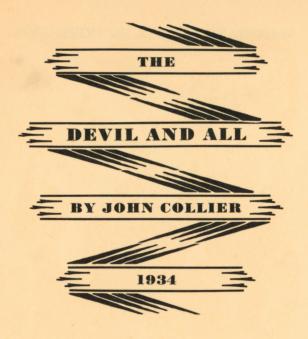
THE DEVIL AND ALL

SIX SHORT STORIES

BY JOHN COLLIEB







Possession of Angela Bradshaw

The Right Side

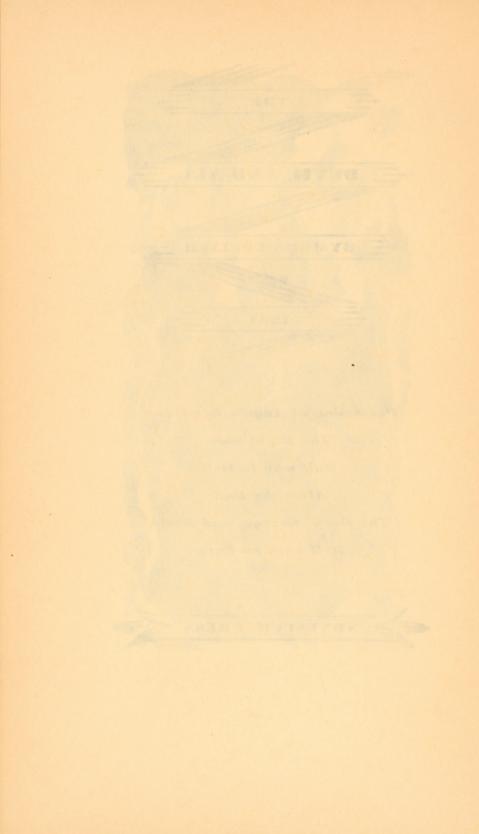
Half way to Hell

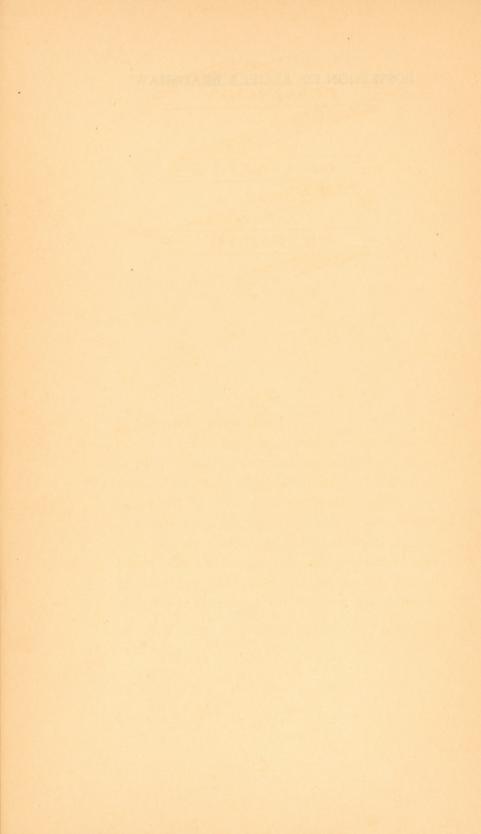
After the Ball

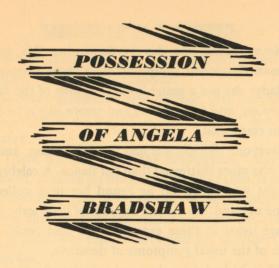
The Devil, George, and Rosie

Hell hath no Fury









THERE was a young woman, the daughter of a retired colonel, resident in one of London's most select suburbs, and engaged to be married to Mr. Angus Fairfax, a solicitor who made more money every year. The name of this young woman was Angela Bradshaw: she wore a jumper, had an Aberdeen terrier, and when snakeskin shoes were in fashion, she wore snakeskin shoes. Angus Fairfax was as ordinary as herself, and pleasant and ordinary were all the circumstances of their days.

Nevertheless, one day in September this young woman developed symptoms of a most distressing malady: she put a match to the curtains of the drawing-room, and kicked, bit, and swore like a trooper when restrained.

Everyone thought she had lost her reason, and no one was more distressed than her fiancé. A celebrated alienist was called in: he found her in a collected frame of mind. He made a number of little tests, such as are usual in these examinations, and could find none of the usual symptoms of dementia.

When he had done, however, she burst into a peal of coarse laughter, and, calling him a damned old fool, she reminded him of one or two points he had overlooked. Now these points were extremely abstruse ones, and most unlikely to be known to a young girl who had never studied psycho-analysis.

The alienist was greatly shocked and surprised, but he was forced to admit that while such knowledge was most abnormal, and while the term she had applied to him was indicative of the extreme of folly, he did not feel that she could be certified on these grounds alone.

"But cannot she be certified for setting fire to my curtains?" asked her mother.

"Not unless I find symptoms of insanity," said the specialist. "You can, of course, charge her with arson."

"What? And have her go to prison?" cried her mother. "Think of the disgrace!"

"I could undertake her defence, free of charge, and doubtless get her off with a caution," said Mr. Fairfax.

"There would still be the newspapers," said the Colonel, shaking his head. "At the same time, it seems extraordinary that nothing can be done about it." Saying this, he gave the eminent alienist his cheque and a look. The alienist shrugged his shoulders and departed.

Angela immediately put her feet on the table (her legs were extremely well-turned) and recited a string of doggerel verses, celebrating the occasion in great detail, and casting scorn on her parents and her fiancé. They were very scurrilous, or I would reproduce them here.

During the next few days, she played some other tricks, all of them troublesome and undignified: above all, she rhymed away like the principal boy in a panto. A whole string of doctors were called in: they all said her misbehaviour was not due to insanity.

Her parents then tried a few quacks, who, powerless to certify, were also impotent to cure. In the end they went to a seedy Madame who claimed to see into the soul. "The whole thing is perfectly clear," said this unprepossessing old woman. "Your daughter is possessed of a devil. Two guineas."

They asked her to exorcise the intrusive fiend, but that was ten, so they said they would think the matter over, and took Angela home in a taxi.

On the way, she said to them with a smile, "If you had had the decency to ask me, I could have told you that that was the trouble, all along."

When they had finished rating her for allowing them to go to so much expense unnecessarily, they asked her how she knew.

"In the simplest way," she said. "I see him very frequently."

"When?" cried the Colonel.

"Where?" cried her mother.

"What is he like?" cried her fiancé.

"He is young and not at all bad-looking," replied Angela, "and he talks most amusingly. He generally appears to me when I am alone: I am seldom alone but in my bedroom, and it is there that I see him, between eleven at night and seven in the morning."

"What does he say?" cried her father, grasping his malacca.

"Is he black?" cried her mother.

"What does he . . . ? How do you know it is not a she-devil?" cried her fiancé.

"He expresses himself rather coarsely, but I believe sincerely," replied Angela. "I sometimes find the things he says quite beautiful. He is not black. He is not a she-devil."

"But how does he appear?" asked her mother.

"Frequently I find him beside me, when I have got into bed," said Angela, with the greatest composure in the world.

"I have always asked you to let me order a wider bed for that room," observed her mother to the Colonel.

"This fiend must be exorcised at once," said Angus Fairfax, "for there is no bed wide enough to sleep three, once we are married."

"I'm not sure that he wants to be exorcised," said Angela. "In any case, I must ask him first."

"Colonel Bradshaw," said Angus Fairfax, "I hope you realise my position. In face of these revelations, and of all that lies behind them, I cannot but withdraw from the engagement."

"A good riddance, I say," observed the fiend, now speaking for the first time.

"Be quiet, dear," said Angela.

Mr. Fairfax rapped on the glass, stopped the taxi, and got out.

"In face of what we have just heard," said he, "no action for breach of promise can possibly lie."

"It is not the custom of the Bradshaws to bring actions for breach of promise," said the Colonel. "No more shall we sue you for your share of the taxifare."

The fiend, while Mr. Fairfax hastily fumbled for

his money, recited a valedictory quatrain, rhyming most obscenely upon his name.

To resume our tale. They got home. The Colonel immediately telephoned for the old Madame to come, regardless of cost.

"I'll have this fiend out before eleven tonight, anyway, Miss," said he to his daughter, who laughed.

The old Madame turned up, bearing a great box of powders, herbs, bones, symbols, and heaven knows what else. She had the drawing-room darkened, the wireless disconnected from its aerial, just in case, and, as an afterthought, had the Colonel go out with a sardine to tempt a cat in from the street. "They often like to go into a cat," she said. "I don't know why."

Then, Angela being seated in the middle of the room, and the ornamental paper being taken out of the fireplace, in case he should like to go up the chimney, the old woman lit a joss-stick or two, and began to mumble away for dear life.

When she had said all that was required, she set fire to a saucerful of Bengal Light. "Come forth, Asmodeus!" she cried.

"Wrong," said the fiend, with a chuckle.

"Bother!" cried the old woman in dismay, for the flare had shown the cat eating one of the bones she had brought. "That was a bone of St. Eulalia, which was worse than Keating's Powder to devils, and cost me twenty guineas," she said. "No devil will go into

that cat now, and the bone must go into the bill, and the Colonel must go into the street to fetch a fresh cat."

When everything was resettled, she began again, and, lighting a new saucerful: "Come forth, Beelzeebub!" she demanded.

"Wrong again," said the fiend, with a louder chuckle than before.

"They'll never guess, darling," said Angela.

The old beldame went on, at a prodigious expense of the Bengal Light, which was of a special kind. She called on Belial, Belphegor, Mahound, Radamanth, Minos, all the fiends ever heard of, and all she brought forth was taunts and laughter.

"Then who the devil are you?" cried the Colonel at last.

"William Wakefield Wall," replied the fiend.

"You might have asked that at the beginning," said Angela quietly.

"And who, if you please, is William Wakefield Wall?" enquired her mother, with dignity. "At least, dear, he is not one of these foreign fiends," she added to the Colonel.

"He is some charlatan," said the old woman. "I have never heard of him."

"Very few Philistines have," rejoined the fiend with great equanimity. "However, if there is, by any odd chance, anyone in this suburb who is familiar with

the latest developments of modern poetry, I advise you to make your enquiries of him."

"Do you mean to say you're a poet?" cried the Colonel.

"It would be pretentious of me, if I were a Romantic," said the fiend, "and, to one of classical tendencies, the distinction seems a superfluous one. Call me, if you will, a . . ."

"He is a poet, father," said Angela, "and a very good one. He had a poem in a magazine printed in Paris. Didn't you, Will?"

"If the rascal is a poet," cried the Colonel, "bring in a bottle of whisky. That'll get him out, if I know the breed."

"A typical army idea!" replied the poet. "Perhaps the only one. No, Colonel, you need not bring whisky here, unless you need some yourself, and you may send away that old woman, at whom I do nothing but laugh. I shall come out on my own terms, or not at all."

"And your terms are . . . ?" said the Colonel.

"Permission to marry your daughter," said the poet. "And the settlement upon her of a sum commensurate with the honour which my profession will bestow upon the family."

"And if I refuse?" cried the outraged father.

"I am very comfortable where I am," replied William Wall. "Angela can eat enough for two,

and we are both as happy as anything. Aren't we, Angela?"

"Yes, dear," said Angela. "Oh, don't!"

"We shall continue to have our bit of fun, of course," added the poet.

"My dear," said the Colonel to his wife, "I think we had better sleep on this."

"I think it must be settled before eleven, my dear," said Mrs. Bradshaw.

They could see no way out of it, so they had to come to an agreement. The poet at once emerged, and proved to be quite a presentable young man, though a little free in his mode of speech, and he was able to satisfy them that he came of an estimable family.

He explained that he had first seen Angela in the foyer of a theatre, during the *entr'acte*, and, gazing into her eyes (for he was much attracted), he had been amazed and delighted to find himself enter into possession of her. He was forced to reply in the affirmative to a certain question of Mrs. Bradshaw's: however, young people have their own standards in these days. They were married at once, and, as he soon took to writing novels, the financial side worked out very satisfactorily, and they spent all their winters on the Riviera.

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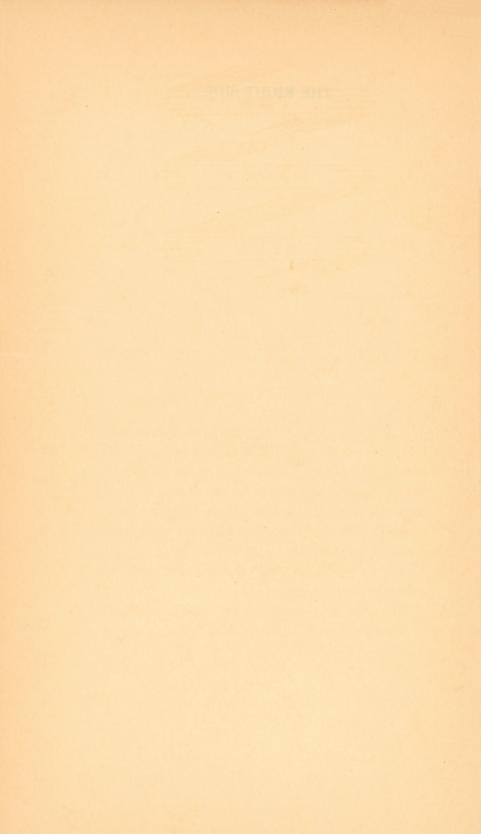
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A YOUNG man, who was looking extremely pale, walked to the middle of Westminster Bridge and clambered on to the parapet. A swarthy gentleman, some years his senior, in evening dress, with dark red carnation, Inverness cape, monocle, and short imperial, appeared as if from nowhere, and had him by the ankle.

"Let me go, damn you!" muttered the would-be suicide, with a tug and a kick.

"Get down, and walk beside me," said the stranger; "or that policeman, who has already taken a step or two in our direction, will most certainly run you in. Let us pretend to be two friends, of whom one wished for a thrill, while the other was anxious that he should not fall."

The young man who was so eager to be in the Thames, had a great aversion to being in prison. Accordingly he fell into step with the stranger, and, smiling (for now they were just passing the bobby), "Damn and blast you!" he said. "Why can't you mind your own silly business?"

"But, my dear Philip Westwick," replied the other, "I regard you as very much my business."

"Who may you be?" cried the young man impatiently. "I don't know you. How did you get hold of my name?"

"It came into my mind," said his companion, "just half an hour ago, when first you formed your rash resolution."

"I don't know how that can be," said Philip. "Nor do I care."

"You lovers," said his companion, "are surprised by nothing, except first that your mistresses should fancy you, and next, that they should fancy someone else."

"How do you know," cried our poor Philip, "that it was over that sort of thing?"

"I know that, and much more, equally ridiculous," replied the other. "What would you say if I reminded

you that no less than a month ago, when you considered yourself in heaven, and were, in point of fact, in your Millicent's arms, you discerned something of the essence of ennui in the nape of her neck, and actually wished her transformed into the little brunette who serves in a tea-shop in Bond Street? And now you are on the brink of suicide because your Millicent has left you, though the little brunette is, for all you know, in Bond Street still. What do you say to that?"

"You seem to be unaware," said Philip, "that what one wishes when one is in one girl's arms, and what one wishes when someone else is probably there, are two very different things. Otherwise, I admit your knowledge is devilish uncanny."

"That is only natural," replied the other with a complacent smile, from which Philip immediately realised that he was in the company of none other than the Devil himself.

"What are you up to?" he demanded, drawing back a little.

The Devil, with a look of great benevolence, offered him a cigarette.

"I suppose it's not doped?" enquired Philip, sniffing at it suspiciously.

"Oh, come!" said the Devil with a sneer. "Do you think I need resort to such measures as that, to overcome you. I have *reason* on my side."

"You have a reputation for reasoning to some effect," said Philip. "I have very little desire to be eternally damned."

"What did you expect, then," said the Devil, "when you contemplated suicide?"

"I see nothing wrong in that," cried our hero.

"Nor does a puppy that destroys his master's slipper," said the Devil. "However, he is punished for it."

"I can't believe it," said Philip obstinately.

"Come with me, then," said the Devil, and took him to a Fun Fair in the neighbourhood of the Tottenham Court Road. Here a number of the ugliest wretches on earth were amusing themselves with gambling games: others were peering into stereoscopes which showed scenes of Parisian night life. The rest of them were picking pockets, making overtures to certain female habitués of the place, swearing, and indulging in all manner of filthy conversation.

The Devil looked on all these much as one who has been walking among the poppies and the wild cornflowers of the fields looks upon the cultivated plants in the garden about his back-door. The commissionaire touched his cap much as gardeners do: the Devil acknowledged the salute, and, taking out a latch-key, led Philip to a little door in the wall, which, being opened, discovered a lift.

They got in, and descended for several minutes at an incredible speed.

"My dear Devil," said Philip, puffing at his cigarette, which was, in fact, doped, and gave him the impression of being a man of affairs, "My dear Devil, if we go on at this rate, we shall soon be in Hell itself."

Nothing could have been more true. The lift stopped, they got out: they were in a vast hall, which resembled nothing so much as the foyer of some gargantuan theatre or picture palace. There were two or three box offices, in front of which the prices of admission were displayed: Stalls—gluttony; Private Boxes—lechery; Dress Circle—vanity; Gallery—sloth, and so forth. There was also a bar, at which one or two uniformed fiends were chatting with the barmaids, among whom our friend was astonished to see the little brunette from Bond Street.

Now and then a door opened upon the vast auditorium, and it was apparent that the play or talkie in progress was a lively one.

"There's a dance lounge through here," said the Devil, "to which I particularly wanted to take you."

A door was opened for them: they found themselves in a reasonably large apartment got up in the grotto style, with ferns and imitation rock-work, and a damp and chilly air. A band was playing a travesty of

Scarlatti: several people were dancing rather listlessly. Philip observed that many of them were disgustingly fat.

The Devil led him up to a slim and pale girl, murmured a few words: Philip, seeing nothing else to do, bowed, offered her his arm, and they began to circle the room.

She danced very languidly, and kept her heavy lids dropped low over her eyes. Philip uttered one or two trifling remarks. "Do you come here often?" he said. She smiled faintly, but did not reply.

He was a little piqued at her remaining so listless (besides, he had smoked one of the Devil's cigarettes): "How very cold your hand is!" he said, giving it a slight squeeze. It certainly was. He manœuvred this unresponsive partner into a corner, where he clutched her waist rather more tightly than was necessary for dancing. He felt a chilly moisture penetrate the sleeve of his jacket, and a faint but unmistakable smell of river-mud became perceptible. He looked at her closely and observed something extremely pearly about her eyes.

"Excuse me," he said.

You may depend he lost no time in rejoining the Devil.

"Now," said that worthy, "are you still unable to believe that those who drown themselves are eternally damned?"

Philip was forced to admit the point.

"You have no idea how bored that poor girl is," said the Devil compassionately. "And she has only been here thirty years. What is that, in comparison to Eternity?"

"Very little. Very little, indeed," said Philip.

"You see what sort of partners she gets," continued the arch-fiend. "During every dance they reveal to her, and she to them, some little unpleasantness of the sort that so disquieted you."

"But why should they be in a dance lounge?" asked Philip.

"Why not?" said the Devil with a shrug. "Have another cigarette."

He then proposed that they should adjourn to his office, to talk matters over.

"Now, my dear Westwick," said he, when they were comfortably ensconced in armchairs, "what shall our little arrangement be? I can, of course, annihilate all that has occurred. In that case you will find yourself back on the parapet, in the very act of jumping; just as you were when I caught you by the ankle. Shortly afterwards you will arrive in the little dance lounge you saw; whether fat or thin depends upon the caprice of the waters."

"It is night," said Philip. "The river flows at four miles an hour. I should probably get out to sea unobserved. Yes, I should almost certainly be one of the

fat ones. They appeared to me remarkably deficient in it or S.A., if those terms are familiar to you."

"I have heard of them," said the Devil, with a smile. "Have a cigar."

"No, thanks," said Philip. "What alternative do you suggest?"

"Here is our standard contract," said the Devil. "Do have a cigar. You see—unlimited wealth, fifty years, Helen of Troy—well, that's obsolete. Say Miss——," and he mentioned the name of a delightful film-star.

"Of course," said Philip, "there's this little clause about possession of my soul. Is that essential?"

"Well, it's the usual thing," said the Devil. "Better let it stand. This is where you sign."

"Well, I don't know," said Philip. "I don't think I'll sign."

"What?" cried the Devil.

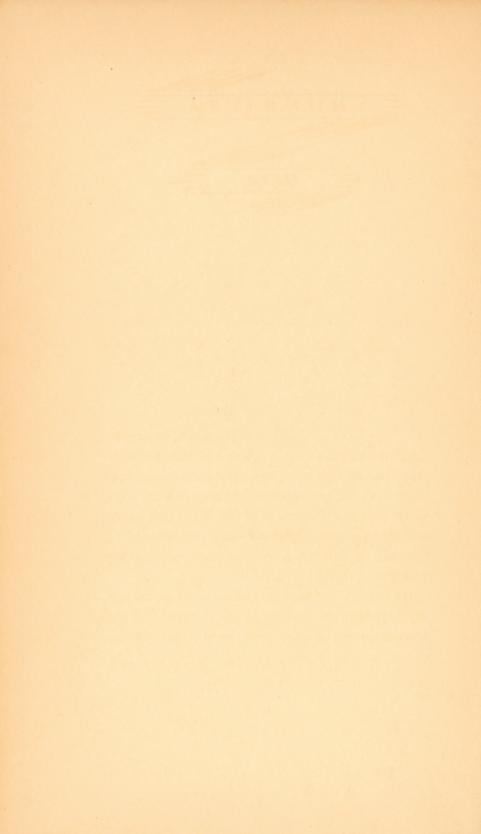
Our hero pursed his lips.

"I don't want to influence you, my dear Westwick," said the Devil, "but have you considered the difference between coming in tomorrow as a drowned suicide, and coming in—fifty glorious years hence, mind—as a member of the staff? Those were members of the staff you saw talking to the little brunette at the bar. Nice girl!"

"All the same," said Philip, "I don't think I'll sign. Many thanks, though."

"All right," said the Devil. "Back you go, then!"
Philip was aware of a rushing sensation: he seemed
to be shooting upwards like a rocket. However, he
kept his presence of mind, kept his weight on his
heels, and, when he got to the parapet, jumped down,
but on the right side.







Louis Thurlow, having decided to take his own life, felt that at least he might take his own time also. He consulted his passbook: there was a little over a hundred pounds left: "Very well," he said, "I'll get out of this flat, which stinks, and spend a really delightful week at Mutton's. I'll taste all the little pleasures just once more, to say goodbye to them."

He engaged his suite at Mutton's, where he kept the page-boys on the run. At one moment they had to rush round into Piccadilly to buy him chrysan-

themums, in which to smell the oncoming autumn, which he would never see. Next they were sent to Soho to get him some French cigarettes, to put him in mind of a certain charming hotel which overlooked the Seine. He had also a little Manet sent round by the Neuilly Galleries—"To try living with," he said, with the most whimsical smile. You may depend he ate and drank the very best: just a bite of this and a glass of that: he had so many farewells to take.

On the last night of all he telephoned Celia, whose voice he felt inclined to hear once more. He did not speak, of course, though he thought of saying, "You should really not keep on repeating 'Hallo,' but say 'Goodbye.'" However, she had said that already, and he had been taught never to sacrifice good taste to a bad *mot*.

He hung up the receiver, and opened the drawer in which he had stored his various purchases of veronal tablets.

"Everything is relative. I prided myself on not being one of those panic-stricken, crack-brained suicides who rush to burn out their guts with gulps of disinfectant: now it seems scarcely less civilised to end this pleasant week with twenty hard swallows and twenty sips of water. Still, life is like that. I'll take it easy."

Accordingly he arranged his pillows very comfortably, congratulated himself on his pyjamas, propped up a photograph against his bedside clock: "I have no appetite," he said, "I force myself to eat as a duty to my friends. There is no bore like a despairing lover." And with that he began to toy with this last, light, plain little meal.

The tablets were not long in taking effect. Our hero closed his eyes, put on the smile with which he hoped to be found in the morning, shut off that engine which drives us from one moment to the next, and prepared to glide into the valley of the shadow.

The glide was a long one. He anticipated no landing, and was the more surprised to learn that there is no such thing as nothing, while there is quite definitely such a thing as being dead in the most comfortable bedroom in all Mutton's Hotel.

"Here I am," he said. "Dead. In Mutton's Hotel."
The idea was novel enough to make him get out of bed at once. He noticed that his corpse remained there, and was glad to observe that the smile he had assumed on retiring was still in place, and looked extremely well.

He strolled across to the mirror to see if his present face was capable of an equally subtle expression, but when he came to look in he saw nothing at all. Nevertheless he obviously had arms and legs, and he felt that he could still do his old trick with his eyebrows,

from which he assumed that he was much the same, only different.

"I am just invisible," he said, "and in that there are certain advantages."

He decided to go out at once, in order to have a bit of fun. He went down the stairs, followed a departing guest through the revolving door, and in two minutes he was walking down Cork Street. It appeared to be just after midnight: there was a bobby, a taxi or two, a few ladies, none of whom took any notice of him at all.

He had not gone twenty yards, however, and was, as a matter of fact, just passing his tailor's, when a lean dark figure detached itself from the shadows which hung about the railings in front of the shop, and coming up close behind his elbow, said, "Damn and blast it, man, you have been a time!"

Louis was a little put out at finding himself not so invisible as he had thought. Still, he glanced at the stranger and saw that his eyes were as luminous as a cat's eyes, from which it was plain that he could see better than most.

"Do you mean," said Louis, "that I've been keeping you waiting?"

"I've been hanging about here, freezing, for a week," said the stranger peevishly.

Now it was only September, and the nights, though nippy, were not as cold as all that. Louis put two and

two together: "Is it possible," said he, "that you have been waiting to . . . to take me in charge, so to speak, on account of my recent suicide?"

"I have," said the fiend. "You'll come quietly, I suppose."

"My dear fellow," said Louis, "I know you have your duty to do, and in any case I'm not the sort of person to make a scene in the street. I'm sorry if I've kept you hanging about in the cold, but the truth is I had no idea of your existence, so I hope there'll be no ill-feeling."

"I've got an ill feeling all right," replied the other, grumpily. "I swear I've got the 'flu, curse it!" And with that he sneezed miserably. "The worst of it is," he added, "we've got such a human of a way to go. I shall be fit for nothing for weeks."

"Really, I can't bear to hear you sneeze like that," cried our hero, "Have you ever tried the Quetch at the Rat Trap Club?"

"What's Quetch?" asked the other, between sneezes.

"It tastes like liquid fire," replied Louis, "I believe it's made from plum stones, though why I can't tell you. Possibly to cure your cold."

"Liquid fire, eh?" observed the stranger, his eyes glowing like cigarette ends.

"Come and try it," said Louis.

"I don't know," said the other. "We're a week late

through your fault: I don't see why we shouldn't be half an hour later through mine. I suppose there'll be trouble if they hear of it."

Louis assured him that this last half-hour must be put down to his account also: "You caught the cold through my delay," said he. "Therefore I am responsible for the time you take to cure it." The fiend obviously believed this, which caused our hero to reflect that he must be a very simple fiend.

They set out for the Rat Trap. Passing through Piccadilly Circus, the fiend indicated the Underground, saying: "That's where I'm going to take you when we've had this drop of what-d'ye-call-it."

"That does not take you to Hell," said Louis, "but only to Barons Court. The mistake is pardonable."

"No mistake," replied the fiend. "Let's cross the road this way, and I'll show you what I mean."

They went in and travelled down the escalator, chatting very affably. No one took any notice of them at all.

When they had reached the ordinary lowest level, where the trains run: "Come," said the fiend, and drew Louis into a passage he had never before noticed, up which there came a huger clanking and a sultrier blast. He saw a notice saying, "Follow the wrong light." A few paces brought them to the top of an escalator such as our hero had never dreamed

of: it swooped down from under their feet with a roar and a groan, down into the close innards of the earth. Its passage was lit by the usual lamps: Louis, whose sight seemed to have become extremely keen, saw that at some far point on its vast curve, the black shades changed to blue, and the lamps gave place to stars. However, it seemed to go on the devil of a long way past that.

For the rest, it was made just like all other escalators: its sides were adorned with pictorial advertisements of temptations, some of which Louis thought might be very interesting. He could have stepped on, for there was no barrier or ticket collector, but, as we have seen, he liked to take his time.

Now and then, he and his companion were jostled by other fiends and their charges. I am afraid some of the latter were behaving in rather an undignified manner, and had to be marched along in a sort of policeman's grip. The effect was degrading. Louis was interested to see, however, how tremendously this escalator accelerated once it felt the weight of these infernal policemen and their victims. It was a tremendous spectacle to see this narrow moving chain, dimly lit, roaring, rushing down, looping the distance between Earth and Hell, which is greater than one would imagine.

"What did you do before this sort of thing was invented?" asked Louis.

33

"We had to leap down, like chamois, from star to star," replied the fiend.

"Splendid!" said Louis. "Now let's go and have that drink."

The fiend consenting, they went off to the Rat Trap, and ordered a full bottle of the famous Quetch. The fiend disdained a glass, and put the bottle to his lips, whereupon Louis saw, to his great amazement, this powerful form of brandy was actually brought to the boil. The fiend appeared to like it: when the liquid was gone he sucked away at the bottle, the melting sides of which collapsed like the skin of a gooseberry sucked at by a child. When he had drawn it all into his mouth, he smiled, pursed his lips, and blew out the glass again, this time more like a cigarette-smoker exhaling his first puff. What's more, he didn't blow the glass into bottle shape again, but into the most delightful statuary piece; most realistic, most amusing. "Adam and Eve," said he, laconically, placing it on the table to cool.

"Oh, very, very good!" cried Louis. "Can you do Mars and Venus?"

"Oh, yes," said the fiend. Louis immediately ordered another bottle of Quetch.

He called for one or two other subjects, of a nature that would hardly interest the reader. The fiend, however, thought each more amusing than the last, and nearly split his sides over the effect of a hiccough on

Lady Godiva. The fact is, he was getting rather tight. Louis encouraged him, not so much for love of art as because he had no great desire to ride on that escalator.

At last the fiend would drink no more. He got up, jingled his money (fiends have money—that's where it's all gone to), puffed out his cheeks. "Whoop!" says he, with a hiccough, "my cold's better, I believe. If it isn't; well then—to Hell with it! That's what I say. Ha! Ha!"

Louis, you may be sure, told him he was a fine fellow. "Well," said he, as they stood on the steps of the club, "I suppose you're going that way: I'm going this." He made a bit of a face, pleasantly, raised his hat, and set off along the street, scarcely daring to breathe till he had rounded the corner.

When he thought himself in safety: "By Jove," said he, "I'm well rid of that fellow. Here I am, dead, invisible, and the night is yet young. Shall I go and see what Celia's doing?"

Before he could embark on this rash project, he felt a very hard hand on his arm, looked round, and saw his custodian.

"Oh, there you are," said he. "I wondered where the devil you'd got to."

"Drunk as a lord," said the fiend, with a smile. "Got to see one another home, eh?"

There was nothing for it; they set out for Piccadilly Circus. The fiend kept his hand on Louis' wrist, quite inoffensively of course, only Louis would rather it had not been there.

So they went chatting into the subway again. Just as they got to the level of the Piccadilly line, which is where the infernal aperture gapes for those who are privileged to see it, who should Louis see, in top hat, white silk scarf, and all the rest, but his damned nasty rival, catching a late train home.

"I bet," said Louis at once, addressing the fiend, "that you are not strong enough to carry me on your back from here to the escalator."

The fiend, with a sneer of contempt, immediately bent down. Louis, with a desperate effort, picks hold of his rival round the waist and dumps him on the back of the fiend, who grips his legs, and starts off like a race-horse.

"Carry you all the way to Hell for tuppence," cries he, in drunken pride.

"Done!" cries Louis, who was skipping along beside them to enjoy the spectacle.

He had the delicious pleasure of seeing them jump on the escalator, whose terrific acceleration seemed even more marked and more admirable than before.

Louis returned to the street as happy as a king. He walked about for a bit, and suddenly decided to look

in at Mutton's Hotel to see how his corpse was getting on.

He was rather annoyed to see, even as he stood looking at it, that the effective smile, over which he had taken so much trouble, was slipping. In fact, it was beginning to look altogether idiotic. Without giving the matter a thought, he instinctively nipped inside to hook it back into place. In doing so he twitched his nose, found it necessary to sneeze, opened his eyes, and, in a word, found himself quite alive and no longer kicking, in that excellent bedroom of Mutton's Hotel.

"Well, upon my word!" said he, glancing at the bedside table. "Is it possible I dropped off to sleep after taking only two of those tablets? There is really something to be said for taking one's time. It must have been just a vivid dream."

In short, he was glad to be alive, and still gladder a day or two afterwards, when some news came through that made it seem that it was not a dream after all. Louis' rival was announced as missing, having last been seen by two friends at the entrance of Piccadilly Circus station at twelve forty-five on Tuesday.

"Who'd have thought it," said Louis. "Anyway, I suppose I had better go and see Celia."

However, he had learned the advantage of taking his time, and before he went he thought better of it,

and, in fact, did not go at all, but went to Paris for the autumn, which shows that girls shouldn't play fast and loose with the affections of small men with blue eyes, or they may find themselves left in the lurch.





Which, if in hell no other paines there were,

Makes mee feare hell, because he must be there.

DR. JOHN DONNE

WHEN Mr. Dickinson put his hand down under the bed, to retrieve his fallen handkerchief, it was at once seized by another hand, hairy and hard as iron, but, even as the nervous gentleman's mild blood stood prickling in his veins, it was pressed, with unmistakable reverence and amity, to a pair of bristly lips.

"Oh!" thought Mr. Dickinson, and, withdrawing

his hand, he sat bolt upright, tense in every nerve, in the very middle of his bed.

"Who's there?" he cried.

"Only me," said the fiend, who still crouched submissively below.

"Come out of that," said Mr. Dickinson at last, for he was greatly reassured by the meek and piping tone of this answer. The fiend bumped and scuffled out, and stood sheepishly on the hearth-rug.

What an oaf! His voice had belied him. He was much the size and shape of the largest gorilla, and his hulking body was covered with a short, napless fur, like that of a nasty toy, cheap and gingerish. This fur showed through the gaps in his costume, which was infinitely too small for him, for he had stolen it, on his way here, from a little curate half his size, the better to commend himself to Mr. Dickinson, who abhorred the nude.

A word as to the natures of these two, thus dramatically met at midnight in the first-floor front bedroom of 10 Boskyn Road, N.14.

Dickinson, a bachelor in the best sense of that much abused term, had led a stainless life. Surrounded by luxury, for he was a cashier in one of our largest stores, he had never allowed luxury to lead him astray. His stamps tallied: his books, best nutriment of commerce, were uncooked. The racecourse knew him not, the bar and billiard saloon had offered their allure

unavailingly. For all that, he was no nincompoop who had never known temptation. If the young ladies of the store withheld their hopeless coquetry, awed by his Galahad eye, it was nevertheless his need daily to steel himself against the gleaming and rounded battalions of beauty, for the way to his desk lay through the corset department, and at an hour when the simpering nymphs, still ungarbed, stood in all the sweet shamelessness of their rosy wax. In his progress down this Cytherean aisle, Mr. Dickinson's emotion was such that his Adam's-apple might have lent a needed inspiration to the lift-boy, but, swiftly as it leapt up to his very teeth, it always subsided, so to speak, unbitten.

It was this experience of the dark god, or devil, within the masculine blood-stream, that made our hero so enthusiastic a murmurer of "Hear, hear!" at meetings of the Anti-Sunbathing Association. His own pure flesh was, I am glad to say, never exposed. Save where the veins ran like azure rivulets just beneath the skin, it was white as a gardenia under the chaste and cosy wool. His corns, though, were his martyrdom.

Enough of Dickinson. Who was the fiend?

He was, of all Hell's legions, the most calfish hobbledehoy, stupid to such a degree that not even his bulk could gain him a place in the least football team of the lowest division of the Infernal League. There, where everyone plays, this spelt failure. Our fiend, whose name was Tazreel, collected about him one-and-twenty similar outcasts, and proposed that they should start a club between themselves. Their objection was, that he was too great a booby to be included, and that they had no ball. Let him supply the second deficiency, they said, and they would overlook the first. Nettled, he vowed to, and shambled off to the outer playing-fields in the hope of cadging an old one. He saw a cousin of his taking some practice shots with a battered Pope of the fourteenth century, horribly burst asunder at the seams.

"Nick, Nick, what is that ball?"

"Black Mass, Tazreel, why do you stare at him?"

"Give him me. Give him me."

"No."

His cousin described a couple of turns about Tazreel, dribbling with tantalising finesse.

"Get one for yourself," he said.

"I can't," cried Tazreel. "You know what sort of stuff they serve out nowadays. Machine-made muck that busts up at the second kick! I want one for a proper game. Give him me. Give him me."

"No." And the cousin netted the pontifical pillule.

"If you want a decent one," he said, "go and tempt a good quality on earth. Yes, go and tempt Mr. Dickinson," he added with a snigger, and scampered off after his game.

At that moment, from an adjacent pitch, the bemuddied and leathern soul of Colonel Ingersoll hurtled through the air, and struck Tazreel a stinger on the ear.

In his fury he sent the poor Colonel back in tremendous style.

"I should be a fine player if I got a chance," he murmured, heartened by the success of his kick. "Damn it! I'll try for Dickinson. I can but fail."

This was madness. He told no one of what he was going to do, for fear of mockery, for in that place they talked of Dickinson's soul as office-boys do of a film-star: meat for their betters.

However, he breached up through the surface of the earth, caught up the curate, disrobed him in mid-air, popped him through the bishop's bedroom window, and next moment was under the bed, waiting till Mr. Dickinson should reach down for his handkerchief before switching off the light and settling himself to sleep.

Now he stood upon the hearth-rug, subserviently turning the round hat in his hands.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" said Mr. Dickinson, very much in a flutter again when he saw how extremely bulky this apparent parson appeared.

The fiend fell upon his knees with a supplicating gesture.

"I want to make myself useful, sir," he mumbled.

Mr. Dickinson experienced a spasm of genuine revulsion. It must be, he thought, one of the unemployed, masquerading in a cast-off rig.

"Why don't you work?"

"It's like this, sir: I'm one of the fallen angels. Sir, I can prove it. Look," and whisking round, he slightly adjusted his costume, and displayed to our astonished hero the convincing evidence of his tail.

"What's more, I'm repentant, sir," he continued, speaking, in his eagerness, out from between his knees. "Yes, I want to make good, to go straight in future. Oh boy! I want to be altogether changed. But how?

"'You go to Mr. Dickinson,' they told me. 'He's the only man who can show you the right path. Be his disciple, serve him, clean his boots, make him rich, any little thing. Take no wages, learn from him: he'll show you what a decent, clean, wholesome, manly life is,' they said."

"Who said?" asked Mr. Dickinson.

The fiend, with an expression of awe, jerked his thumb at the ceiling.

"Indeed?" said Mr. Dickinson. "Did they?"

"Yessir. They think a lot of you. 'He's wasted,' they said, 'in his manner of life. Go thou, extend his scope, and increase his good works. Make him famous, envied, admired. Make the ladies love him.'"

"Oh!" said Mr. Dickinson. "I must think this over. I must go into it thoroughly." He tapped his teeth

importantly. "If I decide to assist you," he said, "I'll let you know. Meanwhile I can't have you about this place. Er... begone. Hi! And meet me," he added, causing the fiend to reappear, more effectively than any servant who opens the door again to catch a last instruction, "and meet me on the Embankment by Battersea Bridge at seven to-morrow evening."

With that the fiend vanished respectfully, and Mr. Dickinson lay all of a tremble, excited, timorous, and bewildered.

It might be a trap. On the other hand, need he fear temptation? He desired nothing that was not respectable. But if the fiend spoke the truth, it might be a terrible responsibility, a nuisance. He thought of his landlady. But then, if those above had laid this task upon him, dared he refuse? Never shirk responsibility, that way lies promotion, the success booklet was firm on this point. Besides, the fellow might have powers: he might conjure him up a motor car. Yes, with such a helper he might do anything: become the rage at charity entertainments, a super-Maskelyne on the side of good. Why, he might enter sun-bathing establishments, and after a long homily to the ribald nude he might, at a single flourish, clothe them all in unremovable vests, permanent pants, non-displaceable knickers, everlasting suits, and eternal petticoats and gowns. His imagination soared, and he saw himself cleaning up the whole big city. The prospect was

intoxicating. How he wished tomorrow evening was come: there were a hundred questions he longed to ask.

He might, though, have dispensed quite easily with the interval, for Tazreel had withdrawn only from the sight. He had lingered on invisibly in the room to devour the recumbent Mr. Dickinson with a loving and a burning gaze. He sat, picking his devilish great dog-teeth, on the lower bed-rail.

In the cold morning light, ordinariness crowded in, and our hero found his visions fade a little. They seemed fantastic, dangerous. Every step that he took towards his daily work inclined him more to shun such extravagant dreams, and continue to keep to his straight, if extremely narrow, path.

"There's a catch in it somewhere," he said.

Alas, Mr. Dickinson! A spark of ambition still smouldered in his breast, and as he entered the store, where it might have been quenched for ever, it prompted him to a little action which undoubtedly changed the whole course of his life.

As he made his way up the aisle of immodest figures, it chanced that one, portrayed by the modeller as in the act of bending to draw on a non-existent stocking, had been backed right into his path.

"Outrageous!" cried Mr. Dickinson, thus roundly roused from his reverie. And transferring his newspaper into his left hand, he gave the shameless figure

a well-deserved smack. But before that real thrill, which always follows on a good act, had had time to bathe him in its rosy glow, he saw with horror that he had been too rough, too much the cave man. The bending figure shook on its pedestal, and then, slowly, absurdly almost, toppled forward, and lay prone upon the floor, utterly still.

"You clumsyfool," cried the deputy superintendent brassières and suspender belts, emerging from behind an outsize figure. "You've broken her nose."

"I didn't break her nose," cried Mr. Dickinson. ("The floor did," he added to himself, for he was incapable of a lie.)

"You did. I saw you."

"I deny it."

"In flagrante delicto."

"In toto."

"Don't touch her, anyone," shouted the deputy superintendent. "We'll have his finger-prints to prove it."

A debate ensued, and everyone was against Mr. Dickinson. Miss Warble came forward and described the slap; Albert lift-boy, who had also witnessed it, serving as interpreter when occasion required.

"Ugh!" said Miss Warble.

"Damn it, man!" said the manager, before them all, "I'd not have thought it of you. It's not the damage; that can, and shall, be made good out of

your salary. But Wilfrid Dickinson a hypocrite! This is a great blow to me. In future your books shall be specially checked. Who knows?"

"Oh dear!" said Mr. Dickinson.

"What's more, you shall be transferred to the ironmongery department."

"I resign," said Mr. Dickinson, bethinking himself of his powerful disciple.

"Resign, and be damned!" thundered the manager.

A slight monitory tremor ran through our hero's veins at these words. It was lost, though, in other tremors, those of rage, shame, and resignation. He pouted, and withdrew.

Misunderstood! So ran the current of his thoughts during the hours that followed. He wandered feverishly from tea-shop to tea-shop, finding forget-fulness in none. Just before five he was convulsed by a final spasm, and burst into a heavy perspiration.

"I forgive them," he said.

But, rage deserting him, he was still not at peace.

"To have misunderstood?" So ran the current of his thoughts during the two hours before his appointment. Could his visitor have been the agent of a cruel joke? He remembered the great Thompkins hoax in the Baby-linen department in '27. A dastardly affair!

"Duped!" he cried, arriving at the bridge five minutes too early, and finding no one awaiting him. "And I've thrown up my job! My job!" In

reiteration the word became a mere meaningless syllable. He could hardly believe that it connoted literally—his job.

Soon, however, he saw the fiend approaching him, shambling along at a good pace, and pausing only to take an occasional kick at a stone. He was in a better fitting suit: he had in fact robbed another, and a gigantic, clergyman.

"Late," said Mr. Dickinson pettishly, for his nerves were all on edge.

With infinite respect the fiend displayed to him a superb gold watch, the hands of which exactly marked the hour.

"Accept it, sir," he said. "I spent my last penny on it, as a slight mark of my affection and esteem. But pray, sir, may I venture to hope. . . ."

"I have decided to give you a trial," said Mr. Dickinson, "provided, that is, you... ah, your powers are satisfactory. Show me some of your tricks. Change that match-box into a motor car."

"I cannot transform objects," said Tazreel, "nor in any way run counter to the laws of nature. Only the big five can do that. But," he added, seeing Mr. Dickinson's look of disappointment, "I am strong, I am swift, I can be invisible, and I enjoy excellent luck at cards. This being so, you need not want for a motor car."

"Honest work, and plenty of it, is certainly your

best help in making good," said Mr. D. "Look to it that you use your powers well, and I will apply their fruits in a way that will be to your credit. What do you propose to do? I will not have you play cards. You say you are swift. Perhaps you could run for prizes in the sports."

"There's not much to be made that way," said the fiend. "If only another of us had repented along of me, we could have gone as front and back legs of a Derby winner."

"No racing," said Mr. Dickinson sternly. "Perhaps you could put your strength to good use. A supernavvy on piecework, eh?"

"The Union would crush me," replied the fiend. "I might box."

"A manly sport," cried Mr, Dickinson, feeling his muscle. "You shall become world's champion, and I will be your manager. Thus we will get money for good works, for the fact is, I am leaving my present situation in order to devote myself to the administrative side."

"I was there when the row was on," said the fiend.
"Then you saw how I was treated."

"They certainly did you dirt. Say, let's muscle in in the morning and clean that joint right up. Yeah?"

"No," said Mr. Dickinson. "I have forgiven them. However, I might go in and try to make them see their vileness. You could be at hand to stay any

attempt at brutal violence. I trust there will be none."

The fiend eyed his quarry in grudging admiration. He began to appreciate his quality.

"It'll be a bit of practice," he said, "if I'm to start in as a pug."

"Streuth," he added, "I've just remembered I had a bit on the three-thirty. Filly came in, too. 'Scuse me, boss, I'll nip off and collar the polony. Then we'll have some eats."

"No," said Mr. Dickinson, "I have forbidden you horse-racing. But stay—this was done before you heard my command. Perhaps the money should not be allowed to rest in the hands of the book-maker, or the unhappy man may get drunk and beat his wife. That must be prevented at all costs. Go then, this once, and we will break bread, and devote the rest to good works. Out of evil cometh forth good! How much is it?"

"I stand to net five hundred," said the fiend.

"Good heavens! That will furnish our headquarters. Go then. We will meet outside the Trocadero and take a frugal meal at the nearest restaurant."

It was a pleasant meal. Mr. Dickinson had oysters, to keep his strength up for his future toil; turtle soup that he might know what it was the Lord Mayor ate, and if it would be good for the poor; a little turbot, and some Pol Roger, to which he made a Canæan

allusion; a grouse, for he had heard St. Francis was fond of birds; a peach, just to taste one, and a little Bisquit du Bouchet for his cold. The fiend had a whiting and a plate of cold beef ordered for him by his master, and, it must be admitted, a little page-boy to whom he helped himself during a temporary withdrawal.

They discussed their plans. Next day a suitable suite for their headquarters was to be chosen, something very simple though of a good address, furnished more like a home than an office, but with a roll-top desk in it.

"I know the very place," said Tazreel: "it's just a modest sort of flatette in Park Lane."

"Let it have a kitchenette for you to work in," said his master, and a miniature gymnasium for my exercises and your professional training. A little drawing-room, bijou dining-room, morning-room and that sort of thing for the necessary entertainment of distinguished visitors, a tiny library for myself, the barest sleeping accommodation, and if possible a weeny swimming-bath for the encouragement of the suitably begarbed in pursuit of cleanliness and health."

"Just the place I had in mind," said the fiend. "And at a rental of only two hundred a week."

"Can you earn proportionately?" asked Mr. Dickinson, rather shocked.

"Sure thing!" was the reply.

"You may have some cheese if you like," said Mr. Dickinson.

Next morning they went early to the store, when Mr. Dickinson rebuked his oppressors, who were, when they advanced to make a savage attack on him, invisibly but severely restrained.

"Pick up that figure," said Mr. Dickinson, when they had fled in pain and terror. He pointed to the disgraceful mannequin, who, with her nose restored, still bent to tug the non-existent hose. "I will have her in my room, where she will no longer lead people astray. She will be a constant urge to effort."

Hastily clothing the figure in a cheap tailor-made, for which Mr. Dickinson commanded his follower to leave the wholesale price on the counter, they took it by the elbow and bore it off to a taxi, thus presenting to the inquisitive crowd all the appearance of detectives arresting a recalcitrant shoplifter.

Noonday found them installed in Park Lane. Mr. Dickinson outlined to the fiend a routine of scrubbing and sweeping, waiting at table, admitting visitors, tending the wardrobe, and acting as secretary-chauffeur. He described exactly how he liked his breakfast prepared. These little matters, he said, combined with the practice and execution of a career as boxer, and with attendance on himself when he

went to rebuke the wicked, would keep Tazreel busy, and this would be half the battle towards regeneration. The fiend sighed a little. He was brisk when put to it, but he was devilishly lazy by nature, and when he contemplated, in addition to all these tasks, the yet harder one of tempting his master, he almost wished himself back on the desolate touch-lines of Hell.

However, he set to, and by labouring twenty-two hours out of the twenty-four he managed to keep abreast of his duties. He was greatly chagrined to find, though, when he entered on his pugilistic programme, that the science of our British heavyweights was such that not all his strength could bring him victory without a preliminary tattoo of rabbit punches, nobs on the smelling bottle, rousers on the cigar-trap, and cruel fibs in the bread basket. His claret was tapped, shutters put up, ears thickened, grinders made to rock in their sockets. Not only that, but, lest his tail should betray his shameful origin when he was stripped for combat, Mr. Dickinson insisted that he should be docked, and performed the operation himself with a pair of garden shears, notched for branch cutting.

Altogether his lot was a miserable one. The worst of it was, that as the months dragged by, Mr. Dickinson showed no signs of committing mortal sin within the meaning of the Act.

Sometimes, when he stood, with folded arms and

reproachful, penetrating gaze, on the threshold of a sun-bathing establishment or night club, his sinister bodyguard would jerk a suggestive thumb at some particularly shameless sylph or piquante dancer on a table, and twitch meanwhile the corner of his mouth violently towards his eye. A stern rebuke would immediately bring him to his senses.

He went to great trouble to introduce Mr. Dickinson into the society of millionaires, that he might become covetous and misappropriate the subscriptions that poured in. His master, returning from a Babylonic week-end, told him that he had arranged a slapstick part for him on the films, the salary of which was commensurate with the incredible sufferings and exertions required.

He introduced a vile book into the covers of Mr. Dickinson's *Black Sheep Turned White*. Mr. Dickinson told him to glance through each new novel that came out, and to bring to him anything similarly deserving of his public censure.

The fiend, hoping to scare him into a murderous panic, sent him letters, apparently signed by a prominent fellow committee-man, and declaring that he (the fiend) was in reality a notorious dancer named Lola de Montmorency, who had disappeared in unsavoury circumstances some time ago, now masquerading in male attire. Exposure was threatened. "This must be the work of some practical joker," said Mr.

Dickinson, glancing gravely at the super-masculine countenance of his unattractive factorum.

That worthy then tried to persuade him to enter politics. Mr. Dickinson pointed out that politicians were frequently compelled to tell lies.

He described, in glowing terms, the pleasures of eastern monarchs. His master cut down his diet.

He earnestly sought the good man to consider enlarging his influence by becoming King Wilfrid I. Mr. Dickinson pondered the matter carefully, sighed, and said he feared the throne could hardly become his by immaculate means. However, he instructed the fiend to put in his spare time speaking at street corners on the off-chance of bringing about a bloodless revolution.

The fiend, then, as if he had become raving mad, staggered in with baskets of jewels which he said he had found; raised up Helen, Cleopatra, all that lot; discoursed on witchcraft; transported the good man to tops of mountains overlooking fine landscapes; sat up in adjacent flats during his two hours' rest, pinching the babies to make them cry; tried to scrape up an acquaintance for his master among artists; wrote "Arise, Dickinson, first Emperor of the World!" in phosphorus on his ceiling, and finally introduced him to Mrs. Walker. All was of no avail.

Poor Tazreel grew as lean as a cat. He no longer took light-hearted kicks at stones that lay in his path:

he no longer sang at his scrubbing and sweeping. He was a victim of overwork, nervous depression, insomnia, fits of giddiness, spots before the eyes, backache, bile, utter fatigue.

One day, as he was polishing Mr. Dickinson's brass-plate on the front railings, a party of happier fiends passed by, who were doing themselves well at the Dorchester, from which they were organising a mass temptation of the Y.M.C.A. They saw Tazreel, and gave each other the nudge. Peals of laughter floated back from this party of well-fed, easy-living, successful executives, and seared the taut nerves of the poor plodding failure on the steps.

The fiend, hysterical with rage, rushed upstairs and broke the waxen trophy in the bedroom.

"You clumsy fool," said Mr. Dickinson, entering upon the crash. "However, I forgive you. I'll get a stenographer."

"Your spelling is atrocious," he added.

"Your typing is slow."

"Your shorthand non-existent."

"It will give you time to get a weight-lifting job at one of the halls."

Tazreel, at this last sentence, uttered a bitter cry. He felt the system was blind, corrupt, utterly rotten, that allowed a man to mislead a poor fiend into the hope of an hour or two's leisure, and then to sentence him to new toils, without incurring immediate and

eternal damnation. He began to feel that he never would be able to entrap Mr. Dickinson. There was no one to encourage him, no one to advise, to sympathise, to care. That night the poor fellow cried himself to sleep.

Two days later Maisie Williams sat at the old-fashioned typewriter near the big roll-top desk. She was just a mere slip of a thing, with big, almost frightened, blue eyes that darkened nearly to black in moments of excitement. Maisie had had a hard time. She was alone in the world, and the manager at her last place had been a beast. It was with a sigh of real thankfulness that she sank into the pleasant atmosphere of the little library in Park Lane, where a restful sense of luxury and beauty, for which her starved soul craved, filled the air, and her employer seemed a regular simp.

That day Mr. Dickinson dictated an unusual number of letters. Tea was served in the oak-panelled, book-lined room. Maisie could not repress a tiny girlish squeal of delight when she saw the delicious petits fours which accompanied the fragrant tea-pot.

"What a child you are!" said Mr. Dickinson kindly. "To squeal like that over a few cakes. My! What a noise you'd make if someone offered you a pearl necklace. It would be deafening."

"Not if it was a relation or a fiancé," said Maisie simply. "But you must not think me a child, Mr.

Dickinson, for the fact is I very seldom see any cakes. But really I seem to have been grown up ever since I can remember: I've not had any proper childhood at all, I mean. You see, my dear mother died when I was twelve. . . ." But Maisie could not go on. She sat bravely blinking back the tears from those big eyes, that seemed to have grown very helpless and very serious, and bright, and appealing, and wistful, and so on.

"That's all right. That's all right," said Mr. Dickinson benevolently.

"It's so kind of you, Mr. Dickinson, to let me tell you all this."

"That's all right," said Mr. Dickinson. "Perhaps I am rather a lonely person myself."

"I say, Mr. Butler, the boss is a pretty rich man, isn't he?" said Maisie to Tazreel later on, when Mr. Dickinson had gone off to his meeting.

"Yes'm, he sho is," replied that worthy, pretending to be a negro.

Maisie sat silent, thrilled. What a strange world it was, where a great big rich man could be lonely, just like her little insignificant self. It seemed incredible: too good to be true. She thought of the lion and the mouse.

Yet before a week had passed, Mr. Dickinson, as though the species had become mixed, was calling her "kitten." In a fortnight they were engaged.

Tazreel, when he heard the news, retired to his room, and dashed his head several times against the wall. He was upset. Not being a fiend of foresight, he saw nothing in this arrangement but the prospect of two bosses instead of one. Besides, he was rather keen on her himself. He felt utterly broken, and determined to resign.

But as he approached the drawing-room door, he heard Maisie say, in her high, clear, girlish voice, into which (so adaptable was she) there was already creeping a little of the authoritative tone inevitable to her future high position:

"Wilf, when we're wed there's just one teeny little change I want to make, apart from refurnishing and taking over the rest of the house."

"My little Maisy-waisy shall never ask twice," replied the impassioned Dickinson, "for anything that her Wilfywumkin can give her."

"I want you to have a proper staff of servants," said Maisie, "and shunt that tough-looking batman of yours right off the premises. He looks at me in a way I don't like."

"I'll break every bone in his body," cried Mr. Dickinson warmly. "But yet—I think you must be mistaken, dear. He works for next to no wages, and he's the most useful creature imaginable."

"If that's what you call love," said Maisie in a dis-

appointed tone, "it's not what I do. Just like men: you promise a girl anything just to get your way, and then let her down. I was only testing you, but, thank goodness, I've found out in time."

"Not at all, my love," said Mr. Dickinson hastily. "I was only playing. He shall go tomorrow."

"And where will the money come from then?" murmured the listening fiend, catching cries of "Yum! yum!" and "Oh, honey!" from within. He crept back to his little cubby-hole feeling faintly cheered. At all events, there would be no more washing-up.

"In future," said Mr. D. to him next morning, "you are excused all domestic duties. In fact, I don't expect you to be seen here at all. If you come, appear to me only when I'm quite alone; do you understand?"

"O.K., chief," replied the fiend.

"That doesn't mean you're to be idle. On the contrary, you must exert your earning powers to the utmost. The future Mrs. D. needs beauty, she says. It would be downright selfishness to continue to live in the frugal style of a hermit. So you'd better get some more big contracts as soon as you can."

The honeymoon passed like a dream. Tazreel enjoyed it only less than Mr. Dickinson. Left behind in London with nothing to attend to but occasional

cables demanding money, he neglected his contracts, lived the life of a man about town, and replenished the exchequer in a way that would have shocked his worthy master.

It was a great day when the domestics crowded into the hall of Mr. Dickinson's little palace in Park Lane to welcome their blushing master and his bride. Tazreel sat invisibly on the stairs, pleased to see the glowing looks which the happy husband lavished on his spouse, and still more pleased to see that two short months in Venice had changed the modest, self-effacing typist into a great lady, in no way unfitted to grace the mansion her adoring partner had prepared for her.

"Why, Wilf," she cried, "this hall looks cramped to me after the Splendide. Can't you widen it somehow? I don't want Society to say I squeeze it to death."

"It would mean taking the house next door, to make this hall any wider," said Mr. Dickinson with a smile.

"Well, take it then," replied his consort, who was a little frayed by the journey. "You're a man, aren't you? Or aren't you? You got to prove it some way, you know."

"Ssh, my dear," murmured her consort. "The servants will hear you." And he ushered her into the principal drawing-room, from whence the sounds of

billing and cooing floated out to the fiend's enraptured ear.

"You must earn fifty thousand before the end of the month," said Mr. Dickinson to him, at their next interview.

"I'll try, boss," he replied. "But money's not so easy in these days. Still, I think I know a way."

"What's that?" said Mr. Dickinson. "But spare me the details. We've a great deal of work to discuss. The organisation will have to be modified."

A little while later he summoned the fiend again.

"What was that I asked you for, before the end of the month?"

"Fifty thousand," said Tazreel.

"What, only that? I must be losing my memory. I shall need a hundred and fifty at the least. Be sure you don't let me down."

"I doubt I can come by it honestly," said Tazreel, pulling a long face.

"What's that?" cried his master. "You, an ex-fiend, to talk to me in that way! I hope you do not think I would command you to do anything dishonest. Get it, I say, and don't let me hear another word about it. Put the money on my table next week without fail, or I cast you off, and back you go to Hell for ever."

Tazreel asked nothing much better than this, provided he could only take Mr. Dickinson with him. He half thought of getting him to compromise him-

self over the money, but feared he might slip off the hook; besides, theft by proxy is a matter for trial, and the fiend wanted immediate possession of his booty.

He saw, in his invisible visits to their ménage, that Mrs. Dickinson, though in all other respects the worthiest young woman in the world, had been starved of beauty so long that her appetite for it was tremendous. She was also a little ambitious to cut a figure among the smart set, and showed signs of not being so passionately enamoured of her husband as he was of her.

In short, the besotted wretch was constantly bothering Tazreel for money, and no longer showing any interest in how it was come by. The fortunate devil, now restored to cheerfulness, did no work except a few cracksman's jobs, which were child's play, and, keeping half the proceeds for himself, you may be sure he had a jolly little bachelor establishment round the corner in Mount Street, played pranks all over the town, and heartily commiserated his fellows at the Dorchester on the embarrassment they must feel on being seen with their young victims in public.

"I married mine off six months ago," he said. "He is already in debt to the tune of half a million, and soon will sign his name to anything for further supplies. That's nothing, however: wait till he becomes jealous. My only trouble then will be to prevent him damning himself so completely off his own bat

as to be put up for raffle, it being said that I had no hand in it. Fear nothing, though; I shall be watchful to prevent that disaster."

As a matter of fact, Mr. Dickinson very soon paid a visit to the fiend's snug little place in Mount Street. He was so broken down by love and his wife's tantrums that he no longer summoned him as before, but would ring at his door quite humbly after dinner, and ask the butler if Mr. Tazreel could possibly spare him a few minutes on a matter of importance. Generally it was money he was wanting: this time, after a good deal of beating about the bush, he asked Tazreel if he could do anything for him in the way of a love philtre.

"What?" cried the fiend, pretending astonishment. "Do you find yourself insufficiently enraptured by such beauty, charm, and talent as your wife has, that you'd resort to such means of being awakened to it?"

"No, indeed," said the poor fellow. "Her virtues are plain enough, but so also is the fact that she is a little impatient when I fail to come up to the high standard her fine taste demands. In short, I would have her a little more in love with me, that she might overlook my blemishes, without my having to gild them to the ruinous extent I do. Besides, if I don't become more attractive in her eyes, I can't help feeling (it's probably only my fancy) that I may find an intruder in the house: a home-wrecker, I mean."

The fiend, though knowing perfectly well there had been one of that sort hanging about for the last month, chose not to mention it, nor did he give him any sort of warning, but only the philtre: the consequence was, that in a very short time there was not one home-wrecker in Park Lane, but at least ten.

When there are ten, a suspicious, prying husband, such as Mr. Dickinson had become, generally gets wind of one of them sooner or later. One night the unhappy man broke in upon the fiend's ease: he was in a terrible state.

"Ask me no questions," he said, "but tell me, have you anything that will undo the effects of that cursed love philtre you gave me? It's all because of that, I'm sure."

"Love," replied the fiend, "is, as you yourself should know, a very tricky passion. In cases like your wife's, what lies in the power of any poor devil to arouse, is often such as the Prince of Darkness himself could not quell. I fear, my dear Dickinson, that we shall have to resort to 'witchcraft.'"

"Heaven forbid!" cried the distracted wretch, piteously.

"Why, as to that, it does," replied the sardonic fiend.

"All I want is something in a bottle," moaned his victim.

"Come, Dickinson," said the fiend, with an abominable briskness, "it's time to be honest with yourself, to play the man. You can't just accept my help and shut your eyes to the measures I have to take on your behalf, as you've been doing over money matters, for example, for the last six months."

"What? Do you mean to say the money was not come by honestly?" cried the poor fool, in affright. "Good gracious, and I needed another forty thousand this very evening. I must have it, too. Maisie says she must have a tiara: she finds the place draughty."

"Tell her to get it from young what's-his-name," was the sly answer.

"Don't madden me."

"Well, here's the money. It came from a late bank messenger, who is getting later every minute, and who will never arrive. Take it. All the rest was come by in much the same way. This little bit won't make any difference."

"After all, it's not for a selfish motive," murmured Mr. Dickinson. "I can't have Maisie getting a cold in the head, can I?"

"No," said the fiend, with a smile.

"Now about this witchcraft," he continued. "You'd better make up your mind quickly. Every minute you hesitate, you're leaving your wife alone. And, as you know, she's very highly strung."

"Oh dear, what have I to do?"

"Oh, just kill a white goat. That's nothing. Butchers do it every day. And gabble a few words after me. What's there in that, eh?"

"After all, I can always repent," said Mr. Dickinson tremulously.

"Yes . . . always," said the fiend.

He gave Mr. Dickinson a stiff brandy and soda, and excused himself for a moment, to fetch the goat, he said. Actually, he took advantage of his withdrawal to telephone to Park Lane, to say that Mr. Dickinson was unexpectedly detained and could not return before morning.

He then went back, leading in a poor old nanny, whom his dupe despatched amid a positive blaze of Bengal Lights, provided gratis by the fiend. After an hour or two spent in such jiggery-pokery, our hero found himself in possession of a phial which contained no less than half a gill of tap water.

"Now, I suppose, I'm what you might call a lost soul," he said, trembling like a blancmange.

"I wouldn't call you such," said the fiend.

"No, of course I can repent."

"You'd better wait till you've administered that," remarked Tazreel, indicating the phial. "Or it would be as useless as tap water."

"All right, I don't repent then. He! he!"

"Spoken like a man! I'll stroll round with you. Here! Take the knife as a little memento."

They walked round in silence through the pleasant night air. When they reached Mr. Dickinson's door:

"I'll just come in and have a drink," said Tazreel.

"Better not, old chap. Maisie doesn't appreciate you."

"Oh, don't worry about the missus. She's in bed. See, there's no lights at all down below."

They entered the hall.

"Nice hat," said the fiend carelessly, picking up a topper from the table. "Yours?"

"... NO."

"Why, that's certainly the low-down," said the fiend, Capone-ishly. "Just while you were jeopardising your soul for her sake—yeah?"

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

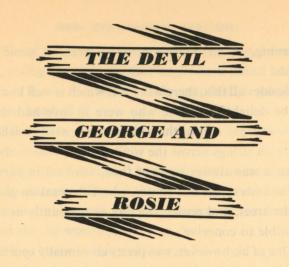
"Dickinson, show yourself a man," said the fiend sternly. "You *are* a man, aren't you? Or aren't you?" He imitated Maisie's voice to perfection.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"You got that knife," shouted the fiend fiendishly. "Come on! I'll hold 'em down."

They rushed up the stairs. Mr. Dickinson applied his ear to the door; the fiend silently opened the door of the lift shaft. They burst into the bedroom; there were screams, and the deed was done. Mr. Dickinson, with a cry of horror, flung down the fatal blade and turned and bolted out of the room. The fiend followed, tripped him up on the landing, stooped like

a hawk after his falling body as he toppled down the lift shaft, nabbed his soul as it popped out, and, with one tremendous kick, landed it favourably into the line-up of Tazreel's United, and in a moment the game was in full swing.



WHEN we were students, we were all as happy as kings. There was quite a little rookery of us, nesting in the housetops behind the Tottenham Court Road. Some of us were studying art, some studied economics, and others, who were slightly older, were students of life. We were not rich; in fact, we were as poor as mice; nevertheless, we cooked things in pots, sang both by day and by night, and whoever felt lonely had only to go a few doors along the street, where he would certainly find three or four others, sitting down to a

morning, or an afternoon, or an evening game of cards.

Besides all this, there was love, which is well known to be delightful. Those who were in love had their rooms turned out for them: their shirts, newly washed, hung on strings across the windows: they themselves, since it was always summer then, went off in parties to the ends of the bus-routes, where they sat on grass, under trees, and passed the day as pleasantly as it is possible to conceive.

One of us, however, was pretty continually spurned, and for no better reason than that he was as ugly as a monkey. He was one of the best fellows in the world, and of a singularly affectionate nature, and unselfish to a degree. He longed merely to be the agency through which some charming creature might achieve fulfilment, from whom she might receive a thousand caresses, who would disperse her inhibitions, teach her to make a few simple dishes, darn socks, and sing songs suitable to all occasions.

Nothing could be more tempting; nevertheless, he met with continual refusals. This embittered him, and he began to hate the sex. He never ceased to say what he thought of women, and what he would do to them had he the power. Although his sufferings sprang entirely from their virtue, what he abused them for was their vices, for which he considered this age to be unique.

"Look," he would hiss, when a pretty girl passed us, giving her a glance that might have licked her up like a flame. "Look. What do you think's going on in her head, eh?"

"Thoughts of love," I would reply. "If not, there is no Providence. . . ."

"Don't call it love," he would cry, in accents of acute distress. "Do me the favour of giving it some more suitable name. I can supply you with a dozen." And this he would proceed to do.

"You know nothing of the girl," I would say. "She looked a charming creature. I wish . . ."

"I know she is a girl," he would say. "And a girl of this age in which you and I have the misfortune to live. That is enough. She is a creature naturally shallow, heartless, and vain, flaunting herself in a society in which those qualities have at last the opportunity to intrude, expand, and dominate. How many good fellows do you and I know," said he in a roaring voice, "who have quarrelled with their friends, been seduced away from their studies and their ideals, made to work like slaves, and all to pander to the egoism of these abominable harpies, who wish to give cocktail parties instead of being content with beer, and who, if there is a hereafter, will certainly drag their besotted mates down to that damnation that they so eminently deserve? Not that I should mind that," said he. "I would very willingly be scorched a

bit myself for the pleasure of seeing them frizzle and fry. Oh! It would be better than being Governor of Bridewell itself—to sit happily on one's gridiron and watch them frizzle and fry!"

With that he left me to go up to his room. I called on him next morning and he was not there, nor did I see him again till a couple of years later, when I met him in Oxford Street with the most charming creature imaginable upon his arm.

In the meantime the most unbelievable adventure had happened to George Pennywhistle, for that was his name.

When he left me that evening, he went up the stairs, opened the door of his room, and saw an extremely well dressed man standing on the hearth-rug, looking about him with a rather patronising air. George immediately perceived that this was no other than the Devil himself, in whom hitherto he had not had the slightest belief.

"Dear me!" said he, in a flutter. "You have come to wrong room, I'm afraid. Who is it you require?"

"Mr. George Pennywhistle," replied the fiend, with a bow.

"Now where have I heard that name?" cried our hero, smiting his forehead. "Look here: try Number 61. You'll find the man you want in the room corresponding to this. He will probably tell you his name is Walters—take no notice of that. You will no doubt

find him behaving licentiously with a little black-eyed thing, who is certainly one of your agents."

"I know the couple you refer to," replied the Devil, "and I anticipate a visit from them before very long. But at present, Mr. Pennywhistle, my business is with you. I have a little proposition to lay before you."

"I am not prepared to discuss propositions with you," replied George uneasily.

"My dear Mr. Pennywhistle," said the Devil, with the most courteous smile imaginable, "you are a student of life, letters, philosophy, et tout ça. You are familiar with my reputation under a dozen names, in as many mythologies, and I am sure you will accord me a reception other than that of some panicstricken and unmannerly little Methodist cobbler."

"I am certainly not panic-stricken," said George, "and I am not usually considered unmannerly. At the same time, I am not prepared . . ."

"I see clearly," said the Devil, "that you suspect me of some stratagem. Reassure yourself, Mr. Pennywhistle. The time is long past when my little establishment needed recruitment in that manner. In fact ... but come, Mr. Pennywhistle; since we are to have a chat, let us at least take our ease."

"Forgive me," said George. "The fact is, your appearance has taken me by surprise; I freely admit it. However, I think there is some liver-sausage in the safe."

"My dear boy," said the Devil, "if you will allow me to call you that (I have been a student myself, and know the true courtesy that disdains the ceremonious). We are both Bohemians: let me, then, play the host. There is a little restaurant in Jermyn Street..."

In the end, George and the Devil were sitting in great comfort in a basement grill-room of the highest class, and the Devil stood a remarkably good bottle of wine.

"You are a person," said he to George, "who, I imagine, knows his own mind, and has the courage of his convictions. Tell me, did you mean what you said to your friend in the Square this evening, when you expressed a wish that there was a hereafter, in order that you might see the fickle temptresses and Delilahs of the world undergoing the punishment of their sins?"

"If I said that," observed George, "you may depend I meant it. I think I may say, that whatever my weaknesses may be, I know my own mind, and have the courage, so to speak, of my what-d'ye-call-'ems."

"Splendid!" cried his companion. "We are getting on like a house on fire. Now, my dear chap, my little difficulty is this. The domain over which I have the honour and pleasure to preside, was designed originally on the most ample scale, but, nevertheless, certain recent tendencies are fast rendering its confines too

narrow, and its supervision too onerous for one who is not as young as he was."

"Sorry to hear that," said George.

"It is not so much the increase of the population of this planet," continued the Devil, "which, knowing what you and I know, might have been foreseen. What did not enter into our calculations, were two developments that have taken place recently. I refer to the spread of infidelity and the emancipation of women."

"Same thing," said George.

"As you please," said the Devil. "They are certainly a little avid of pleasures, and a little unscrupulous as to how they come by them. My dear fellow, that is quite enough. There are a thousand million of them in the world today; modern girls every one, and that is to say—damned."

"Fine!" said George.

"Very fine indeed," said the Devil, "from the artistic point of view. But consider the pressure on space, and the ceaseless strain of organisation."

"Squeeze 'em in," cried George with enthusiasm. "Pack 'em tight. That's what I say."

"They would then imagine themselves at a party," replied his new friend. "No, no. Every one who comes to me must have individual attention. I intend to open a new department. The site is chosen. The builders are at work. All that I need is a superintendent of iron personality."

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"Iron personality?" cried George.

"Iron personality," replied the Devil. "A difficult quest, my dear boy, as you will realise when I tell you that I have heard Beelzebub himself addressed by a blonde as 'sugar daddy."

"No blonde has ever addressed me as 'sugar daddy,'" observed our hero.

"I can imagine what would happen to her if she did," observed his companion, with a smile.

"I should like to know a little about the climate, salary, and prospects," said George, in a business-like tone.

"The climate, much like that of Oxford Street on a summer afternoon," replied the Devil. "The salary is power, and the prospects are infinite. But if you are interested, my dear fellow, allow me to show you over the place. In any case, I should value your opinion on it."

No sooner said than done; they sank into the bowels of the earth, came out in a suburb of Sydney, N.S.W.

"Here we are, then!" cried George.

"No, no," said the Devil. "Just a little farther on."

They proceeded with the speed of rockets to the north-east corner of the universe, which George perceived to be shaped exactly like a pint of beer, in which the nebulae were the ascending bubbles. He observed with alarm a pair of enormous lips approaching the upper rim of our space. "Do not be alarmed," said the Devil. "That is a young medical student called Prior, who has failed his exam. three times in succession. However, it will be twenty million billion light years before his lips reach the glass, for a young woman is fixing him with her eye, and by the time he drinks, all the bubbles will be gone, and all will be flat and stale."

"Poor fellow!" cried our hero. "Damn these women!"

"Do not pity him," said the Devil very tolerantly. "This is his fifth, and he is already as drunk as a lord, and closing time draws near. What's more, our destination is at hand."

George saw that they were nearing what is sometimes called a "fish" in this considerable pint of beer. As they approached it, he saw it was a dark star of gigantic proportions, about which circled a satellite many hundred times larger than the earth.

"That satellite," said his conductor, "is the spot I am proposing to colonise with my new department. We will go straight there, if you wish."

George assenting, they landed in a sterile and saturnine country, close by a palace of black basalt, which covered seven square miles of ground.

"That's a snug-looking box," cried our hero.

"Merely a pioneer's hut," said his companion.

"My future overseer will have to rough it there until something better can be run up."

George, however, observed a prodigious number of barrels being run down into a cellar on the hinder side of this palace. What's more, he saw several groups of fiends, who should have been at their work, squating in one of the unfinished galleries, with cards in their hands.

"You play nap and poker here?" said he, in tones of the liveliest satisfaction.

"We are connoisseurs of every pleasure," said the Devil, with a smile. "And when we play cards, everybody has an excellent hand."

He showed George a number of masterly pictures: some of them were a little indecent. There were also very splendid kitchens, already staffed with cooks; kennels, stables, falconries, gun rooms, music rooms, grand halls, little cosy rooms, rooms devoted to every sort of pastime, and gardens laid out rather like those of Versailles, only much larger. There was a whole cellar full of fireworks of every description. Not only these, but there were a number of other delights of a nature entirely new to the visitor. There was an observatory, for example, from which the behaviour of any young woman in the world could be closely inspected. "This is really a very interesting device," murmured our hero.

"Come!" said the fiend. "We must not stay here all

day. Doubtless you will want to see the rest of your domain."

"Yes, indeed," said George. "For of course I could not have the prisoners here, unless now and then I had one haled up for special admonishment."

The Devil then flew with him over the whole surface of the planet, which, once they were clear of the palace and its lands, proved to have an aspect not unlike that of the Great West Road, where it approaches London. On every hand, rows of cells were being run up: to add the final refinement of misery. they were designed exactly like modern villas. Imitation husbands, who could neither speak nor hear, were planted in arm-chairs with their feet on the mantelpieces. The wardrobes were full of unfashionable garments: small imps disguised as children were already rehearsing by dozens in all the upper rooms. The peculiar property of the walls was to translate the noise of those next door into the sound of a party going on, while the windows were so designed as to make the dowdiest passer-by appear to be arrayed in the very latest mode.

Vast bunion factories belched smoke among the crazy villas: lorry-loads of superfluous hair clattered along the streets. George was shown the towering gasometers of the Halitosis factories, and a number of other things I do not dare imagine. He saw a great concourse of fiends being instructed in door-to-door

salesmanship; others were being fitted out as relationsin-law, rent-collectors, and bailiffs. He himself made two suggestions that were immediately put into force: one was for a stocking ladderer, and the other for an elastic that would break in the middle of any crowded thoroughfare.

As a final encouragement, the Devil took him over to the mainland of Hell itself, which is girdled by the Styx as Saturn by his ring. Charon's vast liner had just come to dock, and our hero had the pleasure of seeing a multitude of film-stars, baby blondes, unfaithful wives, disobedient daughters, frivolous typists, lazy serving-maids, wantons, careless waitresses, cruel charmers, naggers, sirens, clogs, unpunctual sweethearts, bridge-playing grandma's, extravagant helpmeets, mischief-making gossips, tantalisers, female novelists, crazy debutantes, possessive mothers, neglectful mothers, modern mothers, unmarried mothers, would-be, should be, in fact all who could be, mothers: they were all there, and all filed down the gangway, some weeping, some brazen, and some in attitudes of affected modesty.

"This is a magnificent sight," remarked our hero.

"Well, my dear sir," said the Devil, "are you the man for the job?"

"I will do my best," cried George enthusiastically. They shook hands on it; all the little details were arranged; before that evening George was installed as principal vassal of all the Devil's host, and overlord of a planet populated only by women and fiends.

It must be admitted he enjoyed himself with a vengeance. Every day he would go out, having donned his cap of invisibility, and regale himself upon his subjects' endeavours to cope with the hardships he had designed for them. Sometimes he would hold up the ceaseless self-dirtying of plates, put the children to sleep, and amuse them with the prospect of a matinée. He saw to it, though, that they had to queue up for the cheap seats, and arranged for it to rain. In the end, he would announce the show was postponed.

He had a thousand other ways of tantalising them: I shall not enumerate them all. One of the best was to send for any newly arrived young thing who was reported to be vain of her beauty, and give her the impression for an hour or two that she had made a conquest of him, and then (as far as was possible) undeceive her.

When the day's work was done, he sat down to cards with his principal officers, and sure enough everyone had a good hand, but his was the best. They drank like champions; the Devil was constantly sending over the choicest delicacies from Hell; the word "Fine" was continually upon our hero's lips, and the time passed like lightning.

One day, towards the end of the second year, our potentate had just got through his levee, and was refreshing himself with a stroll on a little private terrace which he much affected, when word was brought to him that the senior port official desired an audience. Our hero was the easiest fellow in the world to approach; never stood upon his dignity. "Send the old chap along here," said he. "And, hi! Bring a bottle and couple of glasses back with you when you come."

The fact is, George dearly loved a chat with these old petty officers, who occasionally brought him reports of diverting little incidents at the Ellis Island of Hell, or scraps of gossip concerning the irrelevant affairs of the world, such as sometimes strayed in among Charon's cargo, as lizards or butterflies travel to Covent Garden among the bananas.

On this occasion, however, the harbour-master's face bore an extremely worried expression: "I'm afraid, sir," he said, "I've got a little irregularity to report."

"Well, we all make mistakes sometimes," said George. "What's the trouble?"

"It's like this here, sir," replied the old salt: "young gal come along o' the last cargo—seems as if she didn't ought to be here at all."

"Oh, that'll be all right," cried George. "Bound to be. It's understood we take the whole issue in these days. She's a woman: that's enough. What's on her charge-sheet, anyway?"

"Lot o' little things, sir, what don't amount to

much," replied the honest fellow. "Thing is, sir, it ain't added up." And he pursed his lips.

"Not added up?" cried George in amazement.

"That's how it is, sir," said his subordinate glumly. "This young gal ain't properly dead."

George was absolutely bowled over. "Whew!" said he. "But this is serious, my man."

"It is serious, sir," said the old chap. "I don't know what's to be done, I'm sure."

A score of fine legal points were involved: George despatched an S.O.S. for one of the leading casuists of Hell proper: unfortunately they were all engaged in committee on some fine point concerning an illuminated address, which was being prepared on the saviours of Germany. George therefore had nothing but precedent to go on, and precedent made it clear that a mortal must sin in such and such a way, die in such and such a condition, be checked in, checked out: it was as complicated as a case in Court Leet under a Statute of Ed. Tert. Rex., that statute being based on precedents from the Saxon and Norman codes dually and differently derived from a Roman adaptation of a Graeco-Egyptian principle influenced prehistorically by rites and customs from the basin of the Euphrates or the Indus. It was quite like an income-tax form; George scratched his head in despair.

What made it all the worse was, the Devil himself had given him most serious warning against the least infringement of privilege. "This is," he had said, "little better than mandated territory. We have built up, step by step, and with incredible ingenuity, a system under which we live very tolerably, but we have only done it by sailing devilishly near the metaphysical wind. One single step beyond the strict legal limits, and I am back on my red-hot throne, in that pit whose bottomlessness I shall heartily envy. As for you..."

George therefore had every incentive to caution: he turned over a large number of volumes, tapped his teeth: in the end he knew not what to make of it. "Send the young person in to me," said he.

When she arrived, she proved to be no more than seventeen years of age. I should be telling a downright lie if I said she was less beautiful than a peri.

George was not a bad fellow at heart: like most of us, he was capable of tyranny upon the featureless mass, but when he came to grips with an individual, his bark was a good deal worse than his bite. Most of the young women he had had up for admonishment had complained of little except his fickleness.

This young girl was ushered into his presence: the very lackeys who brought her in rolled their eyes till the whites flickered like the Eddystone Lighthouse. She was complete in every particular, and all of the highest quality: she was a picture gallery, an anthology of the poets, a precipitation of all that has ever been

dreamed of love; her goodly eyes lyke Saphyres shining bright, her forehead yvory white, her cheekes lyke apples which the sun hath rudded, her lips lyke cherryes charming men to byte, her brest lyke to a bowle of creame uncrudded, her paps lyke lyllies budded, her snowie necke lyke to a marble towre; and all her body like a pallace fayre, ascending up, with many a stately stayre, to honors seat and chastities sweet bowre.

Her name was Rosie Dixon. Moreover she gained enormously in contrast to her surroundings, by the mere fact of being alive. It was as though a cowslip were to bloom miraculously between the dark and sterile metals of the Underground; as if its scent was wafted to one's nostrils on the nasty, sultry, canned sirocco of that region. It is no exaggeration to say that she was as good as she was beautiful. It is true her pretty face was a little blubbered with tears. "My dear," said George, taking her hand, "there is no reason for you to cry in that fashion. Have you never heard of the good old saying, 'Never holler before you're hurt'?"

"Pray, sir," cried she, having taken a long, dewy peep at his monkey phiz, and seeing a vast amount of good nature there, "Pray, sir," said she, "tell me only, where am I?"

"Why, in Hell, to be sure," said he, with a hearty laugh.

"Oh, thank goodness!" cried she; "I thought I was in Buenos Aires."

"Most of 'em think that," said our hero, "owing to the liner. But I must say you are the first who has shown any gratification on learning otherwise."

They had a little more conversation of this sort: he questioned her pretty closely as to how she came to be stowed away on Charon's vessel. It appeared that she was a shop-girl who had been much tormented by her workmates; why, she could not say. However, she had to serve a young man who came in to buy some stockings for his sister. This young man, William Smoothhead his name was, had addressed to her a remark that brought her soul fluttering to her lips. At that very moment, the cruellest of her envious colleagues had manœuvred to pass behind her, and had bestowed on her a pinch so spiteful, so sudden and so intensely and laceratingly agonising, that her poised soul was jolted from its perch: it had spread its wings and borne off her swooning body as a woodcock bears off its young. When she had regained her senses, she was locked in one of the narrow state-rooms of a vast ship, stewarded by what she took to be black men, and resounding with the hysterical laughter and screams of captives of her own sex.

George was very thorough: he minutely examined what little evidence she had to offer. "There is no

doubt," said he at length, speaking in tones of the greatest sympathy, "that you have received a very cruel pinch. When your tormentor comes into my hands, I myself will repay it a hundredfold."

"No. No," said she. "She did not mean so much harm. I expect she is a good girl at heart. It is just her little way."

George was overcome with admiration at this remark, which, however, caused a tremor to pass through the whole of the vast black palace. "Upon my word!" said he. "I can't keep you here. You will bring the whole place crashing about my ears. I dare not put you in one of our punishment cells, for, if I did so against your will, all our system of home rule would be snatched away from us, and we should return to the crude discomforts of primitive times. That would be intolerable. There is a museum over on the mainland that would make your blood run cold."

"Could you not send me back to earth?" said she.
"No woman has ever left this place alone," cried he in despair. "My position is so delicate I dare not make an innovation."

"Do not take on so," said she. "I cannot bear to think of so kind a gentleman being plunged into fiery torments. I will stay voluntarily, and perhaps then no fuss will be made. I hope it will not be terribly painful." "You adorable creature!" cried he. "I must give you a kiss for that. I believe you have solved the difficulty."

She gave him back his kiss as sweetly and purely as you can possibly imagine. "Oh, Hell!" he cried in great anguish of spirit, "I cannot bear to think of you undergoing the miseries of this place. My dear, good girl. . . ."

"I don't mind," she said. "I have worked in a shop in Oxford Street."

He gave her a pat or two, and signed up a form for her: "Remanded in custody at own request."

"This is only temporary, after all," he said. "Otherwise I would not permit it."

Very well, she kept a stiff upper lip, and was carted off to a hateful box as cruelly equipped as any of the others. For a whole week George kept his head, reading love lyrics to distract his mind. At the end, he could put the matter behind him no longer: "I must go," said he, "and see how she is getting on."

In Hell, all the officials travel with incredible speed. In a very few minutes George had passed over a couple of continents, and was tapping at the mean front door of poor Rosie's little habitation. He had not chosen to put on his cap of fern-seed virtue, or perhaps he never thought of it: anyway, she came to the door with three or four of the imps hanging about her apron-strings, and recognised him at once. He

observed that she had on the drab and unfashionable garments provided by the authorities, in which her appearance was that of a rose in a jam-pot.

What raised an intolerable burden from his heart, was the fact that the superfluous hair had obviously failed to take root upon her living flesh: he found on enquiry that she had used it to stuff a pillow with, which she had placed behind the head of the snoring imitation husband who gracelessly sprawled before the fire. She admitted a little tuft flourished on the bruise, where she had been pinched.

"No doubt it will fall off," said our hero scientifically, "when the tissues resume their normal condition. These things were designed to flourish upon carrion only, whereas you . . .", and he smacked his lips.

"I hope it will fall off," said she, "for scissors will not cut it. And since I promised some to the eldest of these toddlers, to make him a false moustache of, no more has arrived."

"Shall I try to cut it off?" said our hero.

"No, no," said she, with a blush. "He has stopped crying now. They were all very querulous when first I came here, but now they are improved out of all knowledge."

While she spoke, she busied her fingers with a succession of little tasks. "You seem to be terribly busy," complained George.

"Forgive me," said she, with a smile, "but there

is such a terrible lot to do. Still, it makes the time pass."

"Do you never," said he, "wish to go to the matinée?"

"That would never do," she replied. "Supposing he should wake up" (pointing to the imitation husband), "and call for his tea. Besides, I have plenty of entertainment: the people next door seem always to have a party: it does me good to hear them laugh and sing. What's more, when I'm cleaning the windows, as needs doing pretty often, I always see the most beautifully dressed creatures go by. I love to see people in pretty clothes."

"Your own are not very attractive," said George in a melancholy tone.

"They are plain enough," said she, with a laugh. "But I'm far too busy to think about that. All I could wish is, that they were of slightly stronger materials. The stockings laddered so often I've had to give up wearing them. And whenever I go out shopping. . . . Still, you don't want to hear all this."

George was so devoured by remorse that he had not the spirit to ask an interesting question. "Goodbye," said he, pressing her hand.

She gave him the sweetest glance: he felt it no more than his duty to offer her an encouraging kiss. The doors began to bang, the fire belched smoke, the imps opened their mouths to yell.

"No, no," said she, with just so much of inexpressible regret as to soften the cruelty of it. And she pointed to the dummy husband before the fire.

"Don't worry about him," cried our hero. "He's only a dummy." With that, he gave the image a kick, capsizing it into the hearth.

"Well, if he's not a real husband," said Rosie, "I suppose there is nothing wrong in it." And with that she gave George a kiss, which he found altogether delightful, except that as it increased the high esteem in which he held her, so also it increased his misery in having placed her in such a condition.

When he got home, the poor fellow could neither eat nor sleep. He called up a few of his officers to pass away the night at poker, but though he held four straight flushes in succession, he could take no pleasure in it. In the morning, the telephone bell rang. George's was the only instrument on the planet which did not go wrong as soon as one began to speak: on this occasion he would willingly have surrendered the advantage. The Devil was at the other end, and he was in a towering rage. He made no bones about accusing our hero of downright morality.

"You curse and swear very well," said the victim in an injured tone. "All the same, it was not my fault she came here. I clearly see she may prove a disintegrating influence if I keep her, but, if I may not send her back, I don't see what else I can do."

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"Why, tempt her, you idiot!" replied the Devil. "Have you never tempted woman before?"

"As far as I know, no," said George frankly.

"Well, do so now," said the Devil in quite a silky tone, which nevertheless caused blue sparks to crackle from the instrument. "Once we get possession of her soul, there will not be much fuss made about her body. I leave the matter in your hands entirely. If you fail me, there are one or two ancient institutions over here, which I shall take pleasure in reviving entirely for your benefit."

George detested the idea of tempting this singularly good and beautiful young girl: however, the prospect was not so unredeemedly repulsive as that of immersion in boiling brimstone. He took a glass or two, to stifle what regrets he had, and sent for Rosie to attend him in a silken pavilion, which he had rigged up among the groves and fountains which enclosed his citadel. He considered this fabric to be preferable to blocks of black basalt, in the event of some disruptive phrase of hers bringing the roof about their ears.

It was not very long before she arrived, although it seemed so. Heaven knows how she preserved her radiant health in the nasty grey air of Hell's outer suburbs: she looked as fresh and bright as ever, and seemed to glow through her cheerless wrappings as a peach glows through tissue paper. Nevertheless, George was naturally a slow starter, especially when his conscience was involved. He certainly greeted her very warmly, but if all the scientists in the world had had these hugs and kisses in a test tube, they could not have separated one atom of sin out of them, for they were as simple and natural as could possibly be desired.

I admit the simple and natural is as good a beginning as any other: George, however, proceeded only to the offer of a cup of tea, which is not sinful except at the University. They began to chat: he was unable to resist telling her of his joys and sorrows in the neighbourhood of the Tottenham Court Road, and the reason for this was, that he wished her to know everything about him. She herself was no less frank: it is impossible to describe the emotion with which George heard that she had become an orphan at the age of fourteen, and had since then lived with an old aunt, who was inclined to severity. The moments passed like flowers of that precious, edelweiss joy which blooms on the brink of the abyss.

The light began to fade: the warbling of blackbirds and thrushes now sank into a stillness from which soon arose the diviner strains of the nightingale. Our young people, seated at the entrance of the tent, found their tongues fall idle, and sat in a divine langour which, also, like a silence of the being, permitted the first faint notes of a new music to become

audible in their hearts. In this far, wild corner of the garden, the effect was a little Chinese, with a profusion of willow trees, which now turned blue in the dimming air.

Their fingers interlocked: the moon, which in those parts is of gigantic size, being no other than Hell itself, rose behind the shadowy trees. "They say," said Rosie in a dreamy voice, "that those marks on it are craters."

One person's dream may well be another's awakening. George was at once galvanised into activity. "Come," said he. "It is time we began dinner. It's my birthday, so there's lots of champagne."

He hoped by these words to inveigle the simple girl into making a feast of it; however, he started under a handicap, for he was already as drunk as a lord on the very sound of her voice. A man's true nature appears when he is in that condition: George was prepared to jeopardise his whole future for an amorous whim; his brain reeled under the onslaught of a legion of virtuous thoughts: he even conceived the notion of suggesting to the Devil that it should be the dummy husband who should be cast into the boiling brimstone, and that he should take that useless effigy's place, but from this act of madness the thought of the imps restrained him.

The remembrance of his master brought him back to Hell for a moment: "My dear," said he,

patting her hand, "how would you like to be a film-star?"

"Not at all," said she.

"What?" said he.

"Not at all," said she.

"Oh!" said he. "Well! Well! Well!"

He had a diamond necklace in his pocket, ready to tempt her with, but could not restrain himself from hanging it unconditionally about her neck, he was so delighted by this answer of hers.

She was pleased, even more than by the gift itself, by the spirit in which it was given: she thought George the kindest and the best of men, and (whether it was the wine or not, I'll not say) she would have even stuck to it that he was handsome.

Altogether, the meal went off as merry as a marriage bell: the only drawback was, that George could see no signs of a fitting sequel. Some would say the brimstone was sequel enough: that was not George's idea at all. In fact, when he had played all his cards in this half-hearted fashion, he was suddenly overcome by a hideous prevision of his fate, and could not repress a most alarming groan.

"What is it, my dear?" cried Rosie, in the tenderest of voices.

"Oh, nothing," said he, "nothing at all. Only that I shall burn for ever if I fail to seduce you."

"That is what the young man said at the stocking counter," said she in dismay.

"But I mean it," said he dolorously, "and in brimstone, which, I assure you, is altogether a different proposition from love, whatever the poets may say."

"You are right," said she, in a happier voice than seemed entirely fitting; "love is altogether different from brimstone," and with that she squeezed his hand.

"I fear it will give me no peace, in which to remember you," said he, positively photographing her with his eyes.

"You shall not go there," said she.

"He said I must," cried George.

"Not," said she, "if . . . if it will save you to . . ."
"To what?" cried George.

"To seduce me," faltered Rosie.

George protested very little: he was altogether carried away by the charming manner in which she expressed herself. He flung his arms about her, and endeavoured to convey, in one single kiss, all his gratitude for her kindness, all his admiration for her beauty, his respect for her character, and his regret that she should have been orphaned at the age of fourteen and left to the care of an aunt who was a little inclined to severity. This is a great deal to be expressed in one single kiss: nevertheless, our hero did his best.

Next morning, he had to telephone his report to the Devil. "I'll hold your hand," said Rosie.

"Very well, my darling," said he. "I shall feel better so."

His call was put through like lightning. The Devil, like thunder, asked him how he had got on.

"The young woman is seduced," said George, in a rather brusque tone.

"Excellent!" returned his master. "Now tell me exactly how it happened."

"I thought," said George, "that you were supposed to be a gentleman."

"I am inquiring," said the Devil, "in a strictly professional capacity. What I wish to get at, is her motive in yielding to your almost too subtle charm."

"Why?" cried George. "You don't think that splendid girl would see me frizzling and frying in a lake of boiling brimstone?"

"Do you mean to say," cried the Devil in a terrifying voice, "that she has sacrificed her virtue merely to save you from punishment?"

"What other inducement," asked our hero, "do you imagine would have been likely to prevail?"

"You besotted fool!" cried his master, and proceeded to abuse him ten times more roundly than before.

George listened in fear and rage. When he had done

cursing him, the Devil continued in a calmer voice. "There is only one thing to be done," said he, "and you may consider yourself very fortunate that you (you worm!) are needed to play a part in it. Otherwise you would be frizzling before sunset. As it is, I see I must give the matter my individual attention, and the first step is, that you must marry the girl."

"By all means," replied our hero briskly.

"I shall send you a bishop to perform the ceremony," continued the fiend, "and next week, if I am better of my present fit of the gout, I shall require you to present me to your wife, and I myself will undertake her temptation."

"Temptation to what?" asked George, in a tone of great anxiety.

"To that sin to which wives are peculiarly fitted," replied the Devil. "Does she like a waxed moustache?"

"Oh dear! He says," whispered George to Rosie, "do you like a waxed moustache?"

"No, darling," said Rosie. "I like a bristly, sandy one, like yours."

"She says she likes a bristly, sandy one, like mine," said George, not entirely without complacency.

"Excellent! I will appear in one yet bristlier and sandier," replied the fiend. "Keep her by you. I have never failed yet. And, Pennywhistle..."

"Oh, yes, yes," said George. "What is it now?"

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"Be discreet," said the Devil, in a menacing tone. "If she gets wind of my intentions, you shall be in the brimstone within an hour."

George hung up the receiver. "Excuse me, my dear," he said, "I really must go and think over what I have just heard."

He walked out among his groves of willows, which were then all freshened by the morning dew, and resounding with the songs of birds. It was, of all the mornings of his life, that on which he would most have appreciated his first cigarette, had it not been for his conversation with the Devil. As it was, he did not bother to light one. "The thing is," he said to himself, "he must either succeed or fail. In the latter case his fury will be intolerable: in the former case mine will be."

The problem seemed to defy solution, and so it would have done, had it not been that love, whose bemusing effects have been celebrated often enough in song and story, has another and an ungratefully neglected aspect, in which the mind receives the benefit of clarifying calm. When the first flurry of his perturbation had passed, our hero found himself in possession of a mind as cool and unclouded as the sea-strand sky of earliest dawn. He immediately lit his cigarette.

"After all, we have some days to go," he murmured, "and time is entirely relative. Consider, for example, that fellow Prior, who is at this very moment about to drink up the universe, and who will still be arrested in the act of doing so long after all our little lives have passed away. On the other hand, it is certainly not for me to deny that certain delightful moments can take on the aspect of eternity. Besides, we might always escape."

The thought had entered his mind as unostentatiously as, no doubt, the notion of writing *Paradise Lost* entered Milton's. . . . "H'm, I'll write *Paradise Lost*." "Besides, we might always escape." Just a few words, which, however, made all the difference. All that remained, in one case as in the other, was to work out the little details.

Our hero was ingenious. What's more, he was assisted in his reflections by the hoarse cry, like that of a homing swan, of Charon's siren. It was the hour when that worthy, having cast loose from the quays of Hell, where he dropped his male cargo, turned his great ship towards George's planet. It came into sight, cleaving the morning blue, flashing in the beams of the local sun, leaving behind it a wake like that of a smoke-trailing aeroplane, only altogether better. It was a glorious sight: soon George could see the women scampering up and down the decks, and hear their cry: "Is that Buenos Aires?"

He lost no time, but repairing to his palace, and seating himself in the most impressive of salons, he sent forth a messenger to the docks, saying, "Bid the skipper come up and have a word with me."

Charon soon came stumping along in the wake of the messenger. He might have been inclined to grumble, but his eyes brightened at the sight of a bottle George had on his desk. This contained nothing less than the Old Original Rum of Hell, a liquor of the fieriest description, and now as rare as it is unappreciated.

"Skipper," said George, "you and I have got on well enough hitherto, I believe. I have to ask you a question, which may seem to reflect a little on your capacities. However, I don't ask it on my own behalf, you may be sure, and in order to show my private estimation of you as a friend, as a man, and above all as a sea-dog of the old school, I am going to ask you to do me the favour of taking a little tipple with me first."

Charon was a man of few words: "Ay, ay," said he.

George then poured out the rum. When Charon had wet his whistle: "The chief," said George, "is in a secret fury with you over Mrs. Soames of Bayswater."

"Avast," said Charon, with a frown.

"Has it slipped your memory that I mentioned her to you on two previous occasions?" continued our hero. "She is now a hundred and four, and as cross as two sticks. The chief wants to know why you have not brought her along months ago." As he spoke, he refilled Charon's glass.

"Avast," said that worthy again.

"Perhaps," said George, "among your manifold onerous duties, his express commands concerning one individual may have seemed unworthy of your attention. I'm sure I should have forgotten the matter altogether, had I such a job as yours. Still, you know what he is. He has been talking of changes at the Admiralty: however, pay no attention to that. I have to visit the earth myself on important business, and I find that the young woman you brought by such a regrettable mistake, has had training as a hospital nurse. Between us, I assure you, we will shanghai the old geezer in a brace of shakes: the chief will find her here when he recovers from his gout, and foul weather between you will be entirely averted."

With that he poured the rest of the rum into the old salt's glass.

"Ay! Ay!" said that worthy.

George at once pressed the bell, and had Rosie ushered in, in a bewitching uniform. "To the ship, at once," he cried.

"Ay! Ay!" cried Charon.

"I can take you back," whispered George to his beloved, "as long as you don't look round. If you do, we are lost." "Depend upon me," she said, "nothing in the world will make me cast a single glance behind while you and I are together."

Very well, they got aboard. Charon believed all landlubbers were mad; moreover he had long suspected machinations against him at headquarters, and was obliged to George for giving him word of them. George ordered a whole case of the admirable rum (the last case in existence) to be placed in his cabin, lest Charon should remember that old Mrs. Soames had never been mentioned to him at all.

Amid hoots and cries of "Avast," the great ship left her moorings. George, on the pretext that he had to maintain constant communication with his chief, took over the wireless operator's cabin. You may depend Satan was in a fury when he heard what had happened; but the only effect of that was, that his gouty members became a thousand times worse inflamed, and grew still more so when he found it impossible to establish communication with the ship.

The best he could do was to conjure up, in the trackless wastes of space, such dumb images as might tempt Rosie to glance behind her. A Paris hat would bob up like a buoy on the starboard bow, and a moment later (so great was the speed of the ship) be tossing far astern. On other occasions, the images of the most famous film actors would be descried sitting

on the silver planets of far constellations, combing their hair. She was exposed to a hundred temptations of this sort, and, what was crueller, she was subjected, by pursuant imps, to ceaseless tweakings of the hair, tuggings of the garments, sensations as of a spider down her back: the devoted girl, holding fast to the forward rail of the boat-deck, never so much as flickered an eye.

The result of this devotion, coupled with George's vigilance at the earphones and Charon's drunkenness below, was that they soon heaved to in the latitudes of the earth: George and Rosie were set to slide at dizzy speed down an invisible rope, and they found themselves safely in bed, beside the old centenarian, Mrs. Soames.

She was in a tearing rage when she found this young couple beside her: "Get out of here at once," she cried.

"All right," they said, "we will."

The very next day I met them in Oxford Street, looking in the windows of the furniture shops, and George acquainted me with the whole story.

"I can hardly believe it," said I.

"To prove it to you," said he, "I will show you where Rosie was pinched by the envious young woman."

"Will you, indeed?" I cried.

"Yes," said he. "It was in that shop over there,

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half-way down the stocking counter, on the right as you go in."

"And you say," said I, very thoughtfully, "that the universe is really a pint of beer?"

"It is, indeed," said he, "and I have no doubt that, if ever the scientists succeed in ascending through the air-strata that envelop this bubble of ours, that is the discovery which awaits them."

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As soon as Einstein declared that space was finite, the price of building sites, both in Heaven and Hell, soared outrageously. A number of petty fiends who had been living in snug squalor in the remoter infernal provinces, found themselves evicted from their sorry shacks, and had not the wherewithal to buy fresh plots at the new prices. There was nothing for it but to emigrate: they scattered themselves over the various habitable planets of our universe; one of them arrived in London at about the hour of midnight in the October of last year.

Some angels in like case took similar measures, and by a coincidence one of them descended at the same hour into the same northern suburb.

Beings of this order, when they take on the appearance of humans, have the privilege of assuming whichever sex they choose. Things being as they are, and both angels and devils knowing very well what's what, both of them decided to become young women of about the age of twenty-one. The fiend, as soon as he touched earth, was no other than Bella Kimberly, a brunette, and the angel became the equally beautiful Eva Anderson, a blonde.

By the essential limitation of their natures, it is impossible for an angel to recognise fiendishness on beholding it, and equally so for a fiend even to conceive the existence of angelic virtue. As a matter of fact, at such a meeting as now took place in Lowndes Crescent, St. John's Wood, the angel is innocently attracted by what seems to her the superior strength and intensity of the fiendish nature, while the devil experiences that delicious interest that one feels in a lamb cutlet odorous upon the grill.

The two girls accosted one another, and each asked if the other knew of a suitable lodging-house in the neighbourhood. The similarity of their need caused them first to laugh heartily, and then to agree to become room-mates and companions of fortune. Bella suggested that it was perhaps too late to make respect-

able application for a lodging, therefore they spent the night strolling on Hampstead Heath, talking of how they would earn their livings, and of what fun they would have together, and of love, and then of breakfast, which is not an unnatural sequel.

They had some poached eggs in the little Express Dairy in Heath Street, and afterwards found a pleasant room on the third floor of an apartment house in Upper Park Road. Then they went out in search of employment: Bella was soon taken on as a dancing instructress, and Eva, with a little more difficulty, secured a situation as harpist in a cinema orchestra.

Once they were settled thus, they began to enjoy themselves as girls do, chattering and giggling at all hours. It is true that some of the things Bella said made Eva blush from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet, but she already loved her dark friend, and found her daring humour quite irresistible. They made amicable division of the chest of drawers, and shared the same bed, which no one thought was extraordinary, nor would if they had known them in their true characters, for nothing is more common than to find a fiend and an angel between the same pair of sheets, and if it was otherwise life would be hellishly dull for some of us.

Now there was living in this apartment house a young man scarcely older than Bella and Eva, who was studying to become an architect, and who had

never known love, nor been put off for long by any imitation. His name was Harry Pettigrew, and his hair was a very medium colour, neither too dark nor too fair.

His means were very limited, and his room was on the topmost floor, but not so far above that inhabited by the two girls but he could hear their delicious giggling at that still hour when he should have been at his latest studies. He longed to go down and tap at their door and ask them what the joke was, but he was too shy.

However, when three such young people are in the same house, it is not long before they become acquainted: on one occasion Bella forgot to lock the bathroom door, and the reason for this must have been that in Hell there are no baths, and hence no bathrooms, and consequently no bathroom doors.

It was a Sunday; the young man himself was descending in a dressing-gown: there was a delicious little *contretemps*, in which, fortunately, he saw no more than any decent young man would wish to see. All the same, he retreated in great confusion, for he had no notion of the wishes of decent young women. His confusion was so extreme, that he counted neither stairs nor landings in ascending, and, flinging open a door which he took to be his own, he discovered Eva in the third position of Muller's exercise for the abdominal muscles, and in nothing else at all.

Now angels, as every man knows, are, by virtue of their very innocence, or the simplicity of the celestial costume, sometimes far less conventionally modest than the squeakers of the darker sisterhood. Eva hastily but without panic threw a wrap about her shoulders: "You look quite upset," she said. "There is no reason to be upset. Did you want anything?"

"No . . ." he said, ". . . I did not. In fact I came in by mistake. It is nice of you not to scream or be angry with me."

They exchanged one or two more little civilities. In the end, Harry was emboldened to suggest a walk on the Heath. Before Eva could reply, Bella entered, and, not seeing him there, she burst out, with a giggle, "Whatever do you think happened to me?" Then, catching sight of him, she subsided into a confusion doubly arch.

This took off a little from the exquisite naturalness of the other encounter, a service for which Harry was not as grateful as he might have been, had he known to what a quarter, and from what a quarter, his fancy was being inclined. The truth is, that where a fiend and an angel, both in female form, are seen by the same young man, in precisely the same illuminating circumstances, he will, fifty or fifty-five times out of a hundred, choose the angel, if he is a nice young man, and if he has time enough.

Therefore, when they were all three on Hampstead

Heath that afternoon, Harry addressed Bella with very pleasant words, but with words only, while to Eva he accorded certain looks as well.

Bella was not very slow at putting two and two together. She had been looking forward to a long period of mortal sin with this attractive young man, and to flying off with his soul afterwards. The soul of an architect, especially if he is of strong Palladian tendencies, is well worth a handsome villa, standing in two or three acres of well-laid-out grounds, in the most desirable residential quarter of Hell. You imagine this homeless fiend's mortification, against which could have been measured the fury of the woman scorned, since they were here resident in the same anatomy.

She saw every day that Harry was growing fonder of her blonde companion, and conceived the idea of adding a fourth to their party, in the shape of a young man nearly as swarthy as herself, whom she had met at the dancing-hall, and with whom she was already quite sufficiently familiar.

She represented to him that Eva was likely to inherit a large sum of money. This, and her blonde locks and guileless air, were quite enough for Master Dago, and all he asked was opportunity to come at her.

"It's no good just trying to do the sheik," said Bella, "for she's already soft and soppy on Harry

Pettigrew, who should be my boy friend by rights. What you want, is to give him the idea she lets you: that'll make him sheer off quick enough, if I know his lordship." It will be observed that Bella's speech was vulgar in the extreme: this is a very usual deficiency of fiends.

Her dancing-partner, whom she had made well acquainted with the stings of jealousy, soon found means to introduce them to Harry. For example, on one Sunday when they were all walking in the sylvan shades of Ken Wood, he had Bella fall behind with Harry on some pretext or other, and when he and Eva had gone ahead a turn or two of the winding pathway, he put his arm behind her, without touching her in the least (or he would have had a severe rebuke), but so that it should appear to Harry, when he rounded the bend, that his hastily withdrawn arm had been about her consenting waist.

Not only this, but he once or twice made a sudden movement, and appeared flustered, when Harry entered a room in which he and Eva had been left alone by his accomplice. He was not above making, when he heard his rival's step outside the door, a little kissing sound with his perjured lips. On one occasion, when Bella was away for the week-end, he went so far as to throw a sock in at Eva's window.

Here he overreached himself. Harry, returning with Eva from a walk, was so overcome by the sight of this sock that he could no longer suffer in silence, but, first of all asking (as it were carelessly) whose sock that could be, he soon burst out with all the accumulated suspicions of the past few weeks, and had the infinite pleasure of hearing them denied frankly, emphatically, unmistakably and, above all, angelically.

A pretty little scene ensued, in which they discovered that their love partook of the nature of perfection. In fact, the only attribute that was wanting was completeness, which is recognised as being an essential by many of the ancient philosophers, several of the fathers of the Church, and by all young lovers. It is the nature of men to strive after perfection, and of angels to attain it: our young pair were true to type, and, after a little amicable discussion, it was agreed that they should endeavour to realise perfection in Eva's room that very night, when all the house was asleep. If perfection itself is insufficient for the censorious, such are reminded that in Heaven there is no marrying or giving in marriage, and among architectural students very little.

Now it so happened that Bella had returned that very afternoon, and had gone into conference with her accomplice to devise some bold stroke by which they might each achieve their impatient ends. At last they agreed on the boldest of all: Bella that very night was to visit Harry in his bedroom, and the swarthy dancing-man was to play the Tarquin in Eva's.

That night, at about the middle hour, they repaired to Hampstead. It was as black as pitch, no moon, a mist over the stars; no lights in the lodgers' rooms, for they were all asleep; no light in Harry's, because he was not there; no light in Eva's, because he was.

Bella, not knowing this, goes up to the top, finds him absent, and gets into his bed by way of a little surprise for him when he returns.

The dancing-man, making his entry a little later, gropes his way up the stairs, and, stopping at Eva's door, hears a murmuring within, which is in fact our young pair expressing to one another their great admiration of the perfection of perfection. He concludes he is a flight too low, goes higher, opens the door of Harry's room, and, all in the dark, seizes upon the waiting Bella, who, in high delight at his enthusiasm, lets down a losing battle in a very convincing way.

Several hours passed, in which the good enjoyed that happiness which is the reward of virtue, and the wicked that illusion of it that is the consolation of vice.

In the first grey of dawn, our good Harry made a very pretty speech of thanks to his charmer, in which he told her that she was an angel and had transported him to Heaven itself.

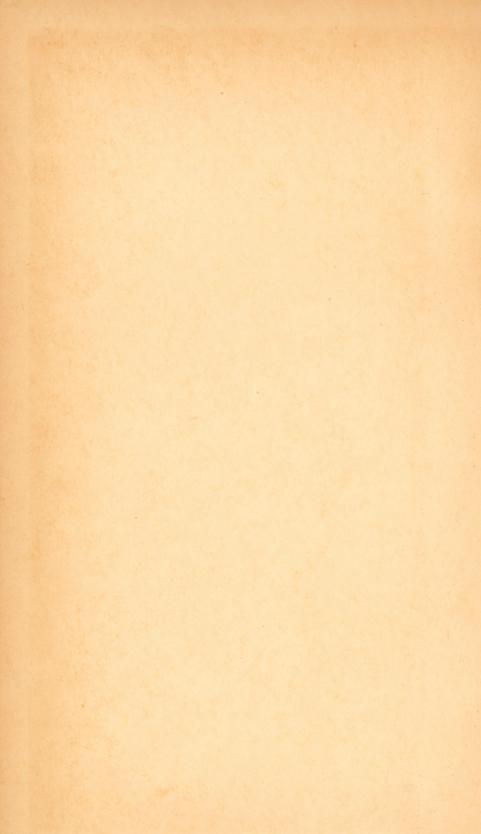
Bella and her companion, on the other hand, damned one another with more heat then grace. They

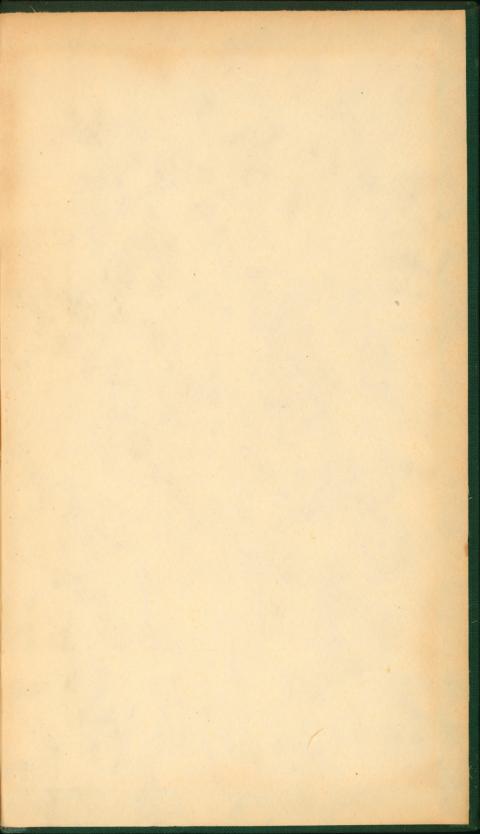
were sufficiently realistic, however, to agree that a good illusion is better than nothing at all, and they resolved to perpetuate their error by seeking it in an eternity of darknesses, but at this, I believe, they were not particularly successful.

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