat, which had risen from her place before the stove, came creeping across the floor right at him. Before I could move she flattened her belly to the ground, crouched, trembled, and sprang into his face. Howling and foaming, they rolled over and over on the floor, scratching and clawing, until the cat screamed and fled under the cabinet, and Mr. Wilde turned over on his back, his limbs contracting and curling up like the legs of a dying spider. He *was* eccentric.

Mr. Wilde had climbed into his high chair, and, after studying my face, picked up a dog's-eared ledger and opened it.

"Henry B. Matthews," he read, "book-keeper with Whysot Whysot & Company, dealers in church orna-

ments. Called April 3rd. Reputation damaged on the race-track. Known as a welcher. Reputation to be repaired by August 1st. Retainer, Five Dollars." He turned the page and ran his fingerless knuckles down the closely written columns.

"P. Greene Dusenberry, Minister of the Gospel, Fairbeach, New Jersey. Reputation damaged in the Bowery. To be repaired as soon as possible. Retainer, \$100."

He coughed and added, "Called, April 6th."

"Then you are not in need of money, Mr. Wilde," I inquired.

"Listen"—he coughed again.

"Mrs. C. Hamilton Chester, of Chester Park, New York City, called April 7th. Reputation damaged at Dieppe, France. To be repaired by October 1st. Retainer, \$500.

"Note—C. Hamilton Chester, Captain U.S.S. *Avan-lanche*, ordered home from South Sea Squadron October 1st."

"Well," I said, "the profession of a Repairer of Reputations is lucrative."

His colorless eyes sought mine. "I only wanted to demonstrate that I was correct. You said it was impossible to succeed as a Repairer of Reputations; that even if I did succeed in certain cases, it would cost me more than I would gain by it. To-day I have five hundred men in my employ, who are poorly paid, but who pursue the work with an enthusiasm which possibly may be born of fear. These men enter every shade and grade of society; some even are pillars of the most exclusive social temples; others are the prop and pride of the financial world; still others hold undisputed sway among the 'Fancy and the Talent.' I choose them at my leisure from those who reply to my advertisements. It is easy enough—they are all cowards. I could treble the number in twenty days if I wished. So, you see, those who have in their keeping the reputations of their fellow-citizens, I have in my pay."

"They may turn on you," I suggested.

He rubbed his thumb over his cropped ears and ad-

justed the wax substitutes. "I think not," he murmured, thoughtfully, "I seldom have to apply the whip, and then only once. Besides, they like their wages."

"How do you apply the whip?" I demanded.

His face for a moment was awful to look upon. His eyes dwindled to a pair of green sparks.

"I invite them to come and have a little chat with me," he said, in a soft voice.

A knock at the door interrupted him, and his face resumed its amiable expression.

"Who is it?" he inquired.

"Mr. Steylette," was the answer.

"Come to-morrow," replied Mr. Wilde.

"Impossible," began the other; but was silenced by a sort of bark from Mr. Wilde.

"Come to-morrow," he repeated.

We heard somebody move away from the door and turn the corner by the stair-way.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"Arnold Steylette, owner and editor-in-chief of the great New York daily."

He drummed on the ledger with his fingerless hand, adding, "I pay him very badly, but he thinks it a good bargain."

"Arnold Steylette!" I repeated, amazed.

"Yes," said Mr. Wilde, with a self-satisfied cough.

The cat, which had entered the room as he spoke, hesitated, looked up at him, and snarled. He climbed down from the chair, and, squatting on the floor, took the creature into his arms and caressed her. The cat ceased snarling and presently began a loud purring, which seemed to increase in timbre as he stroked her.

"Where are the notes?" I asked. He pointed to the table, and for the hundredth time I picked up the bundle of manuscript entitled

"THE IMPERIAL DYNASTY OF AMERICA."

One by one I studied the well-worn pages, worn only by my own handling, and, although I knew all by heart, from the beginning, "When from Carcosa, the Hyades, Hastur, and Aldebaran," to "Castaigne, Louis de Calvados, born December 19, 1887," I read it with an eager, rapt attention, pausing to repeat parts of it aloud, and dwelling especially on "Hildred de Calvados, only son of Hildred Castaigne and Edythe Landes Castaigne, first in succession," etc., etc.

When I finished, Mr. Wilde nodded and coughed.

"Speaking of your legitimate ambition," he said, "how do Constance and Louis get along?"

"She loves him," I replied, simply.

The cat on his knee suddenly turned and struck at his eyes, and he flung her off and climbed onto the chair opposite me.

"And Dr. Archer? But that's a matter you can settle any time you wish," he added.

"Yes," I replied, "Dr. Archer can wait, but it is time I saw my cousin Louis."

"It is time," he repeated. Then he took another ledger from the table and ran over the leaves rapidly.

"We are now in communication with ten thousand men," he muttered. "We can count on one hundred thousand within the first twenty-eight hours, and in forty-eight hours the State will rise *en masse*. The country follows the State, and the portion that will not, I mean California and the Northwest, might better never have been inhabited. I shall not send them the Yellow Sign."

The blood rushed to my head, but I only answered, "A new broom sweeps clean."

"The ambition of Caesar and of Napoleon pales before that which could not rest until it had seized the minds of men and controlled even their unborn thoughts," said Mr. Wilde.

"You are speaking of the King in Yellow," I groaned, with a shudder.

"He is a king whom emperors have served."

"I am content to serve him," I replied.

Mr. Wilde sat rubbing his ears with his crippled hand. "Perhaps Constance does not love him," he suggested.

I started to reply, but a sudden burst of military music from the street below drowned my voice. The Twentieth Dragoon Regiment, formerly in garrison at Mount St. Vincent, was returning from the manoeuvres in Westchester County to its new barracks on East Washington Square. It was my cousin's regiment. They were a fine lot of fellows, in their pale-blue, tight-fitting jackets, jaunty busbies, and white riding-breeches, with the double yellow stripe, into which their limbs seemed moulded. Every other squadron was armed with lances, from the metal points of which fluttered yellow-and-white pennons. The band passed, playing the regimental march, then came the colonel and staff, the horses crowding and trampling, while their heads bobbed in unison, and the pennons fluttered from their lance points. The troopers, who rode with the beautiful English seat, looked brown as berries from their bloodless campaign among the farms of Westchester, and the music of their sabres against the stirrups, and the jingle of spurs and carbines was delightful to me. I saw Louis riding with his squadron. He was as handsome an officer as I have ever seen. Mr. Wilde, who had mounted a chair by the window, saw him, too, but said nothing. Louis turned and looked straight at Hawberk's shop as he passed, and I could see the flush on his brown cheeks. I think Constance must have been at the window. When the last troopers had clattered by, and the last pennons vanished into South Fifth Avenue, Mr. Wilde clambered out of his chair and dragged the chest away from the door.

"Yes," he said, "it is time that you saw your cousin Louis."

He unlocked the door and I picked up my hat and stick and stepped into the corridor. The stairs were dark.

Groping about, I set my foot on something soft, which snarled and spit, and I aimed a murderous blow at the cat, but my cane shivered to splinters against the balustrade, and the beast scurried back into Mr. Wilde's room.

Passing Hawberk's door again, I saw him still at work on the armor, but I did not stop, and, stepping out into Bleeker Street, I followed it to Wooster, skirted the grounds of the Lethal Chamber, and, crossing Washington Park, went straight to my rooms in the Benedick. Here I lunched comfortably, read the *Herald* and the *Meteor*, and finally went to the steel safe in my bedroom and set the time combination. The three and three-quarter minutes which it is necessary to wait, while the time lock is opening, are to me golden moments. From the instant I set the combination to the moment when I grasp the knobs and swing back the solid steel doors, I live in an ecstasy of expectation. Those moments must be like moments passed in paradise. I know what I am to find at the end of the time limit. I know what the massive safe holds secure for me, for me alone, and the exquisite pleasure of waiting is hardly enhanced when the safe opens and I lift, from its velvet crown, a diadem of purest gold, blazing with diamonds. I do this every day, and yet the joy of waiting and at last touching again the diadem only seems to increase as the days pass. It is a diadem fit for a king among kings, an emperor among emperors. The King in Yellow might scorn it, but it shall be worn by his royal servant.

I held it in my arms until the alarm on the safe rang harshly, and then tenderly, proudly I replaced it and shut the steel doors. I walked slowly back into my study, which faces Washington Square, and leaned on the window-sill. The afternoon sun poured into my windows, and a gentle breeze stirred the branches of the elms and maples in the park, now covered with buds and tender foliage. A flock of pigeons circled about the tower of the Memorial Church, sometimes alighting on the purple-tiled roof, sometimes wheeling downward to the lotos fountain in

front of the marble arch. The gardeners were busy with the flowerbeds around the fountain, and the freshly turned earth smelled sweet and spicy. A lawn-mower, drawn by a fat, white horse, clinked across the greensward, and watering-carts poured showers of spray over the asphalt drives. Around the statue of Peter Stuyvesant, which in 1906 had replaced the monstrosity supposed to represent Garibaldi, children played in the spring sunshine, and nurse girls wheeled elaborate baby-carriages with a reckless disregard for the pasty-faced occupants, which could probably be explained by the presence of half a dozen trim dragoon troopers languidly lolling on the benches. Through the trees the Washington Memorial Arch glistened like silver in the sunshine, and beyond, on the eastern extremity of the square, the gray-stone barracks of the dragoons and the white-granite artillery stables were alive with color and motion.

I looked at the Lethal Chamber on the corner of the square opposite. A few curious people still lingered about the gilded iron railing, but inside the grounds the paths were deserted. I watched the fountains ripple and sparkle; the sparrows had already found this new bathing nook, and the basins were crowded with the dusty-feathered little things. Two or three white peacocks picked their way across the lawns, and a drab-colored pigeon sat so motionless on the arm of one of the Fates that it seemed to be a part of the sculptured stone.

As I was turning carelessly away, a slight commotion in the group of curious loiterers around the gates attracted my attention. A young man had entered, and was advancing with nervous strides along the gravel path which leads to the bronze doors of the Lethal Chamber. He paused a moment before the Fates, and as he raised his head to those three mysterious faces, the pigeon rose from its sculptured perch, circled about for a moment, and wheeled to the east. The young man pressed his hands to his face, and then, with an undefinable gesture, sprang up the marble steps, the bronze doors closed behind him, and half an hour later the loiterers slouched away and the

frightened pigeon returned to its perch in the arms of Fate.

I put on my hat and went out into the park for a little walk before dinner. As I crossed the central drive-way a group of officers passed, and one of them called out, "Hello, Hildred!" and came back to shake hands with me. It was my cousin Louis, who stood smiling and tapping his spurred heels with his riding-whip.

"Just back from Westchester," he said; "been doing the bucolic; milk and curds, you know; dairy-maids in sun-bonnets, who say 'haeow' and 'I don't think' when you tell them they are pretty. I'm nearly dead for a square meal at Delmonico's. What's the news?"

"There is none," I replied, pleasantly. "I saw your regiment coming in this morning."

"Did you? I didn't see you. Where were you?"

"In Mr. Wilde's window."

"Oh, hell!" he began, impatiently, "that man is stark mad! I don't understand why you—"

He saw how annoyed I felt by this outburst, and begged my pardon.

"Really, old chap," he said, "I don't mean to run down a man you like, but for the life of me I can't see what the deuce you find in common with Mr. Wilde. He's not well bred, to put it generously; he's hideously deformed; his head is the head of a criminally insane person. You know yourself he's been in an asylum—"

"So have I," I interrupted, calmly.

Louis looked startled and confused for a moment, but recovered and slapped me heartily on the shoulder.

"You were completely cured," he began; but I stopped him again.

"I suppose you mean that I was simply acknowledged never to have been insane."

"Of course that—that's what I meant," he laughed.

I disliked his laugh, because I knew it was forced; but I nodded gayly and asked him where he was going. Louis looked after his brother officers, who had now almost reached Broadway.

"We had intended to sample a Brunswick cocktail, but,

to tell you the truth, I was anxious for an excuse to go and see Hawberk instead. Come along; I'll make you my excuse."

We found old Hawberk, neatly attired in a fresh spring suit, standing at the door of his shop and sniffing the air.

"I had just decided to take Constance for a little stroll before dinner," he replied to the impetuous volley of questions from Louis. "We thought of walking on the park terrace along the North River."

At that moment Constance appeared and grew pale and rosy by turns as Louis bent over her small, gloved fingers. I tried to excuse myself, alleging an engagement up-town, but Louis and Constance would not listen, and I saw I was expected to remain and engage old Hawberk's attention. After all, it would be just as well if I kept my eye on Louis, I thought, and, when they hailed a Spring Street electric-car, I got in after them and took my seat beside the armorer.

The beautiful line of parks and granite terraces overlooking the wharves along the North River, which were built in 1910 and finished in the autumn of 1917, had become one of the most popular promenades in the metropolis. They extended from the Battery to One Hundred and Ninetieth Street, overlooking the noble river, and affording a fine view of the Jersey shore and the Highlands opposite. Cafés and restaurants were scattered here and there among the trees, and twice a week military bands from the garrison played in the kiosques on the parapets.

We sat down in the sunshine on the bench at the foot of the equestrian statue of General Sheridan. Constance tipped her sunshade to shield her eyes, and she and Louis began a murmuring conversation which was impossible to catch. Old Hawberk, leaning on his ivory-headed cane, lighted an excellent cigar, the mate to which I politely refused, and smiled at vacancy. The sun hung low above the Staten Island woods, and the bay was dyed with golden hues reflected from the sun-warmed sails of the shipping in the harbor.

Brigs, schooners, yachts, clumsy ferry-boats, their decks

swarming with people, railroad transports carrying lines of brown, blue, and white freight-cars, stately Sound steamers, *déclassé* tramp steamers, coasters, dredgers, scows, and everywhere pervading the entire bay impudent little tugs puffing and whistling officiously—these were the craft which churned the sunlit waters as far as the eye could reach. In calm contrast to the hurry of sailing vessel and steamer, a silent fleet of white war-ships lay motionless in mid-stream.

Constance's merry laugh aroused me from my reverie.

"What *are* you staring at?" she inquired.

"Nothing—the fleet." I smiled.

Then Louis told us what the vessels were, pointing out each by its relative position to the old red fort on Governor's Island.

"That little cigar-shaped thing is a torpedo-boat," he explained; "there are four more lying close together. They are the *Tarpon*, the *Falcon*, the *Sea Fox*, and the *Octopus*. The gunboats just above are the *Princeton*, the *Champlain*, the *Still Water*, and the *Erie*. Next to them lie the cruisers *Farragut* and *Los Angeles*, and above them the battle-ships *California* and *Dakota*, and the *Washington*, which is the flag-ship. Those two squatty-looking chunks of metal which are anchored there off Castle William are the double-turreted monitors *Terrible* and *Magnificent*; behind them lies the ram *Osceola*."

Constance looked at him with deep approval in her beautiful eyes. "What loads of things you know for a soldier," she said, and we all joined in the laugh which followed.

Presently Louis rose with a nod to us and offered his arm to Constance, and they strolled away along the river-wall. Hawberk watched them for a moment, and then turned to me.

"Mr. Wilde was right," he said. "I have found the missing tassets and left cuissard of the 'Prince's Emblazoned,' in a vile old junk garret in Pell Street."

"998?" I inquired, with a smile.

"Yes."

"Mr. Wilde is a very intelligent man," I observed.

"I want to give him the credit of this most important discovery," continued Hawberk. "And I intend it shall be known that he is entitled to the fame of it."

"He won't thank you for that," I answered, sharply; "please say nothing about it."

"Do you know what it is worth?" said Hawberk.

"No—fifty dollars, perhaps."

"It is valued at five hundred, but the owner of the 'Prince's Emblazoned' will give two thousand dollars to the person who completes his suit; that reward also belongs to Mr. Wilde."

"He doesn't want it! He refuses it!" I answered, angrily. "What do you know about Mr. Wilde? He doesn't need the money. He is rich—or will be—richer than any living man except myself. What will we care for money then—what will we care, he and I, when—when—"

"When what?" demanded Hawberk, astonished.

"You will see," I replied, on my guard again.

He looked at me narrowly, much as Dr. Archer used to, and I knew he thought I was mentally unsound. Perhaps it was fortunate for him that he did not use the word lunatic just then.

"No," I replied to his unspoken thought, "I am not mentally weak; my mind is as healthy as Mr. Wilde's. I do not care to explain just yet what I have on hand, but it is an investment which will pay more than mere gold, silver, and precious stones. It will secure the happiness and prosperity of a continent—yes, a hemisphere!"

"Oh," said Hawberk.

"And eventually," I continued, more quietly, "it will secure the happiness of the whole world."

"And incidentally your own happiness and prosperity as well as Mr. Wilde's?"

"Exactly." I smiled, but I could have throttled him for taking that tone.

He looked at me in silence for a while, and then said, very gently: "Why don't you give up your books and

studies, Mr. Castaigne, and take a tramp among the mountains somewhere or other? You used to be fond of fishing. Take a cast or two at the trout in the Rangelys."

"I don't care for fishing any more," I answered, without a shade of annoyance in my voice.

"You used to be fond of everything," he continued—"athletics, yachting, shooting, riding—"

"I have never cared to ride since my fall," I said, quietly.

"Ah, yes, your fall," he repeated, looking away from me.

I thought this nonsense had gone far enough, so I turned the conversation back to Mr. Wilde; but he was scanning my face again in a manner highly offensive to me.

"Mr. Wilde," he repeated; "do you know what he did this afternoon? He came down-stairs and nailed a sign over the hall door next to mine; it read:

MR. WILDE,
REPAIRER OF REPUTATIONS,
3d Bell.

Do you know what a Repairer of Reputations can be?"

"I do," I replied, suppressing the rage within.

"Oh," he said again.

Louis and Constance came strolling by and stopped to ask if we would join them. Hawberk looked at his watch. At the same moment a puff of smoke shot from the casemates of Castle William, and the boom of the sunset gun rolled across the water and was re-echoed from the Highlands opposite. The flag came running down from the flag-pole, the bugles sounded on the white decks of the war-ships, and the first electric light sparkled out from the Jersey shore.

As I turned into the city with Hawberk I heard Constance murmur something to Louis which I did not understand; but Louis whispered "My darling!" in reply; and again, walking ahead with Hawberk through the square,

I heard a murmur of "sweetheart!" and "my own Constance!" and I knew the time had nearly arrived when I should speak of important matters with my cousin Louis.

III

One morning early in May I stood before the steel safe in my bedroom, trying on the golden jewelled crown. The diamonds flashed fire as I turned to the mirror, and the heavy beaten gold burned like a halo about my head. I remembered Camilla's agonized scream and the awful words echoing through the dim streets of Carcosa. They were the last lines in the first act, and I dared not think of what followed—dared not, even in the spring sunshine, there in my own room, surrounded with familiar objects, reassured by the bustle from the street and the voices of the servants in the hall-way outside. For those poisoned words had dropped slowly into my heart, as death-sweat drops upon a bed-sheet and is absorbed. Trembling, I put the diadem from my head and wiped my forehead, but I thought of Hastur and of my own rightful ambition, and I remembered Mr. Wilde as I had last left him, his face all torn and bloody from the claws of that devil's creature, and what he said—ah, what he said! The alarm-bell in the safe began to whirl harshly, and I knew my time was up; but I would not heed it, and, replacing the flashing circlet upon my head, I turned defiantly to the mirror. I stood for a long time absorbed in the changing expression of my own eyes. The mirror reflected a face which was like my own, but whiter, and so thin that I hardly recognized it. And all the time I kept repeating between my clinched teeth, "The day has come! the day has come!" while the alarm in the safe whirled and clamored, and the diamonds sparkled and flamed above my brow. I heard a door open, but did not heed it. It was only when I saw two faces in the mirror; it was only when another face rose over my shoulder, and two other eyes

met mine. I wheeled like a flash and seized a long knife from my dressing-table, and my cousin sprang back very pale, crying: "Hildred! for God's sake!" Then, as my hand fell, he said: "It is I, Louis; don't you know me?" I stood silent. I could not have spoken for my life. He walked up to me and took the knife from my hand.

"What is all this?" he inquired, in a gentle voice. "Are you ill?"

"No," I replied. But I doubt if he heard me.

"Come, come, old fellow," he cried, "take off that brass crown and toddle into the study. Are you going to a masquerade? What's all this theatrical tinsel anyway?"

I was glad he thought the crown was made of brass and paste, yet I didn't like him any the better for thinking so. I let him take it from my hand, knowing it was best to humor him. He tossed the splendid diadem in the air, and, catching it, turned to me smiling.

"It's dear at fifty cents," he said. "What's it for?"

I did not answer, but took the circlet from his hands, and, placing it in the safe, shut the massive steel door. The alarm ceased its infernal din at once. He watched me curiously, but did not seem to notice the sudden ceasing of the alarm. He did, however, speak of the safe as a biscuit-box. Fearing lest he might examine the combination, I led the way into my study. Louis threw himself on the sofa and flicked at flies with his eternal riding-whip. He wore his fatigue uniform, with the braided jacket and jaunty cap, and I noticed that his riding-boots were all splashed with red mud.

"Where have you been?" I inquired.

"Jumping mud creeks in Jersey," he said. "I haven't had time to change yet; I was rather in a hurry to see you. Haven't you got a glass of something? I'm dead tired; been in the saddle twenty-four hours."

I gave him some brandy from my medicinal store, which he drank with a grimace.

"Damned bad stuff," he observed. "I'll give you an address where they sell brandy that is brandy."

"It's good enough for my needs," I said, indifferently. "I use it to rub my chest with." He stared and flicked at another fly.

"See here, old fellow," he began, "I've got something to suggest to you. It's four years now that you've shut yourself up here like an owl, never going anywhere, never taking any healthy exercise, never doing a damn thing but poring over those books up there on the mantel-piece."

He glanced along the row of shelves. "Napoleon, Napoleon, Napoleon!" he read. "For Heaven's sake, have you nothing but Napoleons there?"

"I wish they were bound in gold," I said. "But wait—yes, there is another book, 'The King in Yellow.' " I looked him steadily in the eye.

"Have you never read it?" I asked.

"I? No, thank God! I don't want to be driven crazy."

I saw he regretted his speech as soon as he had uttered it. There is only one word which I loathe more than I do lunatic, and that word is crazy. But I controlled myself and asked him why he thought "The King in Yellow" dangerous.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, hastily. "I only remember the excitement it created and the denunciations from pulpit and press. I believe the author shot himself after bringing forth this monstrosity, didn't he?"

"I understand he is still alive," I answered.

"That's probably true," he muttered; "bullets couldn't kill a fiend like that."

"It is a book of great truths," I said.

"Yes," he replied, "of 'truths' which send men frantic and blast their lives. I don't care if the thing is; as they say, the very supreme essence of art. It's a crime to have written it, and I for one shall never open its pages."

"Is that what you have come to tell me?" I asked.

"No," he said, "I came to tell you that I am going to be married."

I believe for a moment my heart ceased to beat, but I kept my eyes on his face.

"Yes," he continued, smiling happily, "married to the sweetest girl on earth."

"Constance Hawberk," I said, mechanically.

"How did you know?" he cried, astonished. "I didn't know it myself until that evening last April, when we strolled down to the embankment before dinner."

"When is it to be?" I asked.

"It was to have been next September; but an hour ago a despatch came, ordering our regiment to the Presidio, San Francisco. We leave at noon to-morrow. To-morrow," he repeated. "Just think, Hildred, to-morrow I shall be the happiest fellow that ever drew breath in this jolly world, for Constance will go with me."

I offered him my hand in congratulation, and he seized and shook it like the good-natured fool he was—or pretended to be.

"I am going to get my squadron as a wedding present," he rattled on. "Captain and Mrs. Louis Castaigne—eh, Hildred?"

Then he told me where it was to be and who were to be there, and made me promise to come and be best man. I set my teeth and listened to his boyish chatter without showing what I felt, but—

I was getting to the limit of my endurance, and when he jumped up, and, switching his spurs till they jingled, said he must go, I did not detain him.

"There's one thing I want to ask of you," I said, quietly.

"Out with it—it's promised," he laughed.

"I want you to meet me for a quarter of an hour's talk to-night."

"Of course, if you wish," he said, somewhat puzzled. "Where?"

"Anywhere—in the park there."

"What time, Hildred?"

"Midnight."

"What in the name of—" he began, but checked himself and laughingly assented. I watched him go down the

stairs and hurry away, his sabre banging at every stride. He turned into Bleeker Street, and I knew he was going to see Constance. I gave him ten minutes to disappear and then followed in his footsteps, taking with me the jewelled crown and the silken robe embroidered with the Yellow Sign. When I turned into Bleeker Street and entered the door-way which bore the sign,

MR. WILDE,
REPAIRER OF REPUTATIONS,
3d Bell.

I saw old Hawberk moving about in his shop, and imagined I heard Constance's voice in the parlor; but I avoided them both and hurried up the trembling stairways to Mr. Wilde's apartment. I knocked, and entered without ceremony. Mr. Wilde lay groaning on the floor, his face covered with blood, his clothes torn to shreds. Drops of blood were scattered about over the carpet, which had also been ripped and frayed in the evidently recent struggle.

"It's that cursed cat," he said, ceasing his groans and turning his colorless eyes to me; "she attacked me while I was asleep. I believe she will kill me yet."

This was too much, so I went into the kitchen and, seizing a hatchet from the pantry, started to find the infernal beast and settle her then and there. My search was fruitless, and after a while I gave it up and came back to find Mr. Wilde squatting on his high chair by the table. He had washed his face and changed his clothes. The great furrows which the cat's claws had ploughed up in his face he had filled with collodion, and a rag hid the wound in his throat. I told him I should kill the cat when I came across her, but he only shook his head and turned to the open ledger before him. He read name after name of the people who had come to him in regard to their reputation, and the sums he had amassed were startling.

"I put on the screws now and then," he explained.

"One day or other some of these people will assassinate you," I insisted.

"Do you think so?" he said, rubbing his mutilated ears.

It was useless to argue with him, so I took down the manuscript entitled *Imperial Dynasty of America* for the last time I should ever take it down in Mr. Wilde's study. I read it through, thrilling and trembling with pleasure. When I had finished, Mr. Wilde took the manuscript, and, turning to the dark passage which leads from his study to his bedchamber, called out, in a loud voice, "Vance." Then for the first time I noticed a man crouching there in the shadow. How I had overlooked him during my search for the cat I cannot imagine.

"Vance, come in!" cried Mr. Wilde.

The figure rose and crept towards us, and I shall never forget the face that he raised to mine as the light from the window illuminated it.

"Vance, this is Mr. Castaigne," said Mr. Wilde. Before he had finished speaking, the man threw himself on the ground before the table, crying and gasping, "Oh, God! Oh, my God! Help me! Forgive me— Oh, Mr. Castaigne, keep that man away! You cannot, you cannot mean it! You are different—save me! I am broken down—I was in a madhouse, and now—when all was coming right—when I had forgotten the King—the King in Yellow, and—but I shall go mad again—I shall go mad—"

His voice died into a choking rattle, for Mr. Wilde had leaped on him, and his right hand encircled the man's throat. When Vance fell in a heap on the floor, Mr. Wilde clambered nimbly into his chair again, and, rubbing his mangled ears with the stump of his hand, turned to me and asked me for the ledger. I reached it down from the shelf and he opened it. After a moment's searching among the beautifully written pages, he coughed complacently and pointed to the name Vance.

"Vance," he read, aloud—"Osgood Oswald Vance." At the sound of his name the man on the floor raised his head and turned a convulsed face to Mr. Wilde. His eyes were

injected with blood, his lips tumefied. "Called April 28th," continued Mr. Wilde. "Occupation, cashier in the Seaforth National Bank; has served a term for forgery at Sing Sing, whence he was transferred to the Asylum for the Criminal Insane. Pardoned by the Governor of New York, and discharged from the Asylum January 19, 1918. Reputation damaged at Sheepshead Bay. Rumors that he lives beyond his income. Reputation to be repaired at once. Retainer, \$1500.

"Note.—Has embezzled sums amounting to \$30,000 since March 20, 1919. Excellent family, and secured present position through uncle's influence. Father, President of Seaforth Bank."

I looked at the man on the floor.

"Get up, Vance," said Mr. Wilde, in a gentle voice. Vance rose as if hypnotized. "He will do as we suggest now," observed Mr. Wilde, and, opening the manuscript, he read the entire history of the Imperial Dynasty of America. Then, in a kind and soothing murmur, he ran over the important points with Vance, who stood like one stunned. His eyes were so blank and vacant that I imagined he had become half-witted, and remarked it to Mr. Wilde, who replied that it was of no consequence anyway. Very patiently we pointed out to Vance what his share in the affair would be, and he seemed to understand after a while. Mr. Wilde explained the manuscript, using several volumes on Heraldry to substantiate the result of his researches. He mentioned the establishment of the Dynasty in Carcosa, the lakes which connected Hastur, Aldebaran, and the mystery of the Hyades. He spoke of Cassilda and Camilla, and sounded the cloudy depths of Demhe and the Lake of Hali. "The scalloped tatters of the King in Yellow must hide Yhtill forever," he muttered, but I do not believe Vance heard him. Then by degrees he led Vance along the ramifications of the imperial family to Uoht and Thale, from Naotalba and Phantom of Truth to Aldones, and then, tossing aside his manuscript and notes, he began the wonderful story of the Last King. Fascinated and thrilled, I watched him. He threw up his head, his

long arms were stretched out in a magnificent gesture of pride and power, and his eyes blazed deep in their sockets like two emeralds. Vance listened, stupefied. As for me, when at last Mr. Wilde had finished, and, pointing to me, cried, "The cousin of the King," my head swam with excitement.

Controlling myself with a superhuman effort, I explained to Vance why I alone was worthy of the crown, and why my cousin must be exiled or die. I made him understand that my cousin must never marry, even after renouncing all his claims, and how that, least of all, he should marry the daughter of the Marquis of Avonshire and bring England into the question. I showed him a list of thousands of names which Mr. Wilde had drawn up; every man whose name was there had received the Yellow Sign, which no living human being dared disregard. The city, the State, the whole land, were ready to rise and tremble before the Pallid Mask.

The time had come, the people should know the son of Hastur, and the whole world bow to the black stars which hang in the sky over Carcosa.

Vance leaned on the table, his head buried in his hands. Mr. Wilde drew a rough sketch on the margin of yesterday's *Herald* with a bit of lead-pencil. It was a plan of Hawberk's rooms. Then he wrote out the order and affixed the seal, and, shaking like a palsied man, I sighed my first writ of execution with my name Hildred-Rex.

Mr. Wilde clambered to the floor and, unlocking the cabinet, took a long, square box from the first shelf. This he brought to the table and opened. A new knife lay in the tissue-paper inside, and I picked it up and handed it to Vance, along with the order and the plan of Hawberk's apartment. Then Mr. Wilde told Vance he could go; and he went, shambling like an outcast of the slums.

I sat for a while watching the daylight fade behind the square tower of the Judson Memorial Church, and finally, gathering up the manuscript and notes, took my hat and started for the door.

Mr. Wilde watched me in silence. When I had stepped

into the hall I looked back; Mr. Wilde's small eyes were still fixed on me. Behind him the shadows gathered in the fading light. Then I closed the door behind me and went out into the darkening streets.

I had eaten nothing since breakfast, but I was not hungry. A wretched, half-starved creature, who stood looking across the street at the Lethal Chamber, noticed me and came up to tell me a tale of misery. I gave him money—I don't know why—and he went away without thanking me. An hour later another outcast approached and whined his story. I had a blank bit of paper in my pocket, on which was traced the Yellow Sign, and I handed it to him. He looked at it stupidly for a moment, and then, with an uncertain glance at me, folded it with what seemed to me exaggerated care and placed it in his bosom.

The electric lights were sparkling among the trees, and the new moon shone in the sky above the Lethal Chamber. It was tiresome waiting in the square; I wandered from the marble arch to the artillery stables, and back again to the lotos fountain. The flowers and grass exhaled a fragrance which troubled me. The jet of the fountain played in the moonlight, and the musical splash of falling drops reminded me of the tinkle of chained mail in Hawberk's shop. But it was not so fascinating, and the dull sparkle of the moonlight on the water brought no such sensations of exquisite pleasure as when the sunshine played over the polished steel of a corselet on Hawberk's knee. I watched the bats darting and turning above the water plants in the fountain basin, but their rapid, jerky flight set my nerves on edge, and I went away again to walk aimlessly to and fro among the trees.

The artillery stables were dark, but in the cavalry barracks the officers' windows were brilliantly lighted, and the sally-port was constantly filled with troopers in fatigue, carrying straw and harness and baskets filled with tin dishes.

Twice the mounted sentry at the gates was changed while I wandered up and down the asphalt walk. I looked at my watch. It was nearly time. The lights in the bar-

racks went out one by one, the barred gate was closed, and every minute or two an officer passed in through the side wicket, leaving a rattle of accoutrements and a jingle of spurs on the night air. The square had become very silent. The last homeless loiterer had been driven away by the gray-coated park policeman, the car tracks along Wooster Street were deserted, and the only sound which broke the stillness was the stamping of the sentry's horse and the ring of his sabre against the saddle pommel. In the barracks the officers' quarters were still lighted, and military servants passed and repassed before the bay-windows. Twelve o'clock sounded from the new spire of St. Francis Xavier, and at the last stroke of the sad-toned bell a figure passed through the wicket beside the portcullis, returned the salute of the sentry, and, crossing the street, entered the square and advanced towards the Benedick apartment house.

"Louis," I called.

The man pivoted on his spurred heels and came straight towards me.

"Is that you, Hildred?"

"Yes, you are on time."

I took his offered hand and we strolled towards the Lethal Chamber.

He rattled on about his wedding and the graces of Constance and their future prospects, calling my attention to his captain's shoulder-straps and the triple gold arabesque on his sleeve and fatigue cap. I believe I listened as much to the music of his spurs and sabre as I did to his boyish babble, and at last we stood under the elms on the Fourth Street corner of the square opposite the Lethal Chamber. Then he laughed and asked me what I wanted with him. I motioned him to a seat on a bench under the electric light, and sat down beside him. He looked at me curiously, with that same searching glance which I hate and fear so in doctors. I felt the insult of his look, but he did not know it, and I carefully concealed my feelings.

"Well, old chap," he inquired, "what can I do for you?"

I drew from my pocket the manuscript and notes of the Imperial Dynasty of America, and, looking him in the eye, said:

"I will tell you. On your word as a soldier, promise me to read this manuscript from beginning to end without asking me a question. Promise me to read these notes in the same way, and promise me to listen to what I have to tell later."

"I promise, if you wish it," he said, pleasantly. "Give me the paper, Hildred."

He began to read, raising his eyebrows with a puzzled, whimsical air, which made me tremble with suppressed anger. As he advanced, his eyebrows contracted, and his lips seemed to form the word "rubbish."

Then he looked slightly bored, but apparently for my sake read, with an attempt at interest, which presently ceased to be an effort. He started when, in the closely written pages he came to his own name, and when he came to mine he lowered the paper and looked sharply at me for a moment. But he kept his word, and resumed his reading, and I let the half-formed question die on his lips unanswered. When he came to the end and read the signature of Mr. Wilde, he folded the paper carefully and returned it to me. I handed him the notes, and he settled back, pushing his fatigue cap up to his forehead with a boyish gesture which I remembered so well in school. I watched his face as he read, and when he finished I took the notes, with the manuscript, and placed them in my pocket. Then I unfolded a scroll marked with the Yellow Sign. He saw the sign, but he did not seem to recognize it, and I called his attention to it somewhat sharply.

"Well," he said, "I see it. What is it?"

"It is the Yellow Sign," I said, angrily.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Louis, in that flattering voice which Dr. Archer used to employ with me, and would probably have employed again, had I not settled his affair for him.

I kept my rage down and answered as steadily as possible, "Listen, you have engaged your word?"

"I am listening, old chap," he replied, soothingly.

I began to speak very calmly: "Dr. Archer, having by some means become possessed of the secret of the Imperial Succession, attempted to deprive me of my right, alleging that, because of a fall from my horse four years ago, I had become mentally deficient. He presumed to place me under restraint in his own house in hopes of either driving me insane or poisoning me. I have not forgotten it. I visited him last night and the interview was final."

Louis turned quite pale, but did not move. I resumed, triumphantly: "There are yet three people to be interviewed in the interests of Mr. Wilde and myself. They are my cousin Louis, Mr. Hawberk, and his daughter Constance."

Louis sprang to his feet, and I arose also, and flung the paper marked with the Yellow Sign to the ground.

"Oh, I don't need that to tell you what I have to say," I cried, with a laugh of triumph. "You must renounce the crown to me—do you hear, to *me*?"

Louis looked at me with a startled air, but, recovering himself, said kindly, "Of course I renounce the—what is it I must renounce?"

"The crown," I said, angrily.

"Of course," he answered, "I renounce it. Come, old chap, I'll walk back to your rooms with you."

"Don't try any of your doctor's tricks on me," I cried, trembling with fury. "Don't act as if you think I am insane."

"What nonsense!" he replied. "Come, it's getting late, Hildred."

"No," I shouted, "you must listen. You cannot marry; I forbid it. Do you hear? I forbid it. You shall renounce the crown, and in reward I grant you exile; but if you refuse you shall die."

He tried to calm me, but I was roused at last, and, drawing my long knife, barred his way.

Then I told him how they would find Dr. Archer in the cellar with his throat open, and I laughed in his face when I thought of Vance and his knife, and the order signed by me.

"Ah, you are the King," I cried, "but I shall be King. Who are you to keep me from empire over all the habitable earth! I was born the cousin of a king, but I shall be King!"

Louis stood white and rigid before me. Suddenly a man came running up Fourth Street, entered the gate of the Lethal Temple, traversed the path to the bronze doors at full speed, and plunged into the death-chamber with the cry of one demented, and I laughed until I wept tears, for I had recognized Vance, and knew that Hawberk and his daughter were no longer in my way.

"Go," I cried to Louis, "you have ceased to be a menace. You will never marry Constance now, and if you marry any one else in your exile, I will visit you as I did my doctor last night. Mr. Wilde takes charge of you tomorrow." Then I turned and darted into South Fifth Avenue, and with a cry of terror Louis dropped his belt and sabre and followed me like the wind. I heard him close behind me at the corner of Bleeker Street, and I dashed into the door-way under Hawberk's sign. He cried, "Halt, or I fire!" but when he saw that I flew up the stairs leaving Hawberk's shop below, he left me, and I heard him hammering and shouting at their door as though it were possible to arouse the dead.

Mr. Wilde's door was open, and I entered, crying: "It is done, it is done! Let the nations rise and look upon their King!" but I could not find Mr. Wilde, so I went to the cabinet and took the splendid diadem from its case. Then I drew on the white silk robe, embroidered with the Yellow Sign, and placed the crown upon my head. At last I was King, King by my right in Hastur, King because I knew the mystery of the Hyades, and my mind had sounded the depths of the Lake of Hali. I was King! The first gray pencillings of dawn would raise a tempest which would shake two hemispheres. Then as I stood, my

every nerve pitched to the highest tension, faint with the joy and splendor of my thought, without, in the dark passage, a man groaned.

I seized the tallow dip and sprang to the door. The cat passed me like a demon, and the tallow dip went out, but my long knife flew swifter than she, and I heard her screech, and I knew that my knife had found her. For a moment I listened to her tumbling and thumping about in the darkness, and then, when her frenzy ceased, I lighted a lamp and raised it over my head. Mr. Wilde lay on the floor with his throat torn open. At first I thought he was dead, but as I looked a green sparkle came into his sunken eyes, his mutilated hand trembled, and then a spasm stretched his mouth from ear to ear. For a moment my terror and despair gave place to hope, but as I bent over him his eyeballs rolled clean around in his head, and he died. Then, while I stood transfixed with rage and despair, seeing my crown, my empire, every hope and every ambition, my very life, lying prostrate there with the dead master, *they* came, seized me from behind and bound me until my veins stood out like cords, and my voice failed with the paroxysms of my frenzied screams. But I still raged, bleeding and infuriated, among them and more than one policeman felt my sharp teeth. Then when I could no longer move they came nearer; I saw old Hawberk, and behind him my cousin Louis' ghastly face, and farther away, in the corner, a woman, Constance, weeping softly.

"Ah! I see it now!" I shrieked. "You have seized the throne and the empire. Woe! woe to you who are crowned with the crown of the King in Yellow!"

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—Mr. Castaigne died yesterday in the Asylum for Criminal Insane.]

Ernest Bramah

THE TRANSMUTATION OF LING

(1900)

The gorgeous, bejeweled, magical world of Ernest Bramah has few admirers more enthusiastic than this editor. Bramah was a shy, retiring British writer who attained considerable popularity with his mystery tales of a blind detective named Max Carrados; but his most brilliant and enchanting imaginative creation was the lovely, dream-like Oriental world of his four books about a wandering Chinese story-teller named Kai Lung.

The Kai Lung books, oddly enough, were not at all popular with Ernest Bramah's public during the years between 1900 and 1940, when they were first published in Great Britain. Oh, here and there an intelligent and discerning connoisseur saw clearly their wit and charm and beauty; but there were never enough of these readers to build an audience large enough to sustain a market for the Kai Lung books, and after a while Ernest Bramah just stopped writing them, rather in the same mood of disillusionment that caused the American writer, Robert W. Chambers, to turn away from his superb early weird fantasies and start writing historical romances for a larger readership.

I suppose the failure of the Kai Lung books may be explained simply. They were ahead of their time—written for an audience that was not yet born. Today, luckily for

people like you and me, an audience has arisen that is willing and eager to read fantasy, especially fantasy written with such delightful gusto, such sparkling wit, such tongue-in-cheek aplomb as the delicious tales of Kai Lung.

The Transmutation of Ling is a short novel written by Ernest Bramah back at the very beginning of his career. Like the glorious Kai Lung books that followed it, it leads us through an enchanted fairyland-China that never really existed, except in books and stories. A world of delectable marvels, filled with shadowy forests, echoing gorges, toy-like cities; a fabulous world peopled by plump, placid mandarins, fierce bandits, unscrupulous rogues, wise djinns and dragons, and (of course!) plenty of sinister and cunning magicians.

Last year we revived one of Ernest Bramah's best books, *Kai Lung's Golden Hours*, for the Adult Fantasy Series. Here's a splendid sample of his story-telling magic in case you missed that book.

THE TRANSMUTATION OF LING

I

Ling was the youngest of three sons, and from his youth upwards proved to be of a mild and studious disposition. Most of his time was spent in reading the sacred books, and at an early age he found the worship of apes to be repulsive to his gentle nature, and resolved to break through the venerable traditions of his family by devoting his time to literary pursuits, and presenting himself for public examinations at Canton. In this his resolution was strengthened by a rumor that an army of bowmen was shortly to be raised from the Province in which he lived, so that if he remained he would inevitably be forced into an occupation which was even more distasteful to him than the one he was leaving.

Having arrived at Canton, Ling's first care was to obtain particulars of the examinations, which he clearly perceived, from the unusual activity displayed on all sides, to be near at hand. On inquiring from passers-by, he received very conflicting information; for the persons to whom he spoke were themselves entered for competition, and therefore naturally misled him in order to increase their own chances of success. Perceiving this, Ling determined to apply at once, although the light was past, to a Mandarin who was concerned in the examinations, lest by delay he should lose his chance for the year.

"It is an unfortunate event that so distinguished a person should have selected this day and hour on which to overwhelm us with his affable politeness!" exclaimed the

porter at the gate of the Yamên, when Ling had explained his reason for going. "On such a day, in the reign of the virtuous Emperor Hoo Chow, a very benevolent and unassuming ancestor of my good lord the Mandarin was destroyed by treachery, and ever since his family has observed the occasion by fasting and no music. This person would certainly be punished with death if he entered the inner room from any cause."

At these words, Ling, who had been simply brought up, and chiefly in the society of apes, was going away with many expressions of self-reproach at selecting such a time, when the gate-keeper called him back.

"I am overwhelmed with confusion at the position in which I find myself," he remarked, after he had examined his mind for a short time. "I may meet with an ungraceful and objectionable death if I carry out your estimable instructions, but I shall certainly merit and receive a similar fate if I permit so renowned and versatile a person to leave without a fitting reception. In such matters a person can only trust to the intervention of good spirits; if, therefore, you will permit this unworthy individual to wear, while making the venture, the ring which he perceives upon your finger, and which he recognizes as a very powerful charm against evil, misunderstandings, and extortion, he will go without fear."

Overjoyed at the amiable porter's efforts on his behalf, Ling did as he was desired, and the other retired. Presently the door of the Yamên was opened by an attendant of the house, and Ling bidden to enter. He was covered with astonishment to find that this person was entirely unacquainted with his name or purpose.

"Alas!" said the attendant, when Ling had explained his object, "well said the renowned and inspired Ting Fo, 'When struck by a thunderbolt it is unnecessary to consult the Book of Dates as to the precise meaning of the omen.' At this moment my noble-minded master is engaged in conversation with all the most honorable and refined persons in Canton, while singers and dancers of a very expert and nimble order have been sent for. The entertainment

will undoubtedly last far into the night, and to present myself even with the excuse of your graceful and delicate inquiry would certainly result in very objectionable consequences to this person."

"It is indeed a day of unprepossessing circumstances," replied Ling, and, after many honorable remarks concerning his own intellect and appearance, and those of the person to whom he was speaking, he had turned to leave when the other continued:

"Ever since your dignified presence illumined this very ordinary chamber, this person has been endeavoring to bring to his mind an incident which occurred to him last night while he slept. Now it has come back to him with a diamond clearness, and he is satisfied that it was as follows: While he floated in the Middle Air a benevolent spirit in the form of an elderly and toothless vampire appeared, leading by the hand a young man of elegant personality. Smiling encouragingly upon this person, the spirit said, 'O Fou, recipient of many favors from Mandarins and of unnumerable taels from gratified persons whom you have obliged, I am, even at this moment, guiding this exceptional young man towards your presence; when he arrives do not hesitate, but do as he desires, no matter how great the danger seems or how inadequately you may appear to be rewarded on earth.' The vision then melted, but I now clearly perceive that with the exception of the embroidered cloak which you wear, you are the person thus indicated to me. Remove your cloak, therefore, in order to give the amiable spirit no opportunity of denying the fact, and I will advance your wishes; for, as the Book of Verses indicates, 'The person who patiently awaits a sign from the clouds for many years, and yet fails to notice the earthquake at his feet, is devoid of intellect.' "

Convinced that he was assuredly under the especial protection of the Deities, and that the end of his search was in view, Ling gave his rich cloak to the attendant, and was immediately shown into another room, where he was left alone.

After a considerable space of time the door opened and there entered a person whom Ling at first supposed to be the Mandarin. Indeed, he was addressing him by his titles when the other interrupted him. "Do not distress your incomparable mind by searching for honorable names to apply to so inferior a person as myself," he said agreeably. "The mistake is, nevertheless, very natural; for, however miraculous it may appear, this unseemly individual, who is in reality merely a writer of spoken words, is admitted to be exceedingly like the dignified Mandarin himself, though somewhat stouter, clad in better garments, and, it is said, less obtuse of intellect. This last matter he very much doubts, for he now finds himself unable to recognize by name one who is undoubtedly entitled to wear the Royal Yellow."

With this encouragement Ling once more explained his position, narrating the events which had enabled him to reach the second chamber of the Yamên. When he had finished the secretary was overpowered with a high-minded indignation.

"Assuredly those depraved and rapacious persons who have both misled and robbed you shall suffer bowstringing when the whole matter is brought to light," he exclaimed. "The noble Mandarin neither fasts nor receives guests, for, indeed, he has slept since the sun went down. This person would unhesitatingly break his slumber for so commendable a purpose were it not for a circumstance of intolerable unavoidableness. It must not even be told in a low breath beyond the walls of the Yamên, but my benevolent and high-born lord is in reality a person of very miserly instincts, and nothing will call him from his natural sleep but the sound of taels shaken beside his bed. In an unexpected manner it comes about that this person is quite unsupplied with anything but thin printed papers of a thousand taels each, and these are quite useless for the purpose."

"It is unendurable that so obliging a person should be put to such inconvenience on behalf of one who will certainly become a public laughing-stock at the examina-

tions," said Ling, with deep feeling; and taking from a concealed spot in his garments a few taels, he placed them before the secretary for the use he had indicated.

Ling was again left alone for upwards of two strokes of the gong, and was on the point of sleep when the secretary returned with an expression of dignified satisfaction upon his countenance. Concluding that he had been successful in the manner of awakening the Mandarin, Ling was opening his mouth for a polite speech, which should contain a delicate allusion to the taels, when the secretary warned him, by affecting a sudden look of terror, that silence was exceedingly desirable, and at the same time opened another door and indicated to Ling that he should pass through.

In the next room Ling was overjoyed to find himself in the presence of the Mandarin, who received him graciously, and paid many estimable compliments to the name he bore and the country from which he came. When at length Ling tore himself from this enchanting conversation, and explained the reason of his presence, the Mandarin at once became a prey to the whitest and most melancholy emotions, even plucking two hairs from his pigtail to prove the extent and conscientiousness of his grief.

"Behold," he cried at length, "I am resolved that the extortionate and many-handed persons at Peking who have control of the examination rites and customs shall no longer grow round-bodied without remark. This person will unhesitatingly proclaim the true facts of the case without regarding the danger that the versatile Chancellor or even the sublime Emperor himself may, while he speaks, be concealed in some part of this unassuming room to hear his words; for, as it is wisely said, 'When marked out by destiny, a person will assuredly be drowned, even though he passes the whole of his existence among the highest branches of a date tree.' "

"I am overwhelmed that I should be the cause of such an engaging display of polished agitation," said Ling, as the Mandarin paused. "If it would make your own stom-

ach less heavy, this person will willingly follow your estimable example, either with or without knowing the reason."

"The matter is altogether on your account, O most unobtrusive young man," replied the Mandarin, when a voice without passion was restored to him. "It tears me internally with hooks to reflect that you, whose refined ancestors I might reasonably have known had I passed my youth in another Province, should be a victim to the cupidity of the ones in authority at Pekin. A very short time before you arrived there came a messenger in haste from those persons, clearly indicating that a legal toll of sixteen taels was to be made on each printed paper setting forth the times and manner of the examinations, although, as you may see, the paper is undoubtedly marked, 'Persons are given notice that they are defrauded of any sum which they may be induced to exchange for this matter.' Furthermore, there is a legal toll of nine taels on all persons who have previously been examined——"

"I am happily escaped from that," exclaimed Ling with some satisfaction as the Mandarin paused.

"—and twelve taels on all who present themselves for the first time. This is to be delivered over when the paper is purchased, so that you, by reason of this unworthy proceeding at Pekin, are required to forward to that place, through this person, no less than thirty-two taels."

"It is a circumstance of considerable regret," replied Ling; "for had I only reached Canton a day earlier, I should, it appears, have avoided this evil."

"Undoubtedly it would have been so," replied the Mandarin, who had become engrossed in exalted meditation. "However," he continued a moment later, as he bowed to Ling with an accomplished smile, "it would certainly be a more pleasant thought for a person of your refined intelligence that had you delayed until to-morrow the insatiable persons at Pekin might be demanding twice the amount."

Pondering the deep wisdom of this remark, Ling took his departure; but in spite of the most assiduous watch-

fulness he was unable to discern any of the three obliging persons to whose efforts his success had been due.

II

It was very late when Ling again reached the small room which he had selected as soon as he reached Canton, but without waiting for food or sleep he made himself fully acquainted with the times of the forthcoming examinations and the details of the circumstances connected with them. With much satisfaction he found that he had still a week in which to revive his intellect on the most difficult subjects. Having become relieved on these points, Ling retired for a few hours' sleep, but rose again very early, and gave the whole day with great steadfastness to contemplation of the sacred classic *Y-King*, with the exception of a short period spent in purchasing ink, brushes, and writing-leaves. The following day, having become mentally depressed through witnessing unaccountable hordes of candidates thronging the streets of Canton, Ling put aside his books, and passed the time in visiting all the most celebrated tombs in the neighborhood of the city. Lightened in mind by this charitable and agreeable occupation, he returned to his studies with a fixed resolution, nor did he again falter in his purpose.

On the evening of the examination, when he was sitting alone, reading by the aid of a single light, as his custom was, a person arrived to see him, at the same time manifesting a considerable appearance of secrecy and reserve. Inwardly sighing at the interruption, Ling nevertheless received him with distinguished consideration and respect, setting tea before him, and performing towards it many honorable actions with his own hands. Not until some hours had sped in conversation relating to the health of the Emperor, the unexpected appearance of a fiery dragon outside the city, and the insupportable price of opium, did the visitor allude to the object of his presence.

"It has been observed," he remarked, "that the accomplished Ling, who aspires to a satisfactory rank at the

examinations, has never before made the attempt. Doubtless in this case a preternatural wisdom will avail much, and its fortunate possessor will not go unrewarded. Yet it is as precious stones among ashes for one to triumph in such circumstances."

"The fact is known to this person," replied Ling sadly, "and the thought of the years he may have to wait before he shall have passed even the first degree weighs down his soul with bitterness from time to time."

"It is no infrequent thing for men of accomplished perseverance, but merely ordinary intellects, to grow venerable within the four walls of the examination cell," continued the other. "Some, again, become afflicted with various malignant evils, while not a few, chiefly those who are presenting themselves for the first time, are so overcome on perceiving the examination paper, and understanding the inadequate nature of their own accomplishments, that they become an easy prey to the malicious spirits which are ever on the watch in those places; and, after covering their leaves with unpresentable remarks and drawings of men and women of distinguished rank, have at length to be forcibly carried away by the attendants and secured with heavy chains."

"Such things undoubtedly exist," agreed Ling; "yet by a due regard paid to spirits, both good and bad, a proper esteem for one's ancestors, and a sufficiency of charms about the head and body, it is possible to be closeted with all manner of demons and yet to suffer no evil."

"It is undoubtedly possible to do so, according to the Immortal Principles," admitted the stranger; "but it is not an undertaking in which a refined person would take intelligent pleasure; as the proverb says, 'He is a wise and enlightened suppliant who seeks to discover an honorable Mandarin, but he is a fool who cries out, "I have found one." ' However, it is obvious that the reason of my visit is understood, and that your distinguished confidence in yourself is merely a graceful endeavor to obtain my services for a less amount of taels than I should otherwise have demanded. For half the usual sum, therefore, this

person will take your place in the examination cell, and enable your versatile name to appear in the winning lists, while you pass your moments in irreproachable pleasures elsewhere."

Such a course had never presented itself to Ling. As the person who narrates this story has already remarked, he had passed his life beyond the influence of the ways and manners of towns, and at the same time he had naturally been endowed with an unobtrusive highmindedness. It appeared to him, in consequence, that by accepting this engaging offer, he would be placing those who were competing with him at a disadvantage. This person clearly sees that it is a difficult matter for him to explain how this could be, as Ling would undoubtedly reward the services of the one who took his place, nor would the number of the competitors be in any way increased; yet in such a way the thing took shape before his eyes. Knowing, however, that few persons would be able to understand this action, and being desirous of not injuring the estimable emotions of the obliging person who had come to him, Ling made a number of polished excuses in declining, hiding the true reason within himself. In this way he earned the powerful malignity of the person in question, who would not depart until he had effected a number of very disagreeable prophecies connected with unpropitious omens and internal torments, all of which undoubtedly had a great influence on Ling's life beyond that time.

Each day of the examination found Ling alternately elated or depressed, according to the length and style of the essay which he had written while enclosed in his solitary examination cell. The trials each lasted a complete day, and long before the fifteen days which composed the full examination were passed, Ling found himself half regretting that he had not accepted his visitor's offer, or even reviling the day on which he had abandoned the hereditary calling of his ancestors. However, when, after all was over, he came to deliberate with himself on his chances of obtaining a degree, he could not disguise from his own mind that he had well-formed hopes; he was

not conscious of any undignified errors, and, in reply to several questions, he had been able to introduce curious knowledge which he possessed by means of his exceptional circumstances—knowledge which it was unlikely that any other candidate would have been able to make himself master of.

At length the day arrived on which the results were to be made public; and Ling, together with all the other competitors and many distinguished persons, attended at the great Hall of Intellectual Colored Lights to hear the reading of the lists. Eight thousand candidates had been examined, and from this number less than two hundred were to be selected for appointments. Amid a most distinguished silence the winning names were read out. Waves of most undignified but inevitable emotion passed over those assembled as the list neared its end, and the chances of success became less at each spoken word. Nevertheless, Ling hoped till the last name was given forth; and then, finding that his was not among them, together with the greater part of those present, he became a prey to very inelegant thoughts, which were not lessened by the refined cries of triumph of the successful persons. Among this confusion the one who had read the lists was observed to be endeavoring to make his voice known, whereupon, in the expectation that he had omitted a name, the tumult was quickly subdued by those who again had pleasurable visions.

"There was among the candidates one of the name of Ling," said he, when no-noise had been obtained. "The written leaves produced by this person are of a most versatile and conflicting order, so that, indeed, the accomplished examiners themselves are unable to decide whether they are very good or very bad. In this matter, therefore, it is clearly impossible to place the expert and inimitable Ling among the foremost, as his very uncertain success may have been brought about with the assistance of evil spirits; nor would it be safe to pass over his efforts without reward, as he may be under the protection of powerful but exceedingly ill-advised deities. The es-

timable Ling is told to appear again at this place after the gong has been struck three times, when the matter will have been looked at from all round."

At this announcement there arose another great tumult, several crying out that assuredly their written leaves were either very good or very bad; but no further proclamation was made, and very soon the hall was cleared by force.

At the time stated Ling again presented himself at the Hall, and was honorably received.

"The unusual circumstances of the matter have already been put forth," said an elderly Mandarin of engaging appearance, "so that nothing remains to be made known except the end of our despicable efforts to come to an agreeable conclusion. In this we have been successful, and now desire to notify the result. A very desirable and not unremunerative office, rarely bestowed in this manner, is lately vacant, and taking into our minds the circumstances of the event, and the fact that Ling comes from a Province very esteemed for the warlike instincts of its inhabitants, we have decided to appoint him commander of the valiant and blood-thirsty band of archers now stationed at Si-chow, in the Province of Hu Nan. We have spoken. Let three guns go off in honor of the noble and invincible Ling, now and henceforth a commander in the ever-victorious Army of the Sublime Emperor, Brother of the Sun and Moon, and Upholder of the Four Corners of the World."

III

Many hours passed before Ling, now more downcast in mind than the most unsuccessful student in Canton, returned to his room and sought his couch of dried rushes. All his efforts to have his distinguished appointment set aside had been without avail, and he had been ordered to reach Si-chow within a week. As he passed through the streets, elegant processions in honor of the winners met him at every corner, and drove him into the outskirts for the object of quietness. There he remained

until the beating of paper drums and the sound of exulting voices could be heard no more; but even when he returned lanterns shone in many dwellings, for two hundred persons were composing verses, setting forth their renown and undoubted accomplishments, ready to affix to their doors and send to friends on the next day.

Not giving any portion of his mind to this desirable act of behavior, Ling flung himself upon the floor, and, finding sleep unattainable, plunged himself into profound meditation of a very uninviting order.

"Without doubt," he exclaimed, "evil can only arise from evil, and as this person has always endeavored to lead a life in which his devotions have been equally divided between the sacred Emperor, his illustrious parents, and his venerable ancestors, the fault cannot lie with him. Of the excellence of his parents he has full knowledge; regarding the Emperor, it might not be safe to conjecture. It is therefore probable that some of his ancestors were persons of abandoned manner and inelegant habits, to worship whom results in evil rather than good. Otherwise, how could it be that one, whose chief delight lies in the passive contemplation of the Four Books and the Five Classics, should be selected by destiny to fill a position calling for great personal courage and an aggressive nature? Assuredly it can only end in a mean and insignificant death, perhaps not even followed by burial.

In this manner of thought he fell asleep, and after certain very base and impressive dreams, from which good omens were altogether absent, he awoke, and rose to begin his preparations for leaving the city.

After two days spent chiefly in obtaining certain safeguards against treachery and the bullets of foemen, purchasing opium and other gifts with which to propitiate the soldiers under his charge, and in consulting well-disposed witches and readers of the future, he set out, and by travelling in extreme discomfort, reached Si-chow within five days. During his journey he learned that the entire Province was engaged in secret rebellion, several towns, indeed, having declared against the Imperial army

without reserve. Those persons to whom Ling spoke described the rebels, with respectful admiration, as fierce and unnaturally skilful in all methods of fighting, revengeful and merciless towards their enemies, very numerous and above the ordinary height of human beings, and endowed with qualities which made their skin capable of turning aside every kind of weapon. Furthermore, he was assured that a large band of the most abandoned and best trained was at that moment in the immediate neighborhood of Si-chow.

Ling was not destined long to remain in any doubt concerning the truth of these matters, for as he made his way through a dark cypress wood, a few li from the houses of Si-chow, the sounds of a confused outcry reached his ears, and on stepping aside to a hidden glade some distance from the path, he beheld a young and elegant maiden of incomparable beauty being carried away by two persons of most repulsive and undignified appearance, whose dress and manner clearly betrayed them to be rebels of the lowest and worst-paid type. At this sight Ling became possessed of feelings of a savage yet agreeable order, which until that time he had not conjectured to have any place within his mind, and without even pausing to consider whether the planets were in favorable positions for the enterprise to be undertaken at that time, he drew his sword, and ran forward with loud cries. Unsettled in their intentions at this unexpected action, the two persons turned and advanced upon Ling with whirling daggers, discussing among themselves whether it would be better to kill him at the first blow or to take him alive, and, when the day had become sufficiently cool for the full enjoyment of the spectacle, submit him to various objectionable tortures of so degraded a nature that they were rarely used in the army of the Emperor except upon the persons of barbarians. Observing that the maiden was not bound, Ling cried out to her to escape and seek protection within the town, adding, with a magnanimous absence of vanity:

"Should this person chance to fall, the repose which

the presence of so lovely and graceful a being would undoubtedly bring to his departing spirit would be out-balanced by the unendurable thought that his commonplace efforts had not been sufficient to save her from the two evilly-disposed individuals who are, as he perceives, at this moment, neglecting no means within their power to accomplish his destruction."

Accepting the discernment of these words, the maiden fled, first bestowing a look upon Ling which clearly indicated an honorable regard for himself, a high-minded desire that the affair might end profitably on his account, and an amiable hope that they should meet again, when these subjects could be expressed more clearly between them.

In the meantime Ling had become at a disadvantage, for the time occupied in speaking and in making the necessary number of bows in reply to her entrancing glance had given the other persons an opportunity of arranging their charms and sacred written sentences to greater advantage, and of occupying the most favorable ground for the encounter. Nevertheless, so great was the force of the new emotion which had entered into Ling's nature that, without waiting to consider the dangers or the best method of attack, he rushed upon them, waving his sword with such force that he appeared as though surrounded by a circle of very brilliant fire. In this way he reached the rebels, who both fell unexpectedly at one blow, they, indeed, being under the impression that the encounter had not commenced in reality, and that Ling was merely menacing them in order to inspire their minds with terror and raise his own spirits. However much he regretted this act of the incident which he had been compelled to take, Ling could not avoid being filled with intellectual joy at finding that his own charms and omens were more distinguished than those possessed by the rebels, none of whom, as he now plainly understood, he need fear.

Examining these things within his mind, and reflecting on the events of the past few days, by which he had been

thrown into a class of circumstances greatly differing from anything which he had ever sought, Ling continued his journey, and soon found himself before the southern gate of Si-chow. Entering the town, he at once formed the resolution of going before the Mandarin for Warlike Deeds and Arrangements, so that he might present, without delay, the papers and seals which he had brought with him from Canton.

"The noble Mandarin Li Keen?" replied the first person to whom Ling addressed himself. "It would indeed be a difficult and hazardous conjecture to make concerning his sacred person. By chance he is in the strongest and best-concealed cellar in Si-chow, unless the sumptuous attractions of the deepest dry well have induced him to take a short journey"; and, with a look of great unfriendliness at Ling's dress and weapons, this person passed on.

"Doubtless, he is fighting single-handed against the armed men by whom the place is surrounded," said another; "or perhaps he is constructing an underground road from the Yamên to Peking, so that we may all escape when the town is taken. All that can be said with certainty is that the Heaven-sent and valorous Mandarin has not been seen outside the walls of his well-fortified residence since the trouble arose; but, as you carry a sword of conspicuous excellence, you will doubtless be welcome."

Upon making a third attempt Ling was more successful, for he inquired of an aged woman, who had neither a reputation for keen and polished sentences to maintain, nor any interest in the acts of the Mandarin or of the rebels. From her he learned how to reach the Yamên, and accordingly turned his footsteps in that direction.

When at length he arrived at the gate, Ling desired his tablets to be carried to the Mandarin with many expressions of an impressive and engaging nature, nor did he neglect to reward the porter. It was therefore with the expression of a misunderstanding mind that he received a reply setting forth that Li Keen was unable to receive him. In great doubt he prevailed upon the porter, by means of a still larger reward, again to carry in his mes-

sage, and on this occasion an answer in this detail was placed before him.

"Li Keen," he was informed, "is indeed awaiting the arrival of one Ling, a noble and valiant Commander of Bowmen. He is given to understand, it is true, that a certain person claiming the same honored name is standing in somewhat undignified attitudes at the gate, but he is unable in any way to make these two individuals meet within his intellect. He would further remind all persons that the refined observances laid down by the wise and exalted Board of Rites and Ceremonies have a marked and irreproachable significance when the country is in a state of disorder, the town surrounded by rebels, and every breathing-space of time of more than ordinary value."

Overpowered with becoming shame at having been connected with so unseemly a breach of civility, for which his great haste had in reality been accountable, Ling hastened back into the town, and spent many hours in endeavoring to obtain a chair of the requisite color in which to visit the Mandarin. In this he was unsuccessful, until it was at length suggested to him that an ordinary chair, such as stood for hire in the streets of Si-chow, would be acceptable if covered with blue paper. Still in some doubt as to what the nature of his reception would be, Ling had no choice but to take this course, and accordingly he again reached the Yamên in such a manner, carried by two persons whom he had obtained for the purpose. While yet hardly at the residence a salute was suddenly fired; all the gates and doors were, without delay, thrown open with embarrassing and hospitable profusion, and the Mandarin himself passed out, and would have assisted Ling to step down from his chair had not that person, clearly perceiving that such a course would be too great an honor, evaded him by an unobtrusive display of versatile dexterity. So numerous and profound were the graceful remarks which each made concerning the habits and accomplishments of the other that more than the space of an hour was passed in traversing the

small enclosed ground which led up to the principal door of the Yamên. There an almost greater time was agreeably spent, both Ling and the Mandarin having determined that the other should enter first. Undoubtedly Ling, who was the more powerful of the two, would have conferred this courteous distinction upon Li Keen had not that person summoned to his side certain attendants who succeeded in frustrating Ling in his high-minded intentions, and in forcing him through the doorway in spite of his conscientious protests against the unsurmountable obligation under which the circumstance placed him.

Conversing in this intellectual and dignified manner, the strokes of the gong passed unheeded; tea had been brought into their presence many times, and night had fallen before the Mandarin allowed Ling to refer to the matter which had brought him to that place, and to present his written papers and seals.

"It is a valuable privilege to have so intelligent a person as the illustrious Ling occupying this position," remarked the Mandarin, as he returned the papers; "and not less so on account of the one who preceded him proving himself to be a person of feeble attainments and unendurable deficiency of resource."

"To one with the all-knowing Li Keen's mental acquisitions, such a person must indeed have become excessively offensive," replied Ling delicately; "for, as it is truly said, 'Although there exist many thousand subjects for elegant conversation, there are persons who cannot meet a cripple without talking about feet.'"

"He to whom I have referred was such a one," said Li Keen, appreciating with an expression of countenance the fitness of Ling's proverb. "He was totally inadequate to the requirements of his position; for he possessed no military knowledge, and was placed in command by those at Pekin as a result of his taking a high place at one of the examinations. But more than this, although his three years of service were almost completed, I was quite unsuccessful in convincing him that an unseemly degradation probably awaited him unless he could furnish me

with the means with which to propitiate the persons in authority at Peking. This he neglected to do with obstinate pertinacity, which compelled this person to inquire within himself whether one of so little discernment could be trusted with an important and arduous office. After much deliberation, this person came to the decision that the Commander in question was not a fit person, and he therefore reported him to the Imperial Board of Punishment at Peking as one subject to frequent and periodical eccentricities, and possessed of less than ordinary intellect. In consequence of this act of justice, the Commander was degraded to the rank of common bowman, and compelled to pay a heavy fine in addition."

"It was a just and enlightened conclusion of the affair," said Ling, in spite of a deep feeling of no enthusiasm, "and one which surprisingly bore out your own prophecy in the matter."

"It was an inspired warning to persons who should chance to be in a like position at any time," replied Li Keen. "So grasping and corrupt are those who control affairs at Peking that I have no doubt they would scarcely hesitate in debasing even one so immaculate as the exceptional Ling, and placing him in some laborious and ill-paid civil department should he not accede to their extortionate demands."

This suggestion did not carry with it the unpleasant emotions which the Mandarin anticipated it would. The fierce instincts which had been aroused within Ling by the incident in the cypress wood had died out, while his lamentable ignorance of military affairs was ever before his mind. These circumstances, together with his naturally gentle habits, made him regard such a degradation rather favorably than otherwise. He was meditating within himself whether he could arrange such a course without delay when the Mandarin continued:

"That, however, is a possibility which is remote to the extent of at least two or three years; do not, therefore, let so unpleasing a thought cast darkness upon our brows or remove the unparalleled splendor of so refined an oc-

casion. . . . Doubtless the accomplished Ling is master of the art of chess-play, for many of our most thoughtful philosophers have declared war to be nothing but such a game; let this slow-witted and cumbersome person have an opportunity, therefore, of polishing his declining faculties by a pleasant and dignified encounter."

IV

On the next day, having completed his business at the Yamên, Ling left the town, and without desiring any ceremony quietly betook himself to his new residence within the camp, which was situated among the millet fields some distance from Si-chow. As soon as his presence became known, all those who occupied positions of command, and whose years of service would shortly come to an end, hastened to present themselves before him, bringing with them offerings according to the rank they held, they themselves requiring a similar service from those beneath them. First among these, and next in command to Ling himself, was the Chief of Bowmen, a person whom Ling observed with extreme satisfaction to be very powerful in body and possessing a strong and dignified countenance which showed unquestionable resolution and shone with a tiger-like tenaciousness of purpose.

"Undoubtedly," thought Ling, as he observed this noble and prepossessing person, "here is one who will be able to assist me in whatever perplexities may arise. Never was there an individual who seemed more worthy to command and lead; assuredly to him the most intricate and prolonged military positions will be an enjoyment, the most crafty stratagems of the enemy as the full moon rising from behind a screen of rushes. Without making any pretence of knowledge, this person will explain the facts of the case to him and place himself without limit in his hands."

For this purpose he therefore detained the Chief of Bowmen when the others departed, and complimented him, with many expressive phrases, on the excellence of

his appearance, as the thought occurred to him that by this means, without disclosing the full measure of his ignorance, the person in question might be encouraged to speak unrestrainedly of the nature of his exploits, and perchance thereby explain the uses of the appliances employed and the meaning of the various words of order, in all of which details the Commander was as yet most disagreeably imperfect. In this, however, he was disappointed, for the Chief of Bowmen, greatly to Ling's surprise, received all his polished sentences with somewhat foolish smiles of great self-satisfaction, merely replying from time to time as he displayed his pigtail to greater advantage or rearranged his gold-embroidered cloak:

"This person must really pray you to desist; the honor is indeed too great."

Disappointed in his hope, and not desiring after this circumstance to expose his shortcomings to one who was obviously not of a highly-refined understanding, no matter how great his valor in war or his knowledge of military affairs might be, Ling endeavored to lead him to converse of the bowmen under his charge. In this matter he was more successful, for the Chief spoke at great length and with evilly-inspired contempt of their inelegance, their indiscriminating and excessive appetites, and the frequent use which they made of low words and gestures. Desiring to become acquainted rather with their methods of warfare than with their domestic details, Ling inquired of him what formation they relied upon when receiving the foemen.

"It is a matter which has not engaged the attention of this one," replied the Chief, with an excessive absence of interest. "There are so many affairs of intelligent dignity which cannot be put aside, and which occupy one from beginning to end. As an example, this person may describe how the accomplished Li-Lu, generally depicted as the Blue-eyed Dove of Virtuous and Serpent-like Attitudes, has been scattering glory upon the Sichow Hall of Celestial Harmony for many days past. It is an enlightened display which the high-souled Ling should cer-

tainly endeavor to dignify with his presence, especially at the portion where the amiable Li-Lu becomes revealed in the appearance of a Pekin sedan-chair bearer and describes the manner and likenesses of certain persons—chiefly high-priests of Buddha, excessively round-bodied merchants who feign to be detained within Pekin on affairs of commerce, maidens who attend at the tables of tea-houses, and those of both sexes who are within the city for the first time to behold its temples and open spaces—who are conveyed from place to place in the chair.”

“And the bowmen?” suggested Ling, with difficulty restraining an undignified emotion.

“Really, the elegant Ling will discover them to be persons of deficient manners, and quite unworthy of occupying his well-bred conversation,” replied the Chief. “As regards their methods—if the renowned Ling insists—they fight by means of their bows, with which they discharge arrows at the foemen, they themselves hiding behind trees and rocks. Should the enemy be undisconcerted by the cloud of arrows, and advance, the bowmen are instructed to make a last endeavor to frighten them back by uttering loud shouts and feigning the voices of savage beasts of the forest and deadly snakes.”

“And beyond that?” inquired Ling.

“Beyond that there are no instructions,” replied the Chief. “The bowmen would then naturally take to flight, or, if such a course became impossible, run to meet the enemy, protesting that they were convinced of the justice of their cause, and were determined to fight on their side in the future.”

“Would it not be of advantage to arm them with cutting weapons also?” inquired Ling; “so that when all their arrows were discharged they would still be able to take part in the fight, and not be lost to us?”

“They would not be lost to *us*, of course,” replied the Chief, “as we should still be with them. But such a course as the one you suggest could not fail to end in dismay. Being as well armed as ourselves, they would

then turn upon us, and, having destroyed us, proceed to establish leaders of their own."

As Ling and the Chief of Bowmen conversed in this enlightened manner, there arose a great outcry from among the tents, and presently there entered to them a spy who had discovered a strong force of the enemy not more than ten or twelve li away, who showed every indication of marching shortly in the direction of Si-chow. In numbers alone, he continued, they were greatly superior to the bowmen, and all were well armed. The spreading of this news threw the entire camp into great confusion, many protesting that the day was not a favorable one on which to fight, others crying out that it was their duty to fall back on Si-chow and protect the women and children. In the midst of this tumult the Chief of Bowmen returned to Ling, bearing in his hand a written paper which he regarded in uncontrollable anguish.

"Oh, illustrious Ling," he cried, restraining his grief with difficulty, and leaning for support upon the shoulders of two bowmen, "how prosperous indeed are you! What greater misfortune can engulf a person who is both an ambitious soldier and an affectionate son, than to lose such a chance of glory and promotion as only occurs once within the lifetime, and an affectionate and venerable father upon the same day? Behold this mandate to attend, without a moment's delay, at the funeral obsequies of one whom I left, only last week, in the fullness of health and power. The occasion being an unsuitable one, I will not call upon the courteous Ling to join with me in sorrow; but his own devout filial piety is so well known that I conscientiously rely upon an application for absence to be only a matter of official ceremony."

"The application will certainly be regarded as merely official ceremony," replied Ling, without resorting to any delicate pretence of meaning, "and the refined scruples of the person who is addressing me will be fully met by the official date of his venerated father's death being fixed for a more convenient season. In the meantime, the unobtrusive Chief of Bowmen may take the opportunity of re-

questing that the family tomb be kept unsealed until he is heard from again."

Ling turned away, as he finished this remark, with a dignified feeling of not inelegant resentment. In this way he chanced to observe a large body of soldiers which was leaving the camp accompanied by their lesser captains, all crowned with garlands of flowers and creeping plants. In spite of his very inadequate attainments regarding words of order, the Commander made it understood by means of an exceedingly short sentence that he was desirous of the men returning without delay.

"Doubtless the accomplished Commander, being but newly arrived in this neighborhood, is unacquainted with the significance of this display," said one of the lesser captains pleasantly. "Know, then, O wise and custom-respecting Ling, that on a similar day many years ago this valiant band of bowmen was engaged in a very honorable affair with certain of the enemy. Since then it has been the practice to commemorate the matter with music and other forms of delight within the large square at Si-chow."

"Such customs are excellent," said Ling affably. "On this occasion, however, the public square will be so insufferably thronged with the number of timorous and credulous villagers who have pressed into the town that insufficient justice would be paid to your entrancing display. In consequence of this, we will select for the purpose some convenient spot in the neighborhood. The proceedings will be commenced by a display of arrow-shooting at moving objects, followed by racing and dancing, in which this person will lead. I have spoken."

At these words many of the more courageous among the bowmen became destructively inspired, and raised shouts of defiance against the enemy, enumerating at great length the indignities which they would heap upon their prisoners. Cries of distinction were also given on behalf of Ling, even the most terrified exclaiming:

"The noble Commander Ling will lead us! He has promised, and assuredly he will not depart from his word. Shielded by his broad and sacred body, from which the

bullets glance aside harmlessly, we will advance upon the enemy in the stealthy manner affected by ducks when crossing the swamp. How altogether superior a person our Commander is when likened unto the leaders of the foe-men—they who go into battle completely surrounded by their archers!”

Upon this, perceiving the clear direction in which matters were turning, the Chief of Bowmen again approached Ling.

“Doubtless the highly-favored person whom I am now addressing has been endowed with exceptional authority direct from Peking,” he remarked, with insidious politeness. “Otherwise this narrow-minded individual would suggest that such a decision does not come within the judgment of a Commander.”

In his ignorance of military matters, it had not entered the mind of Ling that his authority did not give him the power to commence an attack without consulting other and more distinguished persons. At the suggestion, which he accepted as being composed of truth, he paused, the enlightened zeal with which he had been inspired dying out as he plainly understood the difficulties by which he was enclosed. There seemed a single expedient path for him in the matter; so directing a person of exceptional trustworthiness to prepare himself for a journey, he inscribed a communication to the Mandarin Li Keen, in which he narrated the facts and asked for speedy directions, and then despatched it with great urgency to Si-chow.

V

When these matters were arranged, Ling returned to his tent, a victim to feelings of a deep and confused doubt, for all courses seemed to be surrounded by extreme danger, with the strong probability of final disaster. While he was considering these things attentively, the spy who had brought word of the presence of the enemy again sought him. As he entered, Ling perceived that his

face was the color of a bleached linen garment, while there came with him the odor of sickness.

"There are certain matters which this person has not made known," he said, having first expressed a request that he might not be compelled to stand while he conversed. "The bowmen are as an inferior kind of jackal, and they who lead them are pigs, but this person has observed that the Heaven-sent Commander has internal organs like steel hardened in a white fire and polished by running water. For this reason he will narrate to him the things he has seen—things at which the lesser ones would undoubtedly perish in terror without offering to strike a blow."

"Speak," said Ling, "without fear and without concealment."

"In numbers the rebels are as three to one with the bowmen, and are, in addition, armed with matchlocks and other weapons; this much I have already told," said the spy. "Yesterday they entered the village of Ki without resistance, as the dwellers there were all peaceable persons, who gain a living from the fields, and who neither understood nor troubled about the matters between the rebels and the army. Relying on the promises made by the rebel chiefs, the villagers even welcomed them, as they had been assured that they came as buyers of their corn and rice. To-day not a house stands in the street of Ki, not a person lives. The men they slew quickly, or held for torture, as they desired at the moment; the boys they hung from the trees as marks for their arrows. Of the women and children this person, who has since been subject to several attacks of fainting and vomiting, desires not to speak. The wells of Ki are filled with the bodies of such as had the good fortune to be warned in time to slay themselves. The cattle drag themselves from place to place on their forefeet; the fish in the Heng-Kiang are dying, for they cannot live on water thickened into blood. All these things this person has seen."

When he had finished speaking, Ling remained in deep and funereal thought for some time. In spite of his mild

nature, the words which he had heard filled him with an inextinguishable desire to slay in hand-to-hand fighting. He regretted that he had placed the decision of the matter before Li Keen.

"If only this person had a mere handful of brave and expert warriors, he would not hesitate to fall upon those savage and barbarous characters, and either destroy them to the last one, or let his band suffer a like fate," he murmured to himself.

The return of the messenger found him engaged in reviewing the bowmen, and still in this mood, so that it was with a commendable feeling of satisfaction, no less than virtuous contempt, that he learned of the Mandarin's journey to Peking as soon as he understood that the rebels were certainly in the neighborhood.

"The wise and ornamental Li Keen is undoubtedly consistent in all matters," said Ling, with some refined bitterness. "The only information regarding his duties which this person obtained from him chanced to be a likening of way to skillful chess-play, and to this end the accomplished person in question has merely availed himself of a common expedient which places him at the remote side of the divine Emperor. Yet this act is not unwelcome, for the responsibility of deciding what course is to be adopted now clearly rests with this person. He is, as those who are standing by may perceive, of under the usual height, and of no particular mental or bodily attainments. But he has eaten the rice of the Emperor, and wears the Imperial sign embroidered upon his arm. Before him are encamped the enemies of his master and of his land, and in no way will he turn his back upon them. Against brave and skillful men, such as those whom this person commands, rebels of a low and degraded order are powerless, and are, moreover, openly forbidden to succeed by the Forty-second Mandate in the Sacred Book of Arguments. Should it have happened that into this assembly any person of a perfidious or uncourageous nature has gained entrance by guile, and has been undetected and driven forth by his outraged com-

panions (as would certainly occur if such a person were discovered), I, Ling, Commander of Bowmen, make an especial and well-considered request that he shall be struck by a molten thunderbolt if he turns to flight or holds thoughts of treachery."

Having thus addressed and encouraged the soldiers, Ling instructed them that each one should cut and fashion for himself a graceful but weighty club from among the branches of the trees around, and then return to the tents for the purpose of receiving food and rice spirit.

When noon was passed, allowing such time as would enable him to reach the camp of the enemy an hour before darkness, Ling arranged the bowmen in companies of convenient numbers, and commenced the march, sending forward spies, who were to work silently and bring back tidings from every point. In this way he penetrated to within a single li of the ruins of Ki, being informed by the spies that no outposts of the enemy were between him and that place. Here the first rest was made to enable the more accurate and bold spies to reach them with trustworthy information regarding the position and movements of the camp. With little delay there returned the one who had brought the earliest tidings, bruised and torn with his successful haste through the forest, but wearing a complacent and well-satisfied expression of countenance. Without hesitation or waiting to demand money before he would reveal his knowledge, he at once disclosed that the greater part of the enemy were rejoicing among the ruins of Ki, they having discovered there a quantity of opium and a variety of liquids, while only a small guard remained in the camp with their weapons ready. At these words Ling sprang from the ground in gladness, so great was his certainty of destroying the invaders utterly. It was, however, with less pleasurable emotions that he considered how he should effect the matter, for it was in no way advisable to divide his numbers into two bands. Without any feelings of unendurable conceit, he understood that no one but himself could hold the bowmen before an assault, however

weak. In a similar manner he determined that it would be more advisable to attack those in the village first. These he might have reasonable hopes of cutting down without warning the camp, or, in any event, before those from the camp arrived. To assail the camp first would, assuredly, by the firing, draw down upon them those from the village, and in whatever evil state these might arrive, they would, by their numbers, terrify the bowmen, who without doubt would have suffered some loss from the matchlocks.

Waiting for the last light of the day, Ling led on the men again, and sending forward some of the most reliable, surrounded the place of the village silently and without detection. In the open space, among broken casks and other inconsiderable matters, plainly shown by the large fires at which burned the last remains of the houses of Ki, many men moved or lay, some already dull or in heavy sleep. As the darkness dropped suddenly, the signal of a peacock's shriek, three times uttered, rang forth, and immediately a cloud of arrows, directed from all sides, poured in among those who feasted. Seeing their foemen defenceless before them, the archers neglected the orders they had received, and throwing away their bows, they rushed in with uplifted clubs, uttering loud shouts of triumph. The next moment a shot was fired in the wood, drums beat, and in an unbelievable short space of time a small but well-armed band of the enemy was among them. Now that all need of caution was at an end, Ling rushed forward with raised sword, calling to his men that victory was certainly theirs, and dealing discriminating and inspiring blows whenever he met a foeman. Three times he formed the bowmen into a figure emblematic of triumph, and led them against the line of matchlocks. Twice they fell back leaving mingled dead under the feet of the enemy. The third time they stood firm, and Ling threw himself against the waving rank in a noble and inspired endeavor to lead the way through. At that moment, when a very distinguished victory seemed within his hand, his elegant and well-con-

structed sword broke upon an iron shield, leaving him defenceless and surrounded by the enemy.

"Chief among the sublime virtues enjoined by the divine Confucius," began Ling, folding his arms and speaking in an unmoved voice, "is an intelligent submission——" but at that word he fell beneath a rain of heavy and unquestionably well-aimed blows.

VI

Between Si-chow and the village of Ki, in a house completely hidden from travellers by the tall and black trees which surrounded it, lived an aged and very wise person whose ways and manner of living had become so distasteful to his neighbors that they at length agreed to regard him as a powerful and ill-disposed magician. In this way it became a custom that all very unseemly deeds committed by those who, in the ordinary course, would not be guilty of such behavior, should be attributed to his influence, so that justice might be effected without persons of assured respectability being put to any inconvenience. Apart from the feeling which resulted from this just decision, the uncongenial person in question had become exceedingly unpopular on account of certain definite actions of his own, as that of causing the greater part of Si-chow to be burned down by secretly breathing upon the seven sacred water-jugs to which the town owed its prosperity and freedom from fire. Furthermore, although possessed of many taels, and able to afford such food as is to be found upon the tables of mandarins, he selected from choice dishes of an objectionable nature; he had been observed to eat eggs of unbecoming freshness, and the *Si-chow Official Printed Leaf* made it public that he had, on an excessively hot occasion, openly partaken of cow's milk. It is not a matter for wonder, therefore, that when unnaturally loud thunder was heard in the neighborhood of Si-chow, the more ignorant and credulous persons refused to continue in any description of work until certain ceremonies connected with rice

spirit, and the adherence to a reclining position for some hours, had been conscientiously observed as a protection against evil.

Not even the most venerable person in Si-chow could remember the time when the magician had not lived there, and as there existed no written record narrating the incident, it was with well-founded probability that he was said to be incapable of death. Contrary to the most general practice, although quite unmarried, he had adopted no son to found a line which would worship his memory in future years, but had instead brought up and caused to be educated in the most difficult varieties of embroidery a young girl, to whom he referred, for want of a more suitable description, as the daughter of his sister, although he would admit without hesitation, when closely questioned, that he had never possessed a sister, at the same time, however, alluding with some pride to many illustrious brothers, who had all obtained distinction in various employments.

Few persons of any high position penetrated into the house of the magician, and most of these retired with inelegant haste on perceiving that no domestic altar embellished the great hall. Indeed, not to make concealment of the fact, the magician was a person who had entirely neglected the higher virtues in an avaricious pursuit of wealth. In that way all his time and a very large number of taels had been expended, testing results by means of the four elements, and putting together things which had been inadequately arrived at by others. It was confidently asserted in Si-chow that he possessed every manner of printed leaf which had been composed in whatsoever language, and all the most precious charms, including many snake-skins of more than ordinary rarity, and the fang of a black wolf which had been stung by seven scorpions.

On the death of his father the magician had become possessed of great wealth, yet he contributed little to the funeral obsequies, nor did any suggestion of a durable and expensive nature for conveying his enlightened name

and virtues down to future times cause his face to be come gladdened. In order to preserve greater secrecy about the enchantments which he certainly performed, he employed only two persons within the house, one of whom was blind and the other deaf. In this ingenious manner he hoped to receive attention and yet be unobserved—the blind one being unable to see the nature of the incantations which he undertook, and the deaf one being unable to hear the words. In this, however, he was unsuccessful, as the two persons always contrived to be present together, and to explain to one another the nature of the various matters afterwards; but as they were of somewhat deficient understanding, the circumstance was unimportant.

It was with more uneasiness that the magician perceived one day that the maiden whom he had adopted was no longer a child. As he desired secrecy above all things until he should have completed the one important matter for which he had labored all his life, he decided with extreme unwillingness to put into operation a powerful charm towards her, which would have the effect of diminishing all her attributes until such time as he might release her again. Owing to his reluctance in the matter, however, the magic did not act fully, but only in such a way that her feet became naturally and without binding the most perfect and beautiful in the entire province of Hu Nan, so that ever afterwards she was called Pan Fei Mian, in delicate reference to that Empress whose feet were so symmetrical that a golden lily sprang up wherever she trod. Afterwards the magician made no further essay in the matter, chiefly because he was ever convinced that the accomplishment of his desire was within his grasp.

The rumors of armed men in the neighborhood of Si-chow threw the magician into an unendurable condition of despair. To lose all, as would most assuredly happen if he had to leave his arranged rooms and secret preparations and take to flight, was the more bitter because he felt surer than ever that success was even standing by his side. The very subtle liquid, which would

mix itself into the component parts of the living creature which drank it, and by an insidious and harmless process so work that, when the spirit departed, the flesh would become resolved into a figure of pure and solid gold of the finest quality, had engaged the refined minds of many of the most expert individuals of remote ages. With most of these inspired persons, however, the search had been undertaken in pure-minded benevolence, their chief aim being an honorable desire to discover a method by which one's ancestors might be permanently and effectively preserved in a fit and becoming manner to receive the worship and veneration of posterity. Yet, in spite of these amiable motives, and of the fact that the magician merely desired the possession of the secret to enable him to become excessively wealthy, the affair had been so arranged that it should come into his possession.

The matter which concerned Mian in the dark wood when she was only saved by the appearance of the person who is already known as Ling, entirely removed all pleasurable emotions from the magician's mind, and on many occasions he stated in a definite and systematic manner that he would shortly end an ignoble career which seemed to be destined only to gloom and disappointment. In this way an important misunderstanding arose, for when, two days later, during the sound of matchlock firing, the magician suddenly approached the presence of Mian with an uncontrollable haste and an entire absence of dignified demeanor, and fell dead at her feet without expressing himself on any subject whatever, she deliberately judged that in this manner he had carried his remark into effect; nor did the closed vessel of yellow liquid which he held in his hand seem to lead away from this decision. In reality, the magician had fallen owing to the heavy and conflicting emotions which success had engendered in an intellect already greatly weakened by his continual disregard of the higher virtues; for the bottle, indeed, contained the perfection of his entire life's study, the very expensive and three-times-purified gold liquid.

On perceiving the magician's condition, Mian at once called for the two attendants, and directed them to bring from an inner chamber all the most effective curing substances, whether in the form of powder or liquid. When these proved useless, no matter in what way they were applied, it became evident that there could be very little hope of restoring the magician, yet so courageous and grateful for the benefits which she had received from the person in question was Mian, that, in spite of the uninviting dangers of the enterprise, she determined to journey to Ki to invoke the assistance of a certain person who was known to be very successful in casting out malicious demons from the bodies of animals, and from casks and barrels, in which they frequently took refuge, to the great detriment of the quality of the liquid placed therein.

Not without many hidden fears Mian set out on her journey, greatly desiring not to be subjected to an encounter of a nature similar to the one already recorded; for in such a case she could hardly again hope for the inspired arrival of the one whom she now often thought of in secret as the well-formed and symmetrical young sword-user. Nevertheless, an event of equal significance was destined to prove the wisdom of the well-known remark concerning thoughts which are occupying one's intellect and the unexpected appearance of a very formidable evil spirit; for as she passed along, quickly yet with so dignified a motion that the moss received no impression beneath her footsteps, she became aware of a circumstance which caused her to stop by imparting to her mind two definite and greatly dissimilar emotions.

In a grassy and open space, on the verge of which she stood, lay the dead bodies of seventeen rebels, all disposed in very degraded attitudes, which contrasted strongly with the easy and unbecoming position adopted by the eighteenth—one who bore the unmistakable emblems of the Imperial army. In this brave and noble-looking personage Mian at once saw her preserver, and not doubting that an inopportune and treacherous death

had overtaken him, she ran forward and raised him in her arms, being well assured that however indiscreet such an action might appear in the case of an ordinary person, the most select maiden need not hesitate to perform so honorable a service in regard to one whose virtues had by that time undoubtedly placed him among the Three Thousand Pure Ones. Being disturbed in this providential manner, Ling opened his eyes, and faintly murmuring, "Oh, sainted and adorable Koon Yam, Goddess of Charity, intercede for me with Buddha!" he again lost possession of himself in the Middle Air. At this remark, which plainly proved Ling to be still alive, in spite of the fact that both the maiden and the person himself had thoughts to the contrary, Mian found herself surrounded by a variety of embarrassing circumstances, among which occurred a remembrance of the dead magician and the wise person at Ki whom she had set out to summon; but on considering the various natural and sublime laws which bore directly on the alternative before her, she discovered that her plain destiny was to endeavor to retain the breath in the person who was still alive rather than engage on the very unsatisfactory chance of attempting to call it back to the body from which it had so long been absent.

Having been inspired to this conclusion—which, when she later examined her mind, she found not to be repulsive to her own inner feelings—Mian returned to the house with dexterous speed, and calling together the two attendants, she endeavored by means of signs and drawings to explain to them what she desired to accomplish. Succeeding in this after some delay (for the persons in question, being very illiterate and narrow-minded, were unable at first to understand the existence of any recumbent male person other than the dead magician, whom they thereupon commenced to bury in the garden with expressions of great satisfaction at their own intelligence in comprehending Mian's meaning so readily), they all journeyed to the wood, and bearing Ling between them, they carried him to the house without further adventure.

VII

It was in the month of Hot Dragon Breaths, many weeks after the fight in the woods of Ki, that Ling again opened his eyes, to find himself in an unknown chamber, and to recognize in the one who visited him from time to time the incomparable maiden whose life he had saved in the cypress glade. Not a day had passed in the meanwhile on which Mian had neglected to offer sacrifices to Chang-Chung, the deity interested in drugs and healing substances, nor had she wavered in her firm resolve to bring Ling back to an ordinary existence even when the two attendants had protested that the person in question might without impropriety be sent to the Restoring Establishment of the Last Chance, so little did his hope of recovering rest upon the efforts of living beings.

After he had beheld Mian's face and understood the circumstances of his escape and recovery, Ling quickly shook off the evil vapors which had held him down so long, and presently he was able to walk slowly in the courtyard and in the shady paths of the wood beyond, leaning upon Mian for the support he still required.

"Oh, graceful one," he said on such an occasion, when little stood between him and the full powers which he had known before the battle, "there is a matter which has been pressing upon this person's mind for some time past. It is as dark after light to let the thoughts dwell around it, yet the thing itself must inevitably soon be regarded, for in this life one's actions are for ever regulated by conditions which are neither of one's own seeking nor within one's power of controlling."

At these words all brightness left Mian's manner, for she at once understood that Ling referred to his departure, of which she herself had lately come to think with unrestrained agitation.

"Oh, Ling," she exclaimed at length, "most expert of sword-users and most noble of men, surely never was a maiden more inelegantly placed than the one who is now

by your side. To you she owes her life, yet it is unseemly for her even to speak of the incident; to you she must look for protection, yet she cannot ask you to stay by her side. She is indeed alone. The magician is dead, Ki has fallen, Ling is going, and Mian is undoubtedly the most unhappy and solitary person between The Wall and the Nan Hai."

"Beloved Mian," exclaimed Ling, with inspiring vehemence, "and is not the utterly unworthy person before you indebted to you in a double measure that life is still within him? Is not the strength which now promotes him to such exceptional audacity as to aspire to your lovely hand, of your own creating? Only encourage Ling to entertain a well-founded hope that on his return he shall not find you partaking of the wedding feast of some wealthy and exceptionally round-bodied mandarin, and this person will accomplish the journey to Canton and back as it were in four strides."

"Oh, Ling, reflection of my ideal, holder of my soul, it would indeed be very disagreeable to my own feelings to make any reply save one," replied Mian, scarcely above a breath-voice. "Gratitude alone would direct me, were it not that the great love which fills me leaves no resting-place for any other emotion than itself. Go if you must, but return quickly, for your absence will weigh upon Mian like a dragon-dream."

"Violet light of my eyes," exclaimed Ling, "even in surroundings which with the exception of the matter before us are uninspiring in the extreme, your virtuous and retiring encouragement yet raises me to such a commanding eminence of demonstrative happiness that I fear I shall become intolerably self-opinionated towards my fellow men in consequence."

"Such a thing is impossible with my Ling," said Mian, with conviction. "But must you indeed journey to Canton?"

"Alas!" replied Ling, "gladly would this person decide against such a course did the matter rest with him, for as The Verses say, 'It is needless to apply the ram's head

to the unlocked door.' But Ki is demolished, the unassuming Mandarin Li Keen has retired to Peking, and of the fortunes of his bowmen this person is entirely ignorant."

"Such as survived returned to their homes," replied Mian, "and Si-chow is safe, for the scattered and broken rebels fled to the mountains again; so much this person has learned."

"In that case Si-chow is undoubtedly safe for the time, and can be left with prudence," said Ling. "It is an unfortunate circumstance that there is no mandarin of authority between here and Canton who can receive from this person a statement of past facts and give him instructions for the future."

"And what will be the nature of such instructions as will be given at Canton?" demanded Mian.

"By chance they may take the form of raising another company of bowmen," said Ling, with a sigh, "but, indeed, if this person can obtain any weight by means of his past service, they will tend towards a pleasant and unambitious civil appointment."

"Oh, my artless and noble-minded lover!" exclaimed Mian, "assuredly a veil has been before your eyes during your residence in Canton, and your naturally benevolent mind has turned all things into good, or you would not thus hopefully refer to your brilliant exploits in the past. Of what commercial benefit have they been to the sordid and miserly persons in authority, or in what way have they diverted a stream of taels into their insatiable pockets? Far greater is the chance that had Si-chow fallen many of its household goods would have found their way into the Yamêns of Canton. Assuredly in Li Keen you will have a friend who will make many delicate allusions to your ancestors when you meet, and yet one who will float many barbed whispers to follow you when you have passed; for you have planted shame before him in the eyes of those who would otherwise neither have eyes to see nor tongues to discuss the matter. It is for such a reason that this person mistrusts all things connected with

the journey, except your constancy, oh, my true and strong one."

"Such faithfulness would alone be sufficient to assure my safe return if the matter were properly represented to the supreme Deities," said Ling. "Let not the thin curtain of bitter water stand before your lustrous eyes any longer, then; the events which have followed one another in the past few days in a fashion that can only be likened to thunder following lightning are indeed sufficient to distress one with so refined and swan-like an organization, but they are now assuredly at an end."

"It is a hope of daily recurrence to this person," replied Mian, honorably endeavoring to restrain the emotion which openly exhibited itself in her eyes; "for what maiden would not rather make successful offerings to the Great Mother Kum-Fa than have the most imposing and verbose Triumphal Arch erected to commemorate an empty and unsatisfying constancy?"

In this amiable manner the matter was arranged between Ling and Mian, as they sat together in the magician's garden drinking peach-tea, which the two attendants—not without discriminating and significant expressions between themselves—brought to them from time to time. Here Ling made clear the whole manner of his life from his earliest memory to the time when he fell in dignified combat, nor did Mian withhold anything, explaining in particular such charms and spells of the magician as she had knowledge of, and in this graceful manner materially assisting her lover in the many disagreeable encounters and conflicts which he was shortly to experience.

It was with even more objectionable feelings than before that Ling now contemplated his journey to Canton, involving as it did the separation from one who had become as the shadow of his existence, and by whose side he had an undoubted claim to stand. Yet the necessity of the undertaking was no less than before, and the full possession of all his natural powers took away his only excuse for delaying in the matter. Without any pleasur-

able anticipations, therefore, he consulted the Sacred Flat and Round Sticks, and learning that the following day would be propitious for the journey, he arranged to set out in accordance with the omen.

When the final moment arrived at which the invisible threads of constantly passing emotions from one to the other must be broken, and when Mian perceived that her lover's horse was restrained at the door by the two attendants, who with unsuspected delicacy of feeling had taken this opportunity of withdrawing, the noble endurance which had hitherto upheld her melted away, and she became involved in very melancholy and obscure meditations until she observed that Ling also was quickly becoming affected in a similar gloom.

"Alas!" she exclaimed, "how unworthy a person I am thus to impose upon my lord a greater burden than that which already weighs him down! Rather ought this one to dwell upon the happiness of that day, when, after successfully evading or overthrowing the numerous bands of assassins which infest the road from here to Canton, and after escaping or recovering from the many deadly pestilences which invariably reduce that city at this season of the year, he shall triumphantly return. Assuredly there is a highly-polished surface united to every action in life, no matter how funereal it may at first appear. Indeed, there are many incidents compared with which death itself is welcome, and to this end Mian has reserved a farewell gift." Speaking in this manner the devoted and magnanimous maiden placed in Ling's hands the transparent vessel of liquid which the magician had grasped when he fell. "This person," she continued, speaking with difficulty, "places her lover's welfare incomparably before her own happiness, and should he ever find himself in a situation which is unendurably oppressive, and from which death is the only escape—such as inevitable tortures, the infliction of violent madness, or the subjection by magic to the will of some designing woman—she begs him to accept this means of freeing himself without regarding her anguish beyond express-

ing a clearly defined last wish that the two persons in question may be in the end happily reunited in another existence."

Assured by this last evidence of affection, Ling felt that he had no longer any reason for internal heaviness; his spirits were immeasurably raised by the fragrant incense of Mian's great devotion, and under its influence he was even able to breathe towards her a few words of similar comfort as he left the spot and began his journey.

VIII

On entering Canton, which he successfully accomplished without any unpleasant adventure, the marked absence of any dignified ostentation which had been accountable for many of Ling's misfortunes in the past, impelled him again to reside in the same insignificant apartment that he had occupied when he first visited the city as an unknown and unimportant candidate. In consequence of this, when Ling was communicating to any person the signs by which messengers might find him, he was compelled to add, "the neighborhood in which this contemptible person resides is that officially known as 'the mean quarter favored by the lower class of those who murder by treachery,' " and for this reason he was not always treated with the regard to which his attainments entitled him, or which he would have unquestionably received had he been able to describe himself as of "the partly-drained and uninfected area reserved to Mandarins and their friends."

It was with an ignoble feeling of mental distress that Ling exhibited himself at the Chief Office of Warlike Deeds and Arrangements on the following day; for the many disadvantageous incidents of his past life had repeated themselves before his eyes while he slept, and the not unhopeful emotions which he had felt when in the inspiring presence of Mian were now altogether absent. In spite of the fact that he reached the office during the early gong strokes of the morning, it was not until the with-

drawal of light that he reached any person who was in a position to speak with him on the matter, so numerous were the lesser ones through whose chambers he had to pass in the process. At length he found himself in the presence of an upper one who had the appearance of being acquainted with the circumstances, and who received him with dignity, though not with any embarrassing exhibition of respect or servility.

"The hero of the illustrious encounter beyond the walls of Si-chow," exclaimed that official, reading the words from the tablet of introduction which Ling had caused to be carried in to him, and at the same time examining the person in question closely. "Indeed, no such one is known to those within this office, unless the words chance to point to the courteous and unassuming Mandarin Li Keen, who, however, is at this moment recovering his health at Peking, as set forth in the amiable and impartial report which we have lately received from him."

At these words Ling plainly understood that there was little hope of the past events becoming profitable on his account.

"Did not the report to which allusion has been made bear reference to one Ling, Commander of Archers, who thrice led on the fighting men, and who was finally successful in causing the rebels to disperse towards the mountains?" he asked, in a voice which somewhat trembled.

"There is certainly reference to one of the name you mention," said the other; "but regarding the terms—perhaps this person would better protect his own estimable time by displaying the report within your sight."

With these words the upper one struck a gong several times, and after receiving from an inner chamber the parchment in question, he placed it before Ling, at the same time directing a lesser one to interpose between it and the one who read it a large sheet of transparent substance, so that destruction might not come to it, no matter in what way its contents affected the reader. Thereon Ling perceived the following facts, very skillfully in-

scribed with the evident purpose of inducing persons to believe, without question, that words so elegantly traced must of necessity be truthful also.

A Benevolent Example of the Intelligent Arrangement by which the most Worthy Persons outlive those who are Incapable.

"The circumstances connected with the office of the valuable and accomplished Mandarin of Warlike Deeds and Arrangements at Si-chow have, in recent times, been of anything but a prepossessing order. Owing to the very inadequate methods adopted by those who earn a livelihood by conveying necessities from the more enlightened portions of the Empire to that place, it so came about that for a period of five days the Yamên was entirely unsupplied with the fins of sharks or even with goat's eyes. To add to the polished Mandarin's distress of mind the barbarous and slow-witted rebels who infest those parts took this opportunity to destroy the town and most of its inhabitants, the matter coming about as follows:

"The feeble and commonplace person named Ling who commanded the bowmen had but recently been elevated to that distinguished position from a menial and degraded occupation (for which, indeed, his stunted intellect more aptly fitted him); and being in consequence very greatly puffed out in self-gratification, he became an easy prey to the cunning of the rebels, and allowed himself to be beguiled into a trap, paying for his contemptible stupidity with his life. The town of Si-chow was then attacked, and being in this manner left defenceless through the weakness—or treachery—of the person Ling, who had contrived to encompass the entire destruction of his unyielding company, it fell after a determined and irreproachable resistance; the Mandarin Li Keen being told, as covered with the blood of the foemen, he was dragged away from the thickest part of the unequal conflict by his followers, that he was the last person to leave the town. On his way to Peking with news of this valiant

defence, the Mandarin was joined by the Chief of Bowmen, who had understood and avoided the very obvious snare into which the stagnant-minded Commander had led his followers, in spite of disinterested advice to the contrary. For this intelligent perception, and for general nobility of conduct when in battle, the versatile Chief of Bowmen is by this written paper strongly recommended to the dignity of receiving the small metal Embellishment of Valor.

"It has been suggested to the Mandarin Li Keen that the bestowal of the Crystal Button would only be a fit and graceful reward for his indefatigable efforts to uphold the dignity of the sublime Emperor; but to all such persons the Mandarin has sternly replied that such a proposal would more fitly originate from the renowned and valuable Office of Warlike Deeds and Arrangements, he well knowing that the wise and engaging persons who conduct that indispensable and well-regulated department are gracefully voracious in their efforts to reward merit, even when it is displayed, as in the case in question, by one who from his position will inevitably soon be urgently petitioning in a like manner on their behalf."

When Ling had finished reading this elegantly arranged but exceedingly misleading parchment, he looked up with eyes from which he vainly endeavored to restrain the signs of undignified emotion, and said to the upper one:

"It is difficult employment for a person to refrain from unendurable thoughts when his unassuming and really conscientious efforts are represented in a spirit of no satisfaction, yet in this matter the very expert Li Keen appears to have gone beyond himself; the Commander Ling, who is herein represented as being slain by the enemy, is, indeed, the person who is standing before you, and all the other statements are in a like exactness."

"The short-sighted individual who for some hidden desire of his own is endeavoring to present himself as the

corrupt and degraded creature Ling, has overlooked one important circumstance," said the upper one, smiling in a very intolerable manner, at the same time causing his head to move slightly from side to side in a fashion of one who rebukes with assumed geniality; and, turning over the written paper, he displayed upon the under side the Imperial vermilion Sign. "Perhaps," he continued, "the omniscient person will still continue in his remarks, even with the evidence of the Emperor's unerring pencil to refute him."

At these words and the undoubted testimony of the red mark, which plainly declared the whole of the written matter to be composed of truth, no matter what might afterwards transpire, Ling understood that very little prosperity remained with him.

"But the town of Si-chow," he suggested, after examining his mind; "if any person in authority visited the place, he would inevitably find it standing and its inhabitants in agreeable health."

"The persistent person who is so assiduously occupying my intellectual moments with empty words seems to be unaccountably deficient in his knowledge of the customs of refined society and of the meaning of the Imperial Signet," said the other, with an entire absence of benevolent consideration. "That Si-chow has fallen and that Ling is dead are two utterly uncontroversial matters truthfully recorded. If a person visited Si-chow, he might find it rebuilt or even inhabited by those from the neighboring villages or by evil spirits taking the forms of the ones who formerly lived there; as in a like manner, Ling might be restored to existence by magic, or his body might be found and possessed by an outcast demon who desired to revisit the earth for a period. Such circumstances do not in any way disturb the announcement that Si-chow has without question fallen, and that Ling has officially ceased to live, of which events notifications have been sent to all who are concerned in the matter."

As the upper one ceased speaking, four strokes sounded

upon the gong, and Ling immediately found himself carried into the street by the current of both lesser and upper ones who poured forth at the signal.

The termination of this conversation left Ling in a more unenviable state of dejection than any of the many preceding misfortunes had done, for with enlarged inducements to possess himself of a competent appointment he seemed to be even further removed from this attainment than he had been at any time in his life. He might, indeed, present himself again for the public examinations; but in order to do even that it would be necessary for him to wait almost a year, nor could he assure himself that his efforts would again be likely to result in an equal success. Doubts also arose within his mind of the course which he should follow in such a case; whether to adopt a new name, involving as it would certain humiliation and perhaps disgrace if detection overtook his footsteps, or still to possess the title of one who was in a measure dead, and hazard the likelihood of having any prosperity which he might obtain reduced to nothing if the fact should become public.

As Ling reflected upon such details he found himself without intention before the house of a wise person who had become very wealthy by advising others on all matters, but chiefly on those connected with strange occurrences and such events as could not be settled definitely either one way or the other until a remote period had been reached. Becoming assailed by a curious desire to know what manner of evils particularly attached themselves to such as were officially dead but who nevertheless had an ordinary existence, Ling placed himself before this person, and after arranging the manner of reward, related to him so many of the circumstances as were necessary to enable a full understanding to be reached, but at the same time in no way betraying his own interest in the matter.

"Such inflictions are to no degree frequent," said the wise person after he had consulted a polished sphere of the finest red jade for some time; "and this is in a mea-

sure to be regretted, as the hair of these persons—provided they die a violent death, which is invariably the case—constitutes a certain protection against being struck by falling stars, or becoming involved in unsuccessful law cases. The persons in question can be recognized with certainty in the public ways by the unnatural pallor of their faces and by the general repulsiveness of their appearance, but as they soon take refuge in suicide, unless they have the fortune to be removed previously by accident, it is an infrequent matter that one is gratified by the sight. During their existence they are subject to many disorders from which the generality of human beings are benevolently preserved; they possess no rights of any kind, and if by any chance they are detected in an act of a seemingly depraved nature, they are liable to judgment at the hands of the passers-by without any form whatever, and to punishment of a more severe order than that administered to commonplace criminals. There are many other disadvantages affecting such persons when they reach the Middle Air, of which the chief——”

“This person is immeasurably indebted for such a clear explanation of the position,” interrupted Ling, who had a feeling of not desiring to penetrate further into the detail; “but as he perceives a line of anxious ones eagerly waiting at the door to obtain advice and consolation from so expert and amiable a wizard, he will not make himself uncongenial any longer with his very feeble topics of conversation.”

By this time Ling plainly comprehended that he had been marked out from the beginning—perhaps for all the knowledge which he had to the opposite effect, from a period in the life of a far-removed ancestor—to be an object of marked derision and the victim of all manner of malevolent demons in whatever actions he undertook. In this condition of understanding his mind turned gratefully to the parting gift of Mian, whom he had now no hope of possessing; for the intolerable thought of uniting her to so objectionable a being as himself would have been dismissed as utterly inelegant even had he been in

a manner of living to provide for her adequately, which itself seemed clearly impossible. Disregarding all similar emotions, therefore, he walked without pausing to his abode, and stretching his body upon the rushes, drank the entire liquid unhesitatingly, and prepared to pass beyond with a tranquil mind entirely given up to thoughts and images of Mian.

IX

Upon a certain occasion, the particulars of which have already been recorded, Ling had judged himself to have passed into the form of a spirit on beholding the ethereal form of Mian bending over him. After swallowing the entire liquid, which had cost the dead magician so much to distil and make perfect, it was with a well-assured determination of never again awakening that he lost the outward senses and floated in the Middle Air, so that when his eyes next opened upon what seemed to be the bare walls of his own chamber, his first thought was a natural conviction that the matter had been so arranged either out of a charitable desire that he should not be overcome by a too sudden transition to unparalleled splendor, or that such a reception was the outcome of some dignified jest on the part of certain lesser and more cheerful spirits. After waiting in one position for several hours, however, and receiving no summons or manifestation of a celestial nature, he began to doubt the qualities of the liquid, and applying certain tests, he soon ascertained that he was still in the lower world and unharmed. Nevertheless, this circumstance did not tend in any way to depress his mind, for, doubtless owing to some hidden virtue in the fluid, he felt an enjoyable emotion that he still lived; all his attributes appeared to be purified, and he experienced an inspired certainty of feeling that an illustrious and highly-remunerative future lay before one who still had an ordinary existence after being both officially killed and self-poisoned.

In this intelligent disposition thoughts of Mian re-

curred to him with unreprieved persistence, and in order to convey to her an account of the various matters which had engaged him since his arrival at the city, and a well-considered declaration of the unchanged state of his own feelings towards her, he composed and despatched with impetuous haste the following delicate verses:—

CONSTANCY

About the walls and gates of Canton
Are many pleasing and entertaining maidens;
Indeed, in the eyes of their friends and of the passers-by
Some of them are exceptionally adorable.
The person who is inscribing these lines, however,
Sees before him, as it were, an assemblage of deformed
and unprepossessing hags,
Venerable in age and inconsiderable in appearance;
For the dignified and majestic image of Mian is ever before
him,
Making all others very inferior.

Within the houses and streets of Canton
Hang many very bright lanterns.
The ordinary person who has occasion to walk by night
Professes to find them highly lustrous.
But there is one who thinks contrary facts,
And when he goes forth he carries two long curved poles
To prevent him from stumbling among the dark and
hidden places;
For he has gazed into the brilliant and pellucid orbs of
Mian,
And all other lights are dull and practically opaque.

In various parts of the literary quarter of Canton
Reside such as spend their time in inward contemplation.
In spite of their generally uninviting exteriors
Their reflections are often of a very profound order.
Yet the unpopular and persistently-abused Ling
Would unhesitatingly prefer his own thoughts to theirs,
For what makes this person's thoughts far more pleasing
Is that they are invariably connected with the virtuous and
ornamental Mian.

Becoming very amiably disposed after this agreeable occupation, Ling surveyed himself at the disc of polished metal, and observed with surprise and shame the rough and uninviting condition of his person. He had, indeed, although it was not until some time later that he became aware of the circumstance, slept for five days without interruption, and it need not therefore be a matter of wonder or of reproach to him that his smooth surfaces had become covered with short hair. Reviling himself bitterly for the appearance which he conceived he must have exhibited when he conducted his business, and to which he now in part attributed his ill-success, Ling went forth without delay, and quickly discovering one of those who remove hair publicly for a very small sum, he placed himself in the chair, and directed that his face, arms, and legs should be denuded after the manner affected by the ones who make a practice of observing the most recent customs.

"Did the illustrious individual who is now conferring distinction on this really worn-out chair by occupying it express himself in favor of having the face entirely denuded?" demanded the one who conducted the operation; for these persons have become famous for their elegant and persistent ability to discourse, and frequently assume ignorance in order that they themselves may make reply, and not for the purpose of gaining knowledge. "Now, in the objectionable opinion of this unintelligent person, who has a presumptuous habit of offering his very undesirable advice, a slight covering on the upper lip, delicately arranged and somewhat fiercely pointed at the extremities, would bestow an appearance of—how shall this illiterate person explain himself?—dignity?—matured reflection?—doubtless the accomplished nobleman before me will understand what is intended with a more knife-like accuracy than this person can describe it—but confer that highly desirable effect upon the face of which at present it is entirely destitute. . . . 'Entirely denuded?' Then without fail it shall certainly be so, O incomparable

personage. . . . Does the versatile mandarin now present profess any concern as to the condition of the rice plants? . . . Indeed, the remark is an inspired one; the subject is totally devoid of interest to a person of intelligence. . . . A remarkable and gravity-removing event transpired within the notice of this unassuming person recently. A discriminating individual had purchased from him a portion of his justly renowned Thrice-extracted Essence of Celestial Herb Oil—a preparation which in this experienced person's opinion, indeed, would greatly relieve the undoubted afflictions from which the one before him is evidently suffering—when after once anointing himself——”

A lengthy period containing no words caused Ling, who had in the meantime closed his eyes and lost Canton and all else in delicate thoughts of Mian, to look up. That which met his attention on doing so filled him with an intelligent wonder, for the person before him held in his hand what had the appearance of a tuft of bright yellow hair, which shone in the light of the sun with a most engaging splendor, but which he nevertheless regarded with a most undignified expression of confusion and awe.

“Illustrious demon,” he cried at length, kow-towing very respectfully, “have the extreme amiableness to be of a benevolent disposition, and do not take an unworthy and entirely unremunerative revenge upon this very unimportant person for failing to detect and honor you from the beginning.”

“Such words indicate nothing beyond an excess of hemp spirit,” answered Ling, with signs of displeasure. “To gain my explicit esteem, make me smooth without delay, and do not exhibit before me the lock of hair which, from its color and appearance, has evidently adorned the head of one of those maidens whose duty it is to quench the thirst of travellers in the long narrow rooms of this city.”

“Majestic and anonymous spirit,” said the other, with

extreme reverence, and an entire absence of the appearance of one who has gazed into many vessels, "if such be your plainly-expressed desire, this superficial person will at once proceed to make smooth your peach-like skin, and with a carefulness inspired by the certainty that the most unimportant wound would give forth liquid fire, in which he would undoubtedly perish. Nevertheless, he desires to make it evident that this hair is from the head of no maiden, being, indeed, the uneven termination of your own sacred pigtail, which this excessively self-confident slave took the inexcusable liberty of removing, and which changed in this manner within his hand in order to administer a fit reproof for his intolerable presumption."

Impressed by the mien and unquestionable earnestness of the remover of hair, Ling took the matter which had occasioned these various emotions in his hand and examined it. His amazement was still greater when he perceived that—in spite of the fact that it presented every appearance of having been cut from his own person—none of the qualities of hair remained in it; it was hard and wire-like, possessing, indeed, both the nature and the appearance of a metal.

As he gazed fixedly and with astonishment, there came back into the remembrance of Ling certain obscure and little-understood facts connected with the limitless wealth possessed by the Yellow Emperor—of which the great gold life-like image in the Temple of Internal Symmetry at Peking alone bears witness now—and of his lost secret. Many very forcible prophecies and omens in his own earlier life, of which the rendering and accomplishment had hitherto seemed to be dark and incomplete, passed before him, and various matters which Mian had related to him concerning the habits and speech of the magician took definite form within his mind. Deeply impressed by the exact manner in which all these circumstances fitted together, one into another, Ling rewarded the person before him greatly beyond his expectation, and hurried without any delay to his own chamber.

X

For many hours Ling remained in his room, examining in his mind all passages, either in his own life or in the lives of others, which might by any chance have influence on the event before him. In this thorough way he became assured that the competition and its results, his journey to Si-chow with the encounter in the cypress wood, the flight of the incapable and treacherous Mandarin, and the battle at Ki, were all, down to the matter of the smallest detail, parts of a symmetrical and complete scheme, tending to his present condition, in which he had become involved. Cheered and upheld by this proof of the fact that very able deities were at work on his behalf, he turned his intellect from the entrancing subject to a contemplation of the manner in which his condition would enable him to frustrate the uninventive villainies of the obstinate person Li Keen and to provide a suitable house and mode of living to which he would be justified in introducing Mian, after adequate marriage ceremonies had been observed between them. In this endeavor he was less successful than he had imagined would be the case, for when he had first fully understood that his body was of such a substance that nothing was wanting to transmute it into fine gold but the absence of the living spirit, he had naturally, and without deeply examining the detail, assumed that so much gold might be considered as in his possession. Now, however, a very definite thought arose within him that his own wishes and interests would have been better secured had the benevolent spirits who undertook the matter placed the secret within his knowledge in such a way as to enable him to administer the fluid to some very heavy and inexpensive animal, so that the issue which seemed inevitable before the enjoyment of the riches could be entered upon should not have touched his own comfort so closely. To a person of Ling's refined imagination it could not fail to be a subject of internal reproach that while he would become the

most precious dead body in the world, his value in life might not be very honorably placed even by the most complimentary one who should require his services. Then came the thought, which, however degraded, he found himself unable to put quite beyond him, that if in the meantime he were able to gain a sufficiency for Mian and himself, even her pure and delicate love might not be able to bear so offensive a test as that of seeing him grow old and remain intolerably healthy—perhaps with advancing years actually becoming lighter day by day, and thereby lessening in value before her eyes—when the natural infirmities of age and the presence of an ever-increasing posterity would make even a moderate amount of tael of inestimable value.

No doubt remained in Ling's mind that the process of frequently making smooth his surfaces would yield an amount of gold enough to suffice for his own needs, but a brief consideration of the matter convinced him that this source would be inadequate to maintain an entire household even if he continually denuded himself to an almost ignominious extent. As he fully weighed these varying chances the certainty became more clear to him with every thought that for the virtuous enjoyment of Mian's society one great sacrifice was required of him. This act, it seemed to be intimated, would without delay provide for an affluent and lengthy future, and at the same time would influence all the spirits—even those who had been hitherto evilly-disposed towards him—in such a manner that his enemies would be removed from his path by a process which would expose them to public ridicule, and he would be assured in founding an illustrious and enduring line. To accomplish this successfully necessitated the loss of at least the greater part of one entire member, and for some time the disadvantages of going through an existence with only a single leg or arm seemed more than a sufficient price to pay even for the definite advantages which would be made over to him in return. This unworthy thought, however, could not long withstand the memory of Mian's steadfast and high-minded affection,

and the certainty of her enlightened gladness at his return even in the imperfect condition which he anticipated. Nor was there absent from his mind a dimly-understood hope that the matter did not finally rest with him, but that everything which he might be inspired to do was in reality only a portion of the complete and arranged system into which he had been drawn, and in which his part had been assigned to him from the beginning without power for him to deviate, no matter how much to the contrary the thing should appear.

As no advantage would be gained by making any delay, Ling at once sought the most favorable means of putting his resolution into practice, and after many skilful and insidious inquiries he learnt of an accomplished person who made a consistent habit of cutting off limbs which had become troublesome to their possessors either through accident or disease. Furthermore, he was said to be of a sincere and charitable disposition, and many persons declared that on no occasion had he been known to make use of the helpless condition of those who visited him in order to extort money from them.

Coming to the ill-considered conclusion that he would be able to conceal within his own breast the true reason for the operation, Ling placed himself before the person in question, and exhibited the matter to him so that it would appear as though his desires were promoted by the presence of a small but persistent sprite which had taken its abode within his left thigh, and there resisted every effort of the most experienced wise persons to induce it to come forth again. Satisfied with this explanation of the necessity of the deed, the one who undertook the matter proceeded, with Ling's assistance, to sharpen his cutting instruments and to heat the hardening irons; but no sooner had he made a shallow mark to indicate the lines which his knife should take, than his subtle observation at once showed him that the facts had been represented to him in a wrong sense, and that his visitor, indeed, was composed of no common substance. Being of a gentle and forbearing disposition, he did not manifest

any indication of rage at the discovery, but amiably and unassumingly pointed out that such a course was not respectful towards himself, and that, moreover, Ling might incur certain well-defined and highly undesirable maladies as a punishment for the deception.

Overcome with remorse at deceiving so courteous and noble-minded a person, Ling fully explained the circumstances to him, not even concealing from him certain facts which related to the actions of remote ancestors, but which, nevertheless, appeared to have influenced the succession of events. When he had made an end of the narrative, the other said:

"Behold now, it is truly remarked that every mandarin has three hands and every soldier a like number of feet, yet it is a saying which is rather to be regarded as manifesting the deep wisdom and discrimination of the speaker than as an actual fact which can be taken advantage of when one is so minded—least of all by so valiant a Commander as the one before me, who has clearly proved that in time of battle he has exactly reversed the position."

"The loss would undoubtedly be of considerable inconvenience occasionally," admitted Ling, "yet none the less the sage remark of Huai Mei-shan, 'When actually in the embrace of a voracious and powerful wild animal the desirability of leaving a limb is not a matter to be subjected to lengthy consideration,' is undoubtedly a valuable guide for general conduct. This person has endured many misfortunes and suffered many injustices; he has known the wolf-gnawings of great hopes, which have withered and daily grown less when the difficulties of maintaining an honorable and illustrious career have unfolded themselves within his sight. Before him still lie the attractions of a moderate competency to be shared with the one whose absence would make even the Upper Region unendurable, and after having this entrancing future once shattered by the tiger-like cupidity of a depraved and incapable mandarin, he is determined to welcome even the sacrifice which you condemn rather than let the opportunity vanish through indecision."

"It is not an unworthy or abandoned decision," said the one whose aid Ling had invoked, "nor a matter from which this person would refrain taking part, were there no other and more agreeable means by which the same results may be attained. A circumstance has occurred within this superficial person's mind, however. A brother of the one who is addressing you is by profession one of those who purchase large undertakings for which they have not the money to pay, and who thereupon by various expedients gain the ear of the thrifty, enticing them by fair offers in return to entrust their savings for the purpose of paying off the debt. These persons are ever on the watch for transactions by which they inevitably prosper without incurring any obligation, and doubtless my brother will be able to gather together a community which would in some way endow you with a just share of the value of your highly-remunerative body without submitting you to the insufferable annoyance of losing a great part of it prematurely."

Without clearly understanding how so inviting an arrangement could be effected, the manner of speaking was exceedingly alluring to Ling's mind, perplexed as he had become through weighing and considering the various attitudes of the entire matter. To receive a certain and sufficient sum of money without his person being in any way mutilated would be a satisfactory, but as far as he had been able to observe an unapproachable, solution of the difficulty. In the mind of the amiable person with whom he was conversing, however, the accomplishment did not appear to be surrounded by unnatural obstacles, so that Ling was content to leave the entire design in his hands, after stating that he would again present himself on a certain occasion when it was asserted that the brother in question would be present.

So internally lightened did Ling feel after this inspiring conversation, and so confident of a speedy success had the obliging person's words made him become, that for the first time since his return to Canton he was able to take an intellectual interest in the pleasures of the city.

Becoming aware that the celebrated play entitled "The Precious Lamp of Spotted Butterfly Temple" was in process of being shown at the Tea Garden of Rainbow Lights and Voices, he purchased an entrance, and after passing several hours in this conscientious enjoyment, returned to his chamber, and passed a night untroubled by any manifestations of an unpleasant nature.

XI

Chang-ch'un, the brother of the one to whom Ling had applied in his determination, was confidently stated to be one of the richest persons in Canton. So great were the number of enterprises in which he had possessions, that he himself was unable to keep an account of them, and it was asserted that upon occasions he had run through the streets, crying aloud that such an undertaking had been the subject of most inferior and uninviting dreams and omens (a custom observed by those who wish a venture ill), whereas upon returning and consulting his written parchments, it became plain to him that he had indulged in a very objectionable exhibition, as he himself was the person most interested in the success of the matter. Far from discouraging him, however, such incidents tended to his advantage, as he could consistently point to them in proof of his unquestionable commercial honorableness, and in this way many persons of all classes, not only in Canton, or in the Province, but all over the Empire, would unhesitatingly entrust money to be placed in undertakings which he had purchased and was willing to describe as "of much good." A certain class of printed leaves—those in which Chang-ch'un did not insert purchased mentions of his forthcoming ventures or verses recording his virtues (in return for buying many examples of the printed leaf containing them)—took frequent occasion of reminding persons that Chang-ch'un owed the beginning of his prosperity to finding a written parchment connected with a mandarin of exalted rank and a low caste attendant at the Ti-i tea-house among the paper

heaps, which it was at that time his occupation to assort into various departments according to their quality and commercial value. Such printed leaves freely and unhesitatingly predicted that the day on which he would publicly lose face was incomparably nearer than that on which the Imperial army would receive its behind pay, and in a quaint and gravity-removing manner advised him to protect himself against an obscure but inevitable poverty by learning the accomplishment of chair-carrying—an occupation for which his talents and achievements fitted him in a high degree, they remarked.

In spite of these evilly-intentioned remarks, and of illustrations representing him as being bowstrung for treacherous killing, being seized in the action of secretly conveying money from passers-by to himself and other similar annoying references to his private life, Chang-ch'un did not fail to prosper, and his undertakings succeeded to such an extent that without inquiry into the detail many persons were content to describe as "gold-lined" anything to which he affixed his sign, and to hazard their savings for staking upon the ventures. In all other departments of life Chang was equally successful; his chief wife was the daughter of one who stood high in the Emperor's favor; his repast table was never unsupplied with sea-snails, rats' tongues, or delicacies of an equally expensive nature, and it was confidently maintained that there was no official in Canton, not even putting aside the Taotai, who dare neglect to fondle Chang's hand if he publicly offered it to him for that purpose.

It was at the most illustrious point of his existence—at the time, indeed, when after purchasing without money the renowned and proficient charm-water Ho-Ko for a million taels, he had sold it again for ten—that Chang was informed by his brother of the circumstances connected with Ling. After becoming specially assured that the matter was indeed such as it was represented to be Chang at once discerned that the venture was of too certain and profitable a nature to be put before those who entrusted their money to him in ordinary and doubtful

cases. He accordingly called together certain persons whom he was desirous of obliging, and informing them privately and apart from business terms that the opportunity was one of exceptional attractiveness, he placed the facts before them. After displaying a number of diagrams bearing upon the matter, he proposed that they should form an enterprise to be called "The Ling (After Death) Without Much Risk Assembly." The manner of conducting this undertaking he explained to be as follows: The body of Ling, whenever the spirit left it, should become as theirs to be used for profit. For this benefit they would pay Ling fifty thousand taels when the understanding was definitely arrived at, five thousand taels each year until the matter ended, and when that period arrived another fifty thousand taels to persons depending upon him during his life. Having stated the figure business, Chang-ch'un put down his written papers, and causing his face to assume the look of irrepressible but dignified satisfaction which it was his custom to wear on most occasions, and especially when he had what appeared at first sight to be evil news to communicate to public assemblages of those who had entrusted money to his ventures, he proceeded to disclose the advantages of such a system. At the extreme, he said, the amount which they would be required to pay would be two hundred and fifty thousand taels; but this was in reality a very misleading view of the circumstance, as he would endeavor to show them. For one detail, he had allotted to Ling thirty years of existence, which was the extreme amount according to the calculations of those skilled in such prophecies; but, as they were all undoubtedly aware, persons of very expert intellects were known to enjoy a much shorter period of life than the gross and ordinary, and as Ling was clearly one of the former, by the fact of his contriving so ingenious a method of enriching himself, they might with reasonable foresight rely upon his departing when half the period had been attained; in that way seventy-five thousand taels would be restored to them, for every year represented a saving of five thousand. Another agreeable contemplation

was that of the last sum, for by such a time they would have arrived at the most pleasurable part of the enterprise, a million taels' worth of pure gold would be displayed before them, and the question of the final fifty thousand could be disposed of by cutting off an arm or half a leg. Whether they adopted that course, or decided to increase their fortunes by exposing so exceptional and symmetrical a wonder to the public gaze in all the principal cities of the Empire, was a circumstance which would have to be examined within their minds when the time approached. In such a way the detail of purchase stood revealed as only fifty thousand taels in reality, a sum so despicably insignificant that he had internal pains at mentioning it to so wealthy a group of mandarins, and he had not yet made clear to them that each year they would receive gold to the amount of almost a thousand taels. This would be the result of Ling making smooth his surfaces, and it would enable them to know that the person in question actually existed, and to keep the circumstances before their intellects.

When Chang-ch'un had made the various facts clear to this extent, those who were assembled expressed their feelings as favorably turned towards the project, provided the tests to which Ling was to be put should prove encouraging, and a secure and intelligent understanding of things to be done and not to be done could be arrived at between them. To this end Ling was brought into the chamber, and fixing his thoughts steadfastly upon Mian, he permitted portions to be cut from various parts of his body without betraying any signs of ignoble agitation. No sooner had the pieces been separated and the virtue of Ling's existence passed from them than they changed color and hardened, nor could the most delicate and searching trials to which they were exposed by a skillful worker in metals, who was obtained for the purpose, disclose any particular, however minute, in which they differed from the finest gold. The hair, the nails, and the teeth were similarly affected, and even Ling's blood dried into a fine gold powder. This detail of the trial being suc-

cessfully completed, Ling subjected himself to intricate questionings on all matters connected with his religion and manner of conducting himself, both in public and privately, the history and behavior of his ancestors, the various omens and remarkable sayings which had reference to his life and destiny, and the intentions which he then possessed regarding his future movements and habit of living. All the wise sayings and written and printed leaves which made any allusion to the existence and possibility of discovery of the wonderful gold fluid were closely examined, and found to be in agreement, whereupon those present made no further delay in admitting that the facts were indeed as they had been described, and indulged in a dignified stroking of each other's faces as an expression of pleasure and in proof of their satisfaction at taking part in so entrancing and remunerative an affair. At Chang's command many rare and expensive wines were then brought in, and partaken of without restraint by all persons, the repast being lightened by numerous well-considered and gravity-removing jests having reference to Ling and the unusual composition of his person. So amiably were the hours occupied that it was past the time of no light when Chang rose and read at full length the statement of things to be done and things not to be done, which was to be sealed by Ling for his part and the other persons who were present for theirs. It so happened, however, that at that period Ling's mind was filled with brilliant and versatile thoughts and images of Mian, and many-hued visions of the manner in which they would spend the entrancing future which was now before them, and in this way it chanced that he did not give any portion of his intellect to the reading, mistaking it, indeed, for a delicate and very ably-composed set of verses which Chang-ch'un was reciting as a formal blessing on parting. Nor was it until he was desired to affix his sign that Ling discovered his mistake, and being of too respectful and unobtrusive a disposition to require the matter to be repeated then, he carried out the obligation without in any

particular understanding the written words to which he was agreeing.

As Ling walked through the streets to his chamber after leaving the house and company of Chang-ch'un, holding firmly among his garments the thin printed papers to the amount of fifty thousand taels which he had received, and repeatedly speaking to himself in terms of general and specific encouragement at the fortunate events of the past few days, he became aware that a person of mean and rapacious appearance, whom he had some memory of having observed within the residence he had but just left, was continually by his side. Not at first doubting that the circumstance resulted from a benevolent desire on the part of Chang-ch'un that he should be protected in his passage through the city, Ling affected not to observe the incident; but upon reaching his own door the person in question persistently endeavored to pass in also. Forming a fresh judgment about the matter, Ling, who was very powerfully constructed, and whose natural instincts were enhanced in every degree by the potent fluid of which he had lately partaken, repeatedly threw him across the street until he became weary of the diversion. At length, however, the thought arose that one who patiently submitted to continually striking the opposite houses with his head must have something of importance to communicate, whereupon he courteously invited him to enter the apartment and unweigh his mind.

"The facts of the case appear to have been somewhat inadequately represented," said the stranger, bowing obsequiously, "for this unornamental person was assured by the benignant Chang-ch'un that the one whose shadow he was to become was of a mild and forbearing nature."

"Such words are as the conversation of birds to me," replied Ling, not conjecturing how the matter had fallen about. "This person has just left the presence of the elegant and successful Chang-ch'un, and no word that he spoke gave indication of such a follower or such a service."

"Then it is indeed certain that the various transactions have not been fully understood," exclaimed the other, "for the exact communication to this unseemly one was, 'The valuable and enlightened Ling has heard and agreed to the different things to be done and not to be done, one phrase of which arranges for your continual presence, so that he will anticipate your attentions.'"

At these words the truth became as daylight before Ling's eyes, and he perceived that the written paper to which he had affixed his sign contained the detail of such an office as that of the person before him. When too late, more than ever did he regret that he had not formed some pretext for causing the document to be read a second time, as in view of his immediate intentions such an arrangement as the one to which he had agreed had every appearance of becoming of an irksome and perplexing nature. Desiring to know the length of the attendant's commands, Ling asked him for a clear statement of his duties, feigning that he had missed that portion of the reading through a momentary attack of the giddy sickness. To this request the stranger, who explained that his name was Wang, instantly replied that his written and spoken orders were: never to permit more than an arm's length of space to separate them; to prevent, by whatever force was necessary for the purpose, all attempts at evading the things to be done and not to be done, and to ignore as of no interest all other circumstances. It seemed to Ling, in consequence, that little seclusion would be enjoyed unless an arrangement could be effected between Wang and himself; so to this end, after noticing the evident poverty and covetousness of the person in question, he made him an honorable offer of frequent rewards, provided a greater distance was allowed to come between them as soon as Si-chow was reached. On his side, Ling undertook not to break through the wording of the things to be done and not to be done, and to notify to Wang any movements upon which he meditated. In this reputable manner the obstacle was ingeniously removed, and the intelligent nature of the device was clear-

ly proved by the fact that not only Ling but Wang also had in the future a much greater liberty of action than would have been possible if it had been necessary to observe the short-sighted and evidently hastily-thought-of condition which Chang-ch'un had endeavored to impose.

XII

In spite of his natural desire to return to Mian as quickly as possible, Ling judged it expedient to give several days to the occupation of purchasing apparel of the richest kinds, weapons and armor in large quantities, jewels and ornaments of worked metals and other objects to indicate his changed position. Nor did he neglect actions of a pious and charitable nature, for almost his first care was to arrange with the chief ones at the Temple of Benevolent Intentions that each year, on the day corresponding to that on which he drank the gold fluid, a sumptuous and well-constructed coffin should be presented to the most deserving poor and aged person within that quarter of the city in which he had resided. When these preparations were completed, Ling set out with an extensive train of attendants; but riding on before, accompanied only by Wang, he quickly reached Si-chow without adventure.

The meeting between Ling and Mian was affecting to such an extent that the blind and the deaf attendants wept openly without reproach, notwithstanding the fact that neither could become possessed of more than a half of the occurrence. Eagerly the two reunited ones examined each other's features to discover whether the separation had brought about any change in the beloved and well-remembered lines. Ling discovered upon Mian the shadow of an anxious care at his absence, while the disappointments and trials which Ling had experienced in Canton had left traces which were plainly visible to Mian's penetrating gaze. In such an entrancing occupation the time was to them without hours until a feeling of hunger recalled them to lesser matters, when a variety of very select foods

and liquids were placed before them without delay. After this elegant repast had been partaken of, Mian, supporting herself upon Ling's shoulder, made a request that he would disclose to her all the matters which had come under his observation both within the city and during his journey to and from that place. Upon this encouragement, Ling proceeded to unfold his mind, not withholding anything which appeared to be of interest, no matter how slight. When he had reached Canton without any perilous adventure, Mian breathed more freely; as he recorded the interview at the Office of Warlike Deeds and Arrangements, she trembled at the insidious malignity of the evil person Li Keen. The conversation with the wise reader of the future concerning the various states of such as be officially dead almost threw her into the rigid sickness, from which, however, the wonderful circumstance of the discovered properties of the gold fluid quickly recalled her. But to Ling's great astonishment no sooner had he made plain the exceptional advantages which he had derived from the circumstances, and the nature of the undertaking at which he had arrived with Chang-ch'un, than she became a prey to the most intolerable and unrestrained anguish.

"Oh, my devoted but excessively ill-advised lover," she exclaimed wildly, and in tones which clearly indicated that she was inspired by every variety of affectionate emotion, "has the unendurable position in which you and all your household will be placed by the degrading commercial schemes and instincts of the mercenary-souled person Chang-ch'un occupied no place in your generally well-regulated intellect? Inevitably will those who drink our almond tea, in order to have an opportunity of judging the value of the appointments of the house, pass the jesting remark that while the Lings assuredly have 'a dead person's bones in the secret chamber,' at the present they will not have one in the family graveyard by reason of the death of Ling himself. Better to lose a thousand limbs during life than the entire person after death; nor would your adoring Mian hesitate to clasp proudly to her organ

of affection the veriest trunk that had parted with all its attributes in a noble and sacrificing endeavor to preserve at least some dignified proportions to embellish the Ancestral Temple and to receive the worship of posterity."

"Alas!" replied Ling, with extravagant humiliation, "it is indeed true; and this person is degraded beyond the common lot of those who break images and commit thefts from sacred places. The side of the transaction which is at present engaging our attention never occurred to this superficial individual until now."

"Wise and incomparable one," said Mian, in no degree able to restrain the fountains of bitter water which clouded her delicate and expressive eyes, "in spite of this person's biting and ungracious words do not, she makes a formal petition, doubt the deathless strength of her affection. Cheerfully, in order to avert the matter in question, or even to save her lover the anguish of unavailing and soul-eating remorse, would she consign herself to a badly-constructed and slow-consuming fire or expose her body to various undignified tortures. Happy are those even to whom is left a little ash to be placed in a precious urn and diligently guarded, for it, in any event, truly represents all that is left of the once living person, whereas after an honorable and spotless existence my illustrious but unthinking lord will be blended with a variety of baser substances and passed from hand to hand, his immaculate organs serving to reward murderers for their deeds and to tempt the weak and vicious to all manner of unmentionable crimes."

So overcome was Ling by the distressing nature of the oversight he had permitted that he could find no words with which to comfort Mian, who, after some moments, continued:

"There are even worse visions of degradation which occur to this person. By chance, that which was once the noble-minded Ling may be disposed of, not to the Imperial Treasury for converting into pieces of exchange, but to some indiscriminating worker in metals who will fashion out of his beautiful and symmetrical stomach an

elegant food-dish, so that from the ultimate developments of the circumstance may arise the fact that his own descendants, instead of worshipping him, use his internal organs for this doubtful if not absolutely unclean purpose, and thereby suffer numerous well-merited afflictions, to the end that the finally-despised Ling and this discredited person, instead of founding a vigorous and prolific generation, become the parents of a line of feeble-minded and physically-depressed lepers."

"Oh, my peacock-eyed one!" exclaimed Ling, in immeasurable distress, "so proficient an exhibition of virtuous grief crushes this misguided person completely to the ground. Rather would he uncomplainingly lose his pigtail than——"

"Such a course," said a discordant voice, as the un-presentable person Wang stepped forth from behind a hanging curtain, where, indeed, he had stood concealed during the entire conversation, "is especially forbidden by the twenty-third detail of the things to be done and not to be done."

"What new adversity is this?" cried Mian, pressing to Ling with a still closer embrace. "Having disposed of your incomparable body after death, surely an adequate amount of liberty and seclusion remains to us during life."

"Nevertheless," interposed the dog-like Wang, "the refined person in question must not attempt to lose or to dispose of his striking and invaluable pigtail; for by such an action he would be breaking through his spoken and written word whereby he undertook to be ruled by the things to be done and not to be done; and he would also be robbing the ingenious-minded Chang-ch'un."

"Alas!" lamented the unhappy Ling, "that which appeared to be the end of all this person's troubles is obviously simply the commencement of a new and more extensive variety. Understand, O conscientious but exceedingly inopportune Wang, that the words which passed from this person's mouth did not indicate a fixed determination, but merely served to show the unfeigned depth of his emotion. Be content that he has no intention of evad-

ing the definite principles of the things to be done and not to be done, and in the meantime honor this commonplace establishment by retiring to the hot and ill-ventilated chamber, and there partaking of a suitable repast which shall be prepared without delay."

When Wang had departed, which he did with somewhat unseemly haste, Ling made an end of recording his narrative, which Mian's grief had interrupted. In this way he explained to her the reason of Wang's presence, and assured her that by reason of the arrangement he had made with that person, his near existence would not be so unsupportable to them as might at first appear to be the case.

While they were still conversing together, and endeavoring to divert their minds from the objectionable facts which had recently come within their notice, an attendant entered and disclosed that the train of servants and merchandise which Ling had preceded on the journey was arriving. At this fresh example of her lover's consistent thought for her, Mian almost forgot her recent agitation, and eagerly lending herself to the entrancing occupation of unfolding and displaying the various objects, her brow finally lost the last trace of sadness. Greatly beyond the imaginings of anticipation were the expensive articles with which Ling proudly surrounded her; and in examining and learning the cost of the set jewels and worked metals, the ornamental garments for both persons, the wood and paper appointments for the house—even incenses, perfumes, spices and rare viands had not been forgotten—the day was quickly and profitably spent.

When the hour of sunset arrived, Ling, having learned that certain preparations which he had commanded were fully carried out, took Mian by the hand and led her into the chief apartment of the house, where were assembled all the followers and attendants, even down to the illiterate and superfluous Wang. In the centre of the room upon a table of the finest ebony stood a vessel of burning incense, some dishes of the most highly-esteemed fruit, and an abundance of old and very sweet wine. Be-

fore these emblems Ling and Mian placed themselves in an attitude of deep humiliation, and formally expressed their gratitude to the Chief Deity for having called them into existence, to the cultivated earth for supplying them with the means of sustaining life, to the Emperor for providing the numerous safeguards by which their persons were protected at all times, and to their parents for educating them. This adequate ceremony being completed, Ling explicitly desired all those present to observe the fact that the two persons in question were, by that act and from that time, made as one being, and the bond between them incapable of severance.

When the ruling night-lantern came out from among the clouds, Ling and Mian became possessed of a great desire to go forth with pressed hands and look again on the forest paths and glades in which they had spent many hours of exceptional happiness before Ling's journey to Canton. Leaving the attendants to continue the feasting and drum-beating in a completely unrestrained manner, they therefore passed out unperceived and wandering among the trees, presently stood on the banks of the Heng-Kiang.

"Oh, my beloved!" exclaimed Mian, gazing at the brilliant and unruffled water, "greatly would this person esteem a short river journey, such as we often enjoyed together in the days when you were recovering."

Ling, to whom the expressed desires of Mian were as the word of the Emperor, instantly prepared the small and ornamental junk which was fastened near for this purpose, and was about to step in, when a presumptuous and highly objectionable hand restrained him.

"Behold," remarked a voice which Ling had some difficulty in ascribing to any known person, so greatly had it changed from its usual tone, "behold how the immature and altogether too-inferior Ling observes his spoken and written assertions!"

At this low-conditioned speech, Ling drew his well-tempered sword without further thought, in spite of the restraining arms of Mian, but at the sight of the utterly

incapable person Wang, who stood near smiling meaninglessly and waving his arms with a continuous and backward motion, he again replaced it.

"Such remarks can be left to fall unheeded from the lips of one who bears every indication of being steeped in rice spirit," he said with unprovoked dignity.

"It will be the plain duty of this expert and incorruptible person to furnish the unnecessary but, nevertheless, very severe and self-opinionated Chang-ch'un with a written account of how the traitorous and deceptive Ling has endeavored to break through the thirty-fourth vessel of the liquids to be consumed and not to be consumed," continued Wang with increased deliberation and an entire absence of attention to Ling's action and speech, "and how by this refined person's unfailing civility and resourceful strategy he has been frustrated."

"Perchance," said Ling, after examining his thoughts for a short space, and reflecting that the list of things to be done and not to be done was to him as a blank leaf, "there may even be some small portion of that which is accurate in his statement. In what manner," he continued, addressing the really unendurable person, who was by this time preparing to pass the night in the cool swamp by the river's edge, "does this one endanger any detail of the written and sealed parchment by such an action?"

"Inasmuch," replied Wang, pausing in the process of removing his outer garments, "as the seventy-ninth—the intricate name given to it escapes this person's tongue at the moment—but the ninety-seventh—experLingknowswhamean—provides that any person, with or without, attempting or not avoiding to travel by sea, lake, or river, or to place himself in such a position as he may reasonably and intelligently be drowned in salt water, fresh water, or—or honorable rice spirit, shall be guilty of, and suffer—complete loss of memory." With these words the immoderate and contemptible person sank down in a very profound slumber.

"Alas!" said Ling, turning to Mian, who stood near, unable to retire even had she desired, by reason of the

extreme agitation into which the incident had thrown her delicate mind and body, "how intensely aggravating a circumstance that we are compelled to entertain so dissolute a one by reason of this person's preoccupation when the matter was read. Nevertheless, it is not unlikely that the detail he spoke of was such as he insisted, to the extent of making it a thing not to be done to journey in any manner by water. It shall be an early endeavor of this person to get these restraining details equitably amended; but in the meantime we will retrace our footsteps through the wood, and the enraptured Ling will make a well-thought-out attempt to lighten the passage by a recital of his recently-composed verses on the subject of 'Exile from the Loved One; or Farewell and Return.' "

XIII

"My beloved lord!" said Mian sadly, on a morning after many days had passed since the return of Ling, "have you not every possession for which the heart of a wise person searches? Yet the dark mark is scarcely ever absent from your symmetrical brow. If she who stands before you, and is henceforth an integral part of your organization, has failed you in any particular, no matter how unimportant, explain the matter to her, and the amendment will be a speedy and a joyful task."

It was indeed true that Ling's mind was troubled, but the fault did not lie with Mian, as the person in question was fully aware, for before her eyes as before those of Ling the unevadable compact which had been entered into with Chang-ch'un was ever present, insidiously planting bitterness within even the most select and accomplished delights. Nor with increasing time did the obstinate and intrusive person Wang become more dignified in his behavior; on the contrary, he freely made use of his position to indulge in every variety of abandonment, and almost each day he prevented, by reason of his knowledge of the things to be done and not to be done, some refined and permissible entertainment upon which Ling and Mian

had determined. Ling had despatched many communications upon this subject to Chang-ch'un, praying also that some expert way out of the annoyance of the lesser and more unimportant things not to be done should be arrived at, but the time when he might reasonably expect an answer to these written papers had not yet arrived.

It was about this period that intelligence was brought to Ling from the villages on the road to Peking, how Li Keen, having secretly ascertained that his Yamên was standing and his goods uninjured, had determined to return, and was indeed at that hour within a hundred li of Si-chow. Furthermore, he had repeatedly been understood to pronounce clearly that he considered Ling to be the head and beginning of all his inconveniences, and to declare that the first act of justice which he should accomplish on his return would be to submit the person in question to the most unbearable tortures, and then cause him to lose his head publicly as an outrager of the settled state of things and an enemy of those who loved tranquillity. Not doubting that Li Keen would endeavor to gain an advantage by treachery if the chance presented itself, Ling determined to go forth to meet him, and without delay settle the entire disturbance in one well-chosen and fatally-destructive encounter. To this end, rather than disturb the placid mind of Mian, to whom the thought of the engagement would be weighted with many disquieting fears, he gave out that he was going upon an expedition to surprise and capture certain fish of a very delicate flavor, and, attended by only two persons, he set forth in the early part of the day.

Some hours later, owing to an ill-considered remark on the part of the deaf attendant, to whom the matter had been explained in an imperfect light, Mian became possessed of the true facts of the case, and immediately all the pleasure of existence went from her. She despaired of ever again beholding Ling in an ordinary state, and mournfully reproached herself for the bitter words which had risen to her lips when the circumstance of his condi-

tion and the arrangement with Chang-ch'un first became known to her. After spending an interval in a polished lament at the manner in which things were inevitably tending, the thought occurred to Mian whether by any means in her power she could influence the course and settled method of affairs. In this situation the memory of the person Wang, and the fact that on several occasions he had made himself objectionable when Ling had proposed to place himself in such a position that he incurred some very remote chance of death by drowning or by fire, recurred to her. Subduing the natural and pure-minded repulsion which she invariably experienced at the mere thought of so debased an individual, she sought for him, and discovering him in the act of constructing cardboard figures of men and animals, which it was his custom to dispose skillfully in little-frequented paths for the purpose of enjoying the sudden terror of those who passed by, she quickly put the matter before him, urging him, by some means, to prevent the encounter, which might assuredly cost the life of the one whom he had so often previously obstructed from incurring the slightest risk.

"By no means," exclaimed Wang, when he at length understood the full meaning of the project; "it would be a most unpresentable action for this commonplace person to interfere in so honorable an undertaking. Had the priceless body of the intrepid Ling been in any danger of disappearing, as, for example, by drowning or being consumed in fire, the nature of the circumstance would have been different. As the matter exists, however, there is every appearance that the far-seeing Chang-ch'un will soon reap the deserved reward of his somewhat speculative enterprise, and to that end this person will immediately procure a wooden barrier and the services of four robust carriers, and proceed to the scene of the conflict."

Deprived of even this hope of preventing the encounter, Mian betook herself in extreme dejection to the secret room of the magician, which had been unopened since the day when the two attendants had searched for substances to apply to their master, and there she diligently exam-

ined every object in the remote chance of discovering something which might prove of value in averting the matter in question.

Not anticipating that the true reason of his journey would become known to Mian, Ling continued on his way without haste, and passing through Si-chow before the sun had risen, entered upon the great road to Peking. At a convenient distance from the town he came to a favorable piece of ground where he decided to await the arrival of Li Keen, spending the time profitably in polishing his already brilliant sword, and making observations upon the nature of the spot and the condition of the surrounding omens, on which the success of his expedition would largely depend.

As the sun reached the highest point in the open sky the sound of an approaching company could be plainly heard; but at the moment when the chair of the Mandarin appeared within the sight of those who waited, the great luminary, upon which all portents depend directly or indirectly, changed to the color of new-drawn blood and began to sink towards the earth. Without any misgivings, therefore, Ling disposed his two attendants in the wood, with instructions to step forth and aid him if he should be attacked by overwhelming numbers, while he himself remained in the way. As the chair approached, the Mandarin observed a person standing alone, and thinking that it was one who, hearing of his return, had come out of the town to honor him, he commanded the bearers to pause. Thereupon, stepping up to the opening, Ling struck the deceptive and incapable Li Keen on the cheek, at the same time crying in a full voice, "Come forth, O traitorous and two-stomached Mandarin! for this person is very desirous of assisting you in the fulfillment of your boastful words. Here is a most irreproachable sword which will serve excellently to cut off this person's undignified head; here is a waist-cord which can be tightened round his breast, thereby producing excruciating pains over the entire body."

At the knowledge of who the one before him was, and

when he heard the words which unhesitatingly announced Ling's fixed purpose, Li Keen first urged the carriers to fall upon Ling and slay him, and then, perceiving that such a course was exceedingly distasteful to their natural tendencies, to take up the chair and save him by flight. But Ling in the meantime engaged their attention, and fully explained to them the treacherous and unworthy conduct of Li Keen, showing them how his death would be a just retribution for his ill-spent life, and promising them each a considerable reward in addition to their arranged payment when the matter in question had been accomplished. Becoming convinced of the justice of Ling's cause, they turned upon Li Keen, insisting that he should at once attempt to carry out the ill-judged threats against Ling, of which they were consistent witnesses, and announcing that, if he failed to do so, they would certainly bear him themselves to a not far distant well of stagnant water, and there gain the approbation of the good spirits by freeing the land of so unnatural a monster.

Seeing only a dishonorable death on either side, Li Keen drew his sword, and made use of every artifice of which he had knowledge in order to disarm Ling or to take him at a disadvantage. In this he was unsuccessful, for Ling, who was by nature a very expert sword-user, struck him repeatedly, until he at length fell in an expiring condition, remarking with his last words that he had indeed been a narrow-minded and extortionate person during his life, and that his death was an enlightened act of celestial accuracy.

Directing Wang and his four hired persons, who had in the meantime arrived, to give the body of the Mandarin an honorable burial in the deep of the wood, Ling rewarded and dismissed the chairbearers, and without delay proceeded to Si-chow, where he charitably distributed the goods and possessions of Li Keen among the poor of the town. Having in this able and conscientious manner completely proved the misleading nature of the disgraceful statements which the Mandarin had spread abroad concerning him, Ling turned his footsteps towards Mian,

whose entrancing joy at his safe return was judged by both persons to be a sufficient reward for the mental distress with which their separation had been accompanied.

XIV

After the departure of Ling from Canton, the commercial affairs of Chang-ch'un began, from a secret and undetectable cause, to assume an ill-regulated condition. No venture which he undertook maintained a profitable attitude, so that many persons who in former times had been content to display the printed papers setting forth his name and virtues in an easily-seen position in their receiving-rooms, now placed themselves daily before his house in order to accuse him of using their taels in ways which they themselves had not sufficiently understood, and for the purpose of warning passers-by against his inducements. It was in vain that Chang proposed new undertakings, each of an infallibly more prosperous nature than those before; the persons who had hitherto supported him were all entrusting their money to one named Pung Soo, who required millions where Chang had been content with thousands, and who persistently insisted on greeting the sacred Emperor as an equal.

In this unenviable state Chang's mind continually returned to thoughts of Ling, whose lifeless body would so opportunely serve to dispel the embarrassing perplexities of existence which were settling thickly about him. Urged forward by a variety of circumstances which placed him in an entirely different spirit from the honorable bearing which he had formerly maintained, he now closely examined all the papers connected with the matter, to discover whether he might not be able to effect his purpose with an outward exhibition of law forms. While engaged in this degrading occupation, a detail came to his notice which caused him to become very amiably disposed and confident of success. Proceeding with the matter, he caused a well-supported report to be spread about that Ling was suffering from a wasting sickness, which, with-

out in any measure shortening his life, would cause him to return to the size and weight of a newly-born child, and being by these means enabled to secure the entire matter of "The Ling (After Death) Without Much Risk Assembly" at a very small outlay, he did so, and then, calling together a company of those who hire themselves out for purposes of violence, journeyed to Si-chow.

Ling and Mian were seated together at a table in the great room, examining a vessel of some clear liquid, when Chang-ch'un entered with his armed ones, in direct opposition to the general laws of ordinary conduct and the rulings of hospitality. At the sight, which plainly indicated a threatened display of violence, Ling seized his renowned sword, which was never far distant from him, and prepared to carry out his spoken vow, that any person overstepping a certain mark on the floor should assuredly fall.

"Put away your undoubtedly competent weapon, O Ling," said Chang, who was desirous that the matter should be arranged if possible without any loss to himself, "for such a course can be honorably adopted when it is taken into consideration that we are as twenty to one, and have, moreover, the appearance of being inspired by law forms."

"There are certain matters of allowed justice which over-rule all other law forms," replied Ling, taking a surer hold of his sword-grasp. "Explain, for your part, O obviously double-dealing Chang-ch'un, from whom this person only recently parted on terms of equality and courtesy, why you come not with an agreeable face and a peaceful following, but with a countenance which indicates both violence and terror, and accompanied by many whom this person recognizes as the most outcast and degraded from the narrow and evil-smelling ways of Canton?"

"In spite of your blustering words," said Chang, with some attempt at an exhibition of dignity, "this person is endowed by every right, and comes only for the obtaining, by the help of this expert and proficient gathering, should

such a length become necessary, of his just claims. Understand that in the time since the venture was arranged this person has become possessed of all the property of 'The Ling (After Death) Without Much Risk Assembly,' and thereby he is competent to act fully in the matter. It has now come within his attention that the one Ling to whom the particulars refer is officially dead, and as the written and sealed document clearly undertook that the person's body was to be delivered up for whatever use the Assembly decided whenever death should possess it, this person has now come for the honorable carrying out of the undertaking."

At these words the true nature of the hidden contrivance into which he had fallen descended upon Ling like a heavy and unavoidable thunderbolt. Nevertheless, being by nature and by reason of his late exploits, fearless of death except for the sake of the loved one by his side, he betrayed no sign of discreditable emotion at the discovery.

"In such a case," he replied, with an appearance of entirely disregarding the danger of the position, "the complete parchment must of necessity be overthrown; for if this person is now officially dead, he was equally so at the time of sealing, and arrangements entered into by dead persons have no actual existence."

"That is a matter which has never been efficiently decided," admitted Chang-ch'un with no appearance of being thrown into a state of confusion at the suggestion, "and doubtless the case in question can by various means be brought in the end before the Court of Final Settlement at Peking, where it may indeed be judged in the manner you assert. But as such a process must infallibly consume the wealth of a province and the years of an ordinary lifetime, and as it is this person's unmoved intention to carry out his own view of the undertaking without delay, such speculations are not matters of profound interest."

Upon this Chang gave certain instructions to his followers, who thereupon prepared to advance. Perceiving that the last detail of the affair had been arrived at, Ling

threw back his hanging garment, and was on the point of rushing forward to meet them, when Mian, who had maintained a possessed and reliant attitude throughout, pushed towards him the vessel of pure and sparkling liquid with which they had been engaged when so presumptuously broken in upon, at the same time speaking to him certain words in an outside language. A new and Heaven-sent confidence immediately took possession of Ling, and striking his sword against the wall with such irresistible proficiency that the entire chamber trembled and the feeble-minded assassins shrank back in unrestrained terror, he leapt upon the table, grasping in one hand the open vessel.

"Behold the end, O most uninventive and slow-witted Chang-ch'un!" he cried in a dreadful and awe-compelling voice. "As a reward of your faithless and traitorous behavior, learn how such avaricious-minded incompetence turns and fastens itself upon the vitals of those who beget it. In spite of many things which were not of a graceful nature towards him, this person has unassumingly maintained his part of the undertaking, and would have followed such a course conscientiously to the last. As it is, when he has made an end of speaking, the body which you are already covetously estimating in taels will in no way be distinguishable from that of the meanest and most ordinary maker of commercial ventures in Canton. For, behold! the fluid which he holds in his hand, and which it is his fixed intention to drain to the last drop, is in truth nothing but a secret and exceedingly powerful counteractor against the virtues of the gold drug; and though but a single particle passed his lips, and the swords of your brilliant and versatile murderers met the next moment in his breast, the body which fell at your feet would be meet for worms rather than for the melting-pot."

It was indeed such a substance as Ling represented it to be, Mian having discovered it during her very systematic examination of the dead magician's inner room. Its composition and distillation had involved that self-opinionated person in many years of arduous toil, for with a somewhat unintelligent lack of foresight he had obstinately

determined to perfect the antidote before he turned his attention to the drug itself. Had the matter been more ingeniously arranged, he would undoubtedly have enjoyed an earlier triumph and an affluent and respected old age.

At Ling's earnest words and prepared attitude an instant conviction of the truth of his assertions took possession of Chang. Therefore, seeing nothing but immediate and unevadable ruin at the next step, he called out in a loud and imploring voice that he should desist, and no harm would come upon him. To this Ling consented, first insisting that the followers should be dismissed without delay, and Chang alone remain to have conversation on the matter. By this just act the lower parts of Canton were greatly purified, for the persons in question being driven forth into the woods, mostly perished by encounters with wild animals, or at the hands of the enraged villagers, to whom Ling had by this time become greatly endeared.

When the usual state had been restored, Ling made clear to Chang the altered nature of the conditions to which he would alone agree. "It is a noble-minded and magnanimous proposal on your part, and one to which this misguided person had no claim," admitted Chang, as he affixed his seal to the written undertaking and committed the former parchment to be consumed by fire. By this arrangement it was agreed that Ling should receive only one-half of the yearly payment which had formerly been promised, and that no sum of taels should become due to those depending upon him at his death. In return for these valuable allowances, there were to exist no details of things to be done and not to be done, Ling merely giving an honorable promise to observe the matter in a just spirit, while—most esteemed of all—only a portion of his body was to pass to Chang when the end arrived, the upper part remaining to embellish the family altar and receive the veneration of posterity.

* * * * *

As the great sky-lantern rose above the trees and the time of no-noise fell upon the woods. a flower-laden

pleasure-junk moved away from its restraining cords, and, without any sense of motion, gently bore Ling and Mian between the sweet-smelling banks of the Heng-Kiang. Presently Mian drew from beneath her flowing garment an instrument of stringed wood, and touching it with a quick but delicate stroke, like the flight and pausing of a butterfly, told in well-balanced words a refined narrative of two illustrious and noble-looking persons, and how, after many disagreeable evils and unendurable separations, they entered upon a destined state of earthly prosperity and celestial favor. When she made an end of the verses, Ling turned the junk's head by one well-directed stroke of the paddle, and prepared by using similar means to return to the place of mooring.

"Indeed," he remarked, ceasing for a moment to continue this skillful occupation, "the words which you have just spoken might, without injustice, be applied to the two persons who are now conversing together. For after suffering misfortunes and wrongs beyond an appropriate portion, they have now reached that period of existence when a tranquil and contemplative future is assured to them. In this manner is the sage and matured utterance of the inspired philosopher Nien-tsu again proved: that the life of every person is largely composed of two varieties of circumstances which together build up his existence—the Good and the Evil."

Eden Phillpotts

THE LAVENDER DRAGON

(1923)

Last year, in an anthology called *Discoveries in Fantasy*, I introduced an extraordinary, almost completely unknown writer named Eden Phillpotts to you. Well, I have been itching to give you his best short novel, *The Lavender Dragon*, ever since. And here it is at last, a story of knights and dragons so thoroughly unique that I can hardly think of any other tale to which it could possibly be compared.

Eden Phillpotts is a writer hardly known to American readers at all. In England, he was a very respected author of serious regional novels, rather in the tradition of Thomas Hardy; and he enjoyed subsidiary reputations of some eminence as a playwright and a poet. Few of his books appeared on our side of the Atlantic, and those few that *did* have an American edition seem to have made little impact and been quickly forgotten.

A fate which stories as thoroughly pleasurable and entertaining as *The Lavender Dragon* do not in the least deserve. As you will discover to be true when you have read the tale that follows.

THE LAVENDER DRAGON

I

Pongley-In-The-Marsh

Nigh about the middle of the Dark Ages, when ignorance, greed and superstition largely ruled the world, pretty much in fact as do these forces at present, a knight and his squire proceeded to their destination under the setting sun. Sir Jasper de Pomeroy, descendant of that distinguished man who assisted William the Conqueror, and received for his service fair hundreds in the County of Devon, was a youth who favoured his English mother and betrayed little of the Norman in his appearance or composition. He conformed to a style formerly regarded as noble and now considered somewhat fatuous. His architecture befitted the times and was Gothic, supple and exquisite. The knight's hair flashed golden in the evening sunshine; his eyes were large, prominent and very blue; his complexion, though warmed to ruddiness by outdoor life, had naturally been pink and white. He wore a heavy amber moustache, which often caught in the mouthpiece of his helmet and gave him a painful tweak. His nose had a lofty bridge and his brow was high but wanted breadth. The purest ideals, combined with a profound lack of humour, characterised Sir Jasper's quality. He resembled an admirable mother; and his father, a man of average ability and more than average selfishness, had bluntly told the young fellow that he possessed a heart of gold and a brain of clay. Weighing the criticism without resentment, Sir Jasper, determined on his career, took all the proper

vows, and dedicated himself to the service of knight errantry.

He now approached the conclusion of his first circuit, and, up to the present, nothing of any note had challenged his knightly courage, or offered an obstacle to his uneventful progress. His squire, George Pipkin, was a plain dealer of large experience. He had filled similar appointments on former occasions, seen life and felt it, for he chanced to be unhappily married. A grizzled, lean Yorkshireman of fifty was George, and since Sir Jasper enjoyed great wealth and entertained the highest opinion of his supporter, the squire felt well satisfied of his present employ. The better was he pleased, because their expedition, now drawing to its close, had encountered no hardships and proceeded with reasonable comfort, smiled upon by good weather, devoid of any adventure whatsoever.

Sir Jasper rode a magnificent stallion with large chestnut markings on a white ground. In the Middle Ages a circus was not known, and therefore your piebald horse awakened no anticipation of merriment. Nor, in any case, had the knight been a man to find amusement in the color of his steed. As for George Pipkin, he bestrode an elderly roan, as tough and wiry and experienced as himself.

The elder was talking as they traversed rough tracks of moorland, which ceased suddenly at an edge of limestone crags. Beneath these boundaries there subtended fertile plains, ran a river, and stood an attractive hamlet with gabled roof-trees and white-washed walls.

"What makes life picturesque," declared the squire, "are the people who prefer their own experience to that of others—such men as yourself, Sir Jasper. But those who trust tradition and the accumulated wisdom of the race, go farther, are generally more satisfactory and invariably more prosperous members of society. They are safe and therefore rather dull to watch; while the adventurer, who casts loose for good or ill, is nearly always entertaining. Not that his experiences will be novel, or probably outside our own; but the freshness and charm of the spectacle he presents lie in the fact that familiar, old

things are happening to a new spirit, unarmed against them with the trite weapons of precaution. Such a young man's retort to the primitive tests of love, danger, temptation and so forth cannot be foretold. Hence every one of his adventures has the charm of novelty."

"Do not imagine, George, that I flout tradition," answered the younger. "My grandfather was a famous knight without fear or reproach. Indeed, my father devotes such leisure as he allows himself from the business of money-making and enjoyment of luxury, to writing a full and punctual account of Sir Hugo de Pomeroy's attractive career."

"Yes, he does; and that is the difference between you and your parent," answered Pipkin. "He sees no charm in a suit of steel and the life that you have adopted. He feels it far more convenient to write of another's devotion to high causes than seek high causes himself; while you, on the contrary, would emulate your famous ancestor."

Sir Jasper sighed.

"Would that I might," he replied. "The world has changed since his romantic day. The times are tame, George. The giants are dead and the dragons have fled; not a robber baron to chastise; not a village to rescue out of tyranny; not a maiden in need of succour from her oppressors."

"We never know our greatest blessings," replied Pipkin. "Many a knight has rued the day when he rescued a fair damsel. I need not repeat the story of a former master, Hildebrand of the Iron Forehead. You recollect particulars of his married life. When he passed to glory, under the scimitars of a thousand Saracens, there was a smile of pure happiness on his forbidding features. As for my own career, had I not wedded his lady's serving maid, I should be a home-staying man at this moment."

"Be sure that your wife will welcome you with awakened affection when you see her again, next September," said Sir Jasper kindly; but George Pipkin shook his head.

"For the most part," he answered, "marriage is like following the ocean. What married man, or mariner, would

not change his state if he could do so? But they plunge into wedlock, or go down to the sea in ships, as the case may be, and only regret it once, and that is for ever afterwards."

They had now reached the declivities, and Sir Jasper smiled at the scene of rural peace and beauty extended in the valley beneath them. George drew a roll of paper from his wallet and consulted a rough map, made by the inn-keeper with whom they had lodged on the previous night.

"This will be Pongley-in-the-Marsh," he said. "A populous hamlet apparently and good, no doubt, for comfortable quarters."

"A place without a care as far as one may judge," declared Sir Jasper, surveying the smiling thorpe. "Still we will proceed, as ever, with enthusiasm to inspire and hope to guide."

The sun flamed upon his splendid figure and flashed along his armour and crested helm, so that it seemed a shooting-star descended the bridle-path into the valley. Indeed, an object so conspicuous could not be missed even by peasant eyes, and when, half an hour later, the knight and his companion approached the outskirts of Pongley-in-the-Marsh, he perceived some concourse of the folk.

George Pipkin frowned, for his experienced eyes feared a deputation, and a deputation usually meant labour at no distant date.

Some fifty people, of rustic and humble pattern, approached Sir Jasper, and at the head of the company marched a majestic, old man who bore a staff of office. He wore homespun garments, but was decorated with a chain round his neck and a badge upon his breast. His long, white hair curled about his stooping shoulders, and he appeared a little nervous, for his mouth worked tremulously.

"Welcome to Pongley-in-the-Marsh, most noble knight," he said. "We are your servants, Sire, one and all, and beg that you will accept such simple but ample hospitality as we can offer, and such comfort as we know. The best we have is yours to command."

Sir Jasper felt gratified, for the country folk were not wont to receive him thus, and George Pipkin stepped forward to rehearse in a loud voice his master's style and title.

"Sir Jasper de Pomeroy," he concluded, "rides the world to right all wrong, redress all grievance and place his sword and his lance at the service of the humblest sufferer, be he noble or simple. Therefore, if there are any among you who smart undeservedly, or endure evil within the power of a doughty knight to defeat, let him speak, that Sir Jasper of the Silver Lance may judge whether his cause be such as to claim right, as well as might, and unchain his unconquerable puissance upon the side of God and man."

The ancient Portreeve of Pongley bowed to the earth, and the company behind him did the like. A rabblement of urchins were driven back, and a mongrel dog, who dared to sniff at the heels of Sir Jasper's piebald steed, received a kick and howled unmelodiously. When silence had been restored, the old man spoke.

"Never have we heard a more gracious message, or welcomed a rarer knight," he declared. "My name, Sir Jasper de Pomeroy, is Jacob Pratt, and I am master here by accordant vote of my friends and neighbours. You come to us at a moment when trouble and concern are heavy in the land, and when, despite the promise of good harvest and other propitious signs, we are cast into deep tribulation. For years we have suffered from a melancholy scourge, and but a week ago, after periods of peace, the evil broke forth again and our inveterate enemy has struck in the tenderest quarter and robbed us of the fairest maiden who ever brightened Pongley-in-the-Marsh with her radiant presence. In a word, Sir Knight, there is a dragon of formidable proportions and utmost malevolence, who abides in an impenetrable lair but a league and a half from this unhappy hamlet. From time to time he breaks upon us in our most secure hours and snatches from our midst now one citizen and now another. Not only men, but women and orphan children he devours;

and such is his incredible cunning, that though our trained bands have often marched against him, he evades their sallies and is never faced save by unarmed and helpless persons. He flies through the air on immense pinions, but at a height invariably beyond bow-shot; nor would any cloth-yard shaft pierce the monster—of that be sure. Only once within my memory has an errant knight ever before visited Pongley; but nothing came of it; and we pray on our bended knees that you may have a stouter courage and better appetite to rid us of this cruel tyrant than had he.”

Sir Jasper’s eyes sparkled as he turned to Pipkin.

“My vade-mecum, George,” he said, and on receiving a little, well-thumbed volume, he turned to the index and looked up “Dragons.”

“These misbegotten monsters are few,” he told them. “I find here not above six or seven right, authentic dragons left in the land of the living, and of these four flourish abroad—two in Italy, one in France, and one in the Holy Land. We still appear to have ‘a great Worm’ in the Peak and—yes, ‘The Lavender Dragon’ of Yorkshire!”

“The Lavender Dragon! The Lavender Dragon!” cried the inhabitants of Pongley in melancholy chorus.

“He is our accursed foe, Sir Jasper,” explained Jacob Pratt. “He dwells some ten miles distant, amidst the impenetrable Woods of Blore, and from Caytor Fell good eyes may see a huge wall that circles his domain and strange, barbaric buildings of enormous size erected therein. For the monster is no cave-dweller, or laidly wretch, who lives beneath the earth. To such a measure of understanding has he attained, that he dares to assume human manners, lives in a castle and hides his iniquities behind cyclopean masonry. In fact, he is a dragon with a brain—the most perilous combination of mind and matter it is possible to imagine. For his intelligence only lends power to his ferocity, and though he may dwell in a castle and ape his betters, he does not scruple to destroy the sons and daughters of mankind and behave otherwise after the horrible custom of his own species.”

"My perambulation draws to a close," replied Sir Jasper, "and it is a source of the keenest satisfaction to me that Providence has seen fit to guide my charger's steps to this secluded spot. We will sup with you, Jacob Pratt, and accept the best that your means afford; and at the dawn of another day, having heard particulars, we will set forth into the marches of the Lavender Dragon and draw not rein until either he, or ourselves, have returned to the merciful Father of us all."

Upon which welcome assurance, Sir Jasper and his squire proceeded among a joyful gathering into the village. After supper and before he retired for the night, the fearless lad sat by a fire of peat and listened to his host's discourse, while George, in an adjoining chamber, overhauled the hero's armour, his sword and his famous Silver Lance, all grown a little rusty from long disuse.

The Portreeve perceived that he had to do with a brave and stalwart hero; but he threw no shadow on the immense difficulties of the enterprise.

"A high soul and a trusty spear are only the first essentials," he ventured to say. "Craft must be met with craft, your honour, and cunning with cunning. He is a dragon of great age and vast experience. It is vain to suppose that no knight until now has tackled the ruffian; and as he still flourishes like the green bay tree, we are to fear that he has triumphed on previous occasions, when justice demanded another issue to the conflict. Too well we know, in this hard world, that might is often allowed to conquer right—doubtless for heavenly purposes by us not understood."

Sir Jasper nodded.

"It is idle to blink facts," he confessed. "One hears of our knightly triumphs, but the troubadours seldom sing those unhappy failures which tact conceals, though knowledge cannot deny. The dragon you say lies hidden upon the path of solitary individuals and spirits them away?"

"We have reason to believe that he devours them in situ," answered Jacob Pratt. "So far as we can judge, the monster consumes them as we eat a radish, for not a

fragment of mortality, not a garment, not a cap, not a tag, or shoestring, ever remains to tell the tale. Dusk is his happy hunting hour, and such as wander in the gloaming of dawn or night take their lives into their hands. Sometimes a scream is heard and the hurtle of his infernal wings and the scent of lavender, which always accompanies his progress by land and air. Then that lonely soul is gone for ever. He has a strange art to choose the widow, or the widower, and such as lack for friends or substance. As I have told you, an orphan possesses a horrible fascination for him, and children he cannot resist even in the noon of day. For many years he was but an evil legend; but of late his activities increase. Within my experience, as Portreeve of Pongley, he has snapped Thomas Fagg, the woodman; Nicol Prance, the thatcher; old John Cobbley, a swine-herd; and Hugh Hobanob, the baker's man. Of females we have lost Avisia Snell and her child—devoured together; Mary Fern, a good girl, who lost her man in the wars; Betsy Snow, a widow; Jenifer Mardle, another widow; and, only last week, Lilian Lovenot, the belle of the village and the noblest, worthiest, loveliest maiden that ever gladdened the eyes of her fellow creatures. Her parents are both dead, or I should say her foster parents, for there is a mystery attaching to her birth, and we have never believed that such a homely pair as Peter and Nancy Lovenot could have begotten so distinguished a child as Lilian. But now she, too, has been snatched away, and as for the children, both boys and girls that he has laid his claws upon, their numbers can hardly be remembered. Thus our cup of grief is full, and you will guess with what gratitude we learn that you will destroy this abomination, or perish in the attempt."

Sir Jasper pulled his great moustache, drank another stoup of metheglin and looked thoughtfully at the fire.

"What manner of knight was he of whom you spoke when first we met?" he inquired.

"One Sir Rollo Malherbe," replied the Portreeve; "but——"

"Enough," said George Pipkin, who had joined them

for a drink; "if that gallant gentlemen indeed learned that a formidable dragon was wasting your quarters, it is certain that he put no great tax upon the hospitality of Pongley-in-the-Marsh."

"He stayed but four and twenty hours," admitted Jacob Pratt. "On the morrow of his arrival he set forth, conducted by our valiant young men, and beheld the Lavender Dragon roaming at will along the Valley of Red Rocks, a favourite haunt nigh the Woods of Blore. One glance, at a distance of half a mile, proved enough for Sir Rollo. He remembered him of a fire-drake which he had undertaken to slay somewhere in the South Riding, many leagues distant, and, saying that he must keep faith, but would return at an early date, spurred his charger and was never seen again."

"Your fire-drake, or hippogriff, is found but six to ten feet long," mused Sir Jasper, "whereas your right dragon may number six hundred feet—or more."

"Our enemy is computed to be perhaps five and thirty rods from beak to tail," said the Portreeve's right-hand man—a little, plump fellow with a cane-coloured beard and fat, pock-marked cheeks. "He is of a coerulean blue colour, having a rich rosy sheen in direct sunlight; and when he spreads his pinions they are as a flower-garden for beauty, being all shades of emerald and azure, purple and gold. In truth a lovelier beast God never made; yet within this fair and glittering carcase there hides the heart of a crocodile and the brain of a demon."

"It would seem that I have my work cut out for me," said Sir Jasper grimly.

"Fear nothing, noble knight. All Pongley will be upon its knees at the first moment of onset."

From the adjacent chamber came the hum of a hone, where George was putting an edge to his master's battle-axe.

He rejoined them presently, and mentioned one or two occasions whereon he had witnessed successful strife with dragons now defunct. But he was not in a sanguine mood and presently suggested that Sir Jasper should retire.

"What would you wish for breakfast?" inquired the Portreeve.

"Red meat, wheaten bread and honey," replied Pipkin, "and plenty of mead. If we can engage the pest before noon, so much the better; if not, then we must eat again before doing so. Ere the sun goes west, a dragon, being largely nocturnal, is somnolent; but, as the day advances, he attains to his full energy, and he is at his worst and deadliest about the hour of dusk."

"Take this for your comfort," said Pratt's right-hand man. "He is undoubtedly a very old reptile, and though far from infirm—be under no false hope as to that—cannot fairly be called a dragon in his prime. Youth will be served, as we all know."

Thereupon both heroes retired and, despite the tremendous ordeal now before him, Sir Jasper, having said his orisons and committed himself and his fortunes to the Creator, prepared to sleep as soundly as usual.

"Though few knights but hold a lady in their hearts, to clear their eyes and strengthen their sword-arms, yet for my part, I still believe it better to do one's work without such glorious and distracting obligations," he reflected. "Some day, no doubt, I shall love and seek to prolong our line, now depending upon me for its continuation; but plenty of time, plenty of time; and if, meanwhile, destiny wills that I fall with my face to a foe who shall overtax my powers, then no heart is broken save my own."

He slept, and the moon sailed over slumbering Pongley, while from the reed ronds round about arose the croak of a myriad frogs, and in the black Forest of Blore owls shouted their hollow laughter.

II

The Appointment For Rainbarrow

Having made a meal worthy of the occasion, Sir Jasper and his squire, declining the assistance offered, set forth in a grey summer morning to reconnoitre the haunts of the enemy and, if possible, encounter him.

Chance willed that they discovered signs within three miles of the hamlet, for immense impressions of the Lavender Dragon's feet suddenly stared up from a marshy bottom, and while George dismounted and measured these vast tridents stamped into the damp soil, out of willow brakes not above a quarter of a mile distant, the mighty creature himself sprang into the air. The sun had now broken through the mists of morning and his roseal beam struck upon the outstretched pinions of the dragon so that they appeared to be wrought of precious stones. They flapped with slow and solemn strokes and propelled the radiant body of the monster at speed not swifter than a heron's flight. Slowly, lazily he rose, until he shrank to the size of a little morning cloud, then diminished until he appeared no greater than a golden pheasant speeding to the comfort of the distant forest.

Sir Jasper's blue eyes were rolling and his tanned cheek flushed with excitement.

"Can such things be!" he cried.

"Evidently," answered George Pipkin, but without enthusiasm.

"Did you observe that he was carrying a human being between his gigantic jaws?"

"I did, Sir Jasper. A big man he bore away; yet the unhappy wretch looked no larger than a hawthorn berry in the beak of a blackbird. But it is true: he is an old—a very old dragon. His flight proclaimed him."

"Old in sin—if indeed a dragon can sin," answered Sir Jasper.

They proceeded to the spot whence the monster had risen and found a clearing in a withy bed. The air was fragrant with the scent of lavender and willow wrens made music. The evidences of a victim did not lack, for beside a bundle of withy wands, freshly cut, they saw a frail, wherein the vanished swain had brought his mid-day meal, and a jerkin of leather, which he had evidently thrown off while at work. A dog also, that had fled before the onset of the dragon, slunk out of the willows and crept to them with his tail between his shaking legs.

Instantly knight and squire set their horses' heads in the direction of the monster's flight, and George expressed a hope that the event of the morning, while unfortunate enough for the day labourer, might yet prove satisfactory from the view-point of their own hopes.

"He has now gone to devour his prey," said Pipkin, "and following the meal, after the manner of all such reptiles, he will seek to slumber. His scent is strong and happily not unpleasant. We may presently get upon it and then, tethering our horses, if fortune be with us, creep to him and destroy him under well-directed blows at the junction of the left wing and the shoulder. Only so will such an enormous creature succumb to us. Open fighting would be impossible. His head is adamant and his tail unapproachable, so long as he shall be wide awake. Indeed, though many a knight has ignored the fact to his detriment, the danger centre and point of highest peril is a dragon's tail; and while engaged with his beak and claws, not a few daring spirits have received their quietus from the back blow, which sweeps a man off his horse, stuns him, and renders him impotent and easy game."

"Should you regard this as a large dragon?" asked the younger.

"Quite the largest I have ever seen, or wish to see," replied his squire.

"Let us talk of other things for a while," responded Sir Jasper. "I am disagreeably conscious of having eaten a little too much of the excellent cold beef we enjoyed for breakfast."

"A groaning table often makes a groaning stomach," admitted George; "but think nothing of it. We shall not be called upon to exert ourselves for some hours at the earliest."

Indeed Pipkin was right, and ere they reached the Woods of Blore, Sir Jasper was hungry again. They had brought with them another ample meal, and having discussed it, made cautious sallies round about the forest in search of scent. To the east lay the Red Rocks, a favourite resting place of the dragon; but the sun had long passed the meridian before they found themselves within sight of this rugged and sequestered gorge. For many miles along the confines of the great wood they had ridden and admired the grandeur of such timber as neither remembered to have seen. Gigantic conifers towered above them, with stems that seemed fashioned of bright, pure silver; and overhead their boughs were dark as night, throwing down a dense shadow upon the flower-lit turf beneath.

It was evening before they reached the Valley of the Red Rocks, and the peaks and pinnacles of this impressive spot already glowed as though red hot under a fine sunset. The place was arid, yet beautiful, and the boulders and crags burned in wondrous and dazzling hues of orange and scarlet, amethyst and rose. It seemed that gems studded these precipices and ragged scarps, for they flashed with rainbow colours and answered the signals of the sinking sun. No herb or shrub appeared to adorn the region, yet, as they proceeded, suddenly beneath them extended a wondrous patch of pale, purple inflorescence and the fragrance of lavender rose to their nostrils.

George started with suspicion, and Sir Jasper inhaled the warning odour. Their steeds also sniffed the scent and pawed the earth.

"It comes from an extensive patch of natural flowers yonder," declared the knight, but Pipkin better appreciated the situation.

"Murrain on your flowers," he whispered. "It is the dragon himself!"

And, looking again, both recognised, in the mass of

colour spread beneath them, the outlines of the slumbering saurian.

"It is as I hoped," said George. "He is sleeping the sleep of repletion, and we have fortunately come up the wind to him."

They made a detour and presently approached the monster. Taking cover behind great boulders strewn upon the valley bottom, they brought their horses nearer and still nearer, then drew up, dismounted and took stock of the insensible giant. He slept profoundly, and his great sides rose and fell three feet at every breath. From his open nostrils rumbled a not unmusical snoring, somewhat suggestive of the French horn, and round about him wild creatures gambolled without fear. Half a dozen rabbits leapt and danced between his huge front paws, lizards ran over him and birds hopped along the serrated summit of his vast back, lofty as the ridge-tiles of a mansion. There were indications of great age about him, for though of a sweet and wholesome appearance, he was thin and the elaborate architecture of massy ribs that supported his circumference appeared through his integument and coat of mail. His wings were furled, and his enormous eyes covered by heavy and wrinkled lids. Pipkin, in the greatest excitement, directed Sir Jasper how to proceed.

"Lose not a moment," he said, "but draw off to the left, mount your charger, then couch your lance and let him have it, striking where the pinion lies over the shoulder. With weight of man and horse behind the blow, you shall reach his heart and destroy him instantly."

Then, to his indignation and confusion, the knight made chilling answer.

"Not so, friend," he replied. "It shall never be said that Sir Jasper de Pomeroy slew a sleeping foe. No glory attaches to the act of an assassin."

"Odds bodikins!" hissed George. "This is a *dragon*, and when was it ever heard that a dragon demanded to be treated with the rules of chivalry? Would he have wakened you had the case been reversed? Providence has given the tormentor into your hands, and to ask him to

fight fair is little better than self-destruction. He couldn't even if he wanted to."

Sir Jasper was, however, obdurate.

"No created thing shall perish in his sleep by hand of mine," he answered. Then he struck his mailed glove upon his shield, lifted his voice and raised such a volume of sound among the echoing cliffs that the Lavender Dragon awoke. Like curtains his eye-lids ascended and revealed two enormous eyes, glorious as fire opals and large as the rose windows in some great cathedral.

"Bless my life!" cried the dragon in good, nervous English. "What have we here?"

"Death, vile reptile!" shouted Sir Jasper, and laying his lance in rest and drawing down his beavor, he spurred his piebald war-horse forward. But the mighty lizard heaved himself on to his feet and so placed his assailant at a great disadvantage. Now horse and man came only to the monster's knees.

"Wait! Wait! Wait!" he said, lifting one gigantic paw. "Let us understand one another. I appreciate your courtesy in rousing me before you laid on. It was done like a true knight and indicates a courage probably only equalled by your mastery of arms. But I, too, am not devoid of fine feeling in these matters. The sun has already set, and as our encounter is likely to be of some duration, I must point out that, in the gloaming, I shall enjoy unfair advantage that I am loath to take. For I can see in the dark by the light of my own eye-balls—a gift denied to you. We may or may not be evenly matched by daylight, but, with the oncoming of darkness, there can be no question that you would suffer a severe handicap, and this must not be."

Struck dumb to hear a primeval dragon speak after so gentlemanly a fashion, the knight and squire reined in their horses and stared upward with open mouths upon the enemy.

"I am perfectly willing to encounter you, if in your judgment the greatest good to the greatest number will be gained thereby," continued the huge creature quietly, "but

you, who have proved yourself the flower of chivalry, must not suffer greater disabilities than myself. I am an old dragon now and I never fought for pleasure even in my palmy days; but I still possess prodigious physical powers, and should little like to exercise them, save under conditions as fair to my opponent as myself."

"This is a dark scheme to evade his doom," whispered George Pipkin. "Parley not a moment, but advance upon him. He doesn't want to fight! The man from the withy bed may have upset him."

Sir Jasper, however, hesitated to take this course, and the enemy again addressed them.

"If I may suggest," he said, "let us meet on Rainbarrow an hour after sunrise to-morrow. There you shall find a smooth, broad plateau whereon you and your squire will be able to manoeuvre your gallant steeds; and the spot also affords an ample theatre for your friends to sustain and support you."

"You would seem to be a reasonable adversary," replied Sir Jasper in doubtful tones. "As for me, my purpose has ever been to play the game with every foe, and I like to believe an enemy is inspired by similar principles; but it is beyond belief that a foul, pestiferous and man-eating dragon should thus seek, even in the jaws of death, to make an honest bargain."

"Why?" asked the monster. "Why suppose that I am acting contrary to my steadfast ideals in this affair?"

"Your 'ideals,' foul cockatrice!" cried George. "Have we not this morning seen you fly away with an innocent peasant from the withy beds? Are you not engaged in digesting him at this moment?"

"What credentials and evidence of good faith can you possibly put before me?" continued Sir Jasper. "Consider my position in this matter as well as your own. If I return to the inhabitants of Pongley-in-the-Marsh and inform them that you are engaged to meet me at sunrise on Rainbarrow, what are they likely to say about it? Surely they will flout me and drive me forth with scorn, judging me such another as Sir Rollo Malherbe, who aforetime

came among them, learned particulars of your dimensions and recollected an engagement elsewhere. The natives of this district are no fools—indeed, no Yorkshireman is ever a fool. You see my predicament if I return with what must seem a fable to the Portreeve of Pongley and his neighbours.”

The Lavender Dragon lifted an enormous paw to his low but broad forehead.

“A genuine difficulty,” he admitted, “though I might summon witnesses—but no. You must, I fear, trust me to keep my word. I attach the utmost importance to truth-telling. Your squire will report the same tale and, if need be, you may exaggerate a trifle without overstepping strict veracity. Behold how night spreads her purple mantle upon the gorge, robbing the rocks and crags of their ruddy splendour; observe how my eyes now shine like glowing meteors and cast a ray of brilliance down the glen. They were far brighter once. But tell the Pongley people how you surprised me on the edge of twilight and that the day was too far spent for our encounter. Do not hesitate to assure them that you credit me; even indicate that I showed a measure of reason, little to have been expected from such a being. Inform Pongley that I shall be upon Rainbarrow at the appointed time, and pray, pray believe me yourself when I tell you so.”

Sir Jasper looked up at the huge head from which these words proceeded in a sonorous but educated voice.

Then the dragon, tired of standing, sat down.

“Do you understand the nature of an oath?” inquired the knight.

“I do,” replied the monster. “I am not unfamiliar with humanity and have had relations with them quite other than those recorded, to my disfavour, by Pongley and more important places. I appreciate the significance of an oath and am perfectly willing to take one, if that will content you.”

“You are no ordinary dragon,” declared Sir Jasper. “Such as I have already heard about, conducted themselves in very different fashion, fought with abandon,

spewed fire, hit below the belt and pursued their defensive and offensive operations without self-control, civil conversation, or any sense of honour. They have risen from the slime, they have been horrible, formidable and utterly repulsive in every way. Mankind is accustomed to believe that the only possible dragon is a dead one; yet here you sit, within reach of my unconquerable lance, and discourse as fluently and grammatically as myself. Even an oath appears to be within your experience. You are courteous, self-contained, intelligent. Your natural weapons are terrific, and no doubt you know exceedingly well how to use them; but, as you confess, you are no longer young, and, if I mistake not, your hinder claws show evidences of gout."

"Once it was acute," explained the Lavender Dragon. "Now alas! it threatens to become chronic. With acute gout, one throws it off and has good times between the attacks; but once the ailment assumes a chronic form, we are forced much to modify our activities. Do not think, however, that I advance these facts as a reason for evading your attack. Far from it. I am still in the possession of very great activity and may give you at least a run for your money."

Like lamps fed by a rainbow the Lavender Dragon's eyes burned steadily above them.

"It is as though we talked to a lighthouse," murmured George Pipkin.

"In the name of your Maker, then—your Maker and my own—you swear to be on Rainbarrow to-morrow morning, wet or fine," said Sir Jasper; and the dragon lowered his prodigious head with becoming reverence and shut his eyes. The action plunged the party into darkness.

"I will—so help me," declared the great creature. It was a strange interview, even for the Dark Ages, and Sir Jasper began to believe that all must be a dream from which he would presently awaken.

"Have you ever fought with a belted knight before?" inquired the squire, and the dragon confessed that he had.

"Once, and once only," he admitted.

"And seeing that you still live, I suppose—?"

The Lavender Dragon indicated a slight scar among the blue scales on his off fore leg.

"He pricked me and no more. I was younger and far more agile of body in those days than at present. The battle lasted exactly thirty-five seconds."

"You slew him?"

"No. I gave him a good thumping and told him not to do it again. He never did."

"His name?" inquired George briefly.

"Sir Claude Pontifex Fortescue," replied the dragon.

"What befell him?" asked Sir Jasper. "He was before my time, and it is many a long year since he was at court, or in company. There is, however, still some speculation among his own generation as to what became of Sir Claude."

"Little need to inquire farther," growled George Pipkin. "A knight who has been thumped by a dragon, and told not to do it again, would scarcely show his face in the society of his peers."

"That's another story—too long to tell you now," declared the huge creature. "Until to-morrow, then, on Rainbarrow?"

"I trust you—chiefly because I must," replied Sir Jasper. "Do not disgrace yourself, or you will disgrace me. Observe that I treat you as an equal."

"I do, and am flattered accordingly," replied the other. "Fear nothing: I shall be there. And now draw off your steeds, and give me room to spread my wings. I thank you."

He rose upon his four feet, towered above them, resembling, if anything, a cyclopean sofa, and slowly opened his pinions. They creaked a little and he sighed.

"Rheumatism," he said, then sprang aloft with a roar, like a sixty-knot gale of wind, soared away and vanished under the stars.

"And that's the last you'll see of him," prophesied the

squire, relief and bitterness strangely mingled in his remark.

"Think better of the fellow," urged Sir Jasper; but George refused to be comforted.

"You have spurned the gifts of Fortune," he answered, "and can hope for no more of her favours."

III Vigil

During the long ride back to Pongley, George Pipkin preserved a very unfavourable attitude toward his master.

"When new ideas clash with old," he said, "when age falls back upon experience and youth advances, armed, as usual, with mistaken opinions, then comes the tug-of-war. But there is no place in knight-errantry for these ingenuous ideals, and to pit your mistaken standards of dragon warfare against my proven knowledge was the height of folly, as you will live to learn."

Sir Jasper let him run on, but at length some word from George stung the hero into retort.

"Has this silver-shafted lance been blessed by three bishops and an archbishop, or has it not, Pipkin?" he asked, shaking his majestic spear.

"What of it?" replied the other.

"It has; and that being so, is it a weapon to thrust into anybody while he sleeps? I ask you?"

"The mistake you are making is to treat an atrocious reptile and enemy of man as though he were on the same footing as yourself," replied Pipkin. "Your rules of conduct are all thrown upside down, just because this particular dragon, by some gift of necromancy, can talk and pretend to be a decent member of society. You know perfectly well that he is not. You have his disgusting record. He has devoured men, women and children. He

has cast a cloud of horror and dismay upon this neighbourhood for years, and no doubt, before he came here, he carried on after the same fashion somewhere else. A dragon is a dragon. They are all the misbegotten spawn of hell, and we are told to bruise their heads and warned that they shall bruise our heels. By the will of God you had him at your mercy; he was given to you that you might destroy him; but you lost your senses and showed a lamentable confusion of thought, a mistaken code, both of honour and duty, whereof he took full advantage. Now one of two things must happen. Either he won't come to Rainbarrow, or else he will. The betting is all Lombard Street to a crab apple that he doesn't; but if he does, then you may be very sure he knows a great deal more about Rainbarrow than we do, and will not stand your onset unless he has secret advantages that the conflict must too soon reveal."

"'A good thumping,'" mused Sir Jasper. "That is un-knightly language, George."

"Bluff," replied the squire. "He spoke only to pour scorn upon your Order. And now you yourself may cheapen knighthood, which is already at a low rate of discount for various reasons. Fight to-morrow, if you get the chance, as you never fought before; and for the sake of mankind and your own name, let no false ruth or other nonsense stay your steel. A dragon is like a mad dog. We do not encounter such a beast with punctilio, or the courtesies of the tourney. Get him down and out by the swiftest and most sanguinary means within your power. And trust me to help you if half a chance offers."

"You lack imagination," answered the younger and more enlightened adventurer. "You do not apparently see, or feel, George, that we have met a being by many degrees removed from the conventional dragon of history and experience. This beast, had he been created on a more economical plan and less material devoted to his prodigious carcase, might have been amenable to human discipline and even culture. He has a kind face. He is very old. I would even go so far as to say that, of course

under other conditions, he might have left the world better than he found it."

"He has left the world lonelier at any rate," replied Pipkin sourly, "but so long as he does leave the world, between six and seven to-morrow morning, I care not. You may set his virtues on his tombstone; but first look to it there shall be a funeral."

George proceeded to expatiate on the technique of fray with dragons and gave Sir Jasper many a valuable hint; yet there was none the less a cloud between them when they drew rein and entered the village. For the knight resented the squire's attitude to their common enemy; while George much feared that the morrow might bring either disgrace from a sceptical country-side, should the dragon play false, or some exhibition of ill-timed clemency, resulting in Sir Jasper's own destruction if the monster did appear.

Nor could their supper serve to calm the agitated nerves of either; for the men and even more the women of Pongley showed a disinclination to believe the extraordinary story they brought back with them from the Red Rocks. A base fellow or two went so far as to sneer and hint that the Portreeve's hospitality was being abused; but Jacob Pratt, with admirable courtesy, silenced the whisperers.

"It will be time to display our feelings to-morrow," he said, "if Rainbarrow is drawn blank. To-night we are not justified in doubting Sir Jasper's word, or the Lavender Dragon's promise. Many strange things happen in the world, and I still hope to see the blood of our foe leap in a ruddy cataract down the steep of the hills after breakfast."

When supper was ended, Sir Jasper got him to the little fane of St. Cormoran, a Yorkshire martyr of old time; and there, with his silver lance and helmet laid before the altar, he kept vigil before battle until the barn cocks crew. Then, at the first shiver of light, when a glimmer as of old ivory widened about the morning star, the spectrum of St. Cormoran himself appeared to Sir Jas-

per, and the knight beheld the vision of a dignified ancient, clad in grey robe and cowl, and having a snow white beard that descended beneath the rope of his girdle.

The watcher expected some word of cheer and hope, but received no more than practical advice.

"Get off to bed," said the saint. "Snatch a couple of good hours' slumber while there is time, and make a light breakfast. Remarkable experiences await you to-day, and to enter upon them short of sleep is not piety but foolhardiness."

With that the ghost vanished, and Sir Jasper, whose eyes indeed had long threatened to close, returned to the dwelling of the Portreeve, threw off his garments and was soon unconscious.

Anon George Pipkin aroused him, and whether he would or no, his master partook of a meagre meal as St. Cormoran directed, for there was not time to do otherwise. Already the entire population of Pongley-in-the-Marsh was streaming towards Rainbarrow, where that flat but elevated table of land rose dimly against the morning, and when Sir Jasper and his squire galloped onto the plateau, they were the last to arrive.

The Lavender Dragon, however, had not yet made his appearance, though it now wanted but five minutes of six o'clock.

IV

The Dragon Keeps His Word

About an open space, flanked with a forest on one side and sloping by abrupt declivities of thorn and furze upon the other, the inhabitants of Pongley were assembled. The elders of the hamlet stood grouped together, while the lesser folk surrounded the plateau and made an audience for the approaching struggle. Above a thousand souls were gathered there, and they greeted the knight and his

squire somewhat coldly as they trotted out upon the arena.

Of the Lavender Dragon as yet appeared no hint, though, from time to time, this or that spectator, pointing to the air, cried that he was on the wing. But while many a delicate cloud, feathered with morning gold, swept west-erly upon the wind, not one resolved itself into the foe.

At six o'clock, concealing a growing concern behind the bars of his helmet, Sir Jasper took the field, and the great piebald steed galloped, caracoled and curveted handsomely. He made a noble picture, but the public was not there for horsemanship; the sense of the company turned against him; hard words flew on Rainbarrow and the knight began to experience a moral chill under his armour. What if indeed he stood convicted of an awful error? Among all those present one only, George Pip-kin, knew that his mistake was venial and centred in a blind trust, where trust had been folly; but the others would accuse him, and his squire also, of something far worse than credulity. Indeed, the few who had accepted his narrative now scorned themselves for doing so, and even the Portreeve's patience began to break down.

Sir Jasper, with his back to the woods, drew rein and considered how best to make his peace with a gathering body of opinion very unfavourable. He was just about to doff his helm and address them, when the Portreeve and others approached and Jacob Pratt spoke uncomfortable words.

"Sir Knight," he said, "if knight indeed you are, it is now apparent that you have played upon the goodwill and trust of well-meaning and kindly folk. You have lied to us and fooled us, and you are either a coward or——"

Suddenly a chorus of loud cries stopped the speaker's mouth and frenzied excitement broke out upon every face.

"Look to yourself! He is there—he is upon you!" screamed the people, while children shouted and ran to their parents, dogs barked and bristled, a fragrant scent permeated the morning breeze. In another moment the

immense and roseal beak of the Lavender Dragon poked suddenly from the coppice, and before Sir Jasper could defend himself, or George Pipkin aid him, the monster had picked up both knight and charger as cleanly, firmly and gently as a trained retriever grasps a fallen bird.

Sir Jasper and his terrified steed struggled to escape, but the dragon lifted his head and they were now thirty feet above the herbage. Then, as the populace fled before him, the gorgeous but unsportsmanlike foe waddled hugely out upon the turf and spread his wings. They flashed, as though they had been gigantic Oriental umbrellas of state, and blinded the beholders; while in another moment the ancient saurian began to rise. Pipkin, with a wild oath, charged and swung Sir Jasper's mace, which he carried until the knight should have need of it; but he did not get to close quarters for, with a swift but sure flick of the tail, his opponent swept squire and steed to the ground in utmost confusion and, before they could return to attack, the Lavender Dragon was on the wing. A few stones and quarterstaves rattled harmlessly against his purple stomach and fell back upon the heads of those who had thrown them; and then the great beast soared upward among the lights of the morning and soon dwindled to a little star amongst the streaming cirri in the blue.

All was over, and the baffled Pipkin, flinging himself again upon the earth, buried his brown face in the sward and wept like a child.

The Portreeve himself sought to comfort George.

"There is only one bright side to this unhappy incident," declared Jacob Pratt. "Your master has been proved a man of his word and a knight without fear or reproach. Had his skill in arms been equal to his nobility of character—however, let that pass. He is not the first hero who has perished in a good cause. We will cherish his memory while regretting his inefficiency. And so home to breakfast, remembering always that God knows best."

But George was not prepared to take this terrible misfortune lying down. Indeed, he rose immediately, dashed

the tears from his eyes and declared that in his opinion all was not quite lost.

"I know better concerning the accursed thing than you do," he replied, "and there is more in this rape of a rare knight than meets the eye. The dragon is a traitor, as might have been expected, for never was dragon known who did not fight foul and aid his clumsy and brute strength with cunning tactics and treacherous strategy. But Sir Jasper is not dead. The brute picked up him and his horse with a great deal of care. Neither one nor the other was injured, save morally, and I doubt not they have been conveyed to some secret holt and haunt of the creature, there to be kept alive for its own purposes. It may torture him, starve him and torment him in a thousand ways to make a dragon's holiday; but one thing is certain: it will never fight him. The wretch is no fool, and very well knows that, put to test of open battle against a man of such incomparable powers as my master can display, it would soon be swept to destruction."

"And what do you propose to do?" inquired the Portreeve.

"I propose to make my way through the dark Woods of Blore, to reach the entrance to the Lavender Dragon's domain, to demand entrance, on pain of a punitive expedition, and learn the fate of Sir Jasper though my own life pay forfeit."

All Pongley cheered the squire's determination, and with one accord the people crowded about George, clasped his hand and wished him well.

As the assembly proceeded from Rainbarrow homeward, Pipkin explained that existence without Sir Jasper held scant attraction for him.

"I am not one of those fortunate men," he said, "who is a hero to his wife. My home, to be frank, promises no welcome worth mentioning. A saddle suits me better than my chair in the ingle nook, and I prefer the sound of the winter wind to the voice of my spouse at the best of times. For that matter, they have much in common. In any case,

did I return, my own man, with this appalling story, there would be few flags flying for me, I assure you. Therefore, give me a day's provender and I will set forth to the woods and save Sir Jasper, or perish with him."

An hour later the old campaigner galloped off upon his self-appointed task; but he did not depart before uttering a promise to return and relate the facts concerning his master, if it should presently be within his power to do so.

V

The Dragon Explains

At an elevation of about a quarter of a mile, the Lavender Dragon pursued his aerial way. Beneath him rustic sons of the morning went forth to their labours and the pastoral life of the plains proceeded. Ahead, in a gloomy band against the western sky, extended the vast woodlands of Blore. Hither came the flying monster on leisurely wings, which flapped with a sound not unmusical, and created that aeolian humming heard by those who have stood beneath telegraph wires in a high wind. The stout horse and his rider in no way encumbered him. An owl thinks less of a fat mouse than the Lavender Dragon thought of the two tons he was now conveying through the air at the rate of forty miles an hour.

But Sir Jasper remained not silent under these indignities.

"False wretch!" he cried. "Is it thus you keep your oath? Was it for this you shut your untruthful eyes at the name of our Creator and swore that you would meet me in a life and death combat upon the crest of Rainbarrow? Accursed above all other dragons shall you be, and infamous in history while man is left upon the earth to read it! Little should I have imagined that dragon could do worse than dragon has already done; but you—you are the vilest, basest progeny of an infamous breed. Your

poisonous blood is upon your own head. You are lost; and if I doubted for a moment the outcome of our encounter, I doubt no more. Your fate is sealed, and whether my lance or another's drive you out of life, die you shall at the hand of outraged man, and that probably sooner than you imagine!"

But the Lavender Dragon answered never a word and Sir Jasper, when his natural wrath was a little cooled, found reason assert itself.

It was clear that if his enemy replied, he must open his jaws to do so, in which event the knight suddenly perceived what would happen to him and his charger: they must fall to earth and be miserably and unromantically destroyed. But both were destined for another fate, and retreating into the tumultuous cavern of his own thoughts, Sir Jasper began to consider what might be expected to happen next. He felt tolerably sure that the dragon dared not now encounter him in fair fight; but would it presently be possible to force a battle? He hoped so, yet felt little certainty. The saurian had proved as artful as he was old, and his victim doubted not that, when again they came to earth, it must be under conditions where little opportunity offered to his right arm and silver lance. He was wrong again, however, for after flying above the black pines of Blore for a league or thereabout, the dragon abated his speed and hovered over a clearing, where the little blossoms of wood strawberry, cyclamen and lady's slipper made a jewelly carpet amid the silver pillars of the forest. Gently the monster volplaned down into this sequestered glen and opened his jaws to liberate the captives.

"Compose yourself," said the Lavender Dragon as soon as his mouth was free to speak. "Tidy your attire, doff your helm, suffer your charger to crop a little of this excellent pasture and listen to me. You are naturally annoyed; I have put you into a position destructive of knightly dignity; I have struck confusion into those exalted ideals by which you rule your conduct; but one story is only good until we have heard the other. I know exactly

how you are feeling and I am well aware that my dragon's blood is about the only thing that you suppose can wash out the extraordinary affront this day has put upon you. Sir Jasper, you shall have it—a pint, a quart, a flagon, a tierce, a barrel—but not until you have listened to what I am about to relate.

"I heard your remarks while we were on the wing," he continued, "and I sympathise fully with your fury and indignation. You could hardly have said less; but in one particular your memory failed you and you were unjust to me. I never asserted that I would fight you on Rainbarrow. I distinctly swore that I would 'meet' you there. I am a truthful dragon and I chose my words and kept my oath. But let this pass. It is enough that I promise you full and complete satisfaction at a future date. Indeed, if you are still in a mind to it, to-day, before the sun goes down, you shall seek to destroy me without any unfair conditions whatsoever. A squire shall be furnished, and if your attractive war horse is rendered less formidable and agile than usual by the events of the morning, you may have your choice of a dozen other splendid chargers as fine as he, all fresh and ready for the field."

"I fall on at once without further parley," declared Sir Jasper. "I am a man of deeds, not words, and nothing you can possibly say will wipe this stain off my scutcheon. Only your own base heart's blood may do it."

"To fight before I have spoken would not suit me," answered the other in a calm but resolute voice. "Sit here, cool your fiery forehead with a dock leaf and listen a little longer. Do not imagine that you are in my hands. On the contrary, I am in yours. I, too, believe that deeds speak louder than words, as I hope to show you by noonday. But first I insist upon it that you listen to me, and I give you my word, as a lover of truth, that you shall not listen in vain."

With ill grace the young man flung himself upon the turf, and for a moment there was no sound but the steady cropping of his philosophic horse, whose custom was to gather his few rose buds when and where he might. Then

the Lavender Dragon, assuming a recumbent attitude, proceeded in this curious fashion.

“Even as the world itself was hatched from the Mundane Egg made by our Creator, as the Phoenicians and Egyptians rightly maintain, so all primitive orders of living things likewise emerged to life in that manner. Dragons are among the most ancient of created beings, and they have unfortunately, though not, I fear, undeservedly, personified evil from the earliest times of man. Nowadays we dragons stand as the symbol of Sin in general and paganism in particular. Satan has been termed the Great Dragon; it is declared that the saints shall trample the dragon under their feet. Mankind has also confused the dragon with chieftainship; hence Pen-dragons—leaders, or kings, created in times of peril. Since Apollo destroyed Python there has reigned enmity between my species and all gods and men who stood for righteousness; and therefore you will judge of my personal astonishment when I came to years of understanding and found myself, not only on the side of the angels from the first, but also entirely opposed to the principles and practice of my own race. In fact a dragon with a conscience—a freak of our common Mother, a caprice of Nature! My great-uncle was the celebrated Dragon of Wantley, in this county; and when he found that I entertained opinions subversive of our family interests and desired, if possible, to heal the breach established in primal time between our kindred and the children of men, he disowned me with fury, beat me cruelly, for I was then a mere dracunculus, and cast me out. My parents were already dead, and I wandered friendless for some three centuries. Then my great-uncle perished under the sword and spear of More of More Hall, a very notable knight, and elsewhere, at other times and seasons, our dwindling race was decimated by yours as history records.

“Among famous dragon-slayers—of whom St. George, that beheaded the far-famed Green Dragon of Syria, stands first—are numbered St. Philip, the Apostle, who accounted for the terror of Phrygia; St. Martha, who with unexam-

pled courage destroyed Terasque, the Scourge of Aix; St. Florent, who slew an ancestor of my own upon the Loire; while St. Cado and St. Maudel of Brittany, and St. Keyne of Cornwall also played havoc with our clan. St. Michael and St. Margaret, Pope Sylvester and the Archbishop of Dol, Denatus and St. Clement of Metz—all these eminent persons succeeded against us; and La Gorgouille, a very formidable and gigantic dragon, responsible for much evil on the banks of Seine, fell at an advanced age to the gallant St. Romain of Rouen.

“Thus we have gone down fighting to the last, and now, as I think, not above half a dozen of us shall be found in civilisation, though a few still remain beyond its borders concealed amid the sandy antres of Africa and the frozen forests of the North. For my part, all endeavours to make the world of men perceive that I desired their friendship failed. Nor do I blame anybody. Centuries of antagonism, suspicion and hatred cannot be destroyed by an individual no matter how great his goodwill. I went my way, found the Woods of Blore, established my seat therein and anon encountered a lady dragon, orphaned under the usual circumstances, and alone and friendless as myself.

“We loved at first sight and contracted an alliance; but hardly had I erected a noble home and built for my wife a fortified palace and castle worthy of her, when she left me—I hope and believe for a better world. She shared my opinions and was of a tender and gentle disposition. She threw herself into my pursuits, learned the human language of the country, which I had been at pains to master, and strove unavailingly to create some golden bridge of understanding by which we could approach man in friendship for our common advantage. But, needless to say, she failed, and it was as a result of wounds, won in a frantic but futile attempt to charm a body of crossbow men upon the march, that she lost her beautiful life.

“Anon you shall see her grave in the centre of our public park at Dragonsville. For to my city I am about to convey you, Sir Jasper; and if, after you have inspected

it, consulted those who inhabit it, and heard and seen such as bestow upon me their affection and regard—if, I say, after that experience, you still desire to fight with me and lay me low, upon my honour you shall be granted every opportunity to do so.

“What remains to be said you must learn at a later time; but now, if you are rested, we will proceed and be at home for luncheon. I am a grass-eater like your noble charger, and doubtless some fine bales of sweet clover hay await us both; but for you is already served such a banquet as we are happy to prepare for a noble and welcome guest.”

“They are then expecting us?” inquired the knight, and the Lavender Dragon admitted that it was so.

“I confess to my little plot,” he said. “I was quite determined that you should enjoy wider knowledge of me and my ways before you attempted, perhaps successfully, to destroy me. A thing once done cannot be undone, Sir Jasper, and if by chance, in future time, you had learned the truth, I am bold to believe that remorse might have darkened your soul and unavailing regrets cast a shadow on your unstained career.”

With that the dragon, tenderly picking up his new acquaintance and the piebald horse, ascended once more into the empyrean. They proceeded for a matter of twenty miles over the bosky gloom of the forest and then the scene changed, a fair and sun-kissed vale opened beneath them and, girdled by a mighty wall, Sir Jasper perceived what men of a later time would have described as a remarkably large and distinguished garden city, watered by a sparkling river.

Wide, open spaces, adorned with lakes and fountains, noble trees and blazing passages of flower colour spread between human dwellings. These stood in the shape of a star whose points extended to all quarters of the compass. The houses were solidly built of stone, and their roofs, of red and sunbaked tiles, seen from this elevation, presented a design of considerable charm. In the midst rose a gigantic castle of barbaric architecture—a

place so hugely planned, with doors so vast and towers so lofty, that the Lavender Dragon himself might move and dwell with comfort and elegance therein. It was his home, and upon an immense terrace before the southern front he now descended.

Nor was there none to welcome him. To the amazement of Sir Jasper, half a hundred stalwart men, in the livery of the Lavender Dragon, greeted the monster as he alighted. Their faces shone with well-being and they crowded about him, cheered him, saluted the visitor with courtesy and friendship and led away his agitated horse. Others took his spear and sword; while an old and kindly retainer begged that he would follow him, where he might rest, refresh, doff his armour and presently partake of the banquet already prepared in his honour.

"I will see you anon," said the Lavender Dragon. "This is Nicholas Warrender, my seneschal. You will be happy with him and a company of our comrades until the afternoon. For the moment I want my dinner before all else."

The dragon led the way into his castle and settled himself with a mighty sigh before six huge trusses of sweet-smelling hay in his own dining-room—a chamber about twice as large as the cathedral of St. Paul. But Nicholas Warrender proceeding with Sir Jasper, conveyed him to an apartment, huge enough, yet not uncomfortably spacious, and there left him to make his toilet and choose from half a hundred comely garments what he would best like to put on.

Arrayed at length in a doublet of grey velvet with amber slashings, comfortable grey hose and a collar of delicate lawn, the knight struck a bell upon his table and Nicholas returned. He led the dragon's guest into an apartment where some two hundred men and women already awaited him, and the seneschal introduced Sir Jasper to a dozen of the party, who welcomed him with much friendship and good cheer. They were for the most part elderly; but age sat lightly about them and the guest could not fail to note that in their faces one saw no lines of

care, no haggard tell-tale stamp of sorrow hidden, or tribulation concealed. Here was happiness—not simulation of the thing, proper to all well-bred and tactful companies meeting together about some common business of council or entertainment, but the genuine emotion; and furthermore he felt almost embarrassed by the manner of their greeting, for their one concern was his own comfort and pleasure. They vied with each other in warmth of welcome; they revealed nothing concerning themselves, but displayed only an altruistic regard for his satisfaction in every particular.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “would you kill me with kindness?”

“Kindness never kills,” declared Nicholas Warrender. “Kindness, Sir Knight, is the small change of a good heart, given to all who extend a hand for it, and as gladly to be received as given. Kindness, in fact, makes our wheels go round, and if it became a human habit—— However, we are not here to preach, but eat. These lampreys come from our own river and are worthy of your attention.”

After the meal Sir Jasper was introduced to a great number of men and women; and others of a younger generation also entered, that they might see and speak with him. If the elders were cheerful with the light of contentment upon their faces, how much more did the same radiance illuminate the young! Maids and boys appeared equally joyous. They greeted the guest with an ingenuous delight and respect, which Sir Jasper was well qualified to appreciate, and in the shy friendship of these young people he swiftly found an exquisite pleasure. They, too, according to their ages and predilections, offered him what they themselves most appreciated. The girls begged him to come and dance with them, or hear them sing; the boys, heedless that he had just dined after a trying journey, hoped that he would join their games and suffer them to teach him new and ravishing pastimes.

Then happened a strange thing, for among those introduced to his notice, Sir Jasper heard many names not unfamiliar.

"This," said the seneschal, "is Thomas Fagg, the wood-cutter, and our friend with the dusty face is good Master Hobanob, who helps to bake our bread. Here stands Nicol Prance, once on a time a master-thatcher, but in Dragonsville the houses are all tiled, so he has learned a new trade. This is our oldest inhabitant—of course after L.D. himself—Johnny Coble, aged ninety-five, once a swineherd, now enjoying his old age and the object of our special care. Here you see Mistress Avisia Snell, and Ann, her daughter, promised in marriage to Billy Greg, the keeper of the fountains. This pretty maid is Mary Fern, who lost her man in the wars and was just going—silly soul—to take her beautiful and useful life, when L.D. found her and brought her amongst us. Betsy Snow and Jenifer Mardell are towers of strength when good plain sewing is to be done; and here is our last arrival before your honoured self. Come forward, Abram Archer, and salute Sir Jasper."

The withy-cutter, last seen in the jaws of the dragon, stepped from the throng. He looked still a little dazed, as a man who has just emerged from a dream; but he was laughing and evidently well pleased to find himself among so many old friends in this flourishing settlement.

"I bring these good people to your notice," proceeded Nicholas Warrender, "because they are all Pongley-in-the-Marsh folk, and you may by chance have heard their names."

"I heard that they had all been devoured by the Lavender Dragon," answered Sir Jasper, and his remark awakened hearty merriment.

"We come here to eat, not to be eaten," said Hugh Hobanob; "for what is Dragonsville but a glorified Pongley after all?"

"A Pongley where there is happiness rather than anxiety, health instead of sickness, abundance in place of scarcity," added the seneschal. "Here we work, but never for ourselves. Note that. Perceive, for instance, our gardens. I will show them to you."

The company stepped into the air and many walked beside Sir Jasper as he accompanied his guide.

"We are great gardeners," continued the seneschal. "Yet nobody ever does a day's work in his own. Everybody applies his best energies and skill to the garden of somebody else. To cultivate your garden is very good, and we are well advised to do so, but how much better to cultivate the garden of your neighbour! It is, in fact, one of our greatest delights to create horticultrual surprises for our friends."

"Surely confusion might arise and disappointment, since tastes differ on this subject as on every other," suggested the knight.

"Confusion does arise," admitted Nicholas. "Thus he who hoped for radishes may find a superfluity of turnips in his garth; while the lover of kale is snowed under with endive, or spring onions. But what of it? Nothing results save cheerful laughter, and never was a better joke than when Jane Blee, who is devoted to the carrot and parsnip, discovered her garden patch obliterated under tansy and alkanet. Even L.D., who sees a joke with utmost difficulty, laughed long at Jane. But what did she do? Why, seek the gardens of her neighbours and help herself to all that she desired. For our good things are in common and our chief delight is to give of our best where it will be most appreciated. This principle runs through all our rule of living. It actuates old and young; it is the mainspring of Dragonsville: hence the brightness of our faces and the heartiness of our laughter."

"And what is the underlying impulse of this curious vagary?" inquired the visitor. "How call you this spirit which accounts for your well doing and well being?"

"For particulars you must listen to L.D.," replied the grey-beard. "And when I say 'L.D.,' think it no term of undue familiarity, or disrespect. Thus we all speak of the Lavender Dragon, both behind and before his face. It was his own idea, for we were desirous of a more respectable and sonorous title. Indeed we offered him a

crown once, and on that occasion he did indeed laugh—so riotously that he blew down a score of houses and devastated several acres of his own favourite food—I mean kidney beans. But he declined the diadem; he would not even accept the office of President. ‘I am,’ said our dragon, ‘just “L.D.” to all of you, no more, no less. Your friend, so long as you will permit it, your well-wisher and your companion in this arduous business of living out the years of our lives with dignity, energy and common advantage.’ ”

“And tell me of Lilian Lovenot,” begged Sir Jasper. “She, too, was a Pongley maiden, and I assure you that her disappearance caused much bitter feeling, for she was loved and cherished and held the pride and top flower of all the hamlet.”

The seneschal’s face fell.

“It may be so. L.D. rarely errs; but it is true that once, or perhaps twice, he has brought among us those who showed an inclination to return whence they came. His rule, however, is to seek out only the lonely, the sad, the failures, the care-worn and life-stained people, or the young who are unwanted and unloved—all such as have only heard of happiness.”

“Hence his predilection for orphans, no doubt,” murmured Sir Jasper.

“Exactly. In the case of Lilian, L.D. judged that she would be happier here, because, among us, are not a few of her own standing and rank. For he was aware that the Lovenots were no parents of hers. He thought, therefore, of her own happiness, and I fear rather overlooked the pleasure she already gave to others—a singular lapse from his own standards. Pongley’s loss was, however, Lilian’s gain. She is exceedingly joyous at present, lives in the Castle and ministers no little to L.D.’s own content; for, while the bulk of us are only concerned to make each other happy, and so indirectly please the master of Dragonsville, a few of the more learned and cultured—such as can speak wisely, or sing harmoniously—spend a measure of their time with him. He delights in music and

story-telling, and his chief material pleasure is to sit in the great central fountain and let the jet beat down upon him as it falls. This is not always good for him, however. He is much afflicted with gout, and the distemper will carry him off some day. These fields on our right are entirely devoted to growing *Colchicum Autumnale*, a crocus of the fall, from whose roots and seeds our doctor compounds the medicine to lessen L.D.'s sufferings."

They sauntered through the little, cobbled streets presently, where folk were busy about their affairs.

"We are, of course, a pastoral people," explained the seneschal, "but there is a certain amount of industrial activity among us also and we are self-supporting in every way. We grow our herds, weave and spin our wool, delve into the earth for iron and make of it our needful implements. Life is simple here, because the need for money does not exist; and even if it did, to save were impossible by reason of the law that directs and controls everything. 'Giving,' is the watchword here, and 'getting' conveys no impression to the rising generation; while, to us elders, this business of 'getting' merely signifies that reactionary and unsocial process which keeps the outer world so short of the content and happiness we enjoy. But hither comes the merry man of the castle. L.D. is probably anxious to see you and sends his messenger."

It was so, and Sir Jasper learned from a jester, who now approached, that his presence in the great Hall of Reception would be welcome.

The buffoon was by no means as cheerful as many of his companions; but only a facial accident explained his apparent depression. He was a dry bird, by the name of Dicky Gollop, and he explained to Sir Jasper how, on an occasion of hawking with his former master, he had made a jest which the baron, who owned him, took in bad part.

"Before I could explain my point," said Dicky, "the dull old dog alighted from his horse, directed a dozen varlets to pinion me against a tree, then beat me with the flat face of his sword until I lost consciousness. There

he left me, still crucified to the pine, and there I must have perished but for L.D., who, passing that way, saved the situation. I regained my understanding in Dragonsville and rejoiced to abide here. I have but one daily regret, and honestly I believe that I am the only member of the community who regrets anything at all."

"What may that be?" enquired Sir Jasper.

"My inability to strike the right note of humour for L.D.," replied Dicky Gollop. "It is not my fault, for I really can be funny when in good form. Others will tell you of my jokes and quips, my quirks and quiddities. I am an excellent wag and make men, and even women, lose themselves in hurricanes of laughter. My repartee is rapier-like, my badinage bewilders with its lightning flashes. For a *jeu de mot*, a quibble, a conundrum, or a double entendre, there is nobody to approach me, and yet I lack the power to make my revered master enjoy the luxury of a hearty roar."

"Perhaps that is as well from all I hear," replied the knight; but Dicky would not allow it.

"No, my mission, so far as he is concerned, is a failure. And he knows it. He is as sorry for me as I am for myself. He tries to make me happy by laughing at my jocularity; but jesters are not deceived. Nobody knows quicker than tomfool if his tomfoolery is touching the spot; and in the ordinary high-class establishments, where jesters form part of the retinue, if we don't give our employers sore sides, we soon receive them. But L.D. never shows any impatience at my failure. He observes that I entertain other people, and since the happiness of others is the only thing he cares a brass button about, in this vicarious sense I please him too. As a man, therefore, I am content; as an artist I shall ever harbour a sense of disappointment."

But Dicky's trouble did not interest Sir Jasper. He was himself devoid of humour, and he could not find it in his heart to blame the Lavender Dragon's indifference.

"Many," he said, "derive no great entertainment from the glib tongues and often questionable drolleries of your

class. If you do not actually irritate your master, you should be content."

"You are not an artist then," ventured Dicky.

"No," replied Sir Jasper. "I am a serious man engaged in making the world better than I find it."

"To be merrier is also to be better," declared the mirth-provoker. "Man is the only laughing animal, and laughter is too little respected. Every child should be taught to laugh—like a gentleman; since there are horrid forms of laughter, which might be cured in youth, but not afterwards. Those who help the world to laugh, Sir Knight, are worthy of respect as great as the mighty ones, and the lovers of bloodshed and battle, who help it to cry. At least that is L.D.'s opinion, and I shall make him laugh yet if I break my heart a-trying."

With that they entered the draconian presence together.

VI

The Dragon Goes On Explaining

Sir Jasper's host reclined amid a chaos of woollen cushions each as large as a haystack. They were coloured amber and blue, jade green and orange. Thus they chimed pleasantly with the rose and delicate shades of lilac which played in sparkling iridescence over the vast body of the Lavender Dragon. He had eaten his hay and was now toying with a little mountain of sugared kidney beans piled up upon a plate of gold, while beside it stood an enormous silver goblet, containing fifty gallons of cider.

A girl sat on an ivory chair beside L.D.; and when the knight appeared, she put her little hand on the dragon's paw as he extended his mighty claws to the sweetmeats in the golden dish.

"No," she said, "you must not eat any more. They are horribly bad for you, and you know that Doctor Doncaster has told you these sugared beans should be taken far more sparingly."

The dragon drew back his paw.

"Let me present Sir Jasper de Pomeroy, my dear Lilian," he said, and then turned to the visitor.

"This is Mistress Lilian Lovenot—so to call her. But she and I have reason to think that her real name is otherwise. However, time will show."

The knight bowed and the lady curtsied, and while they became acquainted, L.D. stealthily helped himself to some more beans. Indeed he tossed a peck into his mighty mouth and munched them quickly, his opal eyes on Lilian.

She was a fair maiden with rich, auburn locks, braided into two heavy bands that descended below her knees. She wore cloth of gold, that fitted close to her sturdy but beautifully modelled body; and the bright fabric was ornamented with emeralds only. Her face was strangely beautiful and winsome, and when her lips parted in a smile, a dimple of the most distracting charm twinkled upon her left cheek. Her eyes especially fascinated Sir Jasper, for they were in lustre and colour like aquamarines.

She spoke in a soprano voice and gave him her hand, which he kissed with courtly respect. They made a striking pair and the dragon gazed upon them benevolently; but he presently interrupted their discourse and bade Lilian leave him with his visitor.

"Depart, dear chuck," he said. "You shall become better acquainted with Sir Jasper anon; for the present he listens to me, and we have some ground to traverse. All that I must say cannot be spoken at a sitting, but if he is so disposed, we will make a beginning this afternoon."

The maiden turned to the knight.

"Do not let him eat too many beans, or drink too much cider," she said. And then she departed, while Sir Jasper had leisure to note the grace of her deportment and progression.

"A blessed girl," said the dragon after Lilian had disappeared. "Beautiful both without, as you perceive, and within, as you shall find. Of her and her mystery more at another time. Now I will proceed with my own story where I left off this morning. When my dear wife died,

a great darkness descended upon me and for the space of five-and-twenty years life held no interest or consolation. Do you see yonder mound beside the fountain—the tumulus bowered in hawthorns?”

He pointed out of a lofty window, where shone brilliant displays of blossom, crimson and white, upon a little hill. Sir Jasper nodded.

“There she lies, and there, ere long, I shall lie beside her,” said L.D. He heaved a sigh, like the breath of a sinking storm, and one or two tears, each representing a quart of the purest lavender water, splashed upon the cushions.

“Pardon me,” said the dragon. He then cleared his throat and proceeded.

“I even contemplated self-slaughter during the full brunt of my bereavement, but a moderate intellect and a good conscience came to my aid. I strove to create fresh interests and immerse myself in such enterprises as should justify existence and be an excuse for my long life. And then I made the astounding discovery that has taken shape in this little republic. I found that the only happiness worthy of being so called is that which we are able to bring to other creatures; and since my own race was beyond the reach of my ambitions in this direction, I turned attention to man—to *Homo Sapiens*, as he so humorously calls himself—and studied him with immense application for two whole centuries.

“Man, Sir Jasper, viewed as it were from the outside, is a difficult customer, and I was more than once minded to abandon my studies in despair; but I persisted and at length arrived at some general conclusions concerning him. What did I find? I discovered, first, that the thing your species chiefly lacked was humility. Man is far the vainest of created things, and his gift of reason, instead of balancing this defect, and helping him to see himself in a juster perspective with regard to his place in the cosmos, tends as a rule to increase his unfortunate arrogance and insensate pride. Rather than employ his wonderful wits to fathom and accept Nature’s law of life, he abuses his best gift, reason, and behaves in a way to put himself

below lesser creatures that lack it. Nothing in the world that goes on two feet, or four, or six—that swims, walks, or flies—is ridiculous and immodest save only mankind; and everything that is unseemly and unworthy on earth arises from him alone. Yet he vaunts himself as a being supreme and in a category apart, for ever denying the one touch of Nature that should make our whole world kin. Man, in fact, is far too pleased with himself and, bogged in his inordinate vanity, fails to make the progress that Nature has a right to expect from him. He is falling behind her time-table; he is loitering by the way to admire his own features in every pool; his values and opinions, his hopes and fears, his interests and activities are all far too elementary for his age.”

The Lavender Dragon gulped a gallon of cider and proceeded.

“And why has he not travelled further on his appointed road? The answer is a melancholy one. He has doubled back upon his own high-water mark; his tides actually ebb rather than flow. The world contains evidence of a higher civilisation and worthier humanity than exist in it at this moment; for man has fouled the lustral waters of his reason and substituted for pure thinking and higher principles, a degraded and reactionary rule of conduct founded on superstitions so gross that even a simple dragon like myself, coming to their examination with unbiased mind, stands aghast before such a retrograde era.

“It is summed up in an aphorism, my friend. Faith took the wrong turning; Faith—that vital principle of progress—instead of founding her vanes upon the rock of reason and building on those mighty foundations laid by your ancient thinkers, sought elsewhere for her inspiration, set back the clock and lost many centuries by so doing. How much more time your race will be content to squander, I cannot say; how many more generations of you will still grope in the night of superstition and suffer it to discolour your thought and retard your progress I know not. Only by persisting in your vanity and by blinding yourselves and your children can it be done.

"Your rights and wrongs are all your concern, never your obligations and errors. You are the most ungrateful of created things, and even that dim sense of gratitude, lying in hope of favours to come and represented by early man's first prayer to beings greater than himself—even that was soon lost. Your religion, that might have been a fair and reasonable addition to life, became foul and more foul, because it sprang from fear instead of love, from suspicion instead of trust; and the poison that polluted its beginnings is with it yet. But given loyalty to the laws that made you, and reverence for the things you might become, rather than foolish pride in the things that you are, then the spectacle you present should lead to impatience instead of self-satisfaction, and create a great will and purpose to give reason a chance, that you may learn whereto she is willing to lead you."

Sir Jasper concealed a yawn, for these affairs did not interest him at all. He tried a sugared bean, but found it far too tough a matter for his teeth.

"A few words more and we will proceed from theory to practice," said L.D. "I say, then, that if man but grasped how much he owed to Nature, how little to his own ill-used gifts, he would be more disposed to humility, more inclined to develop his immense static possibilities in dynamic action. What you have done, and are still busily engaged in doing, is merely to postpone what you might do and should do. You shudder at the base instincts you discover—in your neighbours; you blame your primitive ancestors for these savage survivals; but when distinction, altruism and greatness appear, you give no praise to Nature then. No, you praise your noble selves and take all the credit. But I am boring you?"

"Far from it," replied Sir Jasper. "I hate conceit. We are vain popinjays no doubt."

"Possibly you do not live long enough to be otherwise," reflected the dragon. "Your lives are too brief to attain the long view and the balanced vision which I, for example, enjoy. You are still children for a quarter of existence, and often for the whole of it. But you will be

more interested in the results of my discoveries. Briefly, our little community and township is the result. I began, in quite a small way, with half a dozen old and disconsolate people, who knew but too well their room was more wanted than their company. One by one I snapped them up and conveyed them hither. I explained my idea and put it into practice by devoting myself to the pleasure and satisfaction of these lonely individuals. They supplied me with the names of others, and were in a position to assure me that I should wrong nobody by increasing my collection. They also declared that amid the superfluity of children, I might, without causing inconvenience, help myself as generously as I pleased; and this fact gave me particular satisfaction, for it is the children I was after. Comparatively little can be done for the aged, and even middle-aged, but make them comfortable and fairly contented. Their minds are set and they repose upon a body of fossil opinions, rather than seek the adventure of new ideas. But how different with youth! The present population of Dragonsville, save certain notable exceptions, was generally caught young; and the result has been that my theories, such as they are, win their opportunity. You must, of course, prove for yourself whether the results satisfy you. It is possible that you stand on other ground and mistrust reason; but be that as it may, you will please understand that this little experiment is conducted on lines of reason alone."

"I saw a very nice church, however," murmured Sir Jasper.

"It is a very nice church. I am coming to that," replied the dragon. "But first a few more general precepts. Success has nearly always attended my transplantations. Men and women, removed from the anxieties and perils of modern civilisation, soon find a new sense of security growing within them and come to discover that the simplicity of this self-supporting state is worth the loss of much that the greater world can promise. For the greater world, as you may already be aware, promises so much and performs so little. The promisers are among the mighty

of the earth, but the performers for the most go unrecognised and unrewarded. Here we do not promise much, yet surprise ourselves daily by the beauty of our modest achievement, and that without stifling the unconquerable spirit of hope, which enables humanity to keep going, in face of so many temptations to stop going. These temptations arise from man's own false values and acquired defects of superstition and selfishness, and that most dreadful of all disabilities known as patriotism. But without, I say, quenching hope, I yet seek to modify that illusory quality of the human mind and re-establish it upon surer ground. The result is patience and a growing conviction that things won't happen because we want them to do so, or think that they should happen. The prayer to pray, Sir Jasper, is the prayer you can answer yourself, and the way to pray it is upon your feet, not your knees. This, however, shocks you. I see it in your face."

"I am not sure that I understand," pleaded the knight.

"You should do so, for it is your own rule and ordinance. You held me better dead this morning; but I am sure you did not pray for my destruction: you set out with sword and lance to compass it."

"Let us not return to that," begged the other.

"You may still think it best, when you have heard and seen all. I am at your service as you know. But 'hope'—I was speaking of this great faculty. Hope may simply breed restlessness, and so destroy a man's present content and mar enjoyment of what he has for desire of what he has not. Again hope, which after all is a sort of dreaming, may prevent a man from what he can do, for thinking on what he would like to do. Your Guilds illustrate this inconvenience, for I observe when wages interest the workman so much more than his work, that both work and wages suffer, to the disappointment of everybody concerned."

"You cannot banish hope from the human heart," declared Sir Jasper.

"I would as soon banish sunshine from the earth," replied his companion. "Hope is of the essence of progress.

Hope is a precious adjunct of all reason. But the really hopeful thing about your lives is manifest in a great fact that you have yet to grasp. The very gold mine and treasury of human hope, confounding your pessimists and people with weak knees and little faith in your own destiny, lies in this: that reason, like everything else, is subject to change, and that the change, despite occasional and enormous relapses, none the less makes steady progress in well-doing. Reason's natural growth and motion is upward, not downward; forward, not backward; and they who flout reason terribly err, because they will not permit her to do that vital work which lies within her power. At present you are on the crest of a receding wave and far beneath the high-water mark that earlier generations of men have attained; but despair not: the tide is coming in, because it is a part of the great order of things that it should do so. You must judge what man can do by the best that he has done, not from the worst; you must admit that the best can be bettered, and you must turn your faces to the dawn, rather than bury your noses in night and cry that the darkness thickens. You cannot stand still, and while men slip back, man goes onward under the impulsion of reason, that makes for righteousness despite the cross-currents of greed and superstition, vice and folly that seem to hide the fact. Herein lies the most valuable function of hope: to trust man and to trust his future."

"And, meanwhile, what must we do?" asked Sir Jasper.

"Be humble," replied the Lavender Dragon, "and instead of seeking supernatural guides, bend your glances to earth and learn that creatures far beneath you in the scale of existence can teach you exactly those things you most need to know. Instead of demanding assistance from higher beings, whose purpose is obscure, whose friendship is doubtful, whose very existence is merely a matter of opinion, how far better to turn attention upon humble fellow creatures, whose manners and customs are plain to be observed and whose lives command our admiration. Note yonder swarm of bees collecting in the foliage upon my wife's tomb. The unconscious altruism of the honey-

bee, who does with her might what best becomes her during the short weeks of her existence, is an example so lofty that if it were practised by man the face of this world would be entirely changed. You, my friend, have an ambition to leave the earth sweeter and richer than you find it; and that is exactly what the bee achieves in her own sphere, and what I strive to accomplish in mine. And where reason rules, such an ambition reacts most favourably upon those who persist therein. For it is the solvent of selfishness, the test and touchstone of character. As time passes and the emotion becomes a part of yourself, humility appears; you are emptied of any love for fame, power or pelf; room for happiness is created, and you find, in a negation of personal good, the truest happiness that man may enjoy; for only by individual self-denial can the sum total of happiness be increased. Such a protagonist is on the right road to justify his own existence and help the flowing tide to new high levels, as yet beyond the reach, but not beyond the hope of reason."

"And how does it work?" inquired the knight, whereupon his host drained his vast beaker and made answer.

"My own modest experience appears to work well; but, of course, it is difficult to be sure if I am really in the right road. You might guess that, where everybody strives to be gracious and useful to everybody else, a condition so unusual in human intercourse would have cast the whole enterprise into confusion; but it is not so. The people are happy and we progress in amenities of life. We live and let live; consequently we live and learn. Without a doubt we are going ahead and getting cleverer in the art of a justified and dignified existence. And the people are happy; because if they were not so, none would stop in Dragonsville. But they remain, though under no compulsion to do so; they assure me that such a life as this meets their requirements and is well worth living."

"They never desert you?"

"Never—hence doubtless the general suspicion at Pongley, and many other places, that I devour them. Once only

did a very good man—a holy clerk—declare a desire to return to his grot in the hills. He was a minister of the Christian faith, and having failed to succeed and win his flock as a parish priest, became a hermit and communed in secret with his Maker, living meantime in a natural cavern upon the fruits of the earth. I snapped up Father Lazarus at his own matin prayers, brought him here and talked to him as I have talked to you. He was much annoyed at first, but soon calmed down and enjoyed our home comforts for a season. Then he showed uneasiness and a desire to return to the desert. Presently, however—thanks to his fellow men and women, not to me—he changed his mind, on the condition that I would build him a place wherein he might worship his God and advance the happiness of those who shared his religious opinions.

“I willingly agreed, for you must understand that I am no propagandist, but welcome any ideas which directly or indirectly advance happiness. Upon one point only was I definite. But that’s another story and shall be told you at another time. Father Lazarus is a most excellent and high-minded priest, and we are close friends. The people respect him, and it is his custom to seek me on the first day of every month and devote a morning to my personal welfare. He much desires to convert me to his own predilections in the matter of religion; and since the effort is a part of his duty and gives him satisfaction, I always make leisure to attend his discourses.”

“You marry and are given in marriage?”

“Certainly. Father Lazarus has celebrated many alliances, and the occasion of a marriage is always a day of rejoicing. I hope you may see such ceremonies. Our children will be a delight to you—if you are fond of children.”

“And now a delicate question,” ventured Sir Jasper. “All you have told me, Sir Dragon, is of deep interest and instruction; but it is my habit of mind ever to look forward. What of the future of your colony? You, I take it, are but mortal, and cannot live for ever.”

“The future,” replied L.D., “must look after itself—as

it always has done and always will do. I have never been one to bother my brains about anything but the present. I trust the future handsomely, as you already know, but my own concerns have been with my own few centuries. When I die—probably in a year, or it may be two—I shall be laid beside my wife; and having planted hawthorns over me, the duty of the community, so far as I am concerned, will be at an end. The greater duty to themselves I do not seek to influence. Some will probably desire the complexities of a higher civilisation than ours. Prob- sired to remain; others, to return to the larger world and ably Dragonsville will disappear, when the walls return to the earth from which they were raised; and if a measure of what I have endeavoured to do and advance is carried into the greater world and proves, in its small way, of any service, I shall not have lived in vain.”

Sir Jasper nodded.

“I am deeply impressed and much edified,” he declared; “but I do not think you must ask me to stop with you. To break a precedent is a pity, and the life frankly invites me by reason of its simplicity, dignity and general charm; but my aim and purpose have ever been to redress wrong and fight evil. Here things are so happily ordered that an armed knight—a man of war such as myself—whose business is to destroy the enemies of mankind and strike bitter and bloody blows that the world may be cleaner, safer and happier—such a man, honourable Dragon, would find nothing to do in this place.”

“Why not beat your sword into a ploughshare, your lance into a pruning hook, your armour into kitchen utensils?” asked the other. “I can imagine your silver helmet making an exquisite holder for a pot plant in the boudoir of my dear Lilian.”

A slight warmth of colour mantled the cheek of the hero.

“You are not quite as ingenuous as you pretend, I fear,” he answered.

“Consult her,” urged the Lavender Dragon. “You might do worse, for to her outward charm is united a

very beautiful mind, and I have little doubt that, in reality, she comes of descent as long and noble as your own. Take occasion to have discourse with her before you decide. Speaking generally, your argument is capable of refutation, for the gift of skill in the field is not, I think, your sole claim to distinction. Given good will, the prime motive power of all progress, and a desire to help our body politic, a man of your high principles and exalted sentiments should not be at a loss even here. I, for example, shall beg you to throw light upon much that puzzles my dragon mind. To-day I have done all the talking, but think not that I cannot listen too. Many of my friends and neighbours have helped me vastly with their practical knowledge of your species, and the rising generation is not backward of still more valuable ideas. However, you are free to go when you please; but I should think it courteous and considerate if you would undertake to stay a month with us."

"That I will gladly do," replied his guest. "There is, however, one privilege I would beg. My squire, George Pipkin, must be suffering the extremity of grief on my account, and he will, not unnaturally, fear for me a very different fate than this I now enjoy. Is it within your power, think you, to unite us? I may tell you that he will certainly seek me and push his way, sooner or later, to your outer walls. If, on reaching them, he might be admitted into this happy land, I should thank you heartily."

"I will bring him myself," promised the Lavender Dragon. "A man so faithful and of such devotion to his master is worthy of all respect."

Sir Jasper sighed and reviewed his tremendous experience.

"What the world would think of me, I cannot guess," he said.

"What the world thinks of us is of prodigious unimportance, my friend," replied the saurian. "The only thing that really matters is what we think of ourselves. In nothing is reason so flouted as in our ridiculous self-es-

timates; but when we suffer her to help us read our own hearts and judge the real worth of our own abilities and ambitions, then we shall begin to know what moral progress may mean."

VII

Great News For George Pipkin

Early on the morrow the Lavender Dragon set forth to seek George Pipkin and, after sleeping soundly in a most comfortable and cheerful chamber, the latest arrival at Dragonsville went among the people and saw and heard much that gave him pleasure.

His host had not returned at the hour of midday dinner, but certain elderly and dignified persons of both sexes joined Sir Jasper at the meal. He found Father Lazarus, the priest, to be of the party, together with Nicholas Warrender, the seneschal, a grey-haired dame or two, and an old but venerable man whom the others addressed as "Sir Claude." There were also present Amory Doncaster, the Lavender Dragon's doctor, and Lilian Lovenot, who, radiant in a gown of azure blue, decorated with pearls as large as filberts, sat beside the new-comer.

Conversation proved by no means parochial and his new friends manifested great interest in Sir Jasper's professional experiences and the doings of the outer world. The old people expressed a hope that life ran in more gracious channels than of yore, and that he found an increase of prosperity and happiness upon his travels; while, when he confessed that new wars were in the making and new discontents battering and bruising humanity on every side, the younger men and women present declared their impatience and indignation at the slow progress of the race.

"I cannot but think," said Lilian Lovenot, "that a time is near when the rising generation of Dragonsville will be

called to abandon this life of ease and happiness, and go forth to carry the principles and theories of L.D. into the outer darkness."

"A tremendous opinion," replied a youth by the name of Howard Harris. "But it may come to that. We have all made one another as happy as it is possible to be at Dragonsville, and, for my own part, I sometimes sigh for other fields wherein to conquer."

"Or be conquered," said Sir Claude, and looking upon him, the younger knight observed the first face in this city which betokened a mind not wholly at rest.

After the meal was ended, Sir Jasper, his fellow knight and Lilian walked to the grave of the Lavender Dragon's wife and sat upon it under the shadow of the flowering shrubs. Then Sir Claude, having found that his own adventures in chivalry belonged to a period far anterior to the visitor's, explained the reason of that settled melancholy which appeared upon his grey and wrinkled countenance.

"I am Sir Claude Pontifex Fortescue, of the Strong Shield," he said, "and it was I, Sir Jasper, who, sixty years ago, laid lance in rest against L.D. That awful error of judgment has haunted me and cast the sour shadow of remorse upon my long, and, I hope, subsequently blameless career."

"I did no less in thought," confessed Sir Jasper. "My one desire was to slaughter this prodigious person and cut his head off. Surely he is the last to blame you, or harbour any suspicion of resentment. It is summed in a word, Sir Knight; you and I knew no better. I will go further and declare that there was no reason why we should."

"Exactly; and he has told you so a dozen times, Sir Claude," added Lilian. "It is irrational of you to harbour this sorrow for more than half a century. You merely scratched his side and did not shorten his precious life by an hour."

The ancient knight only shook his head.

"I deserved death, for he strove to address me before I charged, and I would not listen."

"But he spared you to be useful; and no doubt you have been useful," suggested Sir Jasper.

"He has," vowed Lilian. "L.D. himself declares that Sir Claude has been his right paw for sixty years."

But Sir Claude dwelt morbidly on the details of that far-away disaster.

"He merely thumped me; then he brought me here, healed my bruises and exalted me into a position of trust and honour. Would that I had been worthy of such forgiveness, my friends."

He refused to be comforted, and presently Sir Jasper and Lilian left him, still sighing to himself, and went their way through the gardens of the castle.

"Come and look at our carpet bedding," suggested the beautiful maiden, and her companion soon stood where five-and-twenty gardeners were busy arranging a little horticultural surprise for the dragon on his return. Sir Jasper, however, was no authority on these subjects and he turned the conversation into more personal channels. Lilian, at his entreaty, related the brief particulars of her own career as far as she remembered it; but she shared the dragon's opinion concerning her advent into the world and agreed with the inhabitants of Pongley-in-the-Marsh that the excellent Lovenots were not her parents.

"I loved them dearly," she said, "but I never felt towards them as a daughter, and when L.D. discovered me weeping at the well, he knew, by a marvellous intuition peculiar to him and doubtless the result of his vast experience, that I was no true child of the hamlet."

"Here you are happier?" inquired the knight.

"It may sound ungrateful, but I am. I do love comfort and cleanliness and, I am afraid, luxury," confessed Lilian. "Silk next the skin, swansdown to sleep upon, crystal to drink out of, instead of cloam, and so on—weak—very weak, Sir Jasper."

"Doubtless the blood in your veins demands these mod-

est additions to life," he declared. "There can be no sort of doubt that the fairies, after their somewhat malicious custom, played a trick upon your foster-mother and your real one; and now the daughter of the Lovenots probably occupies a position of high estate and has usurped your connections and your lawful style and title."

"It may be so, but I am perfectly happy here," said Lilian. "In the fragrant atmosphere of the Lavender Dragon, we live a life of such fine quality that no distinction could better it. I naturally mourn my own dear parents sometimes, and wonder what they make of the girl who bears my name, whatever that may be; but I daresay they have found a better daughter than I should have been to them."

"That is quite impossible," he asserted, and was lost in thought for the space of twenty minutes.

Sir Jasper then spoke again and put a question.

"Is it beyond reason that I should be permitted to gaze at your left elbow?" he inquired, and the lady started at a request so unusual.

"Who told you about that, Sir Jasper?" she asked in her turn.

"Nobody told me anything, fair mistress; but, as they say, the world is small, and I have in my mind a noble West-country family, who lost a daughter and found a changeling under somewhat distressing circumstances about sixteen years ago. The changeling ran away with a wine-drawer when she was fifteen, and no great search was made to find either of them. The noble family of the Traceys, who are always said to have the wind in their faces, happen to be neighbours of my own kin, and we are therefore familiar with a tradition among them. The eldest son always exhibits a birthmark on his left shoulder-blade in the shape of a poignard; while the eldest daughter's left elbow never fails to reveal an auburn mole in shape of a cuddly wren."

Lilian's aquamarine eyes shone like ocean pools when the tide is out, and she exhibited the wildest astonishment.

"But I have a little wren upon my left elbow," she cried.

"Then you are the vanished daughter of the far-famed Lord Meavybrook, of the family of Tracey in the West country, whose manor adjoins our lands of Pomeroy. I salute Mistress Lovenot no longer, but the Honourable Camilla Petronell Thomasin Tracey and kiss her hand!"

At this dramatic moment a shadow fell upon the carpet bedding, and the aerial music of the Lavender Dragon's wings announced his return. In a few moments he had descended, whereupon George Pipkin and his roan charger reached the ground together. Instantly George perceived his master and, rushing to him, praised God and flung himself at Sir Jasper's feet. The knight raised his squire, cheered him heartily, bade him rejoice, assured him that all was well, and presently surrendered him to the good offices of half a dozen friendly spirits, who hastened to pleasure the new arrival.

The translated maiden meantime attended upon the dragon, and, after L.D. had enjoyed a mighty meal of hay and fine oats, informed him of the amazing discovery concerning herself. He was gratified but by no means surprised, and when Sir Jasper returned from a talk with George, all particulars were demanded.

The knight, however, could add no more to the story than he had already told. He was permitted to study the white elbow of the lady and there, exquisitely fashioned by Nature's self, appeared a wee cuddy wren that, upon the milky purity of the skin, suggested an agate cameo carved by a master's hand.

"One takes these happenings in a large spirit," said the dragon. "I am well-pleased to have my intuition proved correct, and for the moment only a single thought occurs to me. We have now a choice of three names for Mistress Tracey, and what I want to know is this: does she desire that we call her henceforth Camilla, Petronell, or Thomasin?"

The girl looked at Sir Jasper and smiled so radiantly that a mavis on a bough burst into music and added cer-

tain notes to his repertory that have been in every grey bird's song since then.

"It is Sir Jasper, after my gossips, who has given me these pleasant names," she said; "he shall, therefore, determine by which I must henceforth be addressed."

"Let L.D. choose," begged the knight, but the dragon declined.

"Then let it be Camilla on Sundays and Petronell through the week, save upon Fridays, when she shall be called Thomasin."

It was decided so, and in high good humour the Lavender Dragon retired to sleep, and the knight and the lady were again left in each other's company.

Strange emotions already agitated Sir Jasper and he found in his mind a new sensation, which left him a little bemused. Bitter-sweet under-currents of thought possessed him and led to some slight loss of manners; for so occupied was he with his own reflections that more than once he forgot to reply when Petronell questioned him, and thrice he permitted himself to gaze upon her with a direct glare of his blue eyes that cast her into maidenly confusion.

For these lapses he apologised in stumbling words, and he had no sooner done so when he committed the like errors again. Anon she left him and walked pensively to the castle, while he returned to George. Pipkin was now well fed and had changed his travel-stained jerkin of leather and oft-mended boots for a murrey-coloured velvet tunic and small clothes of orange-tawny laced with black. He had entirely recovered from the shock of the morning, and having related how the dragon had snapped him, as he was about to plunge into the Woods of Blore, he dismissed the subject and declared his great satisfaction at the turn of events.

"I have never had such a fuss made about me since I was short-coated," declared the squire, "and I am well content to enjoy a long respite and rest from our tedious life among these delightful people. May I venture to hope,

Sir Jasper, that you design to remain here at least until the autumn?"

But his master thought differently.

"This is no place for us, George," he replied. "A month I have undertaken to remain, that I may study a society from which we can both learn much to our profit; but that done, we take the road. We are men of war, and there is nothing that we can accomplish to add to the perfection of this peaceful community. We will, therefore, glean what wisdom we may and, fortified thereby, return to our own good work."

Pipkin, however, secretly hoped their visit might be prolonged; and then a curious accident brought the squire face to face with one whom he had known in the outer world.

They were strolling down a little street together, wherein every house seemed to smile an invitation upon them from its open door and cheerful countenance, when, out of a cot, in whose garden towered purple columbines above a bed of rosemary, there tripped a young woman and two children. She was dark and comely, with black hair, brown eyes and a skin as ruddy as a burn in spate. The youngsters were like her—a pair of bright-eyed boys with laughing eyes.

"Odds bodikins!" cried George. "Here is Sally Slater, the widow of West Fell. What chance has brought her to this happy valley?"

The woman's eyes now fell on George and she recognised him.

"'Tis Master Pipkin!" she cried.

"By our Lady I command you tell me how you came hither," demanded George, and Sally Slater related her strange story.

"You must know that after my husband died, I took care of his old mother, and on a day when I made for her a brew of lentils, herbs and milk, an awful fate befell me. I was engaged in my cooking and thinking with tears of my departed spouse, when into my cabin burst half

a dozen strange men. There was a witch hunt through West Fell, and seeing me about my pot, the cruel wretches leapt upon me and haled me before a judge. As ill fortune would have it, a black cat with green eyes purred upon my hearth at the time, while in a corner, for I was ever a cleanly woman, there stood a great birch broom. Here was sufficient evidence to endanger my existence, and after I had sworn, by the blood of our Saviour, that I was no witch and had never in all my life held commune with the Fiend, they put me to the torture to make me confess.

"They thrust me into a chair of sharp steel spikes; they dropped boiling oil upon my legs and bosom and held a lighted taper under my armpits. And then, after striving with my poor might to hold to the truth, my body's grief was too great and, even for the brief respite, which I knew was all that remained, I lied and screamed out that I was indeed a witch."

Sir Jasper regarded poor Sally with sorrow.

"It is even so with thousands," he said. "For the brief surcease of their agony, tormented flesh cries out a falsehood, and so men and women without number are forced to say what is false and condemn themselves to death; while those who think they do God service, rejoice and cast the unfortunate innocents into the fire. The Popes of Rome swept away that legal justice enjoyed by all accused persons under pagan law, and our most earnest Christians have sent innumerable harmless men and women to the flames on this account. Fear was responsible for these cruelties, and fear makes all men unjust. Fear surely must it have been that caused Elisha to consign the children to the bears, though why he was alarmed at two score noisy youngsters, we shall never know. And the men who have accomplished these dismal feats were the salt of the earth! The good Bishop of Treves burned six thousand, five hundred parishioners and desolated his diocese; Nicholas Remy, a pious and, I believe, a pleasing person in his home, roasted over eight hundred of his

poor and powerless fellow creatures. One remembers also that admirable Protestant jurist, Benedict Carpzor, who not only read the Holy Bible from cover to cover fifty-three times, but also passed twenty thousand sentences of death on witches and sorcerers."

"Did no ghosts ever haunt or distract these accursed wretches?" cried George Pipkin.

"Certainly not," replied the knight. "They passed to their eternal reward with the blessing and applause of all men, and in consciousness of lives nobly spent on their Maker's business. In the case of Remy aforesaid, however, it is reported that he was unhappy on his death-bed because, in a moment of human weakness, he had only scourged certain young children naked round the pyres whereon their parents were burning, instead of casting them into the flames also. His conscience pricked him sharply in that matter at the end, for it is well known, and Mother Church is clear upon the subject, that the children of witches have the Devil for their sire and should never be spared the stake."

"Then how come you and your brave boys to be alive, Sally?" inquired George.

"Thanks entirely to L.D.," replied the young widow. "By the will of God, he was passing West Fell when I went to the faggots, and scarcely had they been ignited before he came to earth, sent the people flying in every direction and bore me away. Nor did his mercy end with my rescue. As soon as we had landed here and I learned the truth of him, my mother's heart cried for my children. I explained that they would certainly be burned alive after our departure, and were probably already beyond salvation. Whereon he instantly set out again, and West Fell, being cast into a great terror by his visit, the children were still in the land of the living. Certain persons had pitied them in secret and bidden them fly before it was too late. Our dragon came upon the little things lying asleep together without the village, and when they awakened from their journey, it was in my arms."

"All's well that ends well," said George, "and now tell me a little about our native place. I often think of West Fell and my family."

Sally showed some uneasiness.

"I'm very much afraid there will be bad news for you, Master Pipkin, when you gang home again," she said.

"Let me have it," he answered, "for as to ganging home, I do not feel in any violent haste to be there."

"Poor Mistress Pipkin is gathered in," said Sally sadly. "A year or so before my troubles, she went to pick water-cresses in the owl-light, and 'tis feared she mistook the way. Be that as it will, they found her drowned with a very peaceful expression upon her face."

"My stars, Jemima gone!" cried George, staring before him with more astonishment than grief. "Are you sure of what you are telling me, Sally?"

"She lies beside the little one took after he was born; and your daughter has married the cordwainer, John Bindle, and your son has gone for a sailor in one of the king's ships."

"This would seem to be the day of my life!" murmured Pipkin.

"Accept hearty sympathy in your affliction," said Sir Jasper. "You will suffer this blow with your usual philosophic fortitude, George."

"Heaven helping, I shall make shift to face it," answered the widower, "for what saith the Book? 'He hath done all things well.'"

Three Songs And A Story

VIII

This being no tale of love, we are not so much concerned with the swift and ingenuous romance of Sir Jasper and his honourable lady, as challenged by the result of their common passion. Nor can we dwell overmuch upon the less emotional love-making of George Pipkin, who,

before he had resided a week at Dragonsville, was resolutely courting Sally Slater and winning the affection of her sons.

Sir Jasper now found himself at odds between love and duty, yet opposed the one against the other with diminishing zest, for as time passed, he could not fail to observe that the maiden of his adoration was by no means impatient of his company. The knight's cheek grew lean, and his blue eyes became anxious. He had little intelligence, but a conscience of almost morbid activity, and at first he suspected the whole business to be enchantment—a possible wile of the Lavender Dragon to detain him indefinitely, fog his senses and deaden his soul to the clarion of duty. But though enchanting, there was nothing in the attitude of Petronell to suggest that she played a part, endeavoured to enchain Sir Jasper, or come between him and his appointed task. Indeed she delighted to hear of his modest achievements and gave it as her opinion that his career had only just begun. His aspirations were her own, for now she openly longed to be of use in the world and carry the lessons learned at Dragonsville to Devonshire at some future time.

"To do good is an art," she declared, "and needs as much practising as any other. It is, indeed, because the beginner often makes such a mess of it that many are choked off well-doing altogether and turn to other and easier pursuits.

"It is understood," she continued, "that so long as L.D. shall live, I do not leave him; and much I wish, dear knight, you found it possible to make the same promise. To think of the world without him, is to think of a very sad thing; but he is rarely mistaken, and in his opinion he will pass during the spring of next year. Then such as desire to stay and proceed with their lives after his fashion, will do so; but not a few of the rising generation propose to explore the world. Whether their discoveries will turn their feet hither again, who can say? For my part, I was in a mind to stop among those I love and cherish here; but after your astounding information,

it is clearly my duty to go home, reveal my birth-mark and claim my parentage."

"I agree with you, Camilla," declared Sir Jasper, for it was a Sunday on which these words were spoken, and the knight and the lady returned, side by side, to the Castle from Morning Prayer.

"It is our Lavender Dragon's own wish that I should do so," she continued. "Indeed, since he has learned the truth about me, he has even raised the question whether I do well to tarry at all. But my father and mother have waited so many years that it cannot harm them to bide still longer in ignorance; and I will never leave L.D. while he lives. I owe him the little wisdom I possess, and I shall strive to plan my future life by his precepts wherever I may spend it."

A vision of amazing beauty stole into the thoughts of Sir Jasper. He pictured himself returning to the West country with a bride; he saw the great houses of Tracey and Pomeroy gloriously united; he pictured the joy of all concerned, the rejoicings, the largesse flying in silver showers, even the red Devon ox, roasted whole, and the morris dances, cudgel play, bull baiting and other delights of Merrie England proper to such an occasion. Incidentally he saw a ring fence round the two manors.

But he kept these dreams to himself. He had reached a stage at which the next step must be a declaration of marriage, or speedy departure, and he suspected that the lady was of the same opinion. But still he hesitated, until it wanted but three days before the month was ended and his undertaking to remain at Dragonsville absolved. He felt in dire need of another opinion at this juncture, for spiritual uneasiness overtook him in the night watches and he doubted whether these earthly ambitions much became him. To consult George Pipkin was idle. The squire had already become affianced to Sally Slater, and the folk congratulated both man and woman, for George, a resourceful person and quick to respond to friendship, became a favourite from the first. He knew Sir Jasper's plight very well indeed, for his master could not conceal

it. In truth, everybody was alive to the situation and when, finally, the lovesick fellow determined to lay the matter before L.D. himself, his host showed no surprise. They spoke together after knight and dragon had bathed side by side in the great central fountain, before breakfast on a cloudless morning of July; and while the rising sun glittered over the rose and azure scales of the larger animal and quickly dried them, Sir Jasper, having resumed his garments, explained the problem and humbly invited comments and a solution.

"I, of course, am an 'intellectual' and apologise for it," answered L.D. "It is comparatively easy to write, or lecture, eat hay, drink water and tell everybody else what they ought to do. This rule of life gives those who practise it enormous satisfaction and induces them to suppose that they are the only people who really much matter to the cosmic scheme. But as I find that to devour red meat, drink red wine and do things, instead of telling other people to do them, is much more difficult, my admiration has always been reserved for such as themselves attempt to advance the work of the world. To pull down is easier than to build up, and I am entirely on the side of those who would build, even if their building be faulty; while they who snap and snarl and spew opposition on everybody who is honestly seeking to help distracted humanity, leave me cold—even for the cold-blooded reptile which I happen to be. In a word, it may be said that the heart of man seeks to build, while the brain of him is chiefly concerned to destroy the existing order. Both are right and both are vital; and when they work together in the light of reason, good things must happen. But when will they?

"Now, you are of the thick-headed, but warm-hearted, order of men who want to get on with it. And you have fallen in love with a maiden suited to you in every possible way. She belongs to your own order, though that matters nothing; but what does matter is that she also belongs to your own sort of intelligence. She prays to the same God, as far as it can be said that any two

people have the same idea of what their Maker means; she enjoys the same humanist outlook; she resents the same wrongs and evils; she is quite as determined as yourself to leave the world better than she finds it. What more seemly and fitting, then, than that you twain should wed and presently go forth, nerved and heartened each by the other, in the glory of a shared love, a shared trust, and a shared duty to the world? She has already made you happier than she found you, though at present you do not look it; and you have brought into her delightful life a deep and mysterious quickening and wakened her noblest emotions. Thus you have both made the world happier than you found it already, and what is worrying you is a chimera, a vague and futile echo of that melancholy hoot, a vanished order of Christians raised from their burrows, caves and catacombs. The idea of these estimable, but mistaken, cenobites, you will recollect. They held no happiness seemly in this life, and accounted human love the invention of the Devil. They did their best to depopulate the earth; but their claim and clamour were alike unavailing in the face of Nature, and to-day we all, I think, admit that it is a very seemly and blessed thing for a healthy man to marry the right woman and to take a hand in the next generation. But that is a subject not likely to interest you for the moment. Therefore place your heart at Petronell's feet, and if she prove willing to pick it up, wed her, stay with me, as she intends to do, until I go underground—somewhere about the breaking of the leaf next year—and then seek your relations together, and go on doing your duty to the best of your united powers."

"You have greatly heartened me, my noble friend," answered Sir Jasper. "It is almost beyond the dreams of ambition that such a maiden can stoop to such a man; but I will at least summon courage to approach her; and if the answer doom me to everlasting sorrow, you will not take it amiss that I mount my steed, don my armour and go hence."

"Certainly not," replied the devious dragon, who al-

ready knew that Petronell loved the lad with devotion. "If she say you nay, I shall be the first to speed the parting guest."

Within a week, however, the young people were betrothed, much to their own delight and the satisfaction of the entire community. The Lavender Dragon, who never lost an occasion to bring his friends together, proclaimed a banquet and entertainment of unexampled splendour to celebrate this engagement, and it was swiftly planned that both Sir Jasper and his squire should be wedded in the same hour, upon a day after the harvest had been reaped.

Nicholas Warrender, the dragon's old seneschal, was master of the ceremonies on the occasion of this public entertainment; all Dragonsville came to L.D.'s revel, and features of the joyful event were certain performances which followed a great midday meal. There was dancing; there was singing; there were athletic sports and trials of strength and dexterity. But the special attraction, and that most vividly remembered, remained to the credit of Sir Jasper and his bride, George Pipkin, and the Lavender Dragon himself.

The knight, his lady and his squire each obliged with a song; while L.D. told the people a new story.

Sir Jasper's betrothed sang first, and accompanied herself upon a lute. The lyric had been composed for that instrument, and Petronell sang with great charm and natural feeling, though, as she confessed, there was nothing to admire in either the words, or the music. Yet it happened that this was the only song she knew: her foster-mother had taught it to her in childhood.

SONG FOR A LUTE

"Margery, Merle and Aveline—

And rarest, fairest Aveline,

Loveliest maids that ever were seen—

Loveliest ever seen,

Wandered beneath the hunter's moon—

The red, uprising hunter's moon,

For to find the fairies and beg a boon—

Ting-a-ling! Ting-a-ling!
 Ting! Ting! Ting-a-ling!
 Beg for a pixy boon.

"There came a boy along the way—
 A pretty boy along the way,
 And Margery stopped with him to play—
 Margery stopped to play.
 Her sisters went through dimpsy light,
 By dingles dim through dimpsy light,
 And tears of one were falling bright—
 Ting-a-ling! Ting-a-ling!
 Ting! Ting! Ting-a-ling!
 Tears, they were falling bright.

"A convent by the way they trod—
 The dark and dusky path they trod,
 Drew weeping Merle at the will of God—
 Merle by the will of God.
 She entered, and she bides there yet—
 A sainted nun she bides there yet,
 For love of the boy that Margery met—
 Ting-a-ling! Ting-a-ling!
 Ting! Ting! Ting-a-ling!
 Boy that Margery met.

"But Aveline by beck and glen—
 By starry beck and moony glen
 Won to the holt of the pixy men—
 Haunt of the pixy men.
 And thus spake they to Aveline—
 To rarest, fairest Aveline,
 'When the King sees you, he'll forget the Queen!'
 Ting-a-ling! Ting-a-ling!
 Ting! Ting! Ting-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling!
 King shall forget the Queen!'"

Everybody applauded Petronell's singing and refrained from criticising the song; but Sir Jasper held the accompaniment to be very beautiful, and the dragon, who used an ear-trumpet on special occasions, declared the

melody tuneful, and hoped that the lady would sing it many times to him, so that he might better appreciate it; for of music he knew nothing.

Then Sir Jasper, having indicated to Petronell the tune which she must play upon her lute to accompany his song, made ready.

"I will give you 'The Charm,'" he said, "and, though it is long since I had occasion to sing and I am much out of practice, I will do my best."

He proceeded in a not unmusical baritone.

THE CHARM

"When chafers drone their litany
And pray, 'Oh, Father, grant that we
From airy-mouse delivered be,'
Go seek—go seek the Charm.

"Under the sky, when a star shoots,
Beneath an oak, when owlet hoots,
Gather ye simples, dig ye roots
To build—to build the Charm.

"That glassy ghost upon a thorn—
The raiment of a snake outworn—
Bust backward though the dark be borne
To feed—to feed the Charm.

"A glow-worm—she whose gentle light
Glimmers green-gold upon the night,
Beside yon churchyard aconite—
Shall help—shall help the Charm.

"One willow from the cradle take,
Where a boy baby lies awake,
And splinters off a coffin break
To fortify the Charm.

"A tarnished silver chalice bring
Dead gossips gave at christening,
And dip the moonlight from a spring
To crown—to crown the Charm.

"This much, God wot, a child might do,
 Yet all must fail if haply you
 Lack a child's faith, so trusting, true
 To bless—to bless the Charm.

"Many the spells of high degree
 And fruitful happiness, we see
 All lost for faith to set them free
 And work—and work the Charm."

"An excellent song with an excellent moral," declared Nicholas Warrender. "But rather monotonous."

"That is my fault," confessed Sir Jasper. "If I had sung it better, I think that you would have liked it better."

"Or if I had played it better," added the musician.

Then spoke Sally Slater, who was going to marry Master Pipkin.

"If you please, dear L.D., I don't think you will like George's song, and it may be better if he is silent."

"Why, Sally?" asked the dragon kindly. "I do not think that George would sing anything unfit for our ears."

"That's just what he's going to do," declared Sally, whose face was red and whose eyes were anxious.

"Explain before you proceed, George," suggested Sir Jasper.

"It's like this," said the squire. "I'm not wishful to sing if none is wishful to hear. To be honest, the song is about a louse—and why not?"

"There's not a louse in Dragonsville," declared the seneschal with conviction.

"Nevertheless, there are many elsewhere," replied George, "and God made them for His own dark purposes."

The dragon spoke.

"Numerous creatures are quite familiar to us," he said, "and not a few seek the hospitality of our homes and persons, whether we cold-shoulder them or no. They have their own methods of circumventing our hostility, and the black-beetle persists from generation to generation; the rat survives, with a determined resistance, de-

spite all that we do against him; the wolf still makes shift to rear his family and trouble our shepherds; while many lesser things cling closer than a brother and will not be denied. Let us by all means pursue our warfare against them; but let us be just to our enemies, and if some human poet has struck his lyre to the body-louse, that is his affair. I see no objection to hearing what he has to say upon the subject with an open mind."

Thus encouraged, George stood forth; but Petronell did not offer to accompany him.

"The song is in two parts, if you please," explained Pipkin. "The first part is the louse talking to his Maker."

He then sang these words in a deep and sonorous bass, which the dragon had no difficulty in hearing.

A CHAT

Pediculus

"Almighty One, I grieve to find
That in your everlasting nous
For reasons hidden from my mind,
Your servant you have made a louse.

"It was your parasitic whim
All creatures that on earth do dwell,
Whether they walk, or fly, or swim,
Should each one give some brother hell.

"From royal lion to agile flea,
Your all-embracing scheme was laid;
From genus homo down to me
The case is thus, I am afraid.

"But man's the super-louse of earth;
He crawls its face, deflowers, defames,
Devours, destroys, brings rapine, dearth,
Deliriums and deaths and shames.

"So what were meaner, viler, worse
Than my hard fate—a louse of lice!
Oh, Father of the Universe,
It isn't nice; it isn't nice!"

The singer here broke off and addressed the Lavender Dragon. He felt conscious that the audience was against him.

"That's what the creature said to the Creator, your honour; and now, whether they like it or no, I'm going to sing what he got for his answer."

"Certainly, George; one side is only good till we hear the other," answered L.D. courteously, and Pipkin finished thus:

Omnipotence

"My humble friend, take heart of grace;
There's many a miracle of Mine
Compared with which your homely race
May honestly be said to shine.

"You are a polished gem beside
The micrococcus I have made;
Your shapely stature, easy stride
Put bacillus quite in the shade.

"But they, and you, and such small fry
Of matter fashioned to assail
Humanity, stand fairly high
In your Creator's social scale.

"My master-piece and prime device—
My highest flight and true top-hole
Of loathsome horror—are the lice
I send to bite the human soul.

"Could them you see your heart would freeze
Such loathly spectacles to view.
Be of good cheer: compared with these,
A little gentleman are you!"

There was an ominous silence and nobody applauded.

"I told you they'd hate it," said Sally.

"A painful theme, George," declared the dragon. "Nevertheless I am glad to have heard the song. There is truth in it; but like so many other true things—— You might

write the words from George's dictation, Petronell, then I will consider them in private. Do not, however, sing it again. Sally will teach you some sunnier ditties. Your voice is admirable."

After further conversation upon this subject, during which George found the sense of the company against him and learned, to his confusion, from Father Lazarus, that his performance approached, if it did not actually attain, blasphemy, the seneschal called for silence and the dragon made a few remarks before telling his story.

"As you know," he said, "all my stories have a moral, and the story that dares to convey a moral must be extra good, or young people naturally scorn it and grown-up people decline to hear it. A time is fast coming when no story will be permitted any moral whatever, and those who attempt stories with morals will be derided for their pains; but I belong to the old guard in this matter, and the adventure of a mighty monarch I am now about to relate cannot be denied its conclusions. Understand, however, that I do not draw them. I leave them entirely to the listener, who shall apply or ignore them as he may prefer."

The dragon then told his tale, slowly and solemnly. He was himself so impressed by its moral implications, that he quite failed to see the funny side, or if he did see it, he pretended not to do so.

SESOSTRIS

This was the name given by the Greeks to that very distinguished King of Egypt, more generally known as Rameses II, and I shall tell you a pleasing incident in his career, which reveals this great man to have possessed an element of common sense rarely met with among early potentates, who possessed supreme power and held life and death in their hands. Sesostris enjoyed a plenitude of might and glory sufficient to turn the head of any lesser king, nor did he deny himself a certain amount of bar-

baric licence, or decline to accept what passed for pleasure in those remote times.

For example, consider the chariot that he used upon great occasions of State, and, what is still more wonderful to tell, the animals that drew it. The vehicle itself was constructed of gold and ivory and composed entirely of the fruits won from victorious invasions. It had been encrusted with magnificent gems—ruby, sapphire, and diamond—and cunningly wrought to flash its splendor even on a dull day. Sesostri himself drove his coach and four and he never failed to attract a multitude of shouting admirers, for not horse or ass, zebu or zebra, ostrich or cameleopard drew him. Four captive kings strained at the harness; and though Sesostri swung and cracked a formidable whip behind these fallen rulers, in justice to a great man we record that he never touched his team with it. Such an equipage was not contrived for speed, but arrogant pomp alone.

Never the stars in all their courses had witnessed any such tremendous sight as these royal slaves dragging Sesostri about the streets of Thebes, or Luxor. Tyrants were they, made prisoners in war, and even their own old subjects would sometimes travel to see this astounding turn-out, and tremble to witness their monarchs transformed into beasts of burden.

Of these four rulers condemned to this appalling penalty for unsuccess, one was a Syrian of ripe age. He occupied the near off position, and upon an occasion when Sesostri proceeded to offer sacrifice for a good Nile at the temple of Apis, the royal driver observed this chieftain cast repeated back glances of extraordinary interest and awe at the golden wheel of the chariot immediately behind him.

"O King," enquired Sesostri, pulling up, "do you find anything amiss?"

"Not so, Glory of the Earth, and Life of your People," answered the Syrian humbly.

"Then what are you staring at?" asked the ruler of Egypt.

"Sire," replied the elder. "It happens that we may live a great part of our lives with some familiar, necessary object and then, suddenly, at chance prompting of the intellect, or flash of intuition, perceive in the everyday thing a fresh meaning, an added significance, that lifts our homely invention to new and notable seriousness, if not solemnity."

"There is nothing in the least solemn about a chariot wheel, though, seeing that the spokes were fashioned out of the tusks of your late herd of white elephants, they doubtless turn your thoughts to gravity," replied Sesostris.

"They do indeed," confessed his royal slave. "But it is the operation rather than construction of these ivory spokes that gives me my great thought. Herein I find a parable of enormous significance, and only wonder how the mightiest brain on the earth at this moment has failed to note it."

"You refer to me, no doubt," replied Sesostris, "and you may rest assured that I have not missed the meaning of the wheel in our affairs. Surely the wheel of the potter and the wheel of the vehicle are landmarks in all human history."

"There is even more than that I have discerned," answered the Syrian, "for behold, as the wheel turns round, how the spoke now highest earth slowly ascends until it is above all the other spokes and pointing heavenwards; but even in the moment of its highest ascension, steadily and certainly, as the wheel comes full circle, it sinks and sinks, until it is upon the earth again, while another has taken its pride of place aloft. O, Glory of the Universe and Topmost Spoke in the Wheel of the Children of Men, does not this formidable spectacle appal your heart and chill the purple blood in your most honourable veins?"

Doubtless a lesser man might have resented such a sermon at such a time and commanded the preacher to lay hold and get on with his task; but Sesostris, if his mind was not of that majestic dimension his oriental flatterer pretended, had none the less a very keen wit, and the parable was well calculated to challenge his practical wis-

dom and sense of reality. For a moment he remained silent, weighing the measure of the thing spoken; and then, with a certain impulsive and honest habit of mind peculiar to him, he spoke.

"Hear us, my people, and you, our steeds, also give ear. The thing that this learned tyrant of the East has imparted to us, we find to be rich with great meaning; and since the grass is never allowed to grow beneath our royal feet, we determine from this moment to change our mode of traction, and travel henceforth in a manner more fitted to human reason and kingly decorum. Greater is that monarch who walks afoot than he who subjects any fellow man to the indignity of the shafts."

Amazed, all listened, and then Sesostrius turned to his captives and spoke with a swift and regal generosity.

"Kings," said he, "we had permitted ourselves to overlook the way of fate and the immutable vicissitude of every human lot. This grey-haired Syrian is exceedingly right, even though he has proved us to be exceedingly wrong. Depart in peace, free men—all four of you! Return to your nations, that you may govern them with justice and mercy; and take along with you from our treasure houses, wondrous gifts for each wife and child, together with rations for your journeys and an escort worthy of the occasion and its demands. And never more, in this, our little and uncertain life, let warfare and hatred arise between us to mar our future friendship."

He descended from his chariot, embraced each bewildered monarch and kissed the aged Syrian on both cheeks. Then, raising his hand to stay the shout of applause lifted around him by the younger generation of his people, for his counsellors were rather quiet, he spoke again.

"Henceforward, Egypt, when our chariot passes in affairs demanding circumstance and glory, it shall be drawn by two grey donkeys, in token of that common sense which is at the root of all progress honestly to be described as royal. And may they never find any need to talk to us!"

This ended the story of the Lavender Dragon, and the company streamed out over the Castle grounds, to enjoy dancing, archery, quarterstaff and other diversions. L.D. himself presented the prizes—a bunch of flowers for each maiden, a wreath of oak leaves for the men.

IX

Another Dragon Gives A Louder Roar

The event of the autumn at Dragonsville was the erection of two dwellings, one for Sir Jasper and his bride, the other for George Pipkin, Sally Slater and her sons. According to the custom of the country, Sir Jasper was allowed no hand in his own habitation; but he worked as diligently as the rest to make his squire's future home both dignified and comfortable. Petronell, too, lent her aid, and when the walls were raised she painted beautiful pictures inside them; while upon a knoll hard by, overlooking the river, George Pipkin and half a hundred willing workers erected a considerable villa for the knight and his lady.

The weddings were arranged for an early date in October; but while yet the sun held strength to make the autumn foliage gay and gild the ripening berries on briar and thorn, there came a remarkable visitor to Dragonsville.

At dawn on a cloudy autumn morning, a strange dragon was seen bathing his mighty limbs in the great central fountain, and while the creature appeared to be smaller than L.D., none could fail to observe a certain family resemblance. The veteran of Dragonsville was now faded by many tones from his adult splendour, though like a weathered cliff face, or ancient building, he had taken on the livery of age, and his rose and lavender were only dimmed to a gracious tenderness; yet one observed in the active newcomer a similar scheme of decoration, albeit in his somewhat stark magnificence he compared with the

Lavender Dragon only as a new masterpiece resembles an old.

L.D. was still asleep when the discovery stirred his people; but Nicholas Warrender and Sir Claude Fortescue hastened to his couch with the extraordinary news, and though gouty and suffering some acute rheumatism in his left pinion, the dragon rose, looked out of the window, stared with increasing amazement and then left the Castle and strode out to accost the traveller.

It is to be noticed that the inherent suspicion planted in man against these creatures persisted, for, at sight of an unknown dragon, the people had fled to their homes and were now peeping from upper casements and dormer-windows to see what would come of this invasion. Those of faint heart already turned pale and feared the worst, "for," they whispered, "if this young and many-toothed dragon falls upon L.D., the issue is determined. But other parties took a different view. Some, the seneschal and the elders amongst them, believed that L.D. would prevail with fair speech and possibly make a swift convert of the stranger, even if his natural instincts inclined him to the immemorial rule of his kind; Sir Claude, ever a pessimist, thought not; others expected a grave disturbance, but believed that, given the forces of Dragonsville behind him, L.D. would deal faithfully with his young relation, if indeed a relation he proved to be. Of this company were Sir Jasper and George Pipkin. Indeed, the knight hastily donned his armour and rescued his helmet, which had lately been employed as a workbox for Petronell's embroideries, while the squire ran to bring in his steed and the piebald charger of his master. Both animals were far too fat, and George felt ashamed of their circular outlines as he led them under the Castle walls.

But there was no pitched battle, or any sort of disturbance. While the populace awaited with profound anxiety the coming event, L.D. approached his visitor, and though their gigantic preliminary embrace woke screams of terror from the fearful, it was clearly a matter of courtesy alone, for after the huge creatures became again

disentangled, they walked up and down side by side in deep and not unfriendly converse. Clearly they argued a difficult problem, and presently they stopped and sat down together; but after two hours of close conference, and when, in anticipation of a good understanding, great feasts of hay, cider and sugared kidney beans had been prepared, the lesser dragon with a gesture of impatience and anger leapt to his feet, spat fire, spread his gorgeous wings and soared into the sky. A sensation of relief swept the beholders, but before they had time to surround their friend and learn particulars, he, too, opened glimmering vanes and, despite his rheumatism, flew heavily away after the other. Like twin clouds of rosy gold they swept eastward towards the risen sun and were soon lost to view.

Nor did L.D. return at nightfall, and many uneasy spirits slept not for thinking about this doubtful event. The seneschal and those who knew the master best judged that he had not prevailed with his kinsman and followed him in order to do so; but some dreaded a more sinister sequel to the incident and even suspected that the dragons were gone to fight beyond the reach of any interference. In the morning L.D. had not returned and, as day followed day, anxiety increased and despair awakened. A week passed and every face was dark, every heart heavy. The life of Dragonsville appeared to be suspended and the people, slighting good advice to go on with their work and trust Providence, wandered together in melancholy knots about the streets and public places, while every neck ached with straining backwards and every eye sickened at the sight of the empty sky. Father Lazarus did what he might and other leaders of opinion strove to say the word in season and keep hope alive; but all suffered severely and all were gratified when Sir Jasper and George Pipkin prepared to start eastward upon an expedition of search and succour. Everybody applauded this resolve save Sir Claude Fortescue, who declared they should have started far sooner to be of service.

The morning for their departure had actually dawned

and they were preparing to leave Dragonsville by its orient gate, when the Lavender Dragon came home alone. A sharp-eyed son of Sally Slater was the first to see him, and when the lad pointed to a tiny speck in the sky and yelled his glad discovery, others cuffed his ears for daring to waken hope; but he had seen truly; the speck darkened, then brightened and, in half an hour, the Lavender Dragon, flying very slowly, sank amidst his people, worn out and much dejected. They hastened round him, Doctor Doncaster leading the way. His patient was very lame and so feverish that the physician shook his head.

The dragon returned to his castle, ate a meal of clover hay, drank a hogshead of spring water and then addressed his friends.

"I have endured a bitter disappointment," he began. "In this younger being of my own race with whom I have fruitlessly spent the last week, I recognised a relation. He is, in fact, my nephew; and after seeing him upon my own territory, great hopes arose in me. I hastened to him, as you will remember, greeted him with large friendship and made him as welcome as I knew how. He had flown all night and was very hungry. He imagined that you dear people were my slaves—a sort of living larder from which I helped myself as appetite demanded. He declared himself to be starving and his first request was that I might send to him a dozen of the fat, prosperous children he had seen scampering from him on his arrival.

"I invited him to join me at breakfast and spoke of the glories of vegetarian diet. Whereupon he became abusive and said that he supposed his uncle to be a dragon, not a cow. I warned him that as he had come to Rome, he must do as Rome does, and fall in with my customs until he had opportunity to study them and perceive their dignity and worth; but he was ravenous and revealed all the overbearing habits of our race. Hunger, indeed, strips both men and dragons bare. He saw no charm whatsoever in my attitude of mind; he heard my principles with growing indignation. Then, calling me

'Impostor,' 'Renegade,' and so forth, he blew fire from his gullet, opened his wings and leapt from the ground in fury.

"But it is not my habit to yield at the first rebuff. He was a dragon of but one hundred years, and swiftly through my mind there flashed many an instance, gleaned from the annals of humanity, wherein we have seen the young sinner turn from evil and become a radiant convert. I thought upon Themistocles, who was cast out and disowned by his own father for his debaucheries and vile manner of life, yet became the most noble of all Greeks and a portent in Europe and Asia. I reflected on Valerius Flaccus, who from luxury and evil rose to be created Flamen and became as saintly a man as beforetime he was a rascal. I also remembered Polemo of Athens, saved from a life of scandal and a death of ignominy by the wisdom of Xenocrates, the philosopher, who charmed him to virtue and made of him a great and wise person. Did not Titus Vespasianus, from a cruel scoundrel become the darling and exemplar of mankind? And, to seek in the chronicles of Christianity, need we look farther than Saint Augustine, the Manichee, who, after an incontinent and lamentable youth, ascended by the ministry of Ambrose to salvation and saintship? These and other examples fortified hope, and so, taking thought for this son of a brother long departed, I spread wing and followed him.

"But it was all to no purpose whatsoever. He is an inveterate dragon of the prime, with bloody ideas and convictions that I could neither change nor shake. I persisted, however, until, losing his little store of patience, he turned upon me, cried that he held me as a craven abomination, doubtless in the pay of some accursed human monarch, and warned me that if I dogged his footsteps another day, he would forget what youth owed to age and turn and rend me. Indeed, he appeared doubtful whether it were not his duty to rid the world of 'a pestiferous and pusillanimous worm'—his own expression as nearly as I can translate it; and he declared that but

for our relationship he should have done so at the first, and not suffered my bleating for five minutes.

"Worn out in body and mind, I left the callous reactionary, and were it not that he is my nephew, I should instantly direct you, Sir Jasper, to set out in quest of him and see whether your lance and spear cannot bring him in reach of reason. But I have decided to leave him with his reflections for the present. I may have done better than appeared. I live in faint hope that some of the good seed has taken root and will presently induce the fellow to return among us with an altered mind."

"I will go willingly," declared the knight. "It is to destroy just such a typical dragon as this that I set out upon my mission. Let us depart instantly, for my squire and I are equipped and were now about to seek you yourself."

But the weary monster would not sanction any immediate punitive expedition.

"Suffer a little time to pass," he said. "And now pull down the blinds and leave me. My foot must be fomented with a decoction of scalding poppies, and I will drink some physic; then, if the pain abates, I shall sleep for a couple of days and nights and probably awake restored."

As he foretold, the Lavender Dragon, once eased of his acute suffering, slumbered for eight-and-forty hours, and the reverberations from his nostrils rumbled like genial thunder in the ears of his thankful people during that period. At the end of this time he awoke refreshed, hungry and better of his ailment. Whereupon he took a bath in the morning sunshine, ate prodigiously and dismissed this unfortunate failure from his mind and conversation.

He was now in excellent humour and full of the approaching nuptials and the dwellings destined for the wedded pairs.

X

From Joy To Woe

On the day before the double wedding, the Lavender Dragon was in a didactic mood, and said many interesting things which won the applause of some among his listeners but, as usual, made Sir Jasper, Sir Claude, Father Lazarus and other good men sad.

The monster spoke with his usual directness on the limitation of families.

"A great source of human unhappiness is over-crowding," he declared to them, "and here, as we know, it is agreed, with general accord, to expand in a ratio which bears directly upon the well-being and prosperity of all."

"You interfere with the liberty of the subject, Sir Dragon," ventured George Pipkin.

"That the liberty of the community shall not be interfered with, George," replied L.D. "The need to rear and fatten armies and navies for slaughter does not, you see, arise with us. We are a feeble, but not a fearful, folk, and we know that there are too many people in the world. Authority cannot cope with the increase and Nature does so—in a manner very painful to all of good will. Reason bewails the starved souls and bodies of many little ones, while superstition, patriotism and other faulty inspirations, still too much in evidence, clamour for more of these failures. It will presently, however, be driven into man's thick skull that quality is of greater force in affairs than quantity, and that war, famine and pestilence are cruel and abominable engines to keep the race in bounds. And when he makes this discovery, what will he do? He will first reach limitation of swords and spears, then, being a logical beast in his saner moments, attain to limitation of his own species. For when men compose their differences without shedding of blood, masses to murder and be murdered are an anachronism, and over-production

becomes folly. It is argued that restriction may rob us of occasional great men. But can great men only be bred at cost of misery to thousands of small ones? If so, then let us struggle on without great men and rest content with the healthy and the sane. Our danger lies in the Orient world, whose fecundity is awful to contemplate and renders it a great obstacle to the security of the earth. East will not listen to the West on so delicate a subject, for Asia has family ideals and superstitions in this matter which must take centuries of time to dissipate."

"You want better bread than is made of wheat," said Sir Claude, and his voice was drearier than usual.

"Of course I do," replied the Lavender Dragon. "Most certainly I do; and you also, I should hope, and every man and woman who has a spirit worth calling one, and intelligence to measure things as they are. I deprecate discontent and covetousness as you will admit; but there is a discontent of the soul, Sir Claude, without which man is no better than the tadpole. Plenty of hearty, healthy children let us have by all means; and let us learn more from them and about them before we begin pouring in the varied and doubtful nonsense always on tap for their little, empty heads; let us wait in patience until they are ready to pronounce some opinion on the nostrums we hold to their infant lips."

"Do we not know far better than they, what is good for them, dear friend!" asked Father Lazarus.

"No, best of men, we do not," replied the dragon firmly. "I have studied the child for many hundreds of years, and I tell you this: the young are often far more reasonably minded than their parents. Nature leads them to take an honest view of life, and if that view is unvitiated by grown-up lumber, it will not seldom develop and display a very rational estimate of conduct. But the work of our schoolmen in this virgin soil is often disastrous, and woe betide those who sow tares at that critical season when the rich material is best fitted to nourish and sustain them. To warp youthful intelligence and poison growing reason is a great fallacy and evil. There are

precious, humanistic instincts of inquiry in well-nurtured and intelligent children, and that we should graft upon this spirit our questionable conclusions, rules of conduct, conventions, hatred of reality, chronic untruthfulness of outlook and imbecile pride, is utterly to spoil them in a very large proportion of cases. The potential power and value of many future men and women has thus been diminished; they are by so much rendered inferior, both as doers and thinkers. The stream of progress is dammed, the evolution of morals retarded. For, as I have often told you, the evolution of morals is a glorious fact; and that it should tend upwards is still more glorious; because upon this assurance hangs the destiny of mankind—all pessimists and doubters to the contrary notwithstanding. Let us, therefore, suffer the children to follow their bent, guarded and guided by pure reason; let us not catch them too young and foul the well-springs of their souls with a thousand uncertain and preposterous theories. Why, for example, does good Father Lazarus always agitate to get the children? Because he firmly believes that their future happiness and usefulness depend upon his doing so. He is much mistaken. Teach them to be clean, honest and faithful, just and merciful to the weak, humble, tolerant of others, scornful of self. Let them understand that certain instincts and temptations belong to their ancestry and original endowment; explain wherein good and evil consist according to our present worthiest values; but for the creeds and dogmas, the myths and magics, the mysteries and metaphysics, concerning which there is such an infinite diversity of opinion, let us spare them these until they reach years of discretion and are qualified to judge of their value to life and their correspondence with truth. This is not to weaken faith, but set it upon a basis of reason; for think not that faith and reason are opposed. Reason is founded upon our faith in all things reasonable."

Nicholas Warrender agreed with his master.

"Man is credulous enough through his aboriginal forefathers, without making him more so and teaching him

to believe in goblins—good and bad—from his youth up,” said the seneschal. “Thus you stain his dawning intellect, and soak it to such a colour that only one in a thousand ever gets the fabric of thought clean again. Remember that youth is the time of leisure, and when the young grow up, life and its immediate cares and occupations intervene, so that few have opportunity, let alone inclination, to go back and intelligently examine the opinions that have been implanted in them. They take these for granted henceforth, and bolt the doors of the mind upon inquiry. But what do you call them who decline to live behind bolted doors and seek for freedom instead? What name do you give to such as exercise liberty of thought and reject the learning thrust upon their infancy? ‘Infidel’ is the title reserved for such persons. Yet unto what are they unfaithful? Not to honour, justice, mercy, self-denial or charity. Only to the goblins. Thus the mass of men, who care not two pins for this subject, and whose sole concern is to prosper and preserve the approval of their neighbours, succeed in doing so, while such as honour their own gift of understanding and perceive these great and vital questions of religious faith and a world beyond the grave demand the very quintessence of their reverent examination, are cast out, persecuted, horribly destroyed for their pains, when and where the hierophants possess power to destroy them.”

“And what is the melancholy result, my friends?” asked L.D. “In the Golden Age, the idea that religion should come between man and wisdom entered no head. The philosophers instructed and the sages questioned and argued without let and hindrance; for then it was understood that progress depended upon the spirit of inquiry. But now, alas! official and state-supported superstitions block this spirit at every turn; prosperous error bars the way to afflicted truth, and he who approaches these profound subjects through any other road than that pointed out for him by his rulers will soon find himself a trespasser on forbidden ground.”

“All religions are as scaffolding, and our children’s chil-

dren will yet see the scaffolding pulled down," declared Nicholas Warrender. "These opinions are yet in the tide of their career, but must presently remain with us only as the useless hair upon our bodies and the tell-tale fragments of our anatomy which point to purposes now outworn."

"Consider," added the dragon, "how many shapes man has given to his divinities. It was long before he exalted God to his own image. He ransacked the categories of Nature before he conceived those august forms of the later and human pantheons beyond which he cannot go. The Egyptians worshipped Apis, the ox; at Arsinoe, the crocodile was deity; in the city of Hercules, the ichneumon. Others adored a cat, an ibis, a falcon. The people of Hispanola kneel to invisible fairies and pray to them under the name of Zemini. In the Isle of Java the thing first met of a morning is the god for the day, no matter whether a reptile, beast or fowl. Those of Manta have made an emerald the Everlasting, and offer prayer and pilgrimage to it, bringing the inevitable gifts which the priesthood of that precious stone know how to charm from them. The Romans created a goddess of a city, and the people of Negapatam built their Pagod, a massy monster drawn upon a chariot of many wheels and over-laid with gold. The warlike Alani worship a naked sword, which is the only god they know who can answer their petitions; and in Ceylon, upon the peak of Adam, is kept the tooth of an ape—held by the Cingalese to be the holiest thing and the most potent in all Asia. With a more noble faith do the Assyrians confront us, for they worshipped the Sun and the Earth, from which they received life. The dove was sacred among them; it is a symbol still held in holiest esteem among the Christians, as you know. At Ekron the Lord of Flies enjoyed first place, and Baalzebub, the Larder-god, doubtless received many prayers to keep his myriads under control. Those of Peru adored the corpses of their Emperors, and ancestor worship persists among certain Oriental people unto this day.

"A thousand other manifestations of divinity are in

the knowledge of the learned before we come to the solitary god of the Jew—a Being nobly exalted and purified, but, even as the Allah of Mahomet, One still all too human in his essence and behaviour. These deities occupied my profound attention and I made this discovery concerning the different interpretations put upon them, that not Absolutism or Idealism, not Immanentism or Pragmatism, or any other ‘ism,’ or scism whatsoever, will lead mankind’s few and uncertain footsteps through his short life to happiness, or security. To suppose, as these people do, that their gods possess the potency, impatience and selfishness of Oriental panjandruns is vain; and whether such Eternal Beings are transcendent or immanent, universal or particular, matters nothing at all. What does matter is that they are not gentlemen; and to how parlous a state must that divinity be reduced who can learn manners, discipline and conduct from the like of us! The gods who behave worse than their creatures and make it needful that their chosen ministers should forever apologise and explain their unsocial conduct, are not gods; for right must be right and wrong must be wrong, whether committed by a deity or a dragon; and if it be admitted that these Supreme Beings know how to choose, direct and control with utmost wisdom and purest virtue, what shall be thought while they themselves, in their almighty power, daily perpetrate or sanction abominations for which the world would execrate any child of man?

“Then you, my own dear Christians, have discovered a triune God—Three in One and One in Three. And who shall presume to question your convictions if you abide in them peacefully, without hating and murdering other people who cannot see eye to eye with you? Truth asks for nothing but open and honourable warfare against Falsehood. Given a fair field, she cannot be defeated. The story will reach its conclusion, however, because, when there is a means of return to independence, freedom with security, and consequent renewed progress, mankind must be swift to take that way. We shall presently see philosophers, each with his personal God. They will write books

about their deities and every one will seek to show how his own concept of the Eternal transcends all others. Some of these home-made divinities may not be all powerful; some will even depend upon their creatures to strengthen their knees and help their difficult task. They are much to the good—these personal gods conceived by clever and earnest people, even though no two of them will ever have more than a family resemblance. Time does not stand still, and evolution continues to do her perfect work.”

But the Christians had all stolen away, led by Sir Claude and Father Lazarus. The dragon found only his seneschal still left to listen; and he was not listening: the old man had gone to sleep.

A glorious autumn day dawned for the weddings, and Dragonsville made holiday. Only those whose duty it was to milk the cows and feed the cattle put a hand to work, and though it was impossible for L.D. to go to church, the building not being constructed to admit him, he sat just outside with his huge head on the earth, where he might listen to the marriage service and the admirable address delivered to the wedded couples by Father Lazarus. In this exordium the good priest took occasion to traverse sharply and caustically many of the Lavender Dragon's own most cherished sentiments; but the monster felt no unkindly emotion before such an attack. He loved Father Lazarus and never quarrelled with the least person who declined to share his own ideas. Any sort of persecution caused him violent uneasiness, for he held that nothing excused loss of temper and cruelty, fanaticism and intolerance.

L.D. fell into error at the banquet which followed the nuptials and, despite his doctor's entreaties, drank far too much cider and ate too many sugared kidney beans.

After all was consumed, the dragon went into his treasure house and produced wedding gifts and also presents for everybody, to the least infant on his mother's lap.

“I cannot give the little ones anything they value,” exclaimed L.D. to Sir Jasper, “for the idea of property

vanishes in a generation or two when once human nature begins to share the ethical purity of the ant. It is better to want than to have; it is better still not to want. They do not want. But you see everybody takes my gifts for my sake; and you must do the same. These jewels are of priceless value, according to the world's opinion, but of none whatever in Dragonsville. Even for beauty, a necklace of bluebells beats them hollow."

The happy couples departed for their honeymoons in a distant part of the kingdom half a day's ride from town. There, in a notable spot known as the Valley of Ferns, stood two bungalows sacred to the newly wed, and in this sequestered and attractive region the Lady Pomeroy and Mrs. George Pipkin wandered very happily with their husbands.

Then they returned to hear sad news, which at L.D.'s orders had been kept from their ears until they did so.

The Lavender Dragon had fallen dangerously ill with an attack of gout, which involved not only his four gigantic paws, but threatened his vitals also.

A gloom as of eclipse sat upon the faces of the people. All merry-making had ceased; even the children only played the quietest games and could put little heart into their pleasure.

XI

The Passing

By slow and gradual stages the Lavender Dragon approached his end. Sometimes he rallied, and the gallons of colchicum which he consumed, while rendering him very languid, sufficed to lessen his misery. Now and then he was lifted onto a gigantic trolley and dragged for half a mile through the gardens, that he might take the air and see the people; but his activities were over, and though his mind continued clear and his spirit cheerful, his body lost all strength and he knew that he would never take wing

again. To the prospect of a final flight under the sunshine he clove for a long while; then he abandoned the hope with rational resignation.

"It is good," he said, "that we do not know when we perform a well-loved action for the last time. Ignorance in such a matter is mercy, for, looking back after many days, we can bear the knowledge that must have wakened active grief at the moment. . . ."

He was in a pensive mood on an occasion when Sir Jasper and Petronell sat beside him and cheered him with their conversation.

"Fate," he said, "has an art to take what we most value and deny the summit of our ambition, while granting gifts small by comparison in our eyes, though infinitely precious to others, who lack them. He who desires fame is offered wealth, or love. The hungry for love may win to high place by their art, or craft, yet would gladly barter it for the female they dream about. The genius goes childless, though like enough he would thankfully sacrifice his master endowment for little children on his knee; while the man with a full quiver yearns for that peace and lack of responsibility which he supposes would enable him to do great deeds. It is in fact a sad but blessed human quality to covet what lies beyond our reach. The content are ever negligible, for only frozen sympathies and peddling minds can be so."

He spoke of the Latin god, Pan, with great affection, and declared himself to be in union and understanding with that divinity.

"But in Pan lurks a peril against which you must guard," warned the dragon. "There is a panic terror, a fear and dread of him, that may awake at any moment to ruin life; and there is a panic trust, equally destructive—that blind, cowardly repose in his shadow which tends to rob us of self-command and self-expression. Both these extremes stultify existence, and other gods than Pan are also responsible for them."

Sometimes the fading monster was in a cheerful humour and delighted to tell stories. Indeed he never tired

of doing so until the end, and children were admitted to him, fifty at a time, to listen while he related the fables and historic tales they loved.

On one such occasion the little sons of Sally Pipkin replied, when he asked what he should tell the young people assembled, and begged for the narrative of the Jeweller.

"I too, like that story," answered the dragon, "and am well pleased to rehearse it once again. A certain jeweller in the time of Galienus displayed a soup-tureen of exquisite workmanship, which he declared was wrought of a single ruby; and the Empress, doting on the treasure, prevailed with the Emperor Galienus to purchase it for her. To please his lass was the Caesar's first delight at all times; so he paid a mighty price for the soup-tureen, and the jeweller, who had long desired a snug villa on the Sabine Hills, now retired from business and prepared to spend the remainder of his life among his vines and olives in luxury and ease.

"But there came a man from the East, of great wisdom in all jewels and precious things, and having heard concerning this wonder he went to court and prayed that it might be permitted him to gladden his eyes with the ruby soup-tureen—a jewel beyond even his experience. Aware of the Oriental's fame, he was made welcome by Galienus and permitted to see the magnificent collections of the royal palace; and then, after he had beheld and admired a thousand works of art and nature, the crowning glory was placed in his hands and he examined the soup-tureen carved of a single ruby.

"But no word of praise rewarded this masterpiece. Instead, the wise man frowned, sighed heavily, and making obeisance to the Empress, addressed her with Eastern politeness and wrapped his harsh news in flowery words.

"He declared that, from the first, he had suspected fraud, because a ruby of size to make a soup-tureen was clean contrary to Nature. And now his fears had been too bitterly confirmed, for the soup-tureen was only glass.

It possessed small intrinsic value and no interest whatever, excepting of a tragical and painful character.

"Thereupon the Empress ran to the Emperor with many tears, and Galienus, a just prince, despatched swift soldiers to the jeweller's villa, arrested the rascal as he was about to eat his dinner, and hastened him to a dungeon.

"At a later hour he stood before the outraged Emperor and heard his doom. 'What,' enquired Galienus, 'shall be done to him who robs his monarch and fools the Queen? The least, I think, would be that he should make a Roman holiday. In a word, guilty man, you will only see the light of day again upon the sands of the stadium at our next festivity.'

"With this dreadful promise the guilty jeweller was hustled from his sovereign's presence, nothing left to hope for but a terrible and uncertain death; and he had no support in his trial and no consciousness of right behind him to assist his spirit through the evil hours that still remained. For very well indeed he knew that the soup-tureen was glass, since he had himself designed and executed it in secret.

"Not long was the jeweller called to wait execution of sentence, for on the third day after arrest he found himself blindfolded, led away and presently permitted to see again. He now stood on the sand of the amphitheatre amid an immense concourse of his fellow countrymen, while above him, in the royal box, sat the deluded Empress and her spouse, together with the notables of Rome about them.

"Only one other creature shared that bitter expanse of sand with the jeweller. It was a huge, African lion with black mane and tawny pelt; and the spectators, who had thronged the place to see this gaunt monster already waiting for his prey, felt no little astonishment that a lion, kept without food for a week, should hesitate before the plump and succulent spectacle of the erring jeweller now within his reach.

"Yet, for a time the ferocious beast moved not, but sat with its green, unblinking eyes upon the sinner. It opened its mouth, to reveal a formidable circle of white fangs, and it slowly swept the dust with its tufted tail. But, as a sybarite, who delays his delicious morsel for the pleasure of anticipation, the lion still delayed. The jeweller also delayed and made no effort to shorten the distance between himself and the instrument of punishment, until a voice—the Emperor's own—was lifted in command. He ordered the victim to save the lion further trouble and the company longer delay. Whereupon the doomed man, himself weary of such horrid suspense, crept—a stout, solitary figure in a blue toga—to the denizen of the desert.

"The crouching lion lashed his tail, and the man came nearer and nearer, until he stood within half a yard of his destroyer's gaping jaws. Doubtless he then felt that the monster might be invited to do the rest. But thereupon an astounding thing happened, for Galienus himself, to the horror of his wife and the company, leapt alone and unarmed into the arena and joined the shaking criminal and the lion appointed to devour him. Then, in a loud and cheerful voice which reached all corners of that mighty concourse, the Emperor spoke.

"May it please you, my august wife, my ministers and my dear people, to learn what this mystery means. I have, as you well know, been ever of opinion that the punishment should fit the crime; and upon hearing this fat rascal was a cheat, it struck me that to cheat him again would be a very just and proper reward for his villainy. He thought that he was going to die and make a meal for a fine and hungry lion. Well, he's sold, for this lion is but a thing of putty, paint and straw, with a cunning contrivance inside him to make him open his jaws and wag his tail.'

"Galienus kicked the lion as he spoke and the effigy toppled over upon its side; he then kicked the jeweller and told him to be off and mend his abominable ways. Whereupon the thankful fellow fell on his knees, kissed

the purple shoon of his monarch and scuttled sweating from the arena amid roars of laughter.

"But whether the Empress laughed we know not, for it may have been a joke for which she lacked the necessary humour. Galienus, however, won the applause of a vast majority on that occasion, since empires can easiest bear the yoke of tyrants who enjoy a sense of fun."

The children lifted their voices in familiar delight, for this was a story that never wearied them, and they were not saddened by the knowledge that L.D. would never tell it again.

On another occasion the seneschal, Sir Claude, Doctor Doncaster and other of the elders invited the Lavender Dragon to indicate his wishes for the future, concerning which there existed much difference of opinion among them.

"First," said Warrender, "we most desire to render your own great name immortal."

The Lavender Dragon smiled and considered the subject with closed eyes; then, according to his wont, he traced parallel instances from history when a like problem had arisen.

He drank a huge jorum of colchicum and spoke to them.

"You remind me of ingenious men who have desired that their fame should shine after they had gone beyond reach of it. There was that Seventh wonder of the world which Sostratus built for Ptolemy Philadelphus. 'The Tower of Pharos' it was called, and in secret the architect wrote upon it: 'Sostratus to the gods, and for the safety of sailors'; but these words, carved in enduring stone, he hid behind a covering of plaster inscribed with the name and title and glory of Ptolemy. And this he did, well knowing that the waves of the sea would presently wash the monarch's claim away and reveal his own name engraved on marble for subsequent generations. Yet where is that Pharos now? Again, when Alexander the Great threw down the walls of Thebes, Phryne offered to rebuild them at her own charges, provided that she might

record thereon how Alexander had destroyed and Phryne had restored. Remember, too, Trajan, who set his name on every stone he erected, until the wits gave him a new name, and called him 'Pellitory of the Wall.'

"No, my dear Nicholas, and you, my good friends," he continued. "I have not the least desire for posthumous honour, or to be remembered save by the kind hearts that have beaten with my own and aided my endeavour. As to the future, they often have ill-fortune who seek to tie up the time to come with dead hands. For the future will not be dictated to, and no man can prophesy how human values may change, or say when one kingdom shall desire a monarch, another a republic and a third anarchy. True it is that we groan and labour under dead laws and the decayed enactments of vanished generations and pestilential precedents; but that is only because for the most part we richly reward the knaves who enforce them, and the nation as a whole is too ignorant, or lazy, to cast off its burden.

"You remind me of an Emperor of Constantinople, Anastasius by name, who, being short of friends and well knowing that his time was at hand, paused to reflect on his successor. Near issue he had none, and the choice lay between three nephews—brothers, concerning whom he knew little good, or ill. In his esteem they were equal; and since reason could not decide between them, he trusted to chance, for he caused three beds to be set in a sleeping chamber and hid the empire's crown in the tester of one. Then, sending for the boys, he entertained them and, when night was come, bade them go sleep and choose which bed they would. With morn the Emperor himself entered the apartment of the brothers, to learn which had reposed beneath the crown. And what did he discover? The eldest boy slumbered in a bed innocent of the diadem; and to the second, whose sleep also was not frowned upon by the awful symbol, had crept his smallest brother—for company. The regal couch lay untenanted."

"A good tale," said the seneschal, "but no answer, L.D."

"When I chanced upon my own nephew, not so long ago," confessed the dragon, "I own a passing inspiration flashed to my brain and led me to wonder if, by good hap, he might be disposed to carry on our labours and consent to take my place and uphold my tradition. But, as you know, any hope in that direction swiftly vanished. Nor will I even emulate Julian, the Emperor, and leave the helm to him your living judgments may approve. It pleases me better to think that Dragonsville shall be thrown open to the world, and that our modest enterprise may be seen and considered for what it is worth by all men of good will. Let the young go forth and carry with them our principles, and let the middle-aged and old, if they so will, remain here and illustrate them. Let it be shown how that happiness is only real which has been procured by a man for his fellow man; let a community be discovered that is actuated by this rule of conduct. Invite the people to survey Dragonsville, since herein lies our proof; and ask the mighty and the wise and those inspired with love for their kind to determine whether or no our theories admit of application on a more generous scale. Perhaps not; it may be that only such a primitive folk as ourselves, satisfied with little and no longer stung by lust of possession, could pursue this ingenuous manner of life; but much might be done, and I die firmly persuaded that if we could but strike at the root of man's selfishness, his superstition and his egregious desire to prosper at the expense of everybody else, then substantial progress would be merely a question of time. I have lived to see the two bitterest enemies of man, and their names are Greed and Creed; while the handmaid of their happiness, the Cinderella that toils for them with little thanks, and still waits patiently to become their queen, is Reason. And, sooner or later, she will assuredly reign over a united earth, since without reason unity is impossible."

Within a few weeks of this speech, and after another winter's frost was melted out of the ground, the dragon directed that his grave should be begun.

"It will take a long time," he said, "and I should like to see it finished."

Therefore, with many tears (for this business impressed upon them what was soon to happen), the people began to dig a mighty pit, one hundred yards long, twenty-five yards broad and twenty yards deep. It yawned beside the grove of budding hawthorns which covered the tumulus of his wife; and L.D. lived to see the scented glory of the may before he passed.

There was an incident at the early digging and, for the first and only time, Dicky Gollop, the jester, made the Lavender Dragon laugh. For while the monster inspected his grave, as yet but five feet deep, Dicky failed to see where he was stepping and fell in backwards. Thus at last he reached to his ambition, though in a left-handed sort of manner, and genuinely entertained his master.

After the completion of this work the Lavender Dragon failed rapidly, and there came a day in June when with the dawn he died. About him were assembled the seneschal and other old men and women, Father Lazarus, Sir Jasper and Petronell, Sir Claude and Doctor Doncaster, who ministered to the expiring monster. The Lavender Dragon's last words were not forgotten by those who heard them.

"Fetch the trolley, while I have strength to crawl upon it," he said. "It will save you much trouble afterwards."

They obeyed, and with an expiring effort, L.D. stretched his bulk upon the vehicle and lost consciousness. His heart heaved behind the mighty ribs a little longer; then the beat grew slow and stopped; the blinds of his lids rolled down slowly over the fading opals of his eyes, and he was quite dead.

XII Butterflies

Upon the night after the funeral, as though to indicate that the old order had changed for ever, the walls of Dragonsville fell to the earth and the empire of the Lavender Dragon ceased to exist as a separate kingdom, defended and preserved behind its own ramparts. An immense restlessness already infected the people, and when it was known that the walls had crumbled, many feared and many rejoiced. The young would lead away their kinsfolk into the outer world, and not a few consented to accompany them; but others remained and hoped that they might be permitted to do so. Of these were Nicholas Warrender, who took now the lead at the wish of all, with George Pipkin for his right-hand man. Sir Claude of the Strong Shield also determined to spend the balance of his time in tending the dragon's grave.

As for Sir Jasper of Pomeroy and his fair wife, they set forth on a cloudless morning in hope to find welcome and waken far-spreading happiness at home in the West-country; while many from Pongley-in-the-Marsh and elsewhere also returned to their places, somewhat oversanguine that the message of goodwill and good tidings they brought might reconcile their heirs to their return.

Father Lazarus remained at Dragonsville, and it was in connection with this honourable and faithful man that the first hard words were spoken within that township after the decease of the founder.

Sir Jasper was just about to depart upon his long journey southward when this unfortunate thing happened. He rode his piebald charger, and Lady Petronell sat beside him on her riding-horse, a powerful and mettlesome beast. One accompanied them, having his own steed and a second, whereon their trifling luggage was bestowed. He was a lad born and bred at Dragonsville, who had entered

the knight's service. The priest, with Nicholas Warrender, Sir Claude, George Pipkin and many others, collected to bid the voyagers god-speed, and as he drank the stirrup cup, Sir Jasper spoke of their departed friend.

"May his humane and gentle spirit enter into us, and help us to advance the happiness of a weary world," said he.

"It has done so," declared his wife. "None who enjoyed knowledge of our dear dragon can ever be quite the same afterwards."

"Be sure that we shall yet welcome him in a place of perfect happiness when it is our turn," asserted Sir Claude with an unusual ray of hope; but Father Lazarus sighed and refused to echo any such sentiment.

"A vain aspiration," he answered. "We must be brave in this matter and not palter with conscience. None can feel greater grief than myself to recognise the truth; but the truth is ever unassailable. In a word, L.D. has gone where the bad dragons go, since there is no appointed place for good dragons, and it were vain to deceive ourselves and pretend otherwise. To this fate is he fallen, not because he himself was bad—far from it—I never met such a saintly character on two feet, let alone four; but because, having brain and wit to choose the right path, he preferred to remain upon the wrong one; and virtue is of nothing worth that springs from foundations that will not bear the test of Faith."

The seneschal snorted, and Sir Jasper spoke.

"Haply he will be pitied and pardoned in credit of his good works," ventured the knight.

"Alas! We have the highest authority for refusing to believe any such thing," replied Father Lazarus sadly. "He would be the first to own it himself."

"Out on you!" cried Nicholas Warrender, his eye flashing and his white beard a-bristle. "What manner of man are you to deny salvation to your benefactor and first friend? Did not the Almighty make you both, and make him worth a thousand of you?"

They wrangled so that they forgot to bid the parting

pair "farewell," and Sir Jasper, who lacked not sympathy for either side, rode forward with his wife and left them to it. But neither convinced the other, since they had entered upon that age-long argument, wherein only a time yet to come shall declare the victory.

* * * *

For six generations after his disappearance the dragon's grave continued to be a scene of pilgrimage; and then his rede was forgotten and the things he had attempted to do no longer remembered. He sank into a myth, and his castle and his city crumbled away under the sleights of time. The owl hooted in his dining hall; the bat hung aloft in his sleeping chamber; and presently the ivy, with steadfast might, dragged all down until not one stone remained upon another. Then did the watchful Woods of Blore, finding no hindrance, creep forward with sapling legions that swiftly bulked to trees and so engulfed and swallowed that happy valley, until all evidence of man and his labour alike disappeared.

Yet even to this day, at the season of high summer, the wanderer with faith may chance upon a knoll still open to the sky, and find the great mound bright in a robe of scented lavender, agleam with vanessa butterflies—black and scarlet, crimson and purple. The living jewels dance in sunshine and fragrance, and round about sing birds and patter the furry creatures of the wild.

Beneath lie the bones of a vast saurian—that excellent mystery known to the Dark Ages as the Lavender Dragon; and since all history is but an echo and a reverberation, it may happen that his theory shall yet revive to challenge the mind of man, and his practice be again attempted.

We have made a measure of progress since the days of Dragonsville, and the fact that we are so widely, keenly alive to the need for yet swifter advance is the most hopeful thing about us. There speaks the evolution of our moral nature, wakening from long dalliance; there moves the spirit of good will, struck into a cruel coma by the torment of recent years. Mighty powers are they, to help humanity correct its values, purify its ambitions and seek

those ideals of generosity, abnegation and selfless purpose, without which no pathway of advancement through darkness into day can be discovered. Dawn is upon the mountain tops and, as the sun arises, light will descend into the homes and heart of mankind—because it can do no other.

THE END

of Fletcher Pratt and L. Sprague de Camp, and the enormously popular romancer of the early years of this century, Robert W. Chambers. And the variety in plot and style demonstrated by the stories in that first volume is no less remarkable: the Anatole France novella, "The Kingdom of the Dwarfs," is modeled on the format of the classic French fairy-tale; the Pratt and de Camp entry, "Wall of Serpents," is a sort of parody of the national epic of the Finns, the *Kalevala*, done with wit and gusto; the William Morris story, "The Hollow Land," derives from the Medieval prose romancers, like Sir Thomas Malory; and the tale by Chambers is a dreamlike mood-piece which incongruously contains elements of the espionage thriller and the Fu Manchu yarn of Oriental magic and menace. A quartet of curiosities, you will admit!

As for the book at hand, *Great Short Novels of Adult Fantasy #2*, it is, I hope, a worthy successor to that initial volume. Major fantasy novellas by two newly-re-discovered masters of the genre, Ernest Bramah and Eden Phillpotts, are herein included, and yet another haunting novella by Robert W. Chambers, as well as a long-forgotten tale by the great George Macdonald—a tale so utterly obscure that I sometimes wonder if anyone in the world ever really noticed it before.

As you may have guessed by now, I'm quite enthusiastic about this new anthology concept. It opens up the Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series as a whole to a hitherto unexplored region of brilliant imaginative writing. We look forward to bringing back into print again the novella-length work of a superb roster of talents which includes A. Merritt, Aubrey Beardsley, Clark Ashton Smith, David H. Keller, Lord Dunsany, Francis Stevens, Theophile Gautier, Seabury Quinn, and others too numerous to list.

—LIN CARTER

Editorial Consultant:

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