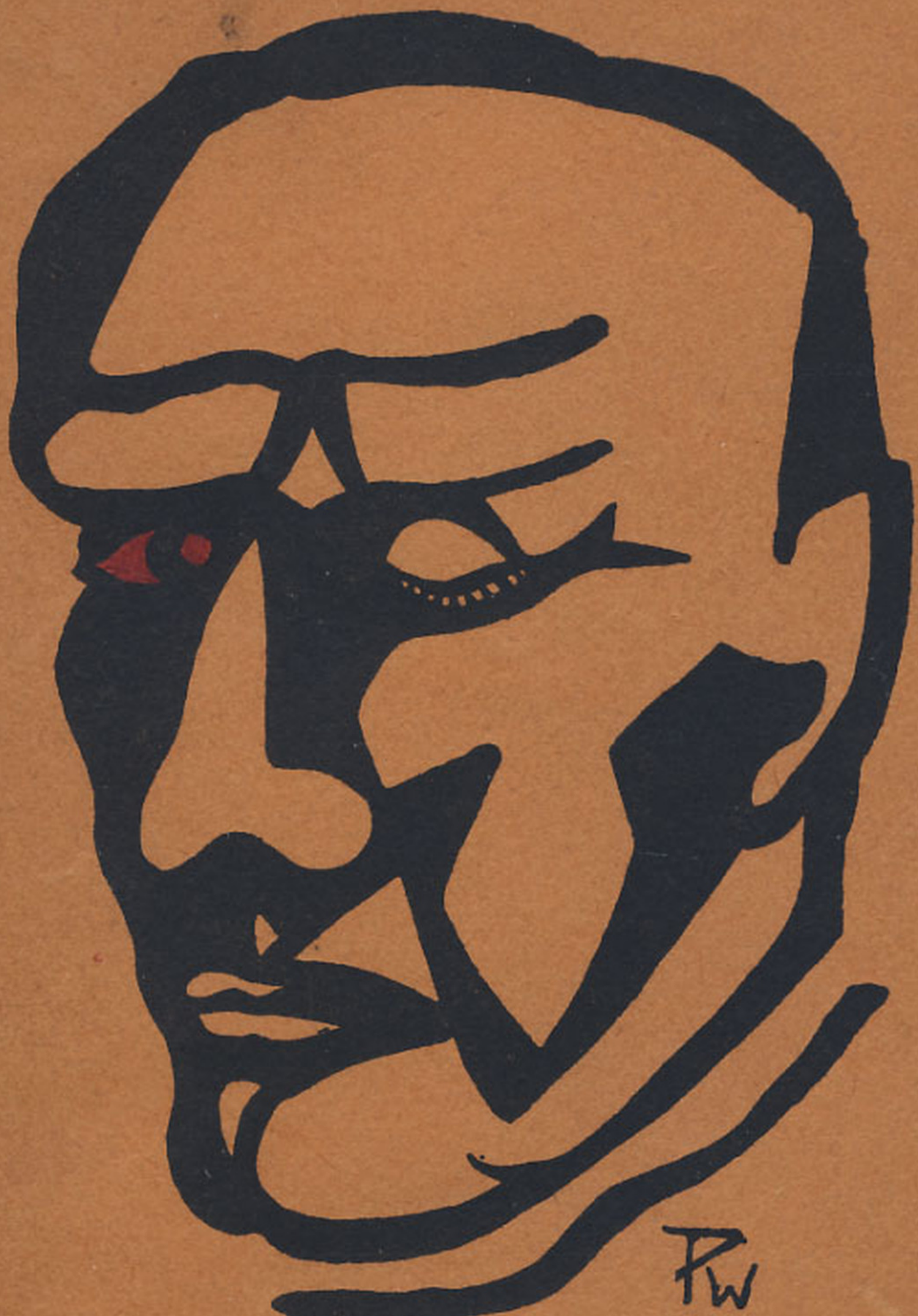
MOODS & TENSES



WILLIAM FRYER HARVEY

Facsimile Dust Jackets L.L.C.

¶ In this book the author (whose *Beast with Five Fingers* appeared in THE NEW DECAMERON) has brought together a collection of eighteen stories—some eerie, some tragic, some humorous—ingeniously linked together by an opening tale that sets the reader a problem, the key to which is hidden in the tales that follow.

Perhaps none of the stories in the book can be described rightly as a ghost story, but in a number of them the reader is conscious of moving in a strange border world where not unpleasantly he is obliged to yield to an unknown fear.

$2.00 net

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WILLIAM FRYER HARVEY

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TO

JOHN HENDERSON

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THE DOUBLE EYE

IT was the chance meeting with Miss Hartigan in a Hampstead drawing-room that was the occasion of my writing this introduction to her nephew's tales.

I had been doing my best to entertain the little old lady, who seemed to hang back rather wistfully from a turbulent stream of conversation, when a casual remark about New Zealand made me ask her if she was any relation of Dan Hartigan the artist, for Dan, I remembered, had spent the first twelve years of his life on a sheep farm somewhere in the North Island.

"I'm only his aunt!" she said with a smile. "Are you a friend of Dan's? I'm keeping house for him just now at Bradsea in Essex. He seems to have lost touch with most of the people he knew. He'd quite forgive my two days' dissipation in town if I could bring back news of a friend."

I told her that we had been at school together and that in the early days of the war we had served in the same battalion. That was before he had been wounded. Later when he was attached to the New Zealand Expeditionary Force as

official artist, I had lost touch with him. Only once had I seen him in the last ten years, at a Queen's Hall concert, and then I had not been able to speak to him. I was naturally anxious for news.

Miss Hartigan told me that Dan had gone out to New Zealand to settle up his uncle's property, that he had become an enthusiastic yachtsman and had bought this house in Essex, Portico House, "where," she said, "he is slowly settling down in the mud and from which nothing but a tidal wave will move him."

When Miss Hartigan left I walked with her to the Tube station.

"I'm really rather anxious about Dan," she said. "He sees far too much of himself and I suppose that's why he gets so depressed. It would be a real kindness if you could look him up. Come down for a few days and see what you can do to cheer him. He hates making new friends—you know how abrupt are his moods —but he is genuinely attached to his old ones."

I gave some sort of a promise. I knew my Hartigan and thought it very likely that he would prefer to be left alone. It was a surprise then, a week later, to get a letter from him urging me to come down if only for a couple of nights.

"You'll find me anything but entertaining company," he wrote, "but things are getting

badly on top of me and I've got to make some pretty important decisions in the near future." Dan, the most unmethodical of men, sent me a list of trains to Colchester and a local bus guide. "All you have to do," he added, "is to wire or drop me a card and your bed will be ready."

That was how I came to Bradsea. The bus put me down at the "Plume of Feathers," and following the conductor's instructions I took the road past the church and the high walled gardens of an old manor house until a sudden turn brought me to the estuary and Bradsea Hard. There was a row of shops, the biggest a marine store dealer's with workshops at the back, some neat wooden cottages that looked as if they had once belonged to the coast-guards, one or two ugly brick houses roofed with unweathered purple slate, and standing back a little from the road with two tall cypresses on either side of the white gate, Portico House.

They gave me the warmest of welcomes. Dan had changed little since the days when Ribstone camp had thrown us together. He was as tall and lanky and uncouth, flabbier perhaps and paler and quite evidently less happy. He had found however in Portico House an anchorage that was wholly to his liking.

"When Dan has exhausted all its good

points," said Miss Hartigan, "and fortunately he's never likely to do that, you must come to me for the debit side of the account—dry rot unless I'm much mistaken, in the attics, a well in the larder—*not* of course drinking water—oil lamps with endless trimming of wicks, rats that are both seen and heard and probably any number of ghosts which so far have been both inaudible and invisible."

At dinner that night the conversation more than once showed signs of flagging. Dan, I thought, resented Miss Hartigan's assumption that I was to be made to feel at home. After all there was no ice to break, no soundings to be taken. The channels were old and familiar, at least to him. But in the drawing-room as we sat round the fire—it was burning apple-wood logs, I remember—he came out of his curmudgeon's shell. He twitted his aunt who had been busy arranging stamps in an immense volume, on her hobby. He told her of a monarch who from innocent philandering with philately developed such a passion for Papal states and West Indian colonies that he imperilled both the Protestant succession and the peace of Europe. He sketched ribald designs for stamps of the Irish Free State. He defended their sanction of the lottery and parried Miss Hartigan's attacks by an ingenious argument in which he invoked the doctrine of Grace—the supreme gifts of life coming unearned to the unworthy. I forget

how he worked out his ingenious theory, but it was obvious that Dan enjoyed teasing the little old lady and just as obvious that she appreciated the gentle shocks he gave her.

But later in the evening, when we sat together in the study upstairs, his light-hearted mood vanished.

"I'm very much attached to my aunt," he said as he filled his pipe, "but she is just a little too bright for me at times. When my spirits get dull and tarnished she is convinced that it is her duty to rub them up. I hate being rubbed up.

"You said something at dinner," he went on after a pause, "about humour being a recognition of incongruity. I forget your actual words, but you were thinking of an outward incongruity. There's more to it than that. It depends on an inward incongruity as well. The single-minded man may laugh and be cheerful but it's not often that he has a sense of humour. He lacks stereoscopic vision. Both eyes see from the same angle instead of from a slightly different angle. Probably the first time that Adam laughed was when he sat munching the apple and was conscious of good and evil at the same time.

"Now I'm not wasting your time talking like this. I know very well why my aunt urged you to come down. She is rather alarmed about me and wants an unprejudiced opinion.

She is quite right. I am alarmed about myself. There is something radically wrong with my left eye."

He looked at me half furtively as he spoke and then quickly turned away his head.

"You don't mean to say that you are losing your sight?" I asked.

"I almost wish I were. No, the trouble is that my left eye sees too much or rather what it sees is different from what the right eye sees. I have literally bad-sight in my left eye.

"You remember me at school, an insignificant brat with a gift for caricature. I wasn't popular, I was no good at games, but somehow I held my own and avoided being bullied. Why was it? You haven't forgotten old Pill-Box Anderson? We meet occasionally—he works under the County Medical Officer of Health—and I put the question of my general and local immunity to him.

" 'You had,' he said, 'an extraordinarily knowing wink.'

"I remembered it then. He was quite right. I could upset the gravity of a class—quite a useful asset—and what was more I somehow succeeded in conveying the impression of being able to look round corners."

As he spoke he turned and slightly raised his head, and his left eyelid closed slowly over a furtive dancing eye.

"It was a useful trick," he went on, "and

what is more it stood me in good stead later when I eked out my income from black-and-white work by acting as visiting art master to a new-fangled school in Norwood. Art masters and science masters are never any good at discipline, but I found that that left eye of mine could keep a class quiet—used sparingly, you know, so that the novelty of fear was not blurred. And now for a few more facts that fit into the picture before I begin theorizing.

"Animals don't like me. My left eye seems to fascinate them. They are interested in it but it disturbs them. I can upset the equanimity of a cat half asleep on the hearth-rug until it paces the room like a tiger in a cage. And I find too that the dear unsophisticated peasants I meet when I'm away from civilization, sketching, act on the supposition that I have the evil eye. Young mothers definitely prefer that I should not admire their babies, a thing I should be most unlikely to do. I remember one occasion in the west of Ireland when my anxious solicitude was given as the reason for the butter refusing to churn. All very amusing, of course, if you are more interested in folk-lore than dairymaids, which I'm not.

"Now for another aspect of the same problem," he went on. "Obviously I'm not a harmonized personality. Any critic of my black-and-white work can see that. It's by no means all of a piece. Those illustrations I did for the

Alsatia Press edition of Cyril Tourneur (you should read the *Revenger's Tragedy*) are frankly sinister, left-eyed productions. The ones for the *Knight of the Burning Pestle* are just as obviously right-eyed. Since the war I've tried my hand from time to time at short stories. I'll give you a bundle of them to look through while you're here. They are a collection of moods and tenses, but without much difficulty you could sort them out into left-eye and right-eye stories with a group that represents, perhaps, binocular vision.

"Well, so much for facts. And now for theory. I have a strong visual imagination built up of sense impressions received through the eyes. But these eyes are not quite alike. At first the impressions that came through the gateways of vision were the same. Then, as time went on, one gateway seems to have been used more for one sort of traffic and unconsciously, I suppose, I encouraged this specialization. Mark what follows: In the normal brain the travellers entering by the two gateways of vision mingle in the byways of the city and finally come to rest in well conducted caravanserais, the poor men in the attics and cellars, the princes and merchants in their rooms of state. But in my city there is not the same wholesome mixture of classes. In one quarter there are doss houses and one or two gorgeous hotels de luxe. It has a fascinating night life

of its own. Another contains the family hotels and those old fashioned, expensive houses where county folk put up, rather dull, perfectly safe, and very respectable. As I said before, I'm beginning to get alarmed.

"You know," he went on after re-lighting his pipe, "there's really a lot to be said for the old notion of bodily organs having a definite life of their own—real self-governing dominions and not just Crown Colonies run from Whitehall. I read somewhere recently that only twenty-five per cent. of body energy is used up by tissues under the control of the will. And what's true of liver and spleen may be true, to a certain extent, with an organ like the eye and that part of the brain concerned with vision. I mean that it may be far more autonomous than one generally imagines. I don't so much mind when my liver is out of order because I don't understand the language of its primitive inhabitants, however conscious I may be of a state of revolt. But it's a very different matter when vision is affected. What would you do if a port had been captured, a gateway, a cable station, and all sorts of people, all sorts of messages, were creeping in?"

He turned on me almost fiercely.

"I suppose you'd sit back in your arm-chair, toasting your feet before the fire, and take joy in the thought that you are the captain (retired on pension) of your soul. But I—do you know

what I'd do? I'd blow up the fort, I'd mine the gateway, I'd play old Harry with the damned cable station."

There came a gentle knocking at the door and Miss Hartigan entered the room.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," she said, "but it's after eleven and Dan is supposed to keep early hours. I've brought a jug of Ovaltine and two cups in case you both feel inclined for a night cap. If you won't have any, Dan, I'll pour a little into the saucer for the cat. Puss! Puss! Now, Dan, it's too bad of you! You know she won't come when you look at her like that. Now you've frightened her and she's gone downstairs."

"Sorry, aunt, I didn't mean to really. I'm just going to rout out some papers for old Bill to go through at his leisure and then we'll toddle along to bed."

My room in Portico House looked out across the estuary. The tide had come in; the mud flats were already covered. A barge had dropped anchor almost opposite my window and seemed to fill a vast canvas framed by the black cypresses that stood on either side of the gate. Behind it were the riding lights of yachts at their moorings, and far away to the left the dim shapes of ocean-going steamers—the out-of-works of the sea—lined up awaiting charter. The wind had gone down; the lap, lap, that I heard came not from the ripple of the tide but

from the leaves of the great aspen on the lawn at the side of the house.

If Dan sought peace for healing he had surely come to the right place.

But had he?

I became conscious of a feeling, hitherto only half acknowledged, that there was something a little incongruous about Portico House.

The drawing-room with its solid Victorian furniture, its footstools upholstered with beads and gay Berlin wools, the framed samplers and silhouettes of a still earlier generation, the china, valuable and ugly in its corner cupboard, the quietly respectable aspidistra—all these were in keeping with a Portico House that was successfully living down the memory of lawless days. My bedroom, again, gave the impression of having been laid up in lavender. The bottom drawers of the immense tallboys would, I felt sure, be filled with neatly folded linen, carefully marked, perhaps by that wistful little lady with the basket of roses whose portrait looked down on me from the wall above the fireplace.

But the hall was different. On my arrival Hartigan had told me to hang my coat and hat on Adam and Eve. These were two wooden figures, almost life-size, that stood in the shadow on either side of the door. He told me that he had picked them up in Spain and thought that they had probably been the terminals of some palatial staircase, "though," he had added,

"I'd rather like to think of them as hidden away in the choir stalls of some forgotten cathedral with an evil old bishop who had no other master than the devil. Late seventeenth century, I put them down as. If they could speak they'd cry aloud for clothes."

There was something distinctly horrible in those leering figures crowned with hats askew. Scarves and cloaks instead of screening only seemed to emphasize their essential iniquity.

No, I did not like Dan's doorkeepers. His study again, was a restless, a divided room. The sheep-like, white-faced china statuette of John Wesley on the mantelpiece had been placed there, I fancied, because it was so completely out of keeping with its surroundings. The world may have been his parish, but here John Wesley was most certainly not at home.

Again I felt that my first impression of peace was false; there was fraternization of armed forces; there were whispers only of an armistice.

I felt little inclination for sleep. I had a virgin candle to burn and in my hand was the typescript of Dan's stories. They were, as he had given me to understand, a mixed lot. One or two might have found their way into the pages of a magazine, but I fancied that most would be difficult to place. They were too elusive for the ordinary reader—left too much to his imagination—and for the others their form was against

them; they had no affinity to the fashionable *conte*. Nor did I see any chance of a publisher taking them up in volume form unless Dan illustrated them. They lacked the same unity that their author lacked. Yet reading them I realized that the tales had some things in common. There was a curious obsession with the idea of death. In some it was no more than a vague background—the gathering of dark clouds at sunset. In others the clouds were banked high and hung menacing. In more than one or two the lightning broke and struck with a sudden and blinding flash. Then again the stories were alike in showing little interest in women. Dan was obviously not at home with them unless they were over fifty. I thought he showed an understanding of elderly people and strangely enough of little children. There was more than a streak of Hartigan's cynical humour, and he sometimes succeeded in conveying the old impression of being able to look round corners.

I still think of his stories in that setting of silver flame and queer distorted shadow. I can still hear the comments of the night world, the hooting of an owl, the distant striking of the church clock—it dropped the quarter-hours after midnight—and within, the scuttling of mice behind the wainscot and the creaking of century-old floor-boards. When at last I fell asleep it was to dream of the sheep and green

New Zealand paddocks that Dan had loved as a boy.

It was raining next morning and after breakfast Dan took me upstairs to the room he used as a studio lit by two north windows that looked out on to the overgrown orchard that was Miss Hartigan's despair. He had been commissioned to illustrate a book on smuggling in East Anglia, "lucrative pot-boiling," he described it, but as I turned over the drawings in his portfolio it was evident that the subject appealed to him strongly. He told me that Portico House itself had been a regular smugglers' warren. There were no fewer than four staircases, and in the very room we sat in was a trap-door going down to a cellar, from which an underground passage led to a barn at the corner of the orchard where pack-horses could wait.

"They would go from here to Tiptree Heath," said Dan. "Sometimes they would make a shorter stage. In the churchyard at Windringhoe there is a vault that was often used as a dumping ground in an emergency. It's only four miles up the creek. Let's take some sandwiches and see what the place looks like on a rainy day."

We set out in a drizzle along the sea wall. The path was too narrow to walk abreast, and Dan's remarks were confined to pointing out the objects of interest, the new water tower at

Hollesbury across the estuary, Rowbarrow Farm where the glass funereal jar in Colchester museum had been unearthed from the mound at the back of the orchard, the towers of Great and Little Swinfleet. On our left was the black mud of the Swinfleet Channel, on our right the saltings. The bloom of the sea lavender had gone from a landscape faintly tinted with dull washes of monochrome.

Windringhoe seemed to consist only of a church and a ramshackle farm, once a manor house but now half derelict. It was approached on the landward side by a lane that ended in a staithe where barges once discharged and loaded.

"If you walked for ten minutes up the lane," said Dan, "you could catch the Colchester bus and be in Liverpool Street in under two hours. All the same we are at the end of the world."

We saw the brick vault in the graveyard surrounded by its broken iron railing, and then, as the church was locked, we sat in the porch to eat our sandwiches.

"I read your stories last night," I said. "If you'll entrust me with them I'd like to go through them again and get Tom Knightley's opinion about them. But to return to what we were talking about last night when the unexpected entrance of the Ovaltine brought us down to earth. You are restless and dissatisfied,

conscious of a divided personality. Why don't you get psycho-analysed?"

"So that's your tack, is it?" said Dan. "I suppose my aunt has been unburdening herself to you. She knows a man, a really good man, who won't cease from his labours until it seems perfectly natural for you to become an orthodox Presbyterian. Or if I wanted to keep the exploitation of my shady past in the family, there is my cousin Joe who has written most helpful handbooks for neurotic mothers on the management of the difficult child. I wouldn't touch any of them with a barge pole. We are such stuff as dreams are made on, but do you see me casting my dreams before scientific swine for them to rout in? No, I saw enough of those gentlemen after I was shell-shocked. I talked a lot of nonsense to you last night. I suppose I had the pip. Forget all about it. If I'm a mixed lot, well, the world is too. Some people come here at high tide and fall in love with the place; then next time they come the mud flats are all uncovered and they long for miles of clean sand or pebbly beaches. For the moment I'm thoroughly enjoying the mud. And I appreciate oysters."

On our way back the drizzle changed into a downpour that extinguished all conversation. I for one felt that I had earned my hot bath and tea. Despite Miss Hartigan's valiant attempts to draw him into talk—she reminded me of a neat

little hen pecking about for corn and scattering grain and chaff in all directions—Dan remained morose and silent. He refused the muffin—"and Alice brought it all the way from Colchester" —and then, saying that he had letters to write for the evening post, left us alone.

With thankfulness I accepted Miss Hartigan's suggestion that I should light my pipe. Obviously I was to be her confidant. She wanted a patient listener.

She began by asking me what I thought of Dan, and seemed almost disappointed when I told her that I had seen in him no cause for real anxiety.

"He's on his guard, of course," she said. "He knows that I wanted to consult you about him. But I really think that there is something the matter with one or both of his eyes. Why instead of experimenting with a shade doesn't he consult a proper oculist? I believe he fears they might say he is going blind. And he won't see Dr. McCandlish—he doesn't call himself a psycho-analyst but he is deeply interested in modern psychology and has had the most wonderful results, a really good man in whom I should put implicit faith. Dan suffers dreadfully from insomnia and I'm afraid he takes drugs for it. I don't trust our chemist here at all; he's a clever man, but you don't get clever men in a remote village like this without a bad reason. He probably goes on repeating some old

prescription Dan has got hold of when he has absolutely no business to. A most unsavoury character, and my nephew won't hear a word against him. I have no doubt that it would be an excellent thing for him if he took up golf, but he only laughs when I suggest it and pours ridicule on the game and everything connected with it. What am I to do? You see, very often when Dan can't sleep he takes to walking about at night. He tells me that he has night vision, whatever that is—I believe he wants to frighten me—and that he finds inspiration for his work. But you can't do that sort of thing in a place like this where everybody knows everybody else. People talk, they seem to do nothing else but talk. They never listen-in to those really interesting lectures on the wireless and we haven't even a village institute. And they say—well, they say that Dan is all right but that he's wrong in the head. I don't mind that so much but supposing he was all right in his head and it was his conduct that was wrong, it would be difficult to make excuses then. I sometimes wonder if I oughtn't to leave Portico House."

I tried to reassure Miss Hartigan. None the less what she said impressed me. She struck me as a kind-hearted, shrewd old lady who certainly did not suffer from nerves. Dan himself had told me that when servants were hard to get and harder still to keep, for weeks together she would sleep alone in Portico House.

Barges that came from nowhere in the night, four staircases, I remembered, to hear creaking, mice behind the wainscot and rats in the wash-house. No, there was nothing the matter with Miss Hartigan's nerves.

An incident that happened later in the evening made me wonder if I had not been a little premature in my assurances.

Dan had gone out with his letters for the post. He had told us he did not know how long he would be. If the box at the post office was cleared he would have to walk on to Cadwick and give the letters to the driver of the bus to post in Colchester.

Miss Hartigan settled down to her patience, only to find that a card was missing. She was reluctantly giving up thoughts of her evening game when she remembered that Dan had a pack in his room and she asked me if I would mind going upstairs to find it.

"It's sure to be somewhere lying about," she said. "I remember him telling me the night before last that he had almost succeeded in going to sleep over Double Demon."

As I was not able to find the cards by the light of a candle I lit the lamp and renewed the search. The lid of the desk in the corner was closed and not locked. I opened it, and there in the first pigeon-hole was the pack of cards. There was a pair of horn-rimmed glasses too. I don't quite know why I took them up. I

hadn't realized that Dan wore glasses. These were broken; one of the side pieces had snapped across and Dan had evidently tried to mend it with sealing wax.

And then I realized that there was something queer about them. The left eyepiece was fitted with dark glass, and on putting it to the test of print I found that the right glass did not alter the size of the letters. It was plain glass. I replaced the spectacles in the pigeon-hole with the feeling that I had been prying, that Dan would not have been altogether pleased at my innocent discovery.

The broken glasses told me two things. I knew now that Dan had been absolutely serious in his talk of the evening before, that he was even acting on the wild theory he had propounded to me. I knew too that it was the left eye that he was trying to shut out.

Miss Hartigan retired to rest early that night with an injunction that we should follow her example. I had brought down with me to Portico House a batch of proofs to correct. So far I had not looked at them, and when I told Dan to get off to bed and leave to me the necessary locking-up, he told me that I might as well bring my things upstairs. There was a table and a fire in his study.

"Your brooding presence—you are a broody old bird you know—may possibly induce sleep. I shan't talk to you. When you have done your

job of work, put out the light and tuck me up."

We went upstairs to his room. He slept in a little box-like alcove that opened out of the study and which at one time had been partitioned off by sliding panelling.

"Very useful for the smugglers," he said. "There's a trap-door in the corner from which staircase number four leads down into the kitchen.

" 'We have our exits and our entrances and one man in his time plays many parts.' Make yourself comfortable and if you want anything you can't find, rout around but don't ask me. For once I'm sleepy."

He got into bed and watched me with a half whimsical smile.

Correcting proofs is the dreariest of occupations, but at least it keeps the mind from wandering. For an hour I was the slave of the galley. From time to time I looked up at Hartigan. He lay with closed eyes and presently his regular breathing told me that he was asleep. Then my fountain pen began to run dry. I had still a dozen slips to correct; it seemed a pity to leave my task unfinished. I would follow Dan's suggestion and rout around for what I wanted—a bottle of ink. Quietly I crossed the room to his desk and opened the lid. I had noticed a bottle there when I had hunted for the patience cards earlier in the

evening. I took it from the pigeon-hole next to the one that contained the spectacles, closed the desk and was about to resume my seat at the table when my glance fell on Dan.

His left eye was wide open and was watching me with a curiosity that yet lacked all recognition. At last my task was finished. I lit my candle and put out the lamp. The counterpane had slipped from the bed. I replaced it and tucked in the blankets—a curious sensation it was, while that eye still continued to stare at me.

"Sleep well!" I said to the man who was already half asleep, and as I closed the door behind me I told myself that it was probably more than I should do.

When Dan had first invited me to Portico House I had told him that I could only get away for a couple of nights, but on the Friday morning he pressed me to stay for another day.

"Your legs would thoroughly enjoy a second walk," he said. "They can't get nearly enough exercise in town, and it looks as if the sun was going to shine on us. You really must stay. I'm almost at the end of my tether, and though last night I slept like a top it was the worst night I've had for weeks."

But I had an engagement that evening in town I could not break. The most I could do was to delay my going until the afternoon and to give the morning to Dan. He proposed that

I should send on my bag by the carrier and that we should walk along the shore, striking inland to Green Peldon, lunch at the "Dun Cow" and from there I could take the bus into Colchester.

I said good-bye to Miss Hartigan who had tried in vain to get me for a few moments by myself. Her "Don't forget to let me know how you get on," I recognized as a pathetic cry for help I should gladly have given her had I known how.

I remember well that walk, the wind at our back, the sun shining on the barley stubble where ploughs were already at work, the narrow margin of sand that bounded the sea wall, the smell of seaweed. Then the heavy clay of lanes that ran between unslashed hedges overgrown with bramble ; farms with outbuildings falling to pieces; poor pasture that was once good corn land, until we came at last to Green Peldon.

As we sat over our cheese and ale Dan told me that he had decided to go abroad. He had a doctor friend in Geneva whom he would see about his eyes; something had got to be done about them. And then he launched out again into his wild theories, breaking off to remind me of some long-forgotten incident of our schooldays or some war experience that was supposed to prove the truth of what he said. There was little I could do to cheer him, for

Dan was in no listening mood. The bus came at last.

"Good-bye!" I said, "and let me know what you are doing and where you are."

"Oh, don't you worry," he answered. "I shall be all right." And then as the bus was moving off he added, "You might look in at Spenser's, the opticians, on your way to the station. Tell them they must forward the glasses at latest by to-night's post. If they can't do that, they had better cancel the order."

When a minute later I looked back, his tall lanky figure still stood disconsolately at the cross roads.

I wrote my duty letter to Miss Hartigan and a few days later received a reply in which she told me that Dan had gone abroad. It was quite a short note. She hoped the change of scene would take him out of himself, but when she thanked me for what I had done, I knew that my intervention had been a complete failure and that I had let her down.

A week later I heard from Dan. He wrote from somewhere in the Jura. I gathered that his friend was away from home and that he was filling in time sketching. It was a fairly cheerful letter. He asked for a few good thrillers, a new pipe and a supply of his favourite tobacco. But there was a postscript that left me troubled.

"If by chance anything should happen to me in the next month or so, you might see what

could be made out of those stories of mine, and if, as you say, they don't hang together, I give you full leave to make some sort of an introductory yarn in which the character of the anonymous author, disguised and distorted according to your taste, gives by his lack of unity a certain cohesion to the whole. You know what I mean, I think. Cast me as hero or villain or both. I am sending along a bundle of verse to vary the cargo. Use it or not as you think fit."

A week later came a picture postcard from Geneva acknowledging the receipt of my parcel and then there was a long gap of three months.

The new year had got well into its stride before I heard again from Dan Hartigan. The letter was dated from Portico House.

"I've just been reading *Paradise Lost*," he wrote, "that glorious passage in the fourth book where Eve conversing with Adam describes the beauties of the morning, noon and night. The double reference to 'this her solemn bird,'—she was not thinking of her husband—conjured up your face as last I saw it. Hence this letter. I've taken my plunge. You'd blame me I expect, if you knew, but if you realized the extraordinary peace—stillness rather—that possesses my soul, I think you would understand.

"My self is no longer divided, and as a result, I suppose, I am filled with a tingling vitality.

It must have been rather too overpowering for my aunt and since there is now no occasion for the anxious solicitude with which she surrounded me she departed to keep house and conscience for one of my cousins in Ireland. You must come down and see me. Portico House has been winter-cleaned under the personal supervision of its resident proprietor. The whole place is swept and garnished, and though at times it is a bit solitary it's good for work and I'm turning out some first-rate stuff. I feed like a fighting cock and to everyone's surprise sleep the sleep of the just. I've bought a lovely little five-tonner at Burnham and shall be sailing her round one of these days. Now what about a long week-end? You can take your choice. They are all the same to me."

But I never crossed the threshold of Portico House again and it was all the same to Dan Hartigan. For the yacht capsized in a squall and he and the man from whom he had bought her were both drowned. Dan's body was never recovered.

After some difficulty I managed to find out Miss Hartigan's address in Ireland and wrote to her without, however, receiving a reply. Shortly afterwards I saw the notice of her death after an operation in a nursing home in Cork.

I was sitting one day in the smoking-room at the club when I heard Hartigan's name mentioned. Two men were talking about him.

"He was a clever fellow, a bit morbid perhaps, but a wonderful artist in his own line."

"And that wasn't the sea," said the other; "that was a tragic business. It ought never to have happened. By the way, didn't Hartigan lose a limb in the war or something like that?"

"He'd lost an eye, right or left, I can't remember which, but that was quite recent; on the continent, I think. Pretty awful for an artist. But if you ever have a chance of getting hold of any of his work take my advice and freeze on to it. You won't be sorry."

"Right or left, I can't remember which."

I suppose if I had wanted to I could have found out. Perhaps it was because I wished to remain in ignorance that I made no effort to attend the sale at Portico House, for a house speaks of the personality of a man and Dan had said that he had arranged this to his liking.

Which part of his nature had at the end held undivided sway? There were, he had told me, two doors to his citadel, two gateways to his city, and to gain control one had to be demolished. He had hesitated and then made a choice that was ultimate. Was it the right eye or the left eye that he had lost or rather sacrificed?

Knowing Dan and having read his stories, I am inclined to think——

But after all the data are as much yours as mine. Read what he has written and judge for yourselves.

PART I

THE DABBLERS

IT was a wet July evening. The three friends sat around the peat fire in Harborough's den, pleasantly weary after their long tramp across the moors. Scott, the ironmaster, had been declaiming against modern education. His partner's son had recently entered the business with everything to learn, and the business couldn't afford to teach him. "I suppose," he said, "that from preparatory school to University, Wilkins must have spent the best part of three thousand pounds on filling a suit of plus-fours with brawn. It's too much. My boy is going to Steelborough grammar school. Then when he's sixteen I shall send him to Germany so that he can learn from our competitors. Then he'll put in a year in the office; afterwards, if he shows any ability, he can go up to Oxford. Of course he'll be rusty and out of his stride, but he can mug up his Latin in the evenings as my shop stewards do with their industrial history and economics."

"Things aren't as bad as you make out," said Freeman, the architect. "The trouble I find with schools is in choosing the right one

where so many are excellent. I've entered my boy for one of those old country grammar schools that have been completely re-modelled. Wells showed in the *Undying Fire* what an enlightened headmaster can do when he is given a free hand and isn't buried alive in mortar and tradition."

"You'll probably find," said Scott, "that it's mostly eyewash; no discipline, and a lot of talk about self-expression and education for service."

"There you're wrong. I should say the discipline is too severe if anything. I heard only the other day from my young nephew that two boys had been expelled for a raid on a hen-roost or some such escapade; but I suppose there was more to it than met the eye. What are you smiling about, Harborough?"

"It was something you said about headmasters and tradition. I was thinking about tradition and boys. Rum, secretive little beggars. It seems to me quite possible that there is a wealth of hidden lore passed on from one generation of schoolboys to another that it might be well worth while for a psychologist or an anthropologist to investigate. I remember at my first school writing some lines of doggerel in my books. They were really an imprecation against anyone who should steal them. I've seen practically the same words in old monkish manuscripts; they go back to the

time when books were of value. But it was on the fly-leaves of Abbott's *Via Latina* and Locke's *Arithmetic* that I wrote them. Nobody would want to steal those books. Why should boys start to spin tops at a certain season of the year? The date is not fixed by shopkeepers, parents are not consulted, and though saints have been flogged to death I have found no connection between top whipping and the church calendar. The matter is decided for them by an unbroken tradition, handed down, not from father to son, but from boy to boy. Nursery rhymes are not perhaps a case in point, though they are stuffed with odd bits of folk lore. I remember being taught a game that was played with knotted handkerchiefs manipulated by the fingers to the accompaniment of a rhyme which began, 'Father Confessor, I've come to confess.' My instructor, aged eight, was the son of a High Church vicar. I don't know what would have happened if old Tomlinson had heard the last verse:—

" 'Father Confessor, what shall I do?'
' Go to Rome and kiss the Pope's toe.'
'Father Confessor, I'd rather kiss you.'
'Well, child, do.' "

"What was the origin of that little piece of doggerel?" asked Freeman. "It's new to me."

"I don't know," Harborough replied. "I've never seen it in print. But behind the noddings

of the knotted handkerchiefs and our childish giggles lurked something sinister. I seem to see the cloaked figure, cat-like and gliding, of one of those emissaries of the Church of Rome that creep into the pages of George Borrow—hatred and fear masked in ribaldry. I could give you other examples, the holly and ivy carols, for instance, which used to be sung by boys and girls to the accompaniment of a dance, and which, according to some people, embody a crude form of nature worship."

"And the point of all this is what?" asked Freeman.

"That there is a body of tradition, ignored by the ordinary adult, handed down by one generation of children to another. If you want a really good example—a really bad example I should say, I'll tell you the story of the Dabblers." He waited until Freeman and Scott had filled their pipes and then began.

"When I came down from Oxford and before I was called to the Bar, I put in three miserable years at school teaching."

Scott laughed.

"I don't envy the poor kids you cross-examined," he said.

"As a matter of fact, I was more afraid of them than they of me. I got a job as usher at one of Freeman's old grammar schools, only it had not been re-modelled and the headmaster was a completely incompetent cleric.

It was in the eastern counties. The town was dead alive. The only thing that seemed to warm the hearts of the people there was a dull smouldering fire of gossip, and they all took turns in fanning the flame. But I mustn't get away from the school. The buildings were old; the chapel had once been the choir of a monastic church. There was a fine tithe barn, and a few old stones and bases of pillars in the headmaster's garden, but nothing more to show where monks had lived for centuries except a dried-up fish pond.

"Late in June at the end of my first year, I was crossing the playground at night on my way to my lodgings in the High Street. It was after twelve. There wasn't a breath of air, and the playing fields were covered with a thick mist from the river. There was something rather weird about the whole scene; it was all so still and silent. The night smelt stuffy; and then suddenly I heard the sound of singing. I don't know where the voices came from nor how many voices there were, and not being musical I can't give you any idea of the tune. It was very ragged with gaps in it, and there was something about it which I can only describe as disturbing. Anyhow I had no desire to investigate. I stood still for two or three minutes listening and then let myself out by the lodge gate into the deserted High Street. My bedroom above the tobacconist's looked out on to a lane that led

down to the river. Through the open window I could still hear, very faintly, the singing. Then a dog began to howl, and when after a quarter of an hour it stopped, the June night was again still. Next morning in the masters' common room I asked if anyone could account for the singing.

" 'It's the Dabblers,' said old Moneypenny, the science master, 'they usually appear about now.'

"Of course I asked who the Dabblers were.

" 'The Dabblers,' said Moneypenny, 'are carol singers born out of their due time. They are certain lads of the village who for reasons of their own, desire to remain anonymous; probably choir boys with a grievance, who wish to pose as ghosts. And for goodness sake let sleeping dogs lie. We've thrashed out the Dabbler controversy so often that I'm heartily sick of it.'

"He was a cross-grained customer and I took him at his word. But later on in the week I got hold of one of the junior masters and asked him what it all meant. It seemed an established fact that the singing did occur at this particular time of the year. It was a sore point with Moneypenny, because on one occasion when somebody had suggested that it might be boys from the schoolhouse skylarking he had completely lost his temper.

" 'All the same,' said Atkinson, 'it might

just as well be our boys as any others. If you are game next year we'll try to get to the bottom of it.'

"I agreed and there the matter stood. As a matter of fact when the anniversary came round I had forgotten all about the thing. I had been taking the lower school in prep. The boys had been unusually restless—we were less than a month from the end of term—and it was with a sigh of relief that I turned into Atkinson's study soon after eight to borrow an umbrella, for it was raining hard.

" ' By the by,' he said, 'to-night's the night the Dabblers are due to appear. What about it?'

"I told him that if he imagined that I was going to spend the hours between then and midnight in patrolling the school precincts in the rain, he was greatly mistaken.

" 'That's not my idea at all,' he said. 'We won't set foot out of doors. I'll light the fire; I can manage a mixed grill of sorts on the gas ring and there are a couple of bottles of beer in the cupboard. If we hear the Dabblers we'll quietly go the round of the dormitories and see if anyone is missing. If they are, we can await their return.'

"The long and short of it was that I fell in with his proposal. I had a lot of essays to correct on the Peasants' Revolt—fancy kids of thirteen and fourteen being expected to write

essays on anything—and I could go through them just as well by Atkinson's fire as in my own cheerless little sitting-room.

"It's wonderful how welcome a fire can be in a sodden June. We forgot our lost summer as we sat beside it smoking, warming our memories in the glow from the embers.

" 'Well,' said Atkinson at last, 'it's close on twelve. If the Dabblers are going to start, they are due about now.' He got up from his chair and drew aside the curtains.

" 'Listen!' he said. Across the playground, from the direction of the playing-fields, came the sound of singing. The music—if it could be called such—lacked melody and rhythm and was broken by pauses; it was veiled, too, by the drip, drip of the rain and the splashing of water from the gutter spouts. For one moment I thought I saw lights moving, but my eyes must have been deceived by reflections on the window pane.

" 'We'll see if any of our birds have flown,' said Atkinson. He picked up an electric torch and we went the rounds of the dormitories. Everything was as it should be. The beds were all occupied, the boys all seemed to be asleep. It was a quarter-past twelve by the time we got back to Atkinson's room. The music had ceased; I borrowed a macintosh and ran home through the rain.

"That was the last time I heard the Dabblers,

but I was to hear of them again. Act II was staged up at Scapa. I'd been transferred to a hospital ship, with a dislocated shoulder for X-ray, and as luck would have it the right-hand cot to mine was occupied by a lieutenant, R.N.V.R., a fellow called Holster, who had been at old Edmed's school a year or two before my time. From him I learned a little more about the Dabblers. It seemed that they were boys who for some reason or other kept up a school tradition. Holster thought that they got out of the house by means of the big wistaria outside B dormitory, after leaving carefully constructed dummies in their beds. On the night in June when the Dabblers were due to appear it was considered bad form to stay awake too long and very unhealthy to ask too many questions, so that the identity of the Dabblers remained a mystery. To the big and burly Holster there was nothing really mysterious about the thing; it was a schoolboys' lark and nothing more. An unsatisfactory act, you will agree, and one which fails to carry the story forward. But with the third act the drama begins to move. You see I had the good luck to meet one of the Dabblers in the flesh.

"Burlingham was badly shell-shocked in the war; a psycho-analyst took him in hand and he made a seemingly miraculous recovery. Then two years ago he had a partial relapse, and when I met him at Lady Byfleet's he was going up to

Town three times a week for special treatment from some unqualified West-End practitioner, who seemed to be getting at the root of the trouble. There was something extraordinarily likeable about the man. He had a whimsical sense of humour that must have been his salvation, and with it was combined a capacity for intense indignation that one doesn't often meet with these days. We had a number of interesting talks together (part of his régime consisted of long cross-country walks, and he was glad enough of a companion) but the one I naturally remember was when in a tirade against English educational methods he mentioned Dr. Edmed's name,—'the head of a beastly little grammar school where I spent five of the most miserable years of my life.' "

" 'Three more than I did,' I replied.

" 'Good God!' he said, 'fancy you being a product of that place!'

" 'I was one of the producers,' I answered. 'I'm not proud of the fact; I usually keep it dark.'

" 'There was a lot too much kept dark about that place,' said Burlingham. It was the second time he had used the words. As he uttered them, 'that place' sounded almost the equivalent of an unnamable hell. We talked for a time about the school, of Edmed's pomposity, of old Jacobson the porter—a man whose patient good humour shone alike on

the just and on the unjust—of the rat hunts in the tithe barn on the last afternoons of term.

" 'And now,' I said at last, 'tell me about the Dabblers.'

" He turned round on me like a flash and burst out laughing, a high-pitched, nervous laugh that, remembering his condition, made me sorry I had introduced the subject.

" 'How damnably funny!' " he said. 'The man I go to in Town asked me the same question only a fortnight ago. I broke an oath in telling him, but I don't see why you shouldn't know as well. Not that there is anything to know; it's all a queer boyish nightmare without rhyme or reason. You see I was one of the Dabblers myself.'

"It was a curious disjointed story that I got out of Burlingham. The Dabblers were a little society of five, sworn on solemn oath to secrecy. On a certain night in June, after warning had been given by their leader, they climbed out of the dormitories and met by the elm tree in old Edmed's garden. A raid was made on the doctor's poultry run, and, having secured a fowl, they retired to the tithe barn, cut its throat, plucked and cleaned it, and then roasted it over a fire in a brazier while the rats looked on. The leader of the Dabblers produced sticks of incense; he lit his own from the fire, the others kindling theirs from his. Then all moved in slow procession to the summer-house in the

corner of the doctor's garden, singing as they went. There was no sense in the words they sang. They weren't English and they weren't Latin. Burlingham described them as reminding him of the refrain in the old nursery rhyme :

> There were three brothers over the sea.
> *Peri meri dixi domine*
> They sent three presents unto me
> *Petrum partrum paradisi tempore*
> *Peri meri dixi domine.*

" 'And that was all?' I said to him.

" 'Yes,' he replied, ' that was all there was to it; but——'

"I expected the but.

" 'We were all of us frightened, horribly frightened. It was quite different from the ordinary schoolboy escapade. And yet there was fascination, too, in the fear. It was rather like,' and here he laughed, 'dragging a deep pool for the body of someone who had been drowned. You didn't know who it was, and you wondered what would turn up.'

"I asked him a lot of questions but he hadn't anything very definite to tell us. The Dabblers were boys in the lower and middle forms and with the exception of the leader their membership of the fraternity was limited to two years. Quite a number of the boys, according to Burlingham, must have been Dabblers, but they

never talked about it and no one, as far as he knew, had broken his oath. The leader in his time was called Tancred, the most unpopular boy in the school, despite the fact that he was their best athlete. He was expelled following an incident that took place in chapel. Burlingham didn't know what it was; he was away in the sick-room at the time, and the accounts, I gather, varied considerably."

Harborough broke off to fill his pipe.

"Act IV will follow immediately," he said.

"All this is very interesting," observed Scott, "but I'm afraid that if it's your object to curdle our blood you haven't quite succeeded. And if you hope to spring a surprise on us in Act IV we must disillusion you." Freeman nodded assent.

" 'Scott who Edgar Wallace read,' " he began. "We're familiar nowadays with the whole bag of tricks. Black Mass is a certain winner; I put my money on him. Go on, Harborough."

"You don't give a fellow half a chance, but I suppose you're right. Act IV takes place in the study of the Rev. Montague Cuttler, Vicar of St. Mary Parbeloe, a former senior mathematics master, but before Edmed's time—a dear old boy, blind as a bat, and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. He knew nothing about the Dabblers. He wouldn't. But he knew a very great deal about the past history of the school, when it wasn't a school but a monastery. He used to

do a little quiet excavating in the vacations and had discovered what he believed to be the stone that marked the tomb of Abbot Polegate. The man, it appeared, had a bad reputation for dabbling in forbidden mysteries."

"Hence the name Dabblers, I suppose," said Scott.

"I'm not so sure," Harborough answered. "I think that more probably it's derived from *diabolos*. But, anyhow, from old Cuttler I gathered that the Abbot's stone was where Edmed had placed his summer-house. Now doesn't it all illustrate my theory beautifully ? I admit that there are no thrills in the story. There's nothing really supernatural about it. Only it does show the power of oral tradition when you think of a bastard form of the black mass surviving like this for hundreds of years under the very noses of the pedagogues."

"It shows too," said Freeman, "what we have to suffer from incompetent headmasters. Now at the place I was telling you about where I've entered my boy—and I wish I could show you their workshops and art rooms—they've got a fellow who is——"

"What was the name of the school?" interrupted Harborough.

"Whitechurch Abbey."

"And a fortnight ago, you say, two boys were expelled for a raid on a hen roost? "

"Yes."

"Well, it's the same place that I've been talking about. The Dabblers were out."

"Act V," said Scott, "and curtain. Harborough, you've got your thrill after all."

FULL CIRCLE

"WHAT'S the matter with you this morning, Benacre? You look bored stiff, and haven't made an intelligent remark since breakfast."

The three men were in the billiard room. It was raining hard. Curtis and Branxton-Hicks were knocking the balls about. Benacre lay sprawling on the divan, lost in thought.

"I'm dead tired," he said at last. "There's nothing to do, and if there was I haven't the energy to do it. There's no taste in my tobacco. That means I'm seriously unwell. But shall I get any sympathy? Of course not. If the weather clears up, and thank goodness it shows no sign of clearing, my aunt is almost certain to suggest that I should take the girls over to Peldon Farm to see the Roman excavations. I came down here for a thorough rest. I ought to be in bed. No one has any right to expect me to be agreeable. What an awful ass that fellow Abberton is."

"Yes, I can't say I've much use for him," said Branxton-Hicks. "I suppose he's got any amount of brains, but the worst of people like

that who are keen on psycho-analysis is that there is no arguing with them, and that they have no sense of humour. Omnipotence and omniscience. And yet I suppose he's got a leg that could be pulled."

"Four at least, the conceited little puppy," broke in Curtis; "and a tail. Did you see his quiet smile of superiority when Lady Mellaby told the story of the dream she had had at Le Touquet? He told me afterwards that it would be charitable if people were warned against undressing in public."

"Do they really mean that they find sense in dreams?" asked Benacre.

"Of course they do. I didn't know you were such a back number. Dreams give the show away every time. If you want to do the thing properly you keep a note book and pencil by the side of your bed and write down what you have dreamed as soon as you wake up, no matter what hour of the night it may be."

"What infernal rot," said Benacre testily, "I've a good mind to make up a dream and get him to interpret it."

Curtis was in the middle of a long break. "That's not half a bad idea," he said when it was finished. "What you want is something strange and inconsequential, and you mustn't lose your temper when he begins to unfold your lurid past. He'll probably tell you some home truths. Get on with your dream now, and

unburden yourself to Abberton in the library before the girls think of bridge."

Benacre for five minutes puffed at his pipe in silence. "So long, "he said at last; " the dream and the interpretation thereof shall be yours when I return."

Half an hour later he was back in the billiard room. "I would never have believed," he said, "that such folly walked the earth. I got talking with him and steered the conversation round with a light and airy touch. The dream I invented was this: I was lying in the four-poster bed in the blue room, when silently the door opened and two men appeared. One was an immense Zulu carrying an assegai in one hand and a candle in the other. The other was a crusader. At least I thought he was a crusader. The armour was a little sketchy, but he wore a surcoat or whatever you call it, on which a red cross was emblazoned on a white ground. I then disappeared behind a grey curtain, but I could hear everything they said. 'Little Willy sleeps,' whispered the crusader. The Zulu dropped his assegai on the floor. 'My God,' he stammered. 'He can't have gone!' I chuckled behind the curtain, thinking what fools they were; and then I awoke. Quite a good dream. What?"

" And the interpretation? "

"I may have got rather mixed with the interpretation, because I'm not familiar with their jargon, but as far as I could gather, I'm in a

state of conflict. I hide behind the grey curtain because I'm afraid to face reality. I've always been under the influence of my father; he is a parson, you must remember, and is represented by the crusader. I'm not quite sure what the Zulu stood for. But I know that it was very significant that he should be carrying the candle. I fancy that Abberton thought that I should have embraced the Zulu and given the crusader the boot. He certainly gave me the impression that he very much disliked my father, and considered his influence as wholly evil, especially when he heard that the Church and the army had both been seriously considered as possible careers before it was discovered that I had a dicky heart. Abberton was very bucked with my dream. I have promised in future to enter them in a notebook."

"And you didn't disillusion him?" asked Curtis.

"I hadn't the heart to. He was so very much in earnest about it all. But if ever his arrogance becomes unbearable I shall trot out the Zulu and the crusader and they shall smite him hip and thigh. And now I must get some letters written before the rain stops and I'm dragged out to Peldon."

"Poor old Benacre," said Curtis when he had left the room. " I'd like to have been present in the library when he tackled Abberton. Can't you picture him, as serious as an owl, blinking away

behind his spectacles? I doubt though whether he would ever succeed in cornering Abberton. If he told Abberton that his dream was pure invention, Abberton would still be capable of finding it significant. That's the worst of these fellows; they'd stoop to analyse upon their mother's grave."

"But if he can't fool Abberton," said Branxton-Hicks, "there is no reason why we shouldn't get a rise out of Benacre. Let us give him the stimulant he evidently needs. You were born to lead a crusade. You always cross your legs in repose. You will supply the quiet dignity, and I, with the magnificent physique of the Zulu, the impudence. We will give just that element of reality which is lacking in Benacre's dream. He pulls Abberton's leg; we pull Benacre's."

"And I wonder who will pull ours?" said Branxton-Hicks.

Ursula Mellaby, aged fourteen, and up to any mischief, was chosen as an accomplice, or more properly, mistress of the robes. She was solemnly sworn to secrecy on the bare blade of a Spanish rapier, but what the secret was she never quite understood, apart from the fact that it had to do with fancy dress. She it was who discovered a white ensign in the attic, an admirable surcoat. The shadowy coat of mail was more difficult until a grey woollen cardigan of Sir Frank Mellaby's was found among a pile

of clothes put aside for the next jumble sale. A trophy in the hall supplied Curtis with shield and assegai. Ursula, with commendable thoroughness, burnt a cork bath-mat in the kitchen garden.

"You've got to look niggerly," she said, "and there's an awful lot of white to blacken. Walnut juice would only make you brown, and besides, our tree's not big enough."

Benacre went early to bed. The bridge players retired soon after eleven, and Curtis and Branxton-Hicks took their drinks into the billiard room. At twelve they stole quietly upstairs to Curtis' bedroom. After a quarter of an hour they surveyed their handiwork with approval.

"We look rather like a scene from a missionary pageant," said Curtis as he stood before the glass. "One of the final tableaux illustrating the impact of Christianity on Africa, while the organ plays 'From Greenland's icy mountains,' and the silver collection is being taken. Have you got the candle all right? Lead on, Lobengula, and don't run your assegai into any of the pictures."

The bedroom door opened with a creak. They paused for a moment on the threshold to listen, but all was silent.

"Oft in the stilly night," said Curtis.
"Ere slumber's chain has bound me,

Fond memory brings the light
Of other days around me."

"Keep on the carpet, you fool. Those boards on the stairs creak abominably."

"I feel like one who treads alone
Some banquet hall deserted,
It's something fled, it's something shed
And all save he departed."—

"Tom Moore, you know, or Tom Hood; I've forgotten which, but I used to know the piece as a boy. Now down the long corridor to the right—what a magic there is in the words—and the door at the end of the passage is the Blue Room."

"The hopes and fears of boyhood's years
The words of love then spoken,
The eyes that shone——"

"Mind the draught doesn't blow the candle out when I open the door, and don't forget the book of words."

He turned the handle and the two men entered the room.

Curtis stood for a moment behind the curtain at the foot of the four-poster.

"Little Willie sleeps," he whispered, and stepped forward; but the huge Zulu with the

candle was ahead of him. He had seen something that Curtis had not seen.

Benacre lay strangely still, with one long thin arm outstretched on the coverlid. Impulsively his fingers clutched the wrist.

"My God!" he stammered. "He can't have gone!"

The candle which he was carrying dropped to the floor. There was the tinkle of shattered fragments of glass, the faint metallic echo of a still fainter laugh.

MRS. ORMEROD

AGATHA, my dear, you are a saint with your letters. They come every month as regularly as the tradesmen's bills and mine to you are hardly more frequent than the demands for Poor Rate. They have to be long to restore British credit. To-night I'm blissfully free; Bill has unexpectedly been called down to address a meeting of local big-wigs in his constituency, so you can picture me feeling all good inside—it isn't the cook's night out—chair drawn up to a blazing fire, coffee on the table beside me, and a fountain pen filled to capacity, which explains the blot.

I'm a pig I suppose to mention November luxuries like this when I remember how impossible you find the problem of maids. You ought to edit a new Famous Trials series. If you do I have a contribution to make. So here goes.

When you were last in England I think you met the Inchpens when they called one afternoon, though I expect you've forgotten all about it. Aleck Inchpen was a medical missionary in equatorial Africa, tall, thin, stooping,

dreadfully short-sighted, with a wisp of a beard; rather a big bug in the anthropological way, but a perfect dear. His wife was at the Royal Free with Nell Butterworth. You would never imagine she was a doctor. She rescues wasps from marmalade and puts them on the window sill with a saucer of water for their wash and brush up. She reminds me rather of the French mistress at St. Olave's and the strange thing is I like her enormously. These two have faced innumerable hardships, have lived alone hundreds of miles away from other white people, have adopted I don't know how many black twins who would otherwise have been left to die, twins apparently being unlucky, and have now come back to England, where Aleck is to write an epoch-making work on native psychology in the intervals of going round as a deputation—a ghastly job—lantern slides, curios, silver collection, vicar in the chair, reluctant hospitality and third-class railway fares. His wife is more or less crippled with rheumatoid arthritis, and her chief trouble is that she doubts if they are justified in having a joint income of five hundred a year with permission to live in a dilapidated house that is far too big for them and would give anyone else the fidgets.

Two more helpless lovable babes you never saw.

I spent a long week-end with them in

September. I wasn't exactly asked, in fact I fished for the invitation because I had a sort of feeling in my bones that I could help them. Be warned by me. If you ever meet any saints, take from them all that they can give you, but never interfere with them. The repercussions are simply awful.

If I had been wise I would have seen from Mary Inchpen's letter that she wasn't altogether anxious for me to come, but she warned me about the inconveniences of the simple life, and that put me on my mettle. Their cook-housekeeper, Mrs. Ormerod, was kind but slow and not used to visitors, and with a house like theirs that was really far too big for them it was impossible to keep things as nice as she would wish. I would have to make allowances for Mrs. Ormerod, who was one of those good women who were never properly appreciated. Reading between the lines, I came to the conclusion that Mrs. Ormerod was a dragon. I rather fancied myself as a fighter of dragons.

Viner's Croft was a derelict farm house. I didn't tell the Inchpens what train I was coming by because I didn't want to be met by Aleck in the second-hand car he had bought. (He is constitutionally incapable of managing a car.) So the carrier drove me from the station in his Ford along twisting lanes. Whenever the road forked we took the worst turning, and by the time he had deposited me at

the foot of the hollow in which Viner's Croft is tucked away I was thinking of your impassable seas of mud.

The door was opened by an unpleasant-looking little boy. He gazed at me through his spectacles with half open mouth—I could have boxed his ears—and then saying that he would fetch his mother, left me on the mat. I waited for three minutes and then Mrs. Ormerod, the housekeeper, appeared.

Agatha, my dear, if you rolled all your Famous Trials into one you wouldn't have the faintest idea of that abominable woman.

At first sight I put her down as about fifty, but I expect she was a good deal older than that. Anyhow her hair was dyed and her teeth were false. I've no objection to people improving their looks; on the contrary I'm grateful to them—but hair of a canary yellow and a cameo brooch of a disconsolate female weeping over an urn! She was dressed in a sickly sort of sea-green robe, with white cuffs turned up from podgy wrists and she wore a girdle from which was suspended a bunch of keys. Round her neck hung a chain, and from it dangled a curious jade ornament that I found out to be a whistle.

I gave my name and said that I believed I was expected.

"I believe you are," said Mrs. Ormerod. She looked me up and down in the way she might

have done a truant kitchen-maid arriving home an hour late after her evening out. And then she winked at me. At least any ordinary lay person would have called it a wink—"habit spasm" is the term the Inchpens use. Her left eyelid quivered and then suddenly closed. I felt rather like a mouse looking at a gorged owl that was too lazy to pounce before dusk. Mrs. Ormerod blew her whistle, the small boy came trotting down the corridor and seized my bag, while I followed the housekeeper the length of the rambling house to the drawing-room and safety.

Mary Inchpen gave me the warmest of welcomes. She is an enfolding sort of person, and wraps herself round you in a way that I could never put up with from anyone else. Aleck, I found, was spending the day in Maldon and wouldn't be back before evening, so we had tea by ourselves. She wasn't at all well, and had to walk with a stick, but she insisted on taking me all round the house before it was too dark. It's a regular rabbit-warren of a place, with steps up and steps down and only half the rooms are furnished. The rest are filled with lumber which Mary is gradually sorting out, so that Aleck will be able to unpack his great cases of curios from Africa—not the sort of things to dream about from what little I saw of them. There is no gas, of course, only oil lamps, and the water has to be pumped until the well

goes dry, after which they depend on big water butts, all green and slimy.

Mary was rather fidgety until Aleck got back safely just before supper time. However it seemed that he had only run over a chicken and scraped a little paint from the mudguard in passing a waggon. Anyone might do that in these narrow lanes. After supper Aleck disappeared for a quarter of an hour. He did this after every meal. I thought at first it was to smoke a cigarette in peace, but before I left I found he used to help Mrs. Ormerod to wash up.

We went to bed early. I'm a shocking sybarite in many ways and even in September I'm dependent on a hot-water bottle. When I unpacked my things I placed mine in a conspicuous position on the bed, where its leanness asked to be filled. Of course it wasn't. The sheets had been turned down, the blinds drawn and the bottle hung on a hook on the door. If Mrs. Ormerod hadn't taken my hint I most certainly was not going to take hers, even if it meant a journey down to the kitchen with a candle that as likely as not would blow out on the way. I got there at last, knocked at the door and was told to come in.

Mrs. Ormerod was seated in a comfortable armchair before the fire, busy sewing. I asked for some hot water. The kettle it appeared had already been removed from the fire, but if I

cared to wait I was at liberty to do so. No apologies, no attempt to set me at my ease, not even a chair was offered me. So I sat down and waited while Mrs. Ormerod went on with her sewing—rather a striking piece of embroidery that might have been an altar cloth. Long before the kettle boiled my patience was worn out. I filled the bottle myself at last with water that was little more than tepid, but not nearly so tepid as the good night I gave her.

"Good night," said Mrs. Ormerod without getting up from her chair. And then her left eye winked at me. I can see it now. "Curse you," it said, "for a meddlesome matty and maker of extra work, and if you think that you are going to get anything out of me you are mightily mistaken."

I stayed four days at Viner's Croft. One would have been enough to show me that Mrs. Ormerod was not only the Inchpens' housekeeper but their manageress. She had them completely under her thumb. Aleck cleaned the boots and the knives while Mary had the beastly business of trimming lamps; and all the time there was that objectionable little boy Simon, who could have done it perfectly well, instead of which Mary gave him lessons on the pianoforte and every day for an hour Aleck taught him, at his, or Mrs. Ormerod's request, Latin! I suppose she had some idea of his going into the Church, when the most he could look for

would be to get a job as a barber's assistant. I thought at first that he was Mrs. Ormerod's own child until Mary told me that she had adopted him. She had adopted others as well, but had been sadly disappointed in them.

"Poor Mrs. Ormerod," said Mary. "She has passed through deep waters."

I daresay she had, but she was on dry land now and looked as if she thoroughly appreciated the fact.

I don't want to do Mrs. Ormerod injustice. She had her points. She was scrupulously clean, and an excellent cook. She had typed out the manuscript of Aleck's new book, and was interested in it too. She knew how to make that child obey her. When she whistled he dropped whatever he was doing and made a bee line for her. But fancy whistling for a child! It makes me sick to think of it.

I lay awake at night pitying the Inchpens, exasperated with them, and wondering all the time how I could free them from the incubus of Mrs. Ormerod.

I have a theory of my own that good attracts evil. It shows it up of course and draws attention to it. The Inchpens always convinced me of selfishness—but it goes beyond that. Really good people, saint-like people, act as magnets to those who have more than a streak of the devil in them. That's why they have adventures and meet with folk that you or I

seldom see. That's why Mrs. Ormerod stays on with them, horrible parasite that she is.

You may say I was making a fuss about nothing. Here was a woman capable enough at her job and two kindly souls who seemed content to ignore what to me appeared impudence. But did Aleck really enjoy cleaning the knives and making his wife's early morning cup of tea? And wasn't Mary at heart humiliated when she half apologized one day for there being visitors to lunch, to say nothing of her seeing that woman going about the house with her keys hanging at her girdle? Of course she was. I know when people are unhappy, and I understand Mary's jargon. When she says she has much to be thankful for and is greatly blessed, she means that things are pretty bad, but they might be worse.

So, greatly daring, on the third morning of my stay at Viner's Croft I tackled Mary and without beating about the bush told her that I thought she ought to get rid of Mrs. Ormerod. She was almost annoyed.

"Why do all my friends say that?" she exclaimed. "It almost makes me afraid of asking them to stay here. You none of you really know Mrs. Ormerod. In some ways she isn't an easy person to live with; like many sensitive people she takes offence very readily. She knows that she is capable and likes to have things in her own hands. We ought not to judge her. She has had a

very unhappy life. That affliction of the eye means that she is debarred from positions of responsibility that her abilities would otherwise entitle her to and has to be content instead with an absurdly low salary. It isn't as if Aleck and I weren't used to living with queer people. You should have seen some of my African lady helps. And if we can't put up with Mrs. Ormerod who can? It's a challenge—no, I don't mean that, it's a privilege to help one whose good qualities make it difficult to help."

I had to leave it at that. The befogged perversity of Mary was impenetrable. There remained Aleck.

With the natural desire to postpone an unpleasant task I had already left things rather late and now it was almost laughable to see the anxiety with which Mary tried to guard against the possibility of my being left alone with her husband. While I shadowed Aleck, Mary shadowed me and betwixt and between were Mrs. Ormerod and the boy. I had at last to feign a headache, to lie on my bed for half an hour, and then when I had seen Simon go off to feed the fowls I slipped quietly downstairs and made my way to Aleck's study.

There I had it out with him.

I didn't waste any time over preliminaries but came straight to the point which wasn't Mrs. Ormerod but Mary. I told him—which was perfectly true—that she seemed to me to be

thoroughly run down and despite the country air not nearly so well as when I saw her in Town.

He agreed. "I am afraid it is my fault," he said. "This deputation work takes up a lot of time, and then there is my book as well. Mary *is* too much alone. Perhaps I ought to speak to Mrs. Ormerod. She once half suggested that she should share our meals. I expect we ought to have treated her more as one of the family, but as one gets older one sets a higher value on privacy and we have been accustomed all our lives to live alone. How would it be if I asked Mrs. Ormerod and Simon to have lunch with us—we might all have it in the kitchen—and then if the plan succeeded we might extend it to other meals? I am at times conscious that we are a divided household."

I could have shaken the man for his obtuseness.

"Aleck," I said, "just listen to me. You are living in a fool's paradise, and Mrs. Ormerod is the serpent. If you really care for your wife's peace of mind, not to mention your own, you have just got to get rid of the woman. She makes Mary's position impossible. In all sorts of ways she humiliates her. She can't even go into her own kitchen. Only yesterday when we were picking up windfalls in the orchard she told me how much she would have enjoyed making jam, but Mrs. Ormerod liked to make

it in her own time and in her own way. And I believe that Mary would gladly have typed out your manuscript for you. Why ever didn't you suggest it to her?"

Aleck pulled off his spectacles and wiped them nervously.

"Perhaps I ought to have done," he said, "but Mrs. Ormerod volunteered, and the book, my dear, the book is not exactly pleasant reading. I don't quite know whether Mary would have liked it. Of course I realize that Mrs. Ormerod is—what shall I say?—a rather queer woman, and one doesn't see all her good qualities at first. But I believe she is devoted to the boy. It would be difficult for her to find a home for him. One mustn't always do the easiest thing."

"Aleck," I said, "whether you like it or not, you are doing the easiest thing in letting matters drift like this. Mary won't give Mrs. Ormerod notice. She is not well enough to face up to it. But you are. The truth of the matter is that you are frightened of Mrs. Ormerod. She may be, as you say, a rather queer woman. Don't think about that, but concentrate on the fact that she is intensely selfish, thoroughly uncongenial, and is getting on your wife's nerves. Give her notice to-day while I'm with you. She will turn on me, and there will be an unholy row, but from the affection I have for you both I'm prepared to stand the racket."

He fidgeted with a paper knife.

"I am willing to admit that there may be something in what you say and I'm grateful for your speaking out like this. You mustn't be dragged into any quarrel though, and in any case a matter of this magnitude can't be decided upon in a hurry. I shall sleep on it and let you know my final decision before you leave."

You can imagine, my dear, that our last evening together was not one of the brightest and best. Aleck and Mary were glum, and since I didn't know what the silence might bring forth I had my work cut out in filling in the gaps in the conversation with the most awful rubbish. At last I pleaded my headache—by this time it was real enough—and the fact that I was leaving first thing in the morning—as an excuse for bed.

After my first unsuccessful attempt to get a hot-water bottle I had not bothered about it. After all, the nights were not cold. Really I supposed I funked going down to the kitchen to face Mrs. Ormerod. You can imagine then my surprise when she knocked at my bedroom door with my bottle in her hand, filled and gloriously hot.

"I thought perhaps you would like it to-night," she said. "They are comforting if you chance to wake in the early hours." Then came the wink. "Good night!"

I wondered as I lay in bed if she thought I

might, after all, be worth propitiating. But I didn't wonder any longer when I woke up about two to find the blessed thing had leaked and had soaked the bedclothes and mattress. It was a new bottle, too. By the light of my candle I surveyed the damage. I could see no puncture, so I unscrewed the stopper. The rubber washer was torn, and of course Mrs. Ormerod had torn it. She must have gone to sleep chuckling. I remembered her "if you chance to wake in the early hours." That wink of hers, like a witty man's stutter, was her way of pointing her remarks. I wondered if she were awake then and if Aleck and Mary were letting their minds wander along the dark passages of Viner's Croft in search of peace. I wondered if I should have the courage to ring the bell and summon Mrs. Ormerod from the vasty deep. But Mary might come instead. Mary who had lived for months in rain sodden huts in tropical Africa. Pioneers! Oh Pioneers! I fixed up some sort of bed on the hardest of sofas and, with the candle still burning to comfort me, fell at last into a restless, aching sleep.

It was half-past six when I awoke to gaze with gathering resentment upon the disorder of my room. In less than three hours Viner's Croft would see me no more. There was satisfaction in that. Why not anticipate my return to civilization and ring for an early morning cup of tea? Such a demand would annoy Mrs.

Ormerod very much and I wanted to annoy her. I gave a tug at the old-fashioned bell-pull and waited. Silence for five minutes and then a pad, pad along the corridor and a knock at the door.

"Come in!" I said.

Enter Mrs. Ormerod in a mauve wrapper and bedroom slippers, registering injured innocence and anxious solicitude except for the left eye, which was wholly malevolent.

"I am most awfully sorry to trouble you," I said, "but do you think you could get me a cup of tea? I've been lying awake for hours; the bottle leaked in the night and I'm chilled to the bone."

"I'll light the fire at once and put the kettle on. No trouble I assure you," (wink) "most unforeseen."

The boy Simon brought up the tea very weak and barely tepid. He held it out to me with a sickly grin and then darted off, leaving the door open. Mrs. Ormerod had whistled for him. I didn't drink it. For all I knew it might have been doctored—poison she wouldn't have dared to try. It went out of the window to water the Michaelmas daisies.

Breakfast. A lively meal. Aleck jocular over his porridge and Mary finding it hard to express her gratitude for the four delightful days I had given them. Did I want to say good-bye to Mrs. Ormerod? Oh, I had already seen her that

morning, and Simon too! She didn't want to hurry me, but she always insisted on Aleck taking plenty of time when he drove to the station, and—in a whisper to me—"You won't talk to him while he's driving, will you? He's rather short-sighted and the car requires all his attention."

Dear Mary! How easy it was to see through her. She thought that I thought that the time for the great *tête-à-tête* had arrived.

I said very little to Aleck; his spirits were boisterously high and I could see that he had come to some decision, though it wasn't until the train was moving off from the platform that he told me that as soon as he got back to Viner's Croft he was going to give a month's notice to Mrs. Ormerod.

Did he do it? No, my dear. In this queer world, this very queer world, there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip. What exactly happened I never heard either from Aleck or Mary. There came rumours, and for my own peace of mind I wrote to Mrs. Wilson, the vicar's wife, whom I had met at lunch at Viner's Croft.

Aleck on his way back from the station had run into Simon and had half killed the boy. It seems that he had been standing by the road-side, a hundred yards from the house, waiting for the car, when, hearing Mrs. Ormerod's whistle, he darted across the road and the mudguard caught him in the back. They think that it is

quite likely he will live, but it will be months before he can be moved. "How fortunate," wrote Mrs. Wilson, "that the Inchpens are both doctors. Poor Simon has given Mary a new object in life. She lives for the day when he will be well enough to go with his mother to the sea. But he is horribly frail, and though I've never breathed it to Mary, I fear he will never leave the house. The strange Mrs. Ormerod bears up wonderfully."

Cheer up, Agatha. You have never had to deal with a woman like that. She can't really touch the Inchpens; they are too good. But ordinary mortals like you and me? Ugh! I shall dream of Mrs. Ormerod to-night.

PELLY'S GAMBIT

SIX days before Christmas and two years before the War; it was a curious conjunction as events showed, a fatal conjunction indeed, and not only for Graham Pelly, who sat in the deserted lounge of the Royal George Hotel, pondering on how best to turn to good account this hastily planned visit to Sidmouth.

His affairs were in a desperate condition. He owed money right and left. He had lost his job in Los Angeles, where, for nearly a year, he had worked for the films, and the American police wanted him. They apparently were the only people who did.

Graham Pelly carried lightly the burden of what he called misfortune. He was tall and handsome, and always managed to dress well. There was nothing of the actor about him except his knowledge of a winning smile and how to use it. You would have had to be a long time in his company before discovering that he was something less than a leisured and cultivated gentleman.

His immediate problem was a difficult one. Miss Pelly, his father's half-sister, lived in

Sidmouth. She was old, an invalid, and very well off. As Graham knew—she had told him of it in her last letter—she had cut him out of her will. That was only another reason for a last attempt to extract something from her before it was too late.

How exactly did matters stand?

Miss Pelly had some natural affection for him, which he, like a fool, had frittered away. She was of course bitterly disappointed in the little she knew of his career of broken promises and unachieved fulfilment. He realized that she had lost faith in him five years ago, when no reply had come to his cabled request from South Africa for money to pay his fare home. On the other hand there was the information he had recently wormed out of that girl he had met in Brighton, who for three months had acted as her companion. It seemed that Miss Pelly had outlived her Anglo-Catholic phase and was now absorbed in some new American brand of theosophy.

Was there, he wondered, an opening to be found there?—some bizarre gambit which he could use to play upon her superstition.

Miss Pelly had always been superstitious. Wasn't that the reason for her giving him the old emerald necklace to dispose of? And hadn't she once refused to make him an allowance on the thirteenth of the month, declaring that for her, thirteen had always been an especially unlucky number?

If he could work on her sense of the superstitious, and combine with it a touch, perhaps more than a touch, of the repentant prodigal, and if only he had the courage to stick out for something big, Miss Pelly was not the sort of woman to do things by halves. She was, he knew, capable of generosity, and Graham determined that it would not be his fault if she lacked the opportunity. Fifteen hundred pounds would set him on his feet. Two thousand—he doubted if he could screw up his courage to ask for that—would be enough to get him in with Waterer and the crowd who were floating the new motor components syndicate. While he remembered, he would write to David Waterer and ask for a twenty-four hours' extension of the option.

He strolled over to the writing table. Three sheets of writing paper, a single envelope, and four pens, only one of which had not a crossed nib, were typical of the "Royal George" two years before the War.

Graham glanced at the calendar—December 19th. He dipped his pen in the sediment at the bottom of the ink-pot and dated the letter, using as he always did a numeral for the month. Then he stopped. What an extraordinary coincidence! And might it not be the very thing that he had been looking for, the very thing which, if suitably manipulated, would serve his purpose?

Hurriedly he finished his letter and then, with his pipe newly charged, sank back into the cushioned depths of the most comfortable of the armchairs before the fire. Graham Pelly had to rehearse a part.

. . . . .

Before and after lunch he made a few inquiries in the town. Miss Pelly, he found, still received occasional visitors, and though her health seemed to be failing she was not wholly confined to bed. For his purpose—if he were to get full value from this amazing coincidence—it was essential that he should be with her from seven to seven-thirty. If he called in time for tea, would he be able to drag out the visit for three hours or would he be sent away with a flea in his ear after a bare ten minutes? It was a difficult point to decide since by putting his visit too late he might find Miss Pelly unable to receive callers. It ended by his leaving the "Royal George" soon after six, just as a faint drizzle was beginning to fall.

He had no difficulty in finding Adelaide Lodge in its quiet road and walked up the drive through a garden dark with evergreens to ring at the door of a neat, old-fashioned house, with a creeper-covered veranda dripping rain.

Miss Pelly was at home, but the old maid-servant seemed doubtful if she would receive

visitors. He took out a card, wrote across it, "I am only in Sidmouth for a few hours. Don't see me if it would disturb you," and following the maid into the breakfast-room sat down to wait the turn of his luck. As he listened to her steps slowly mounting the stairs he felt a curious feeling of elation. Something told him that he was master of the situation. He held the trump cards in his hand; all that was necessary was for him to keep his head and to watch for an opening. In the corner the grandfather's clock—he remembered it at Leamington—ticked out the seconds. At last, after nearly five minutes, the maid returned. Miss Pelly would be glad to see him if he would come upstairs.

The room into which he was shown might well have been the Leamington drawing-room. There were the same bookcases, the same china cupboards, the same couch drawn up to the fire—but shaded from it by a screen—on which Miss Pelly lay propped up with cushions, a frail little old lady with black, quickly glancing bird-like eyes.

"Well, Graham," she said, "this is a wholly unexpected visit. Draw up that armchair to the fire and let me hear the news of your latest wanderings. You will excuse my not offering you tea. My companion, Miss Candler, is out for a few hours, and Hannah to-day is single-handed."

Graham Pelly began to talk, at first with a diffidence that was half real and half assumed. He told a tale of continued failure, the sort of story that Miss Pelly had expected, but he told it in a new way. He did not whine and he did not brag, and for once she thought him entirely untheatrical, even allowing herself to fall under the charm of his smile.

"I've mostly myself to blame," he said. "I've played the fool—cheated other people and cheated myself into the bargain. But all the same luck has been against me. I didn't believe in it at one time. I do now, and that's partly why I'm here. Down at Brighton the other day"—and here Graham spoke with more hesitation for he was making up the story as he went on—"something induced me to go and see a professional medium. I've never had anything to do with that sort of thing; even now I doubt if I believe in it. She told me much that I already knew about myself, and one thing that I didn't know."

"And that?" interrupted Miss Pelly.

"Was that December 19th was my lucky day. That's why I came down here. I know what you are going to say. I'm here to cadge, and in a sense it's true. I want money desperately badly. I know you have cut me out of your will and I don't wonder at it. But when that woman said 'December 19th is your lucky day; it won't be lucky though next year,' I made up my mind

that I would put her words to the test. You were the only person I knew who could bring me good luck, and I turned to you.

"It's like this," he went on. "The recording angel alone couldn't count the new leaves I've turned over. I've lost faith in new resolves that are of my making. But if my luck were to turn—and you could turn it—if I were to meet with a new starting-point not of my choosing, if I could see in it the hand of Fate, then, why then, I do believe that I could still make good."

"If you were assured of the fatted calf," said Miss Pelly, "you would play the part of repentant prodigal. No—perhaps 'play the part' is rather hard. But tell me, Graham, this woman you saw at Brighton (and as likely as not she was an impostor) said, if I heard you rightly, that December 19th wouldn't be your lucky day next year. I wonder what she exactly meant by that? Had you told her anything about me? Did she know that you had a rich relation who was ailing? . . . who, for example, might be dead next year?"

Miss Pelly's fingers played nervously with the fringe of her shawl and a faint flush came into her cheeks. Graham noticed that for the first time his words had made the sort of impression that he had intended.

"No," he answered, "she knew nothing about you. If I had thought of it like that I would never have mentioned the matter."

He took up the poker and began to stir the fire.

"Don't fidget, Graham, I beg. How much money do you want?"

He braced himself with an effort.

"I owe about a thousand," he said, "and with nine hundred pounds to invest I could get a permanent post in a company with excellent prospects. I want nineteen hundred to two thousand pounds and I might as well ask for the moon."

To his surprise Miss Pelly was silent. Then after an interval she went on: "I happen to have three thousand pounds on deposit at the bank. I'm waiting until I hear from my brokers about an investment. You are not modest in your demands," she added with a smile which quickly gave place to a frown.

"December 19th, 1912," she went on slowly. "What is there about it that should make it in any way significant? Why should the same date next year not do as well? 1913. That of course for me would be an unlucky year. 1912—why, Graham, don't you see? I've written no letters to-day but if I had I should have dated them 19. 12. 1912. It's strange that the two numbers should come together. And the sum you wanted was between nineteen hundred and two thousand."

As she spoke she half closed her eyes and so failed to see the glance that Graham gave at the

clock. It was a few minutes before seven, time to strike while the iron was hot, to work his coincidence for all it was worth.

"By Jove!" he said. "There *is* something in the idea of lucky numbers after all! When that Brighton woman spoke she wasn't thinking of your death at all. It was the conjunction of times, of years, of months, of days, yes, and of hours and minutes. 1912. Don't you see? Don't you remember the Continental timetables? 1912 is the same as twelve minutes past seven. In less than a quarter of an hour you could write, 19.12, 19.12, 1912. You could write it then but never again. If I am to turn over a new leaf it will be in 1912, on the 19th day of the 12th month, at the 19th hour and the twelfth minute. Fate says it three times over."

"Graham," said Miss Pelly, "will you be so good as to hand me that medicine bottle from the table by the window, and the glass? My hand is a little shaky. The bottle is measured. Just pour me out a dose."

She took it with a wry smile.

"That's better. These modern doctors don't take much trouble to disguise the flavour or to soften a prognosis. And now if you will ring the bell."

With a strange feeling of exultation he pressed back the old fashioned handle. It was as if he had pulled a trigger. From somewhere in the basement came the jingle of the bell.

"What time do you make it, Graham?" asked Miss Pelly anxiously. "I have an idea that the clock is slow."

"I set my watch by the clock in the post office this morning," he said. "It's four minutes past seven."

Giving him only half her attention, she only half heard his reply. Both were listening to the old maid's slowly approaching footsteps.

"I want you to bring me my writing case, Hannah. I left it somewhere in the bedroom, on the bureau I think, but if it's not there it will be in one of the drawers of the dressing table. Be as quick as you can, I'm in a hurry."

She drummed impatiently with her fingers on the side of the couch.

"Whatever has taken the woman?" she asked. "I believe she thinks that slow service is good for invalids. Ah! Here she comes. You needn't wait, Hannah. Put the writing case on the table."

Miss Pelly fumbled in her heavy spectacle case for her glasses, opened the writing case and took from it her cheque book and fountain pen.

"I'm going to give you another chance, Graham," she said. "In any case you won't be likely to forget this day, but you must be well launched on your new career. I shall make out a cheque to you for nineteen hundred and twelve pounds. No, don't thank me now. We haven't time. Take your watch and call out the

minutes. I shall sign it at twelve minutes past the hour."

"Seven nine," said Graham.

Miss Pelly began to fill in the cheque, and as she did so she repeated aloud the words "December 19th, 1912. Pay Mr. Graham Pelly or order nineteen hundred and twelve pounds."

"Seven ten," said Graham.

"My handwriting is woefully shaky, but I dare say it will pass muster. Now I must fill in the figures 1912."

"Seven eleven."

"I've always believed in lucky and unlucky numbers. 1912, 1912, 1912. There's luck in three's."

"Seven twelve," said Graham. "And now you can sign."

So intent was he in looking at the hands of the watch that he did not see that Miss Pelly's face had changed suddenly.

"No, I can't sign! " she almost screamed. "I can't sign! Your Brighton woman was right after all. She said next year would be no use to you. She meant that I shouldn't be here then. One, nine, one, two; add them together; they make thirteen. It's a warning for me, Graham, it's a warning for me!"

"What nonsense!" he exclaimed, his face white with anger. "Don't be hysterical. Pull yourself together and sign here!"

Miss Pelly half rose from her couch.

"I won't sign," she said, "nobody can make me, and you must not look at me like that. Take your eyes away from me and go!"

"I think you will sign," he said. "I don't want anything unlucky to happen, but——"

"Now you are threatening me. This is intolerable. I shall——"

Miss Pelly never said what she would do. She sat up for a moment, her fingers clenched convulsively, her eyes dilated with fear, and then the pitifully frail body collapsed. Graham felt clumsily for the pulse at the wrist, but her hand lay lifeless in his.

What was he to do? The cheque lay before him on the table lacking only her signature. If his luck had failed he must trust to cunning to complete the evening's work.

Hurriedly he glanced round the room. The revolving bookcase—that would give him what he wanted. He no longer heard the ticking of the clock as he took down one volume after another until he came across a book of essays on the fly leaf of which was written in the delicate handwriting he knew so well *Rachel M. Pelly*.

Drawing up his chair to the table he seized the pen and with the book open before him gave all his mind to the task in hand.

The wind had risen and the December rain was beating fiercely against the windows. A steam wagon passed along the road, shaking the house with its vibrations.

And slowly in slippered feet old Hannah the maid came down the passage. She knocked at the door and opened it without waiting for a reply to witness Graham Pelly in the very act of forging a dead woman's signature.

THE FOLLOWER

"THEY say miracles are past; and we have our philosophical persons to make modern and familiar things supernatural and causeless. Hence it is we make trifles of terrors; ensconcing ourselves into seeming knowledge, when we should submit ourselves to an unknown fear."

Lyn Stanton had found at last the quotation he wanted in *All's Well that Ends Well*, and he had spent the best part of an hour in looking for it. He drew up his chair to the fire and filled his pipe. If only he could hit on the idea for the story, something uncanny, something sinister. It was not yet ten o'clock on an April morning, but he was just in the mood to submit himself to an unknown fear. The story was in him or around him, in the air. He knew the effect he wanted to get, but what was the story itself? Why wouldn't it take shape, come out into the open so that he could see at least the dim outline, the skeleton rather, which later he could clothe at will?

What was it, he asked himself, that was to account for this half pleasurable feeling of

tingling apprehension? He had had, it was true, a disturbed night, for he had awakened from a bad dream about two, to lie for an hour gazing through the uncurtained window at a light burning in the Old Vicarage of Winton Parbeloe half a mile away across the valley. Canon Rathbone, the oriental scholar, was living there, he had heard, with a German friend, Dr. Curtius. The light which would not go out had kept him awake. Canon Rathbone and Dr. Curtius had kept him awake, though they were half a mile away across the valley.

"We have our philosophical persons to make modern and familiar," he repeated, and then stopped. The idea for his story was coming. He began to see the vague, shadowy outline. The skeleton became clear.

At the end of half an hour Stanton took a new exercise book from his desk and wrote on the back of it *The Follower* with the date. Then slowly but without erasures, he began the summary.

"An old scholar searching for manuscripts in the monasteries of Asia Minor comes across some palimpsests of an unusual character. The collector's fever overpowers him—usually the mildest and most honest of men—and with the help of a monk he acquires the documents by means which others would have undoubtedly described as shady. The monk persuades the scholar to take him back to England, since

his help will be invaluable in deciphering the manuscripts. They live together in a remote country village. With extraordinary difficulty they make out the meaning of the palimpsests, which appear to be not fragments of a lost gospel but something very different. The scholar is held fascinated and pursues. The monk, who passes in the district as a Doctor of Divinity, is his constant companion and follower."

Stanton was pleased with himself. The idea was a good one. It might even be worked up into a long story, but on the whole he felt inclined to keep it short, three or four thousand words perhaps. He didn't see how it would end, but he wasn't worried about that. Very likely it would end itself. The main thing was to get the atmosphere right—the seeming knowledge and the unknown fear.

Canon Rathbone, of course, and Dr. Curtius had given him the germ of the idea. If he hadn't woken at two in the morning and seen the light burning in the Old Vicarage, half a mile away across the valley, there would have been no story. "And Shakespeare too," he said to himself. "If I hadn't found that passage I was looking for, I shouldn't have got into the right mood."

Lyn Stanton sat down to lunch with the feeling of a morning lazily and not unsatisfactorily spent. He would do some strenuous

digging in the garden in the afternoon, he told himself, and then put in a couple of hours' work on his novel between tea and supper. The short story could simmer. After a day or two he would have another look at it and see how it was getting on.

But his equanimity was upset by his sister announcing that Mrs. Bramley and Miss Newton were coming to tea. He had no particular fault to find with the vicar's outspoken wife. She was quite in keeping with Winton Parbeloe. But Miss Newton always got on his nerves. It was hard luck having as a neighbour a free-lance journalist with a malicious pen. He disliked her literary gossip, chiefly because he knew that she would not scruple to work up some chance remark of his into a paragraph in some Book-Lovers' Causerie. Probably she wanted to pump him about his new novel. A dangerous woman who would have to be humoured.

So Stanton took his spade and in his shirt-sleeves worked out his resentment on the stony patch of ground that he was double-trenching. He saw the visitors arrive soon after half-past three, gave them a quarter of an hour for garnering the first light crop of parochial scandal, and then with a reluctance adequately concealed joined them in the drawing-room. After all Mrs. Bramley was quite an authority on roses. Tea had just been served and Stanton

was trying to give Miss Newton a non-committal reply to a question about the significance of a modern poet whose work he particularly disliked, when he heard the garden gate click and saw two figures approaching up the long gravel path.

The first was an old clergyman, clean-shaven, rather down at heel, who walked with a rapid and yet shuffling gait. He was followed by a tall man with a long black beard dressed in an old-fashioned frock coat.

The bell rang, and a minute later the maid announced Canon Rathbone and Dr. Curtius.

"I'm afraid, Miss Stanton," said the Canon, when the introductions had been made, "that our call is a little irregular. We are strangers to your delightful village, and I have spent so much of my life in out-of-the-way places that I am all too apt to ignore the ordinary rules of etiquette. We keep very much to ourselves at the Old Vicarage, and quite unconsciously I am afraid we frighten our visitors away. But we want to be neighbourly—I assure you we want to be neighbourly."

The old gentleman was obviously nervous, but Miss Stanton had the gift of putting people at their ease, and distinguished strangers were not too common at Winton Parbeloe.

Mrs. Bramley, however, had a grievance to air.

"I am sorry, Canon Rathbone," she said,

"that we have not had the pleasure of seeing you at church."

The old man looked up with a start, but it was Dr. Curtius who spoke. "Asthma," he said "de asthma."

"Yes, yes," Canon Rathbone went on hurriedly. "It is a curious thing, a very real misfortune, but I find, I find that the use of incense invariably brings on an attack. I have to be most careful."

"And Dr. Curtius," said the undaunted Mrs. Bramley, "he suffers from asthma too?"

"Dr. Curtius," replied Canon Rathbone, "is not a member of the Church of England."

It was at this point that Hilda Newton changed the conversation. "I wish," she said, "you would tell us something about your discoveries, Canon Rathbone. I know you must have had the most thrilling adventures in the East. We in Winton Parbeloe lead such humdrum lives—foxes are the only things we hunt you know—that it's hard for us to imagine the excitement of tracking down some priceless old manuscript."

Canon Rathbone put down his cup. "You are quite right, my dear young lady," he said; "the fascination is extreme, the fascination is quite remarkable." And then to Stanton's surprise he began to talk. He was no longer the nervous little clergyman, but the enthusiast carried away by his subject. He spoke of the

monasteries of Greece and Asia Minor and Sinai, of libraries ransacked again and again by scholars, of piles of rubbish where even yet documents of extraordinary value could be found, of monks who seemed simple and ignorant but were often scholarly and astute, knowing quite well the worth of what they kept in secret hiding-places. "Dr. Curtius could tell you more about that," he said. "His first-hand experience is far greater than mine, but unfortunately he speaks little English."

"Dat ees so," said Dr. Curtius, breaking silence for the second time. "Greek, yes, Latin, yes, Armenian, yes, Syriac, and Aramaic, but Engleesh hardly no."

"The secret languages of dead mysteries," said Miss Newton, "with words for things and experiences that mean nothing to us poor humdrum mortals. How I envy you!"

"What's that? What's that?" asked Canon Rathbone nervously. "As I was saying, the task of deciphering these palimpsests is extraordinarily difficult. You must remember that——"

But Stanton's eyes were fixed on Dr. Curtius. He had eaten nothing and was now slowly stirring his tea. Why was it that the motion looked so clumsy? Because he was stirring it from left to right, of course, and because all the time he was watching like a great black cat the bird-like little figure of his friend on the sofa. What a horribly luxuriant beard the man

has, thought Stanton, and then he found himself trying to see if he had a tonsure, only to avert his eyes hurriedly when Dr. Curtius looked up into his face with an enigmatic smile.

Canon Rathbone was still talking.

". . . they were of course difficult to procure, extremely difficult to procure, and to tell you the truth we had considerable trouble in getting them out of the country. The task of deciphering them is laborious. We burn the midnight oil, Miss Stanton, we burn the midnight oil, and my eyesight is, unfortunately, not as good as it was, but Dr. Curtius is always ready to act as my spectacles."

"It all sounds perfectly thrilling," said Miss Newton. "And when are the results to be published?"

"I am afraid," said Canon Rathbone, "I am afraid it may be rather difficult to find a publisher."

"But the whole story, Canon! It's a shame that it should be wasted. You should get Mr. Stanton here to write it for you." Dr. Curtius and Canon Rathbone looked up at the same moment. Their eyes met, and it seemed to Stanton that Curtius nodded his head.

"Do I understand," said Canon Rathbone, "that Mr. Stanton is an author? I am afraid I did not know. I am afraid I may have been rather indiscreet, a little precipitate. You will, of

course, Mr. Stanton, regard what I have said as strictly confidential. I mean, I mean——"

"We know exactly what you mean," said Miss Newton with a laugh. "You don't want fact turned into delightful fiction."

"I am sure Mr. Stanton knows what I mean. I like to think of myself, Miss Stanton, as a philosophical person who makes modern and familiar, things . . . things that are rather difficult to understand. I fear, I distrust—you will forgive me I know, Mr. Stanton, quite probably I am quite mistaken—the imagination of the writer of fiction. Such a dangerous gift it always seems to me, so disturbingly dangerous. Dr. Curtius, we must be going. Such a very pleasant visit, Miss Stanton, my . . . my asthma you know, Mrs. Bramley, impossible almost for me to get to church. You must all come and visit us at the Old Vicarage. So very kind of you, such a very enjoyable afternoon. Don't trouble to see us to the door, Mr. Stanton. I assure you we can find our own way out."

"Good-bye," said Miss Stanton, "I am afraid we have done little to entertain Dr. Curtius."

"I am happy," he said as he bowed low over her hand, "to be Canon Rathbone's—what do you say? Disciple? No, follower."

Stanton went with his visitors to the door. He put his hand for a moment into the hot, moist hand of Canon Rathbone, into the cold, dry hand of Dr. Curtius. Without a smile he

said good-bye and watched them depart down the narrow, gravel path, the old man leading with that curious shuffling gait that yet was almost half a run, the other, black-bearded, black-coated, following in his shadow with long inexorable strides.

He didn't feel like facing the chatter of the drawing-room. Something queer had happened, and he didn't know what it was. Of course he couldn't write that story now. Even if Hilda Newton hadn't been there he couldn't have written it. But it didn't matter. It would only have been a trifle anyway.

But why had they spiked his guns? How did they know that he had guns to spike? Why had he been so unmistakably warned off? Unless . . . unless he had got too near the truth? What was the truth?

With a feeling almost of relief he opened the drawing-room door. The chatter at least was reassuring. He feared to submit himself to an unknown fear.

PART II

THE KING WHO COULD NOT GROW A BEARD

HE was known in his capital as Adrian the Good. That was in his lifetime. After his death he was sometimes spoken of as Adrian the Insignificant. The epithet was ill-chosen, as it in no way distinguished him from the seven Adrians who had preceded him.

He lived in the days before the War when the music played by the Concert of Europe was sacred music. He was dead when the jazz band of modern diplomacy struck up.

Adrian's kingdom had been preserved by the Concert of Europe for two reasons. It afforded eligible partners for petty German princes, and added immensely to the interest of school boys and a few quietly disposed citizens, by constantly issuing, and as constantly withdrawing, postage stamps of gorgeous colour and design.

It was owing to the all-important question of the new stamps that the King's beard cropped up.

The exchequer was low. The last issue of

1, 1½, 2, 2½, 3, 3½, and so on, up to the magnificent 25-cent stamp, which accurately depicted a corner of the famous Zoological Gardens of the metropolis, had failed. A great Power whose sovereign was an ardent philatelist, had intimated to the Postmaster-General through the usual diplomatic channels that Adrian was overdoing it. The Imperial album had already overflowed the twenty pages allotted to his country and, until the Imperial printers had inserted the fifty extra pages which a wise foresight had demanded, the suggestion was made (in this case tantamount to an order) that no new stamps should be produced.

And so it happened that for three years Adrian was obliged to confine his kingly energies to negotiating the marriage of two sisters, an aunt, and a second cousin. His efforts were successful, and through the instrumentality of his private secretary, who was an American on his mother's side, he secured a a considerable portion of the profits of the cinematograph companies represented at the uniquely interesting ceremonies. In the case of his aunt he even revived the ancient service of betrothal. That film, "so full," as the newspapers described it, "of the quaint old-world customs of the Balkans," had an unprecedented success in all the picturedromes of Europe. At the end of three years the most eligible members of his Royal House had been given in marriage, but,

what was more important, the Imperial album had had the fifty extra pages inserted with such extraordinary skill, that only a bookbinder, stationer, or other tradesman could have detected that they were not part and parcel of the original volume.

The meeting of the Privy Council, over which Adrian presided in person, called to consider the nature of the new stamps, was long and tiring.

The Minister for Education (his post was often regarded as a sinecure), after carefully perusing the State Archives, had discovered that that year was the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Avelina.

Adrian was not well versed in his country's history. In order to be the better fitted for kingship, he had received the greater part of his education in Paris.

"What of that?" he remarked.

The Minister for Education tactfully reminded his Royal Master that on that memorable occasion Adrian the Magnificent had driven back the Turks to the southern bank of the river Dubio.

Adrian yawned. "I know nothing about the river," he said.

The Minister ventured to remind His Majesty of the immense trout, scaling nearly three-and-a-half pounds, which His Majesty had caught in its waters last year.

Adrian recollected the river perfectly.

"It is true," said the Minister for Education, "that the Turks recrossed the river in the ensuing spring; but, nevertheless, the name of Dubio has always been rightly associated with the golden age of our country. The scene at the ford, with the flower of our chivalry beating back the invader, would make an admirable subject for the twenty-five-cent stamp. With a long stamp like that we could easily get in both sides of the river."

"For the one-cent stamp," said the King thoughtfully, "we might have the three-and-a-half-pounder. It might help to attract tourists. I'm told these English will go anywhere to fish."

The designs for the stamps of other denominations were decided upon with greater difficulty. It was, however, eventually agreed that the central idea of each should be the King's head crowned with bays.

"It will not be a striking feature," said the Minister for War, as the Privy Council broke up. "None of His Majesty's features are."

That was where the question of the King's beard came in. For the French artist to whomthe commission was given was forcibly struck by the weakness of Adrian's chin. It was indeed deplorably weak—abruptly receding. A profile would be impossible, but if the portrait were full face, the strength of the nose, long, arched and

massive, would be lost. For many days the artist pondered over the dilemma. He thought at one time that, by bringing the bays right round the monarch's head, the chin could be hidden. He even imagined that, by placing the grand diamond cross of the Order of Saint Porphyrian the Martyr (second class) somewhere in the region of the Royal collar stud, the effulgence from that jewel might be made effectively to mask the lower part of the face.

Small wonder that, harassed as he was by these contending theories, the despondent artist neglected to shave.

It was on the morning of the third day when, having taken up his razor, he was moodily proceeding to test the blade, that the solution of the problem came to him with all the vivid suddenness of a flash of lightning.

"The King must grow a beard."

The idea was excellent. Seizing a piece of chalk, he made a rapid series of sketches of the august profile. It was magnificent! If the beard was sharply pointed, the face of the monarch became brisk and energetic; if the beard was full and sweeping, it fulfilled the promise of majestic stateliness given by the nose.

That evening, André the artist obtained a private interview with the Lord Chamberlain and received the assurance of his help.

"The plan is certainly worth considering,"

said that official. "With a beard such as you have described, our King might go far. We must think of posterity too. We could never put up an equestrian statue on his decease, so long as his chin remains as it is."

"I think even that might be managed," said André, who was a man of infinite resource. "You see he could be brandishing a sword, and the sword could have a tassel attached to the hilt, which could effectively screen the lower portion of his face."

"Perhaps," said the Lord Chamberlain dubiously; "but the beard would be better."

"Undoubtedly," said André.

The Lord Chamberlain was a man of consummate tact. He broached the subject next morning, when Joachin, the Royal valet, was shaving his master.

"Your Majesty's skin is very tender," said Joachin, who was in many ways a privileged person. "Your Majesty should try a little Crème de Papignon. Your Majesty will find that it soothes the skin, renders it supple and of a velvet-like texture, and promotes the capillary circulation."

"Capillary fiddlesticks!" said Adrian testily. "How many times have I told you not to talk to me when you are shaving? What is the use of being a king if I have to listen to a barber's long-winded nonsense just like any ordinary person? You'll be telling me that my hair is

dry or something of the sort next.—What is the matter, Count?"

"I was only thinking," said the Lord Chamberlain, "that, if I were king, rather than put up with the insufferable process of shaving, I should grow a beard." And he surreptitiously jogged Joachin in the back, who gave his master the cut direct with results disastrous to the blood royal.

Adrian's knowledge of French expletives was both extensive and idiomatic. The Count seized the opportunity, rang the bell, and ordered the lackeys to remove the offending barber. Then taking from his pocket the large 25-cent stamp (the one which depicted a corner of the Zoological Gardens of the metropolis), he placed it gently but firmly on Adrian's chin. The hæmorrhage having been effectually controlled, he sat down by the King's bed and expatiated at length on the beauty of André's drawings, which he drew from his pocket, dwelling in turn on the shape and texture of the beard, its size, dignity and absolute fitness.

"Oh! all right," said the King at last, "though the whole thing is a confounded nuisance. It means another visit from the Court photographer. You will have to get round the Queen Consort, Count. I shall have enough to do as it is."

"The thing is done," said the Lord Chamber-

lain to André that evening. "He has promised to grow a beard. You had better waste no time in getting to work. It is to be the pointed one that gives the brisk, alert look to the face. In later years he will probably adopt the other."

But things were not to proceed as easily as the Count desired. The fierce light that beats upon a throne is singularly ill-adapted for the growing of beards. Three days after Joachin's dismissal the King, to his intense disgust, saw in his engagement diary a rough sketch of the head of the Minister for War, which he had placed there in order to remember that the presentation of colours to the 103rd regiment of the line had been arranged for that morning. A single glance in the mirror showed the manifest impossibility of his attending the ceremony. The Minister for War was summoned. He was most emphatic. The 103rd, his own regiment, would be bitterly disappointed at his absence, and yet, picked men as they were and loyal to the core, they would undoubtedly regard their sovereign's presence in the unshaven state he proposed to adopt, as a personal affront. Members of the Diplomatic Corps would be present. They would probably report the matter to their Governments, certainly to their wives. In the former case Adrian's neglect of the ordinary rules of Society would probably be taken as evidence of grave financial embarrass-

ment. They might have trouble with the Pretender.

"But why need I shave?" asked Adrian angrily. "Couldn't I ride by at a hand-gallop, while the artillery fired salutes?"

"Your Majesty forgets that we are now using smokeless powder."

"Then the thing must be put off."

"Impossible," said the General. "I have only just concluded negotiations with the cinematograph people. They are most anxious to secure a record of the quaint old-world uniform of the regiment. Your Majesty would stand to lose something like a hundred pounds."

Adrian rang the bell. "Send for Joachin," he said.

Joachin arrived.

"It is a beautiful morning," he said, as he applied the lather. "The rain seems to have cleared the atmosphere. Your Majesty's skin is just a little tender. Some of this Creaseola rubbed in night and——"

"Joachin," said the King angrily from beneath the soap, "another word and——"

With a deep sigh the barber went on with his work.

Very much out of temper with himself and the world, the King presented the colours to the 103rd regiment. The powder was not smokeless after all. The French ambassador was confined to the legation with a cold. The

German ambassador had at the last moment misplaced his spectacles.

In the evening the Princess Maria Jaquelina was present with her governess at the Opera House, where the morning's film was being exhibited. She brought back word that poor papa's face was horribly out of focus, but that all the creases in his uniform had come out splendidly.

"I might have known it!" said the King in disgust, as he kicked off his slippers preparatory to going upstairs to bed. "Three days have been utterly wasted and the whole thing has to be begun afresh to-morrow."

"Why not spend a month in Your Majesty's Deer Forest?" said the Lord Chamberlain.

"Because the Shooting Box is horribly damp, there is practically nothing to shoot, except rabbits; and the billiard table wants re-cushioning, to say nothing of the cut you made in the cloth, Count, by the far corner pocket. How the deuce am I to fill in my evenings?"

"The cinematograph people are very anxious to secure some films showing the quaint old-world costumes of the Royal beaters," said the Lord Chamberlain tentatively.

"How long will it be for?" exclaimed Adrian resignedly.

"A month should be ample. That is, it should be presentable in a month. Of course it will take a long time to get to the point."

"Of course," said the King.

It was a very slow process and the billiard-table was even worse than he had anticipated. Twice Adrian in the course of his wanderings in the Deer Forest was mistaken for a charcoal burner. Once he was handsomely tipped by a representative of Picturedromes Limited, under the impression that he was a Royal keeper.

The Lord Chamberlain, ever ready to make capital out of the inevitable, tried to start a rumour that the King was endeavouring to learn something of the social conditions of his people.

A series of articles, paid for at the rate of advertisements, appeared in the subsidized press of the metropolis under the heading: "Adrian, the People's Friend."

Then the only halfpenny evening paper the kingdom produced, spoiled everything. One headline did it. The whole of the front page contained nothing but these three words:

WHERE IS ADRIAN?

It was decidedly clever journalism. The editor acknowledged that it was generally believed that the King was at his Royal Hunting Box. Was this true? A pressman had patrolled the Deer Forest for days in disguise. He had seen no King. His Majesty's rooms were guarded with more than usual care. Joachin, the King's confidential body servant, who never left his

Majesty's side, was still in the capital. The honest fellow (portrait inset) feared foul play. If the King were at the Hunting Box let him be produced.

The paper was sold out by five o'clock. The stop-press column of the later edition contained the news that the Pretender, Count Albert, had left Küssingen for Homberg. A slight outbreak of fire, the cause of which was still a mystery, had occurred in the kitchen of the palace of the Archduke Charles, the King's paternal uncle.

The Privy Council, having hurriedly summoned itself, continued its deliberations until past midnight. At one o'clock their conclusion was reached. The King must shave and return to the capital immediately.

Adrian the Good came back to the metropolis on the following day. He rode through the streets on a snow-white charger, accompanied only by the Minister for War, the Lord Chamberlain, and two equerries. He stopped for a moment outside the quaint old-world offices of Picturedromes Limited, in order to receive a loyal address of welcome from the Mayor. He spoke in his reply of the great sacrifice he had made in thus returning to dispel the unfounded fears of his well-beloved subjects. He referred of course, to the three weeks' beard.

If the King was annoyed, André was heart-broken. He had been in personal attendance at the Hunting Box, and, foreseeing the course the

beard would take, had finished his drawings and had forwarded them to England, where the King's head was at once transferred to the printer's block. He could of course cable, cancelling the order, but the Lord Chamberlain advised him not to do so; they still had many months before them.

One man only was delighted—Joachin, who introduced to His Majesty a safety razor for which he had become sole agent in Eastern Europe.

The next meeting of the Privy Council was spent in discussing plans. What suggestions were made seemed little to the point. The Archduke Charles proposed that the King should approach the beard through whiskers. He had once had a bewhiskered coachman, who on being appointed to drive the archducal car, had imperceptibly lost his whiskers by shaving off a little more each day. He, the Archduke, could not see why the reverse process should not be equally effective.

"If only we had a coastline, Your Majesty could cruise about in Your Majesty's private yacht," said the Minister for Education fatuously.

"And if only I were Napoleon, I would go to St. Helena," the King sarcastically replied. "What a chance that man missed!"

"I have it!" said the Lord Chamberlain at last. "We must work it through the Church.

A vow or something of that sort. You must swear never to let razor touch your cheek until something or other happens. The Archbishop will tell you what. It will be a popular thing, too, with the peasants, and the ceremony would be magnificent from the point of view of Picturedromes Limited—the bishops in their quaint old-world costumes, a hair shirt or two, and something of that sort, you know. Ring the old man up on the telephone!"

The Archbishop disliked telephones and was particularly hard of hearing. It took the Lord Chamberlain a long time to make him understand the facts of the case. He said he had never heard of any such vows being made. He would look the matter up in the *Lives of the Saints*, only to-day was Wednesday and the Free Library would be closed.

"I've got a private key to the place somewhere," said the Minister for Education, fumbling in his pockets.

The plan would have succeeded splendidly, everything in fact down to the hair shirts had been arranged, when the Concert of Europe upset it all. For the chief feature of the Concert of Europe at that time happened to be the British Government; at the back of the British Government was the Great Liberal Party; and the great Liberal Party was in the hands of the Nonconformist Conscience. At a by-election the Government candidate was asked whether

he intended to give the moral support of England to an Eastern potentate who had resorted to the barbaric practices of the first century of the Christian era. His answer was equivocal and the Conservative, who pledged himself to have nothing to do with maintaining the integrity of Adrian's kingdom, was returned with an unprecedented majority. A leader in *The Times* spoke of the possibility of trouble in the Balkans in the spring. Adrian's beard was doomed.

Time passed; the stamps could be delayed no longer. Some of the London dealers were already threatening to forestall the issue with forgeries. Then the unexpected happened.

The King became seriously ill. At first he was quite alarmed. The doctors did not seem to understand the case. But after the first week he smiled the smile of utter contentment. His beard was growing! Yes, it was! He watched it lovingly in the looking-glass every day. And it was growing very quickly, too!

Joachin attended every night and morning with a patent vibro-massage machine, the agency of which south of the Danube he had recently accepted. Three times a day he anointed the Royal beard with oil from the quaint old-world ampulla which the Queen Consort had rummaged out from a drawer in the attic that had been used for storing such little symbolic knick-knacks connected with the coronation.

The Privy Council, the Lord Chamberlain, the Archbishop, the Royal family, everyone was delighted.

But the doctors were puzzled. There was something obviously the matter with the King's jaw. An English surgeon of world-wide repute was summoned to the capital.

On the morning of the operation Joachin came into the Royal bed-chamber. A happy smile was on his face; in his hand he carried a little black bag. The surgeon explained through the medium of an interpreter that it would greatly simplify matters if the King were shaved before he was anæsthetized. He wondered at the time why the royal pulse became suddenly jerky.

"Shaved?" said the King faintly. "Shaved?"

"Yes," said Joachin who had already filled his brush with lather, "the weather seems to be holding up wonderfully, though the papers do prophesy a wet summer."

. . . . .

The bulletin, signed that afternoon by four doctors, was most favourable. The Royal patient had slept a little and had thought twice before refusing to take beef tea.

But somehow he never rallied.

His thoughts were with his people to the end, or nearly to the end. It is recorded that his last words were: "My beloved country!" He certainly

said "My be——" but it is possible that after all he may have been referring to his beard.

The stamps of course were issued and were a great success. The philatelist journals of Europe explained at some length that the head was that of Adrian the Magnificent, who died 250 years ago at the historic battle of the Dubio, leading the flower of the chivalry of his country to victory. They pointed out the strong family likeness between him and Adrian the Good, or Adrian the Well-Beloved, as he is more frequently called.

A colossal equestrian statue has been raised to his memory. It stands in the Palace Square. The rider, with sword outstretched, looks not towards the city, but back to the castellated walls of that quaint old-world pile as if summoning the long-forgotten dead to follow him. The fact that the tassel on the pommel of the sword partially hides the face of the King has been criticized by some people. Usually they are strangers. They declare that they would not have expected such carelessness on the part of a sculptor of André's outstanding genius. At which André only smiles. He knew the utter weakness of Adrian's receding chin.

DUNG, WORM-CASTS, SNOW AND ICE

LADY AISLABY was in tears. She had just lost her husband. The second time in twelve short months, and the same husband each time.

It was all so foolish, so unreasonable. Some women lost fountain pens, or cheque books; they mislaid umbrellas or even pearl necklaces, and everyone sympathized with and fussed over them. But when she lost her husband they only laughed at her. They were bound to laugh, she would have laughed in their place, because Julian was never lost for long, and she had never any cause to be anxious about him.

He was absent at lunch. That in itself was annoying, when she had reminded him only the evening before that the Deykinses were motoring over from Illchurch Abbey. She had to make the usual apologies.

"My dear," Mrs. Deykins said, "of course we forgive you, and I love you for saying you don't know where he is. Nine women out of ten would have made some excuse about his being called away on important business."

"Since he never has any, you wouldn't believe me if I did," said Philippa, rather tartly.

"Oh, come now, Lady Aislaby," Colonel Deykins broke in, "You're rather hard on the poor fellow. The trouble with Sir Julian is that absent-mindedness with him is a disease; always has been, always will be."

The Deykinses left before tea. At tea Julian had not returned. After tea Philippa began to grow alarmed, and when she went upstairs to dress for dinner, she was in tears.

But not for long. Once again she comforted herself by the knowledge that Julian always came back.

"James," she said to the butler, as she sat down to her solitary meal, "have you any idea at all what has become of Sir Julian?"

"None whatever, my lady, but if I may say so, I thought that he was unusually absent-minded yesterday, and this morning he twice addressed me as Andrews."

"Then I am afraid he will be gone for some days. You need not keep any dinner for him. And, James, you might find out when he was last seen. Don't trouble to wait."

As soon as she had finished dinner she went upstairs to her husband's dressing room. The case that contained his safety razor was gone, together with his sponge bag and a framed photograph of herself. The strop and the sponge were left behind.

Philippa burst out laughing. She hadn't thought it was as bad as that.

James' report was not helpful. Without saying anything to the chauffeur, Sir Julian had motored off in the old two-seater about eleven.

There remained for his wife the task, always an interesting one, of picking up clues.

She started with the supreme advantage of knowing her man.

Sir Julian in his way was something of a genius. She had never met anyone who combined as he did infinite capacity for taking pains with definite incapacity. Whenever his interest was aroused in any subject he began at the very beginning and at once got in touch with the very best authorities. Someone once told him that he should see the Rhine. Sir Julian agreed; it was the most famous of European rivers. But instead of traversing its middle reaches by boat, he went to Switzerland and traced it down from its source. When he set himself to master Bridge after glorying in a lifelong ignorance of cards, instead of buying a copy of "Auction for Beginners," he got a letter of introduction to the Secretary of the Portland Club, studied for six months in assiduous secrecy, and then made his début with play so brilliant that his friends were left gasping. And at the time of the coal strike it was the same thing over again. Suddenly realizing that he knew nothing

at all about the question—nothing thoroughly, that is—he turned for enlightenment to the geology of the coal measures, then to mining engineering and trade union law, and finally in a fit of abstraction he went off to the South Wales coalfields and was nearly thrown down a disused working by miners infuriated at the intelligent questions he asked.

Philippa then had no hesitation in making the library the first object of her search. When Julian had mounted a new hobby-horse, it was usually his custom to assemble on one shelf those volumes which were most calculated to help him in the art of hobby-horsemanship, though when he disappeared on his solitary rides, most of the books went with him. On the present occasion his special shelf was empty, with the exception of two ponderous tomes, one on Human Anatomy, the other a text book of advanced mathematics.

Philippa sighed. There was very little to go upon. But her husband nevertheless had gone and must be found. Then her eyes caught sight of a sheet of notepaper that was lying on the writing desk. Eagerly she picked it up. On it were written in Julian's exquisite handwriting less than half a dozen words;

"Dung, worm-casts, snow and ice."

She threw herself into the arms of the chesterfield and lit a cigarette. This was the most intriguing clue she had ever come across.

In vain she wracked her brain to discover some common denominator. Dung and worm-casts were of the earth earthy. Snow and ice were decidedly cleaner. Could it be a quotation from one of the Psalms? Not the authorized version, of course, but one of those modern colloquial translations which had the effect of making the man in the street sit up and the scholar in the grave turn over. Or was it a quotation from some poem? What about *Excelsior*?

> "Through dung and worm-casts, snow and ice
> A banner with a strange device."

But then he would have to trail the silly banner. She searched the shelves in vain for a copy of Longfellow before she remembered that she had lent it to the vicar's wife. But somehow she didn't believe it was Longfellow. Julian was not the sort of person to be attracted by Longfellow, and if he were, he would probably have gone off to America, a continent and contingency too awful for her to contemplate. On second thoughts it sounded far more like a lyric by a modern poet, 'Spring on the South Downs,' or something like that.

With a sigh she banished the subject of poetry from her mind, and turned to that of manurial values. There had been a correspon-

dence recently in *The Times* on the treatment of grass land and the value of the mole in drainage. Was Sir Julian about to launch a new agricultural policy?

Philippa lit a second cigarette and started on a new track. Dung, worm-casts and snow were all words of four letters. Perhaps they formed part of one of the puzzles which had followed the cross-word craze. You changed one letter only at a time, and proceeded from dung through worm and cast to snow. This was really rather interesting. Philippa drew up a chair to the fire and sharpened a pencil. At the end of a quarter of an hour her list was finished. She looked at it with pride. *Dung*, dong, dont, wont, went, dent, dint, dine, dire, wire, wore, *worm*, wore, core, care, case, *cast*, cost, coot, soot, slot, slow, *snow*.

"There!" she said with pride. "I knew it could be done."

But she was no nearer to finding Sir Julian. Unless of course the words conveyed in cryptogram a message such as "don't dine ('with that,' understood) worm Dent." But Charlie Dent was not a worm, she had no intention of dining with him, and if she had, why couldn't Julian put his objections in a more sensible form?

Philippa yawned and went to bed. She was very fond of her husband, he had all sorts of engaging eccentricities and a heart of gold, but

his conduct at times would have provoked a saint. Saints were wise not to marry.

The day that followed brought no enlightenment, and no more clues. None, that is, worth speaking of. True, she found in the pocket of one of Julian's old jackets an envelope on the back of which was written "Braid 300 yards." That suggested an immense train, but not of ideas. Under no conceivable circumstances could she connect Julian with 300 yards of Braid. More hopeful was the big volume on Human Anatomy. A book-marker had been inserted at the beginning of the chapter on the muscular system. Could Julian be thinking at his time of life—he was over forty—of taking up medicine? He had, she knew, a morbid interest in vitamins, and, from the noises that issued from the bathroom every morning, she had gathered that he had embarked on a course of physical exercises. But the idea was soon dismissed; it did not fit into the worm-casts.

Sir Julian Aislaby disappeared on a Tuesday. On Friday morning Philippa, thoroughly alarmed, went up to London to spend the night with her aunt, and to consult the family solicitors. She travelled by the 10 o'clock train in a non-smoking compartment, which, as luck would have it, was not empty. Two gentlemen of advanced middle age occupied two of the corner seats. They were discussing the rise in the bank rate, and that on one of the most glorious

of October mornings. Lady Aislaby lowered her window sash and gave them an overdraft. It was, she felt, the least she could do before the city swallowed them.

"That any rate is what Sandeyman says," said one of the old buffers as he turned up the collar of his coat.

"Sandeyman!" ejaculated the other, "I've less than no use for the little bounder. Did I tell you about that game I had with him a fortnight ago? He was sitting disconsolately in the club-house. Jackson, whom I had arranged to meet, never turned up, and so he suggested that I should take him on. He's quite a good player, but he's out to win every time by hook or by crook. He leaves his sense of sportsmanship for his caddy to carry round. It gets in his way. He sliced his ball into the rough at the thirteenth, and I saw him kick it out of a bad lie when he thought I wasn't looking, but at the sixteenth, he was delivered into my hands. We were all square and his ball lay on the green. He was smoking a cigarette and in stooping down the stump dropped from his lips in front of the ball. He knocked it away with his putter.

"Mr. Sandeyman," I said, "according to the rules of the game the putter can only be used to remove dung, worm-casts, snow and ice, *and nothing else.*"

Lady Aislaby dropped the newspaper she was reading.

"Excuse me," she said, "could you tell me if this train stops at Pilsby Junction?"

"Yes," said Mr. Sandeyman's partner, "it stops for three minutes to make connection with the north-bound express."

Lady Aislaby pulled up the window, and Mr. Sandeyman's partner turned down his collar, remarking with a smile that it was a glorious day.

At Pilsby Junction Philippa bought a ticket to St. Andrews, a *Bradshaw's Railway Guide* and a copy of *Golf Illustrated*. She also despatched telegrams to her aunt and her solicitors. As she sped northwards in the express the lightness of the morning was reflected in her spirits. Julian was as good as run to earth. She had always wanted him to take up golf, but he had feared its fascination. Having once succumbed to the idea, she saw clearly how he would proceed. His approach would be mathematical—curves, trajectories, parabolas, the acceleration due to gravity, and all that sort of thing. Then he would combine this with an intimate knowledge of the interaction of different muscles. He would develop these muscles—the noises in the bathroom were accounted for—and acquire a complete knowledge of the theory and history of the game. And as when learning Bridge he went straight to the Secretary of the Portland Club, so now he would go straight to St. Andrews.

As the day wore on she had that happy feeling familiar to so many wives, that she was absolutely convinced that she was right. Everything confirmed it. At York she remembered that Julian had addressed James as Andrews. In spirit he had crossed the border; already he was treading the grey streets of the Royal and Ancient Borough. At Berwick-on-Tweed she remembered that Braid was a great golfer—300 yards was probably his longest drive. In his present state of mind the fact would be dear to her husband.

Philippa spent the night at Cupar. All she knew about it was that it was the capital of Fife, in the same way that Peebles was the capital of Peebles, Banff of Banff, Nairn of Nairn, Clackmannan of Clackmannan. She had always been good at Scotch geography, but she liked to be able to visualize a place, and she did not wish to arrive at St. Andrews late at night. The final confronting of the villain and the heroine was a matter that required careful consideration.

It took place on the afternoon of the following day. Philippa was walking along the road that divides the seventeenth green from the railway sidings. Instinct had told her that the Eden and the Jubilee courses were not for her husband. If he had to replace divots, they would be the royal and ancient divots of the Old Course.

She drew aside to let a coal cart pass, and with her back to the railway paused for a

moment to admire the view. To her right lay the old town, grey and weather beaten; in front of her stretched emerald turf, sandhills, a bar of golden sand, and then the sea. Overhead an aeroplane droned, homing lazily to the aerodrome at Leuchars. On her left, emerald green turf again, and two figures stepping eastward. One was short and stout and strange; the other was tall and thin and familiar. The short man played his ball, a long shot which bore to the right and came to rest behind a lump of coal that had fallen from the passing cart. Julian over-shot the green and narrowly escaped a bunker.

"This," said Philippa to herself, "is no time for me to put Julian off his game," and she turned her back to the sea. The little man's caddy was searching for the ball, but it was the little man who found it. He glanced round furtively and pushed the lump of coal aside with his putter, for it was a putter shot though not actually on the green. He then announced his discovery, and playing a beautiful shot halved the hole with Sir Julian.

"All square!" she heard him say. Philippa was filled with righteous indignation. The man was a thorough little bounder. It was all crooked. His drastic solution of the coal problem had broken every rule of the game. He might never have heard of dung, worm-casts, snow and ice.

But at the eighteenth her husband played like a man inspired. His drive was an epic, his irreproachable approach shot a lyric, and he was left with a single putt, a heroic couplet of ten feet, to win the match. Then and not till then, did he become aware of a familiar presence.

"Julian," she said later, "how could you go off like that? And why didn't you consult me before getting those plus fours?"

"You have often said," replied Sir Julian,—"and I'm awfully sorry that you don't like the plus fours—that you wished I would take to golf, so I started to study the theory of the game seriously about six months ago. I went round this afternoon in two under fives."

"Yes, I know, and it's perfectly wonderful. You really are a genius when you bring your mind to bear on anything, and I respect you enormously for the courage of your convictions, but why, oh why, you silly old goose, didn't you tell me where you were going and let me know how you were getting on?"

"Didn't I?" gasped Sir Julian. "I felt sure I left a message with St. James about Andrews, I mean with James about St. Andrews, and anyhow I wrote to you regularly every day."

"I never got a word from you, not even a postcard."

"But, my dear," said Sir Julian, "this is dreadful. I left a note for you on my writing desk in the library."

"It was a note on dung, worm-casts, snow and ice. I could read in it no apology for your absence."

"I must have left the wrong one then. How awful of me! But I put a knot in my handkerchief every morning to remind me to write."

"Don't worry," said Philippa. "You have a mind like a sieve but I forgive you. How is your cold?"

"Oh I've been dosing myself with quinine, but it's still pretty bad."

"You get through a lot of handkerchiefs a day, I suppose?"

"Four or five."

"And I suppose you just forgot to renew the knot."

Philippa cast on him a look of ice.

"I feel a perfect worm," said Sir Julian.

THE MAN WHO HATED ASPIDISTRAS

THE earliest memories of Ferdinand Ashley Wilton were green memories—of aspidistras.

The aunt with whom he lived at Cheltenham was fond of the plants. As you entered the hall of Claremont Villa there was on the right an upturned drain-pipe painted a sage green and decorated with arum lilies. This contained Miss Wilton's umbrellas and her father's walking stick. Projecting into the hall on the left a fretful erection of mahogany supported a mirror, hooks for cloaks and two shelves. On the upper shelf was a porcelain bowl that contained the cards of callers; on the lower, in a sea-green earthenware pot precariously rested the first of the aspidistras. The second stood in the dining-room—in summer in the fire place, in winter on the ledge of the window that faced south. In the drawing-room was the third, raised high above the ground on a fluted wooden pedestal. The fourth and last aspidistra stood on the round table by the couch in Miss Wilton's bedroom. At night it was carried out on to the landing,

for Miss Wilton, remembering something that her doctor had once said about sick rooms and flowers, thought it on the whole wisest that she should sleep alone.

The aspidistras dominated Ferdinand's life. They were always liable to be upset, so that he was not allowed to run about in the hall or dining-room. When he was very small he had a fancy that they repeated to Miss Wilton the many things that he had done amiss, and especially did he distrust that fourth plant, which stood at night, a sleepless sentinel, on the landing close to his bedroom door. As he grew older he learnt, reluctantly, how to sponge their leaves with soapy water. When a gentle rain was falling he would carry them into the garden in order that they might enjoy what Miss Wilton called a thorough soaking. But if Ben, the poodle, were in the garden he had to be brought in straight away and dried. The laws governing the vegetable and animal worlds seemed to Ferdinand strangely different.

In very dry weather the bath would be half filled and the four aspidistras would stand in a row for hours partially submerged. Ferdinand was not allowed to sail his boat among the gloomy islands of this archipelago, but if his conduct had been satisfactory he was permitted to pull the plug before going to bed.

Ferdinand was still a very little boy when he was sent away to school. He was constantly

ailing and even when he was well he received more than his due share of kicks and bruises. In the matron's room he felt as if he were back again in Cheltenham, the pot of aspidistras reminded him so much of his aunt. On it he vented the hatred of his schoolboy world. When the matron was called out of the room he would share with the aspidistras vegetable laxatives and iron tonics, or impart to their leaves an unnatural glow of health by polishing them with Scott's emulsion or liquid paraffin. A vertical section of the pot illustrating Ferdinand's activities would have shown a thimble, three hairpins, a number of needles, the case of a clinical thermometer and, an inch below the surface, an almost complete tessellated pavement of sugar coated pills.

When, however, in a rash moment, Ferdinand, in applying the contents of a bottle of tincture of iodine to the leaves found to his alarm that the black stains were irremovable, the fat was in the fire. The matron made a formal complaint, but nobody owned up. The ten more or less ailing boys who had visited the room on that fatal morning were indiscriminately punished. To them it was known that Ferdinand was the delinquent. He did not escape. Like the aspidistra he was poked and prodded and shaken to the roots.

Boyhood passed. At the University Ferdinand achieved a certain success. He published

a volume of verse and was founder and secretary of the Mid-Victorians. He only met two aspidistras during the whole of the time he was up, one in the porter's lodge whose leaves he would absent-mindedly trim with pocket scissors, and the other in a dentist's waiting-room.

Miss Wilton died. She left to her nephew the villa at Cheltenham and four hundred pounds a year. Ferdinand was able to devote himself to literature, and from Bloomsbury lodging-houses wrote his first series of Antimacassar Papers. It was at this period of his life that he found himself once again under the influence of aspidistras. He began by nagging them, treating them as ash-trays, pen-wipers, and cemeteries for safety razor blades. He ended by torturing them. One, he slowly did to death with weed-killer; into another, following the example of the Good Samaritan, he would pour in oil and wine. A third he garotted with rubber bands; a fourth slowly succumbing to a solution of bath salts filled his room for weeks with the faint perfume of lavender. A horticultural detective would, of course, have quickly got on the track of the Bloomsbury murders, but no suspicion ever fell upon Ferdinand. He was so inoffensive, so subtle, so respectable, and in his own way so quietly ornamental. His requirements were so few and he needed little looking after. His landladies were always

sorry when he went. The aspidistras never got over his departure.

Ferdinand, of course, should have realized that it is dangerous to indulge in hatred. The man who hates open spaces as likely as not will be killed when crossing a square. It isn't the motor car but the square that kills him. Ferdinand had his warnings. Once on a wet morning a pot of aspidistras fell from a third storey window ledge on to the pavement at his feet. On another occasion when travelling by train a sudden stop brought down from the rack a heavy and bulky package that indubitably involved risk of injury to passengers. If Ferdinand had not been sitting with his back to the engine he would have been struck on the head by the most monstrous aspidistra he had ever seen.

He was smoking one day in a despondent mood when his friend Basset Tankerville chanced to call. The *Blue Review* had noticed his latest volume of essays with less than its usual appreciation. "Listen to this," said Ferdinand to Basset. "'We begin to be conscious of the limitations of his point of view—the interstices of a venetian blind. He is the embodiment of the aspidistra.' And then," said Ferdinand, "they have the impertinence to give half a column to a review of Gertrude Stein."

"Glorious jingles," said Basset. "You should really try your hand at them yourself. 'Ferdinand

Ashley Wilton with his dashed aspidistras that wilt unless fertilized with black tobacco ash. Ad astra Aspidistra.' But seriously you do remind me of the plants. You are becoming more and more green with envy, more and more pot-bound. And, by the way, have you ever thought of how applicable to aspidistras is St. Paul's description of charity? That specimen which I see before me suffereth long and is kind. It vaunteth not itself, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked. Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. And the same, Ferdinand, in a large measure is true of you. You and the aspidistra are one."

Those light words of Basset Tankerville, spoken as they were in jest, marked an epoch in Wilton's life. They stirred the vegetable fibres of his being. His conversation became more and more torpid. The wit that had enlivened the Antimacassar Papers vanished and though from time to time he still wrote, his style—polished and stately as it was—became dull. He left London to live once again in Cheltenham, but it was as an invalid that he lived. Though he took the waters regularly his skin acquired an unmistakable greenish tinge which the dark green cloak he always wore made all the more noticeable. A little odd, his housekeeper thought him, and very old fashioned, but

Mr. Wilton gave next to no trouble. On sunny days she would pull up the venetian blinds and place his chair in the window, where he would sit quietly for hours occasionally sponging his long leaf-like hands with soap and water. He was happiest, however, when the faintest of drizzles was falling. Then the man who hated aspidistras would be wheeled out into the rain to enjoy a thorough soaking.

PART III

THE IVORY HOUSE
1917

"NOW the rest of the acts of Ahab and all that he did, and the ivory house which he built, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? So Ahab slept with his fathers and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead."

In the little cupboard beneath the stairs the telephone bell rang. Mr. Shilitoe turned over a page of the Bible and saw that there were still thirteen verses to read before he came to the end of the chapter. He might suitably stop with the death of Ahab, commencing the morrow's reading with the righteous reign of Jehoshaphat. He closed the book and for half a minute there was silence in the room.

The May sun bursting through a cloud shone through the half turned venetian blinds on to the face of Sarah the cook, who screwed up her eyes but went on thinking of suet puddings. Florence, the parlourmaid, watched impatiently the little pink tongue of the grey persian cat lapping up the milk from a saucer

in the corner by the fireplace and spilling half of it on the linoleum. Fanny, the housemaid, was thinking partly of Ahab and partly of the fishmonger, who was in group 37 and whose appeal was still undecided. Mrs. Shilitoe, in her tapestried armchair, had begun to plan the final phase of the spring-cleaning campaign, with which the week was to open. Miss Merton, the governess, was smiling to herself over the futility of Zedekiah, the son of Chenaanah, in making those horns of iron; if only he had been a twentieth-century prophet he would have been able to hang them in the front hall of the vicarage as a hat stand. What a waste of time it all was! John, Mrs. Shilitoe's youngest grandchild, watched the thin layer of bacon fat slowly congeal on the breakfast plates. He noticed that two pieces of toast remained in the rack uneaten. This, he was afraid, might discourage Sarah, and he did not want to discourage Sarah, because he liked toast, especially when it had big holes in it into which you could squeeze a lot of nut margarine when you were allowed to butter it yourself.

And James, his brother, thought of the ivory house that Ahab built. He saw it gleaming in a dark grove, and there was a throne in the house, and on the throne sat a king clad in purple and fine linen, who did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord; and then the cook shuffling her feet gave the signal for

Florence the parlourmaid to get up and walk out of the room; Fanny, the housemaid, followed her, the cook's chair creaked, and then the cook got up and followed Fanny. Mr. Shilitoe straightened his legs and giving the Bible to John to put away, went to answer the telephone. Mrs. Shilitoe proceeded to the kitchen to arrange the meals for the day, and Miss Merton carried off the two boys to the nursery.

James liked the idea of the ivory house. It was the sort of thing that he would have built if he had been a king. He would have to get hundreds and hundreds of elephants' tusks, but that would not be difficult when he and his mighty men of valour went hunting. Perhaps he would make John the captain of his host. John certainly wasn't very big but neither was David and David had killed Goliath, so John might easily kill an elephant, if only his heart was pure. He wondered where he would go to find his elephants. All through the first lesson on parsing, his eye kept wandering to a big map of the Eastern Mediterranean that hung on the wall. There were funny little lines waggling all over the sea, some in blue, some in red, and some in black, which represented not the mine fields of the Allies which James and John were fond of supposing, but the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul. He remembered that in the north of Russia

merchants found mammoths buried in the ice. He might build his ivory house of mammoths' tusks, but to get there he would have to go through the Dardanelles where Mrs. Simpson's son had been wounded and——

"James, this is the third time I have had to speak to you this morning," said Miss Merton. "You must write out the definition of an adverb ten times after school."

The arithmetic lesson was no better. He did the sum about the man who dug a trench twice as quickly as another man, because he wanted to join the army when he was bigger, like Uncle Bob, and every soldier had to understand about trench digging. But papering rooms was different. Papering rooms was in fact very difficult, because you nearly always papered the floor and the ceiling as well as the walls. In lesson Twenty-three the rooms had only one window. He looked on for four pages, and found that as the sums became more difficult, the rooms became lighter; there was even one room with five square windows, and two doors.

"That's the best of an ivory house," he thought. "There wouldn't be any papering to be done; it would all be smooth and bright and shiny like the bath after it was re-enamelled."

"James," said Miss Merton, "it is impossible for me to teach little boys who pay no attention

to what I say. I don't know what's happened to you this morning. I think you must have got out of bed on the wrong side."

In the recess when Miss Merton had gone out of the room to read her letter (James noticed that a letter came to Miss Merton nearly every morning by the post) there occurred the quarrel. James, who in times of peace had always chosen the engine-driver's profession as his future career, said that some day he proposed to accept a commission in the Royal Engineers. John, on being asked what branch of the army he proposed to enter, said that he thought he would be an engineer as well.

"You can't," said James, "I've chosen that. You can be a flying man and drop bombs."

"I don't want to drop bombs," said John, "I want to drive an engine."

James became very angry.

"John," he said, "you *are* silly. Whenever I do anything, you want to do the same. You had rice at dinner yesterday because I had rice! You asked Bagshotte for some nasturtium seed for your garden because I wanted to grow nasturtiums, and I thought of them first. There's lots of things you can be; you can be a submarine man, or a cavalryman or infantry, or you can join the R. A. M. C. like Dr. Tomlinson and wear spurs and take people's temperature."

"I want to be an engineer," said John.

"Cry baby," said his brother, "great big cry baby."

"I'm not a cry baby," John exclaimed through his tears.

They were both rolling together on the floor when Miss Merton re-entered the room. John was holding James tightly by the hair, and James was calling John a silly blockhead.

"James," said Miss Merton, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You are thoroughly naughty this morning. I shall have to take you to Mr. Shilitoe." He got up with a sigh, for his grandfather could at times be very stern.

"I don't care if you do," he said.

Mr. Shilitoe was busy writing in the study.

"Sit down on that chair, James," he said as soon as Miss Merton had left the room. "What have you been doing?"

"I don't know," James answered.

"While you are trying to remember what you have done, I will finish this letter," said Mr. Shilitoe.

And James was left to his thoughts.

It was very quiet in the study; there was only the scratching of Mr. Shilitoe's pen. The window was open, and he noticed for the first time that the wistaria had begun to flower. Last year it had not flowered until after his birthday. On the lawn, Bagshotte, the gardener, was busy beating the carpets.

"Now," said Mr. Shilitoe, "perhaps you can tell me what you have been doing."

"Abusive adjectives and adverbs always augment anger and animosity."

He had to write it out fifty times, and then to parse and analyse it.

It was very difficult to parse, because, as Miss Merton pointed out when he brought it to her to be corrected before dinner, adjectives and adverbs in this sentence were really nouns. The world of grammar suddenly became to James infinitely complex.

At dinner James, if not in disgrace, was still considered to be under a cloud, even if the cloud was no bigger than a man's hand. The question he asked Mr. Shilitoe as to the age of Ahaziah when he came to the throne was answered perfunctorily by the old gentleman who was finding the mutton abominably tough. John, whose conduct all the morning had been irreproachable, was allowed to have pie; James, whom every one understood to have done evil in the sight of the Lord, ate his rice pudding gloomily, and thought not unkindly of Ahab.

In the afternoon Mrs. Shilitoe took John with her to call on Mrs. Partifer, who had a peacock and a son who was in the navy. Miss Merton went upstairs to write her letter, and Mr. Shilitoe went to sleep in the armchair in the library. James took down the Bible from the

shelf in the dining-room, and getting under the table—the long blue table-cloth made the skirts of an almost regal tent—he began to read of the evil doings of wicked kings. The Bible had references in the margins, and there was a concordance at the end. James wanted to look up ivory houses. It was like Bradshaw, only not quite so difficult.

And then he came upon this text :

"And I will smite the Winter house with the Summer house, and the houses of Ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the Lord."

He could not help wondering why the Lord wanted to smite the summer houses. The summer houses he had in mind were the sort described in catalogues as rustic, with window panes of red, yellow and blue glass. When you looked through the blue windows, the garden and lawn were just the same as in winter when there was snow on the ground. The red windows made it look like summer and the yellow like autumn (you could almost see the leaves fading in the heat) but the blue window was best. And summer houses were such useful places for keeping the tricycle or rabbits or the croquet things. It seemed to James a mistake to go about destroying them. Mrs. Unwin's had cost nearly forty pounds.

Then as time began to drag, he left the purple tent and went out into the garden.

Bagshotte had finished beating the carpets and mowing the lawn. He was going to spend the rest of the afternoon digging in the kitchen garden a hundred yards up the road. James went with him, carrying the spade on his shoulders.

It was a beautiful kitchen garden, surrounded by brick walls up which pears and apricots lazily climbed; there were flowers too as well as vegetables, wallflowers and sweet williams and forget-me-nots rubbing shoulders with cabbages and broccoli and onions, like a third class smoking carriage filled with farmers and farmers' wives. Bagshotte began to dig, his spade passing inexorably through heavy loam and the leaves and the worms. James watched in silence. This gardener, at all events, did not love to talk; for though he had children of his own, his children were all grown up, and many years before he had said to them all that he really wanted to say.

So James stole away to the top of the garden behind the raspberry canes—there was a great pile of sods and leaf mould stacked ready for potting—and there—his thoughts still turned on Ahab—he began to build him a house.

The rotting oak leaves formed a carpet for the floor, the square cut sods made splendid bricks, and when the wall was four feet high he roofed his house with pea sticks for cedars of Lebanon, and over all he placed a six-foot square

of matting which Bagshotte used for protecting the frames against late frost.

James on the whole was well satisfied. He fetched a large plant pot from the potting shed, and, turning it upside down to serve as a chair, he sat over against the threshold contentedly regarding the labour of his hands. His ivory house, it is true, could not compare with Ahab's, but then his resources were admittedly more limited.

At tea that evening, James, oppressed with the joy of the secret of his new abode, was unusually silent, and when two hours later he had said his prayers and got between the cool clean Monday sheets, he wasted no time in arranging for its still better ordering with real ivory and purple and fine gold bought under his own personal supervision from turbaned merchants in the land of dreams.

. . . . .

"James, are you awake?"

He turned over in bed and stared sleepily at Miss Merton, who clad in a dressing-gown was standing close behind him, candle in hand.

"Are you awake, James?" she said. "Poor old boy, it's a shame to disturb you, but I want you and John to get up as quickly as you can and come downstairs; here are your stockings; let's see who can be ready first."

They followed Miss Merton hand in hand

down the stairs into the hall; the excitement of this strange adventure had thoroughly awakened them. In the hall with Mrs. Shilitoe were three strange ladies.

"If we are all here," said Mrs. Shilitoe, "we may as well go down into the cellar. Mr. Shilitoe will join us there. He is turning off the gas at the main. Cook, please, lead the way." The stoutest of the three strange ladies got up from her chair and with a sigh led the way into the mysterious underworld that James and John had so often tried in vain to penetrate. "Zeppelins!" James whispered to John, and John's eyes opened wide with delighted awe. It was rather cold in the cellar and there were no chairs to sit down on. Miss Merton, for some reason or other, began to tell the boys a fairy story, as if the boys cared for fairy stories at one o'clock in the morning, when, for the first time in their lives, there were cellars to explore. "I knew they would come," said the second strange lady in whom James now recognized Florence. "Be quiet, Florence," said Mrs. Shilitoe, "you had better bring some chairs from the kitchen; there is no reason why we should not sit down." Mr. Shilitoe, having completed the mysterious process of turning off the gas at the main, now joined them. He was wearing a crimson dressing-gown and carried in his hand a lighted taper.

"Doesn't grandfather look like St. Peter in

the picture of 'Lazarus, come Forth'?" said John to James as the old gentleman approached them through the heavy wooden door that might indeed have opened into some long-forgotten vault.

"We can do nothing but wait," said Mr. Shilitoe. "Cook, keep calm."

His words were almost immediately followed by a terrific explosion. Even the walls of the cellar seemed to shake. John began to cry.

"The cowards," said Florence the parlour-maid, "the great big cowards! There they are again!" But this time the explosions were farther away. "The Zeppelin is passing in the direction of the Higginbottoms," said Mr. Shilitoe calmly. "We can only hope that they will be spared."

The Higginbottoms were spared. No lives were lost, and the damage done, according to the report published by the Press Bureau, was immaterial. But something was kept back.

The milkman brought the news with the milk, and when after breakfast the boys went up the road with Miss Merton, to see where the bomb had dropped, they found that the kitchen garden no longer existed. The raspberry canes that Bagshotte the gardener had set up, the cabbages that he had watered, the fruit trees and the fig trees that stood over against the gate, had perished, and the ivory

house that James had built was utterly cast down. James was cast down too. "This," said he, greatly wondering, "is because I have done evil in the sight of the Lord," and for two weeks in succession he put half his pocket money into the missionary box that stood on the mantelpiece in Mr. Shilitoe's study. At the end of the third week, when the hole in the garden had been filled with rubbish and the memory of his evil deeds had become faint, he spent his pocket-money on artillery for his soldiers. But for nearly a month he continued to remember the missionaries in his prayers.

THE TWO LLEWELLYNS

WHEN Lucy Fitten, the housemaid at the vicarage, left to get married, Mr. Isherwood felt that he too had been placed in a rather delicate situation. Jabez Larwood, of course, was doing the right thing in marrying her, but there had been an altogether unnecessary delay. Mr. Isherwood did not like a christening to follow within six months of a wedding, and in this case all sorts of comments would be made. The parish would be amused. Mrs. Isherwood's position as president of the local branch of the Girls' Friendly Society would be made more difficult; he and his wife would be considered lacking in acumen, in ordinary commonsense, by not having got rid of the girl sooner.

It was indeed altogether deplorable.

When, however, the baby arrived and Lucy Larwood resolutely refused to have it christened, Isherwood lost his temper. Had the girl no sense of gratitude for the three years she had spent under the vicarage roof? Did the Church mean nothing to her at all? "They'll come to me if they have to bury the boy," he said to his

wife, "but it's tragic to think how lightly they deprive him of his birthright." Mrs. Isherwood made haste to agree. She felt that her husband was indiscreet in discussing parochial matters in the presence of a maid.

And so, by way of the vicarage kitchen, the young man who brought the milk, and the bar parlour of the Osbaldistone Arms, the news soon got round to Lucy Larwood that the vicar was sorry she had been married in church and if the baby died it would be all Lucy's fault.

"He shan't bury you, my love," said Lucy, as she bent over the cradle.

"Of course he shan't," said Jabez, "and don't you fret, my lass. It'll only put him off his feed."

. . . . .

On the same day that the Larwoods' baby was born Mrs. Osbaldistone's springer spaniel bitch had puppies. Mrs. Osbaldistone, who lived at the Hall, was the great lady of the village, very old and very rich. She disliked the vicar—he thought her eccentric—and she held a high opinion of Jabez Larwood, the estate carpenter and son of her old gamekeeper, from whom he had inherited a wonderful understanding of dogs. It was Jabez who nursed her puppies through distemper, who dosed and doctored them; it was Jabez who, after sitting in judgment on the fat half-blind retainers of

Mrs. Osbaldistone, would give them that last swift opiate that brought oblivion. Then they were buried in the dogs' cemetery in the glade behind the grotto, and Mrs. Osbaldistone would compose an epitaph and order a headstone of white marble.

The Larwoods did not know what to call their baby. They had agreed on Gladys Evelyn if it had been a girl; a boy's name, however, was more difficult to find. Lucy liked Cyril, but that would have reminded her of the vicar, whom she wanted to forget. Jabez they both decided was a bit common. There had been too many of them in the Larwood family, and they wanted something very special for their baby. It was Mrs. Osbaldistone who solved the problem for them by calling the prettiest of her spaniel pups Llewellyn. Lucy liked the name, which she had never heard before, and all the more when she was told that it belonged to a Prince of Wales. Jabez had his doubts; it sounded a bit outlandish and he didn't know what Mrs. Osbaldistone would think of their making free with it. "If it's good enough for the Prince of Wales," said Lucy, with a picture in her mind of an attractive young man, followed by an eager crowd at an agricultural show, "it's good enough for the baby, but there would be no harm in asking Mrs. Osbaldistone if she objected."

Mrs. Osbaldistone, when Jabez approached her in the matter, gave her consent readily

enough. She thought it an excellent idea. The boy and the puppy were born on the same day; that was a link between them. The two Llewellyns ought to become good friends. She would be glad to give the baby a christening mug. Jabez, fidgeting about from one foot to the other, cap in hand, explained that they didn't exactly hold with christenings. "Excellent!" said Mrs. Osbaldistone, "but he shall have the mug none the less and a larger one. We will call it a loving cup."

So the two Llewellyns were brought up together. The dog, of course, really belonged to Mrs. Osbaldistone, but Jabez had to break him in, and when he nearly died of distemper it was Jabez who pulled him through. As soon as little Llew was old enough to walk, he used to go with his father to the workshop at the back of the estate office and there he would meet the other Llewellyn, a telepathic appointment that seldom miscarried. The spaniel would lie on his back in the shavings while Llew tickled his chest and pulled his long golden ears. When he got bigger, the two used to wander in the park. Sometimes they would meet old Mrs. Osbaldistone in her wheeled chair, who would rebuke the dog for his fickleness and give the boy sixpence.

"And be sure you spend it!" she would say. "It's no use saving money these days with the Socialists in power."

Melchurch Park was an enchanted kingdom to little Llew. There was the lake, with its island temple bordered with reed beds from which the dog would emerge black and bedraggled; there was the warren with its scurrying rabbits where Mr. Cortright, the keeper, didn't like to find them; there was the grotto, with its underground chambers lined with shells and glittering spar. The two Llewellyns shunned the grotto; it was so cold and frosty-looking, and there were toads there that crawled on sagging bellies beneath the dripping stones. More to their liking were the long beech rides, where the squirrels chattered and sent the spaniel frantic with excitement, upsetting all his faith in a reasonable world by proving that rats with bushy tails have wings.

The dogs' graveyard was in the glade behind the grotto. Llew liked that better than any place in the park. The grass was so green (the gardeners scythed it every three weeks in summer) and the stones, all the same size, were so neat and white, just like the tables of the law in the picture of Moses in his grandmother's Bible. Every little mound had got its own stone, not like Mr. Isherwood's graveyard, where you didn't get a stone at all unless you were grown up or your father was very rich. Llew used to play hide-and-seek behind the headstones with Llewellyn, and the dead dogs from

Ada to Zeno taught him his letters more quickly than Miss Birtwhistle at school.

. . . . .

When the vicar's daughter, Miss Isobel, came back from the finishing school in Paris, she persuaded her father to buy a car. With a car she would be able to get so much more tennis in the summer months, and she could join the Badminton club at Layer Tracey. "Father might find it useful too in his parish work," she said to Mrs. Isherwood, "and you know we could easily afford it." Miss Isobel, as usual, got her own way. She was a reckless driver, but everyone agreed that she had an iron nerve.

It was Miss Isobel who killed the two Llewellyns. She ran into them where they had no business to be playing—in the middle of the road just opposite the Larwoods' cottage, and the Larwoods had quite a large shady garden at the back.

"It is all terribly distressing," said Mr. Isherwood, "and we, of course, must allow for the natural feeling of the jury, though in the circumstances the rider was perhaps carelessly, I was almost going to say callously, worded. I feel very much for the poor Larwoods. They are reserved people and have cut themselves off from the best life of the village. It is hard to direct them to the true source of comfort. I feel

that Lucy has a natural antagonism to me that even this awful tragedy has failed to break down."

The Larwoods sat in the cottage kitchen. Jabez had been weighing up for the last time his wife's proposal.

"It's all right, my lass," he said breaking a five minutes' silence. "You shall have it your own way, and little Llew would have liked it. He never could abide that Isherwood. I'll go to the funeral to-morrow by myself, and you needn't stand the neighbours' gazing. I've got all ready, up in the dogs' graveyard, and when it's over you and I will go there together."

Jabez himself had made the two coffins, and on an afternoon when all the parish was busy leading hay, the wooden bier was brought up to the Larwoods' cottage. Two men carried it easily; so light indeed was their load that they only stopped twice to rest on their way. There was a score of people round the grave when the vicar read the service. Miss Isobel was absent, but she sent a big cross of white roses and Mrs. Osbaldistone sent a wreath from the Hall conservatories. Jabez stood there silent in the black suit in which he had been married. He was the last to leave the grave and it was the vicar who drew him away.

"At rest in God's acre," he said. "There, there; it's hard, very hard, Larwood. Remember

me to your wife. I hope to call on her again in a day or two."

That evening, as the clock struck ten, Jabez and Lucy left their cottage. Resting on the seat of his bicycle was the other coffin; Lucy carried the spade.

It was very still in the glade by the grotto. The moon shone with a cold white light on the marble headstones. An owl called, and in the twenty-acre meadow of the home farm where the hay was still uncut a corncrake cried in unmelodious monotony. Jabez had already dug the grave. Gently they lowered the coffin, and Lucy, her hands pressed over her ears and her eyes closed, waited until the soil had been shovelled back. Then she and Jabez knelt on the dewy grass.

"Oh Lord Jesus," she said, "make our little boy happy. For Christ's sake, Amen."

. . . . .

The cross of roses and the lily wreath on the sodded mound in the graveyard soon withered. But Mrs. Osbaldistone herself gave the order for the marble headstone in the dogs' cemetery.

"I thought of putting 'Llewellyn. A happy little chap,' " she said to Larwood. "Your dear little boy was very fond of the dog. He would have liked to have seen the stone. And Mrs. Larwood must have had a soft place in her

heart for him too. When I was down there in my chair the other day I met her coming away. She had been putting a little jar of flowers on the grave. I sometimes wish that the graves in the churchyard were as well tended."

DEATH OF A GOD

IN the cold light of a March morning Sir William Culverin sat at the table by the north window examining the slide under his microscope. On his right was the door that communicated with the laboratory, behind him the double doors of green baize that shut off the noise of the house and preserved for him the silence that he found so essential for his work.

His study was characteristic of the man. The walls were lined with shelves of unvarnished oak stacked with scientific books, English, German, French, Italian, unbound proceedings of learned societies, slim monographs and business-like files. It was a specialist's library, a library in its shirt sleeves, and the only first editions that a book lover would have coveted were three volumes that had been presented to him by Samuel Butler. Over the fireplace hung a portrait of Pasteur enlarged from a photograph Sir William himself had taken. On the mantelpiece stood an electrical clock of exceptionally fine workmanship, a test-tube stand used as a pipe rack, a glass beaker containing a single

red camelia, a tin of tobacco, and a tear-off calendar. The centre of the room was occupied by a long table littered with papers, graphs, and diagrams. At one corner these had been pushed aside to make room for the typewriter.

Sir William Culverin got up from his stool, pushed the microscope aside, and exchanged the old shooting jacket he had been wearing for the more respectable coat that hung on the laboratory door. He was a man of about sixty, tall, clean-shaven, with keen grey eyes and a slightly cynical mouth. His students at the East London Hospital feared his biting tongue, but they would do anything for him. He was not smiling as he stood looking out over the narrow strip of garden where the crocuses shone bravely in the March sun.

"Purple and fine gold," he said to himself; "all the glory of Solomon. And the wretched little three-for-a-farthing sparrows beat it all down into the dust. I wonder where I put that brandy?"

He found the bottle in the third cupboard in which he looked, emptied a cup of Chinese porcelain that had been used as an ash-tray, and after wiping it carefully with his handkerchief poured himself out a stiff peg.

"Here's to my very good health!" he said, and sitting down in one of the few easy chairs the room possessed, took out his watch and proceeded to take his pulse. It was over a

hundred and twenty; an hour before it had been a hundred, but he had packed a good deal into the last sixty minutes.

The door opened quietly and Lady Culverin came in.

"No, Beppo!" she said. "You know very well that the study is out of bounds. Lie down on the mat, that's a patient little fellow. You shall have your walk presently. Have you had a busy morning, my dear? How stuffy it is in here! I can never understand how you men of science can put up with all these closed windows. It's perfectly glorious in the garden. I haven't seen our spring border look so gay for years. I've just been fixing some cotton round the crocuses before going down to the library to change the books. But, Will! You ought not to be drinking brandy at this hour of the morning! It can't be good for you, and in that dirty old cup, too! I wish you could leave your old researches and get down to Littlehampton for a few days. Your bugs, as you call them, could easily wait."

"Possibly, my dear," said Sir William, as he lay back wearily in his chair. "Possibly not. They are not the easiest of servants."

"No servants are easy nowadays. But I really think you are in danger of getting too absorbed in them, Will. You haven't read a novel for three months, let alone more serious stuff."

He smiled a little bitterly. "I should have

thought my work was serious enough in all conscience."

"Of course it is, but I don't want you to become a man of only one idea. Look at some of the other Fellows of the Royal Society. Whatever their views on life may be they certainly do seem to preserve a sense of proportion, to be conscious of the fact that they only touch the very fringe of things. Take for example all those interesting articles that have been appearing in the *Morning Standard*." Sir William groaned. "Blurbs," he said, "dust-jacket stuff that probably fetches ten guineas a column. They ought to be ashamed of themselves, but I suppose it helps pay for the summer holidays. I'm keeping you though, my dear. You said you had some errands to do."

Lady Culverin refused to take the hint. She always enjoyed her husband's society, and on this occasion she felt that she was doing him good by taking him out of himself.

"Oh, there's no particular hurry," she went on, "and I can't leave you in this horribly cynical mood. Surely the existence of God is the most important of all problems. Did you read Dr. Blenkinhorn's article?"

"Poor old Blenkinhorn, sandwiched in between a novelist and a Roman Catholic Bishop to represent science in a silly-season symposium. No, I did not; I've no use for him when he gets away from his own absorbing

subject, which you may or may not know is sponges. On that I grant you he is omniscient. But why should a knowledge of sponges give weight to a particular theory of a future life?"

"There, Will, I think you are wrong. No one can be an authority on a subject without being an authority on something else as well, even if it is only the value of evidence."

Sir William smiled. Margaret was better than most women at keeping up her end of an argument. Or was she quoting from the introductory remarks of the would-be impartial editor?

"No, seriously," Lady Culverin went on. "I do wish you would write something about religion and science. You are a very wise person, Will, and though you may pose as a scoffer to people like Dr. Cudmore it is really nothing more than a pose. After all you *are* an authority on low forms of life. You represent a controlling intelligence who watches over them. Why shouldn't you speak of God? I think of your germs and things only as something dreadful with horrible possibilities, but you—I really believe that you love them, that they have taken the place of children."

" I give them their meat in due season. I say to them be fruitful and multiply. I hold them, millions of them, in my hand. I do my best to preserve their goings out and their comings in. Certainly I watch over their carryings on. Yes,

it is an idea. For years I have given my life for those infinitesimal bugs, the equivalent of an epoch in the human time-scale. I am a sort of Yorkshire Jehovah with a relation to them that is almost personal. I see to it, or rather Wilkins and the incubator see to it, that the sun shall not smite them by day nor the moon by night, and that they are kept at a comfortable blood heat, about thirty seven degrees centigrade. I suppose that awful eye that used to look down on me from the framed text on my nursery wall is not unlike my own as it peers at the Donovan-Schultz bodies on the stage of the microscope, while I wonder what they are up to now. 'Thou, O Sir William Culverin, seest me.' But I'm afraid I must get on with my work. There are one or two things I must do before going down to the hospital."

He was sorry to cut his wife short. He knew that she appreciated these middle of the morning talks which she regarded as a useful short recess in his day's routine. But time pressed.

"I'm just off," Lady Culverin continued. "I know I mustn't keep you from your work, but I wish you would develop this idea, and work it up for a talk at the Inquirers' Circle at the Club. I mean to show that there is a relation, almost a personal relation, at least on one side, between the infinitely great and the infinitely little—that we, like your germs and things, have a measure

of free will, that we can even thwart the purpose of One who is so tremendously greater and wiser than ourselves."

"And turn on Him as dogs at times will turn on their masters?"

"Will," said Lady Culverin, "I am afraid you have never really been fond of dogs. There's poor little Beppo scratching at the door to remind me of my promise to take him out. Good-bye, my dear, and don't do any more work this morning. You look quite fagged out. I shall have to button-hole Wilkins and get him to keep you to some sort of a time-table."

She went out. There was a scampering of dog's feet in the corridor, accompanied by an eager yapping. Sir William rose slowly to his feet and crossing the room watched his wife go down the path. He needed a change of course, and he told himself that the odds were ten to one that he would get it. Somewhere down the road a man was singing, blackmailing the respectability of Ashcroft Avenue with his misery. Sir William rang the bell, and Wilkins, a tall red-headed man in a white coat, entered the room from the laboratory.

"You had better make a new stock of the new culture medium," he said, "and see that the gas supply to the second incubator is working properly. When you've finished that you might type out those notes. Leave a larger

margin than you did last time. I expect Dr. Cudmore will want to make some comments and I can never read his writing when it's cramped. Everything is pretty well in order, I suppose?"

"Yes, Sir William."

"I shall probably be going away for a few days. You will be able to carry on all right. If you are in doubt about anything take your instructions from Dr. Cudmore. And will you please pour me out a little brandy. Thanks, that will do. I wish that singing would stop. I thought they were prohibited by bye-law."

"We don't often get them, sir. Shall I go down and tell him to stop?"

"No, let him be; he's got to live. That's all, Wilkins, thank you. I'm very much obliged."

Wilkins looked at Sir William in a slightly puzzled manner—there was something unusual in this expression of thanks—and left the room.

Sir William pulled himself together with an effort and went over to the telephone.

"East 2096. Is that the East London Hospital? You might put me on to the Pathology Department. Sir William Culverin speaking.... Is that you, Cudmore? I thought you would like to know the result of the post-mortem on the monkey. It died last night just forty-eight hours after the injection. All the organs were markedly congested, especially the spleen. The

blood was swarming with Donovan-Schultz bodies and I've a beautiful slide showing the transition from the benignant to the malign forms. That new German stain did the trick. . . . Congratulations . . . thanks very much. . . . It clinches our theory, of course, but half the credit is yours. Yes, quite the most fascinating bit of research I've ever done. I'm sorry it's all over. The only trouble is that like a silly fool I've gone and cut my finger. . . . Yes . . . the knife slipped and punctured the rubber glove. You could arrange for a bed I suppose at the hospital? . . . Yes, far better there. Only some brandy, just a little bit faint. I'd thought of a taxi but perhaps an ambulance would be better. You'll come yourself? All right. I haven't told my wife anything about it, couldn't face up to it, you know. I'm afraid nothing really can be done. I've no illusions, always was a pessimist you know. And if there's a P.M., it should be instructive. You'll do it of course? It will be all useful propaganda against the anti-vivisection crowd, but it's rather knocked me out. I think I'll lie down for a bit now."

. . . . .

The street singer in the lane had been coming slowly nearer. The words of the hymn he was singing were barely discernible; they had been familiar enough to him in boyhood's days.

"We may not know
We cannot tell
Wot pains he 'ad to bear;
But we believe
It was for us——"

What was it that Dora had said? A sort of controlling intelligence, a personal relation between the infinitely little and the infinitely great in whom they live and move and have their being. He laughed grimly.

"Me, a controlling intelligence! My people are a rebellious people. The damned impertinent little atheists!"

LONDON CALLING

EBENEZER CARR, of Carr's Cornucopia Curry Powders, was not ashamed to admit that he laid supreme emphasis on spiritual values. It was because he had put first things first that the curry powder business had prospered. It grew like a grain of mustard seed; there seemed no end to the branches thereof. The public were asked to insist on seeing the face on every packet which was the registered trade mark. It was the face of an elderly man with neatly trimmed beard and shaven upper lip—essentially a pulpit face.

But Ebenezer was not a local preacher. He had cut himself off—and with himself his subscriptions—from the sect into which he had been born. He wanted a more spiritual atmosphere. And so it came about that he created a little body of his own, a spiritual body, called the Children of Daniel. They were not many, but week by week he expounded to those who were chosen and sealed, the meaning of the number of the Beast and the nature of the Last Judgment. They met in the chapel that Ebenezer had designed. The bad acoustics were

accounted for by the fact that the building was ten-sided, symbolizing the commandments of the law, and those ten curtains of fine twined linen, blue and purple and scarlet, that adorned the tabernacle in the wilderness. The floor of the chapel was covered with tessellated marbles representing the winged creatures. The lighting was good, for in addition to the ten windows Ebenezer Carr had arranged for the installation of Buckmaster & Crowbody's overhead anti-dazzle illuminators, which were supplied by gas from the Company's mains. The building was heated by hot air on a modification of Stokes' slow combustion system.

From this it will be seen that Ebenezer Carr, despite the emphasis he placed on spiritual values, had more than a working knowledge of mechanics. He was, indeed, intensely interested in every form of mechanism. He had been one of the first people in England to possess a phonograph; he was a pioneer of the safety bicycle; he had courted ridicule by insisting in season and out of season that the motor car had come to stay, and largely because he knew that winged creatures had existed in the past he helped to finance one of the earliest aeroplane construction companies. The invention of wireless seemed to Ebenezer Carr to be as much in the natural order of things as the Great War. Certain texts in the Bible had prepared him for both. They were the beginning of an end for

which the Children of Daniel, worshipping in their ten-sided chapel with its marble floor, were alone prepared.

In the year of the Armistice Ebenezer Carr built a mausoleum in the old apple orchard at the back of the chapel in Nightingale Lane. There when death came he would be buried in a granite vault, where he would await the sound of the trumpet's summons. And in the meantime there were the intricacies of wireless, the listening-in to Paris, Rome, New York.

It was the day after Ebenezer Carr had deciphered a morse signal from some enthusiastic amateur in New Zealand that his imagination was fired. He believed in a life after death, a life that would be independent of the body, where spirit could communicate with spirit when lips were still and ears stopped up with clay. It came to him almost as a revelation that somehow wireless had got to do with this world of spirit, that both were of the same dispensation. He fitted aerials to the mausoleum. He called in the town's best undertaker and bade him construct a special coffin fitted with head-phones of his own devising. In whichever of the five continents the trumpet of doom first should sound, Ebenezer Carr would hear it, because Ebenezer Carr would be listening-in.

And then he died. The nurse, who was one of the Children of Daniel, made sure that death had come. No breath of life dimmed the mirror

or ruffled the feather. She laid out the body and placed two pennies on the eyelids of the millionaire. His nephew and the old man's solicitors, in accordance with the detailed instructions of the will, witnessed the sealing of the coffin; the homoeopathic doctor who owed to him his practice signed the death certificate without having viewed the body and Ebenezer was buried.

The end of the world was nearer at hand than even he had thought. For that evening in the gathering darkness of the mausoleum, while a drowsy bee lured by the heavy scent of the wreaths blundered among the blossoms of the lilies, the voice spoke. To the ears of Ebenezer Carr it sounded clear.

"The funeral of the late Mr. Ebenezer Carr of Lesborough took place this afternoon in the presence of a crowd that numbered many thousands. Mr. Carr was a millionaire noted for his eccentricities and was the founder of the sect known as the Children of Daniel. Throughout his long life he was interested in all forms of invention and was an enthusiastic experimenter in wireless telegraphy. The coffin in which he was buried was fully equipped for listening-in."

Was it the voice of the Archangel Gabriel? Surely he had heard that voice before? Ebenezer Carr was right. It was London Calling.

DOUBLE DEMON

GEORGE CRANSTOUN put down the newspaper to watch more closely the two women who sat in the shade of the cedar on the far side of the lawn.

He had decided that the time had come to inform them of his decision. Its success would depend on his reading of their characters. Were they, in a word, capable of entertaining the idea of murder? He thought they were.

He looked at his sister Isobel reclining on her chaise-longue, sixty years old, very much an invalid, an aristocrat to her finger tips, used to giving orders, relentless, not unconventional but above conventions, a woman who could keep a secret and proud, devilishly proud. Unprincipled?

Well, if to stick at nothing for a principle was that, he supposed she was. The good name of the family was what Isobel cared for most in the world. Provided that were safe she could be trusted to keep silent.

And Judith? A beautiful woman, Judith. More beautiful since his sister had persuaded her to stop wearing her nurse's uniform. Clever,

too, as clever as they make them, and a born actress. She knew how to get her own way right enough and had patience to wait for it. A hard, unscrupulous woman. Isobel had made a mistake in keeping her on when she had really no need for a full-time nurse. Half nurse, half companion was an obviously unsatisfactory arrangement. They were bound to get on each other's nerves.

He wondered sometimes if Judith shared a secret with his sister, and that Isobel hated her for this. So much the better if it were so. It would make his task easier.

There was a movement of the chairs on the other side of the lawn. Isobel was going in to rest. Judith picked up the books and cushions and followed her.

George lit a cigarette. It was hot in the garden, infernally hot. From where he sat in the old stone summer-house his eye took in the long low front of Cranstoun Hall with its white portico. There were too many trees about the house, he told himself. They shut it in on every side except where the gardens sloped down to the park with its lake and templed island. All right perhaps in spring, but in late July the deep green of the foliage was too sombre. Far too many flies about too. A wind ought to blow through the place and there was no breath of wind.

Ah, there was Judith!

He got up and crossed the lawn to meet her.

"What about a stroll in the rock garden," he said. "There's something I want to talk to you about."

"I don't mind where I go as long as you give me a cigarette. What's the matter, George? You've been moody all day. Is anything worrying you?"

"You can't expect me to be my brightest and best in this infernal heat, but what I've got to say is important, damned important, and you've got to listen. I've loved you now—how long? We can't marry; as things are at present, there's no chance of it."

Judith gave him a curious smile.

"Have I said I wanted to marry you, George?"

"Not in so many words, but we understand each other very well. You've made it clear that you don't want to flirt with me. That's policy."

"Well, perhaps it is."

"Anyhow I love you."

"And if I say that I don't love you?"

"Policy again. You sympathize with me, don't you?"

"I'm awfully sorry for you."

"But you do sympathize. You understand me better than I do myself. And I've kissed you, not nearly as many times as I want to and as I hope to do, and you've put up with it. Now

let's be quite frank. You are poor, ambitious, unscrupulous. (I know all about your going through my letters.) You've played up to Isobel, making out that she is far worse than she is so that you could keep your job.

"I want you badly and since it's the only way, we must marry. You'd like the job of running this place, and you'd do it damned well. You would make an excellent hostess. Isobel has lost all interest in that side of things, with the result that we are shunned as if we had the plague. We could travel too and rent a villa on the Riviera. You'd enjoy a flutter at Monte Carlo.

"All this to me is a delightful prospect. But I can't marry you while Isobel lives. She treats me like a boy. You know my father left me practically nothing. She got everything; she's rolling in money, and I'm her dependent. She's so madly jealous of me that I can't even invite my friends here without first asking her leave. She grudges me any new acquaintance I might make. She barely lets me out of her sight. You agree?"

They had reached the rock garden. Judith sat down on a seat by the side of a miniature cascade dabbling her fingers in the cool water.

"You've put the case very clearly, George, but it doesn't seem to get us much further."

"Exactly. We are up against a dead wall. Isobel must go. She's been ill now for months.

She can't get much pleasure out of life. Years ago she tried to commit suicide—news to you, but it's true all the same. We can get a great deal of pleasure out of life on certain conditions. I shall help her to go."

"How?" said Judith, still dabbling her fingers in the cool water of the cascade.

George lowered his voice as he told her how.

"And when?" asked Judith.

George told her when.

"And you'll swear," she said after a pause, looking him straight in the eyes, "that it won't be before?"

"Yes, I swear it won't. It may be later because it depends on a number of things. But it won't be before."

"And Isobel won't suspect?"

"No, I shall tell her a story about you. She'll think it's *you* I am going to put out of the way. There's something secretive about Isobel, something she wishes to hide from me and I think I know what it is. She's jealous of you, she hates you. As I said, she has never got much out of life and you, the daughter of a clerk in Balham have, and are going to get more.

"So now you know all about it, my beautiful Judith," he went on. "In a year's time you'll hardly know this place. We shall be entertaining the gayest of house parties and you doubtless will be flirting with someone a little more presentable than your friend Dr. Croft. It

appeals to you? I see it does. Well, all you have to do is to keep quiet and leave the rest to me. If you have finished washing your hands we will go back to the house."

Dinner that evening was more than usually silent. Judith complained of a headache. Nurse companions are not expected to suffer from headaches. "Too long an exposure to the sun, my dear," said Miss Cranstoun acidly. "You should wear a hat." George did little to keep the conversation going. His interest centred in the decanter.

They adjourned to the library. Judith, refusing coffee, made letter-writing an excuse for an early withdrawal, and the two Cranstouns, brother and sister, were left alone.

"George," said Isobel, "you drank far too much at dinner. You know very well you are supposed to be on a definite regimen. If you can't keep to the amount stipulated we shall have to give up wine altogether. I don't want to do that. The servants will draw their own conclusions but you can't go on as you have been doing."

"Don't be a fool, Isobel," George replied. "For a clever woman your obtuseness sometimes amazes me. You keep me on the leash, you treat me as a boy, you give me no responsibility, and then expect me to find complete satisfaction in life. But I'm not going to quarrel with you. I have other far more impor-

tant things to talk about. If I told you I wanted to marry that Wentworth girl what would you say?"

"Impossible, George. You hardly know her."

"That's not my fault. You take such precious care nowadays to prevent our making new friends. You have no objection to her family?"

" Of course not. They are as old as ours. But you can't marry her."

"I'm inclined to agree with you. Judith, for one, would prevent it."

"Judith? What on earth has she got to do with it?"

"More than you think. Judith is a very clever woman and her chief cleverness is in hiding her cleverness. You made a big mistake, Isobel, in keeping her on so long. There was really no need."

"I've certainly been much better the last month, but I'm not well."

"She sees to that."

"Now what exactly do you mean, George?"

"I'm suggesting that Judith, who after all has ample opportunities, takes care, to put it mildly, that your progress should not be too rapid. Do you like her?"

"She is a competent nurse."

"And as a competent nurse she knows the value of drugs. Of course you don't like her, Isobel. You know she gets on your nerves, you know you hate the way she orders the servants

about and treats the place as if it belonged to her. She thinks it will some day. I suppose you haven't noticed that she's been setting her cap at me?"

"I don't believe it."

"It's true none the less. At first I rather liked the girl, but when I found that she had been tampering with my letters and was proposing to use blackmail, if necessary, for a lever, I revised my opinion. I can't afford to be blackmailed, Isobel. We can't afford it."

"But George, she has nothing to go on."

"I wish I could think that. You remember that keeper, Carver, whose daughter worked in the dairy? He bought a pub down in Wilton. That's settled all right, I fancy. She won't get much change out of him. But there are other things too. And it seems that my father. . . . Well, anyhow, for the sake of the family's good name I've decided that we shan't be troubled with Judith much longer."

"I engaged her, George, and it is I who shall dismiss her."

"I wasn't thinking of dismissing her, not in your way." He cast a glance behind his shoulder and drew his chair nearer to his sister's. "What I really was thinking of was——"

"And why, George," said his sister at last, "do you tell me this?"

"Partly because your help is necessary; much more because I have no wish to go through life with an unshared secret. Yours is a stronger character than mine. We shall need each other's support in the future even more than we have done in the past."

"But Judith; won't she suspect?"

"No. That will be the last thing she will dream of doing."

He told her why.

"And, George," said Miss Cranstoun faintly, "it's a thing I ought to know, it's an awful thing to ask, but . . .when?"

George told her when.

"And now," he said, "I'll say good-night. There are one or two things I want to do."

George Cranstoun locked the door of his room, and taking a key from his pocket unlocked a cupboard. He took down a bottle of whisky from the shelf, poured himself out a stiff peg, and drew a pack of patience cards from a drawer in the writing desk. Things on the whole had gone very well. He had been right in his surmise. Judith and Isobel were capable of entertaining the idea of murder. Altogether an intriguing situation.

Very carefully he put out the cards and began his game of Double Demon. It would be a good omen if luck were with him to-night. Eleven o'clock struck, twelve o'clock. The cards would not come out. Half-an-hour after

midnight he went to bed, and when the clock struck one he was sound asleep.

But when the clock struck one Isobel Cranstoun was wide awake. She had locked her bedroom door. Judith Fuller was wide awake. She, too, had locked her bedroom door, but the communicating door between Isobel's room and Judith's was unlocked, unbolted.

George Cranstoun smiled in his sleep.

. . . . .

In the garage at Cranstoun Hall there were three cars, the Daimler, an Austin Seven, and a capacious bus-like vehicle built to old Mr. Cranstoun's orders, which despite the fact that it was supposed to serve a number of useful purposes, was seldom used. George told the chauffeur that it would be wanted early in the afternoon to go into Totbury. Miss Cranstoun had arranged for the indoor and outdoor staff to visit the County Show. They were not perhaps as appreciative as they might have been had the notice been longer. McFarlane would have liked more time to overhaul the engine, the upper housemaid might have arranged for her new dress to have been delivered earlier; the cook, had she known, would have arranged to meet her cousin; Mr. Brown, the head gardener, had some job or other that wanted doing while the fine weather held.

. . . . .

It was, however, characteristic of Miss Cran-

stoun to make a sudden decision to arrange for other people's pleasure, and Totbury Show had many attractions. Only Woodford the butler, and Mrs. Carlin the housekeeper, chose to remain behind. Mr. George, said Miss Cranstoun, had planned a picnic tea on the island in the lake. They would want only a cold supper.

George spent the morning down by the boat-house, while his sister and Judith took advantage of his absence to hurry over the packing that was necessary for his journey. Each was conscious of a certain restraint, and they worked in silence.

George removed the padlock from the bar that locked the boat-house and got out the punt. It was a good punt, though it badly needed a coat of varnish. The punt was provided with two poles. One was all that would be required, and one paddle. The second pole and paddle he placed in the corner of the boat-house. He brought out cushions from the locker and placed them in the sun to air; then getting into the punt he kept along the reed-fringed side of the lake until he was opposite the island. The island with its solitary poplar and grey stone temple almost hid the hall. Almost but not quite. He could still see the upper rooms of the east wing and the end of the terrace walk. The risk was negligible. From the bank to the island, from the island to the

bank, four times he made the double journey, on each occasion varying his approach. Finally, he fixed on his course; the lake was deep enough there and the bottom muddy. It would all happen in the most natural way. Judith seated at the far end of the punt would like to try her hand with the pole. Isobel would say that it wasn't really safe to change places out in the lake. They had better wait until they reached the island. But, of course, it would be quite safe if they didn't hurry over it. And then he would lose hold of the pole just as Judith was creeping along, there would be a sudden lurch and . . . George Cranstoun remembered the pictures he had seen of methods of rescuing the drowning. The method that appealed to him most was that in which the rescuer, swimming on his back supported the head of the drowning person with his hands and held it just above the level of the water. In this case it would be just below.

A gallant attempt at a double rescue.

George Cranstoun smiled.

An early lunch. Then the departure of the bus for Totbury. At half-past two the unexpected arrival of Dr. Croft and another doctor to see Isobel. Judith, of course, has to be present at the interview.

"But why are they so long about it?" thinks George, as he paces the terrace. "There's nothing much the matter with Isobel." He had

heard nothing about getting a second opinion. The absurd secretiveness of women. Anyhow, he might as well fill in time by carrying down a few extra cushions to the boat-house.

What was Woodford doing hurrying after him like that, poor old Woodford with that hang-dog face of his?

Dr. Croft would like a word with him in the library? To blazes with Dr. Croft, but he supposed he would have to see the man.

In the library with his back to the empty fireplace, stood Dr. Croft. He did not appear to be at ease, and glanced up at his companion as if he expected him to take the lead. "Dr. Hoylake," he said stiffly. "I don't think you have met him before."

George Cranstoun nodded. He was not interested in Dr. Hoylake.

" It's like this, Mr. Cranstoun," Dr. Croft went on. "We've been having a long talk with Miss Cranstoun, and we have come to the conclusion, and Dr. Hoylake agrees, that for the good of everybody, and not least for your own good, we shall have to make a rather serious break in your life's routine. I don't think it need be for long. Dr. Hoylake, perhaps you would like to explain?"

Dr. Hoylake spoke with slowness and deliberation. George Cranstoun realized what he was saying. He found the idea curiously interesting. It explained much.

As he listened he looked out of the window, across the gardens, across the park, to the lake and the boat-house. Somebody, probably Jackson the head keeper, was quietly putting the punt away.

"Safe for the time being under lock and key," said George Cranstoun. "Well, gentlemen, shall we go?"

PART IV

AUTUMN LOVE

SHE wanted to have a kitchen of her own and to start breeding pedigree wyandottes. That was the reason Maggie Helford, who was only twenty-five, married old McKenzie; that, and to have done with the drudgery of acting the mother to a straggling line of six brothers and sisters. Molly was old enough to take her place. The house on the flats was too crowded. Only the other day she had heard Mrs. Sampson at Cathcart's store trying to fit them all into the four rooms.

So she married McKenzie at the little tin church at Piparoa, and the parson, as he saw them drive off to the station to catch the Wellington train, thought of an engraving that used to hang in the damp little spare bedroom in his father's vicarage, "December and May" it was called—an old man in spectacles, fumbling over the hand of a girl, whose head was turned away in mocking laughter.

At McKenzie's station at the back of the hills Maggie had a kitchen as large again as their old living room, with an American range such as she had never seen before. From the

window, shaded by the leaves of the passion fruit, she could see the corner of the paddock her husband was fencing off for the hens, with the road beyond and the steep hillside dotted with grazing sheep. She understood everything about the house, she made soap from the sheep's fat when they killed, she knew exactly what the cows had been eating by some subtle flavour in the butter not one in twenty could have detected. She could hold her own with any man on the relative merits of Border, Leicester and Romney Marsh, Polled Angus and Hereford, and read with comprehension the wool letters of the Bradford correspondent of the weekly paper.

But McKenzie's love for her she did not understand. So strong it was, so tender and yet so passionate, that she would no more have dreamt of exploring its depths than of walking alone without a compass in the trackless bush. Instead she kept to the blazed trail of everyday happenings, a narrow path that served her well.

Maggie Helford had been married scarcely a year, when McKenzie died. It was one of those accidents that come sooner or later to everyone who works in the bush. With Geordie Harrison, the rouseabout, he had been felling a totara, the last left standing on the run, and one which he had long coveted for fencing posts. As it crashed McKenzie slipped on a bit of bark and a splintered bough struck him in the back.

Four hours later the neighbours carried him home on a stretcher of poles and chaff bags. For five long weeks he lay by the fire in the kitchen, a bed-ridden old man. His lower limbs were paralysed—they might have been filled with sawdust—but he had still the use of his hands; he peeled Maggie's potatoes for her, and began to carve out of native woods a wonderful set of chessmen.

Sometimes, as Maggie moved about the room and watched those dark, piercing eyes for ever following her, she would wonder what thoughts were stirring in the old man's brain. He spoke little. On the table by his side was an open Bible, one of the few books the house possessed. His wife was not surprised. Though McKenzie had never been religious she knew there were certain things a man did when he was about to die that a ceremonious leave-taking from life demanded, and did not notice what part of the book he was reading. It was the Song of Songs, a strange choice for a dying man.

There was much to occupy Maggie McKenzie in those long autumn days; house work and station work kept her mind and body busy from the pale hour of the sun's uprising to the time it dipped behind the shoulder of the ninety acre paddock, with its row of black burnt trees against the sky line, and all the eastern ranges, bush covered, were bathed in

purple haze. But when the tea things had been cleared away, and Maggie sat in the dusk by McKenzie's side, with the twitter of the grasshoppers without, so unbroken that it seemed only to make a second silence, a strange feeling came upon her, that at times filled her with fear. She knew now without any words of his how greatly McKenzie loved her; her nature had opened out and developed in the warmth of that love; and, though the man by her side lay dying, there seemed to be no lessening, no dimming of its flame.

"Maggie," he said one evening, as his fingers, now thin and heavy, rested on her hair, "I thought at one time that this life would end things for good and all, and I was glad enough to have it so. I've lived hard, and I've never grumbled at a hard bed at night; but since I've loved you, Maggie, things have seemed different. I loved you with all my heart and soul and strength from the moment I first set eyes on you, and when we married it was for ever and ever."

So heavy and lifeless were his fingers, that he did not notice a sudden drawing away of the head that lay beneath them. "It's cold," said his wife with a shudder. "I'll put some more wood on the fire and warm up the tea. There's no good talking about things like that."

Two days later McKenzie died. The end was quite sudden and came in his sleep. He had

been working only an hour before on the set of chessmen; the Queen, unfinished, lay with his old knife at his side.

The funeral took place at the little cemetery in the township ten miles away. The day was wet and the creek was swollen, so that the cart with the coffin could scarcely cross. All the countryside was there, with deputations from the County Council and Farmers' Union. McKenzie had served his district well. Maggie's father and Molly Helford came from the farm on the flat, and with them was the youngest brother with a happy face and big black tie. They all went home with her afterwards.

"It was a sad thing," said the father to Molly, when Maggie had gone early to bed; "but the girl's young, with her life before her. She should do well for herself yet."

And Molly, not altogether unenvious, agreed. When, an hour later, she passed, candle in hand, into her sister's bedroom, all was still. She thought at first that Maggie was asleep, but presently the silence was broken by sobs. Molly, who was not a girl of many words, said nothing.

"He was an old man, and Maggie, I suppose, will have all his money," she thought, as she fell asleep.

She was right. McKenzie left everything to his widow, on condition that she did not marry again. Were that to happen, the property was

to be sold for the benefit of a sister, living somewhere in the west of Scotland.

If Maggie was satisfied with the arrangement, old Helford was not; he had always regarded his daughter's marriage with McKenzie as but the first step in her career, and held that the dead had no right to impose their will on the living. So hotly indeed did he argue the point with Molly (and as often as not in Maggie's presence) that his elder daughter no longer sought for the means of making his visit pleasant, in the hope of bringing it to an early close.

They went at last, leaving the boy, Jim, behind them; and, for the first time since her husband's death, Maggie had time to think.

One thing was certain; she was not heart-broken. No one can be altogether unhappy who finds interest in plumbing the depths of their sorrow; and Maggie, surprised at first on realizing that hers was not immeasurable, found the new manner of life becoming less and less noticeable by reason of the old routine. She was continually busy, and a gentle melancholy, like grey clouds, makes a fitting background for a working day.

Quickly the months went by; lambing time gave place to shearing, and once again the big wool shed was full of men and huddled, frightened sheep. There was trouble, too, with the shearers that year; but Maggie saw the thing

through and at the sales McKenzie's wool again topped the list. Then came a long rainless autumn, with bad news from her father on the flats, where the sheep were short of feed and swamp fires had played havoc with the fencing; but Maggie, with the paddocks down by the creek high in rape and cocksfoot green in all the gullies, bought when the rest were selling, and earned for herself hard money and hard names.

It was an evening late in March when Maggie McKenzie, coming up from the cow shed with her buckets full of milk, saw young Mike Donovan riding down the road. He was a newcomer to the district, having taken old Peter Cullan's run the month before, and Maggie, in hope that he might have brought the mail up from the township, walked down to the letterbox by the gate. There were only two newspapers and as many letters, one of which looked like a bill; the other was addressed in a handwriting that seemed familiar to Maggie. It bore the Wellington postmark. Letters and newspapers she carried up to the house unopened, put fresh wood on the fire, and made the tea. Then, when the things had been washed up, she drew her chair closer to the hearth, lit the lamp, and began to read the four-days-old paper. It was characteristic of Maggie to leave the letters to the last, not because she valued them the most, but for the reason that they

were concerned only with ordinary individuals and were in consequence less interesting.

That day was her birthday, and though she did not expect anyone to remember it, the fact served to emphasize a sense of loneliness that still oppressed her at times. With a sigh she put the paper down and opened the letter. She read the first page through with a puckered brow, turned over to glance at the signature, picked up the crumpled envelope from the hearth in order to find out the date of the postmark, and then with a step that was firm enough walked across the room to the table on which the lamp was standing and raised the wick, so that the shadows no longer lurked in the corner by the door. For the letter, dated on the preceding day, was from old McKenzie, Maggie's husband.

"It seems strange," he said, "to think of my writing this letter when you are sitting sewing in your low chair, on the other side of the fire. When you get this on your birthday, I shall be dead and buried; but I know that the distance between us will not be the ten miles that lie between here and Carricksville cemetery; for though I am dying, my love is the same as ever it was." And then (and this was more to Maggie's liking, for there is something cold in a dead man's wooing) he went on to speak of business, where it would pay to clear the bush, and where to leave it standing; how

Ferguson and the County Council could best be approached about the new road; and why Isaacs and Henry were a safer firm to deal with than the Pastoralists' Loan and Guarantee.

At last the letter was finished and she laid it down with a sigh. Her first feeling had been one of fear. There was something uncanny about these words that rang with life from a man who had been nine months dead; but, as she sat by the fire gazing into the embers, these thoughts gave place to others. After all, which of her few friends had remembered that the day was her birthday? She had scarcely remembered it herself. As for Molly and her father down on the flat, they were far too busy minding their own affairs and envying her good fortune to dream of setting pen to paper. And those business hints, how shrewd they were. She smiled to herself as she pictured that deceiving look of mild benevolence McKenzie had had a way of assuming when he was getting the best of a hard bargain with some over-confident stranger. When the clock struck nine and she went to bed, her heart was lighter than it had been for many an evening. As she took down the candle from the shelf, she noticed a battered biscuit tin behind the three books in the corner. It contained the set of unfinished chessmen McKenzie had made for her, and, taking one of the pieces in her hand, she admired the delicate workmanship. "Poor

old man," she said, "he was very fond of me. Next time I go to town I must see if I can't find someone to finish them."

. . . . .

Young Mike Donovan, who had taken over Peter Cullan's run, was, as everyone agreed, a clever fellow. Maggie McKenzie found him too a good neighbour, willing to lend her Geordie a hand with the mustering, and with a wonderful power of persuasion when it was a question of getting the County Council to back the proposal for the new road.

He would often look in on Mrs. McKenzie, if chance or business brought him past her door; so that when Molly Helford, driven by the tyranny of much darning and perpetual cookery, paid a second visit to her sister, she found something more interesting to talk about than Parker's rheumatism or young Mrs. Stillwell's baby. Donovan, since he batched by himself, readily agreed to Molly's suggestion that she should bake for him, if he in return did their killing. The bread Molly made (and sometimes Maggie helped her) was very good bread, much better than the Carricksville baker's, and the cakes, which on occasion, came with it, were the best Donovan had ever tasted. The girls too were satisfied with their part of the bargain. "When you've reared the sheep yourself," Maggie said, "and fattened

them in your own paddocks, it's a relief to get them decently killed. When Geordie did it, swearing beneath his breath and thinking what a man he was, it was more like murdering a fat old woman wrapped in a woolly coat."

. . . . .

They were sitting together on the verandah one evening when Molly asked Donovan if he had ever been to the top of the flattened bush-covered cone that shut in the end of the valley. "No," he said, "but there's some sort of a blazed trail up the shoulder. It's a Trig station. I tell you what, I'll take you both up there one of these days. We should have to start early; but if the weather was fine, I reckon we should get a good enough view from the top." The girls were pleased with the plan, which was finally fixed for the following Sunday.

That day was a very happy one. After saddling the horses in the cold morning light, they rode up to Stillwell's boundary fence, where Donovan was waiting for them at the slip-rails. Then came a steep scramble up the shoulder, Donovan leading the way on his wiry little chestnut, for the track through the bush was easily missed; past a clearing (fire-swept three years before) where they left the horses, until, at last, hot and breathless, they stood on the summit and saw the country map-like stretched out beneath them, the tin roofs of Carricksville

shining white and dazzling in the sun, and beyond, the flats, and beyond that the sea, with a thin wisp of black smoke from some southward bound trawler. Then, when the billy had been boiled and the bread and meat eaten and Donovan's pocket emptied of the last apple (red Irish peaches they were, the best and earliest in all the district) they lay among the dried fern, while Donovan talked and smoked. He had no intention of remaining in New Zealand all his life; as soon as the price of wool went up again and there was a boom in land, he would sell out and go where there was more elbow room. He had a brother over in New South Wales who was doing well, but what he would really like would be to take up land in Patagonia. That was the coming country for sheep, with cheap labour and no tiresome godfatherly Government for ever fussing round your heels and trying to keep you straight. "It would be very lonely out there," said Maggie. "Why, he'd have to marry, of course," laughed Molly from her pile of fern, "even if it was only to get someone to keep his rifles clean and oiled." "And bake for me too?" said Donovan with a smile. "No, if I went, I should go alone; I don't think it's much of a place to take a wife to."

Evening had come. Half running, half slipping, they made their way down the hill, while the western sky softened from crimson to rose.

"Do you see that light over there?" said Donovan suddenly, "to the right of that bough? It will be back again in half a minute. That must be the light on Providence Reef a good sixty miles away. There it is; look at it winking! It's been going like that for the last fifty years; there's constancy if you like."

"He's not a bad fellow," said Molly to her sister that night, and for one who never indulged in superlatives this was high praise. "He works well, and is good-natured when things go wrong, which is the main thing after all. I suppose I shall have to go back home next week. You're a lucky girl, Maggie; the funny thing is that you don't seem to know it."

"You'd much better stay," said Maggie. "Ada's growing up, and it's time she learned to manage by herself." But Molly was wise enough to know that the reputation which for the last two years she had enjoyed as being indispensable at the flat might suffer by a further absence. At the same time she wondered at the eagerness with which Maggie pressed her to stay, remembering with what obvious relief her sister had welcomed the termination of her previous visit. "I expect she's lonely," she thought, as Maggie said good-bye. "She's a queer girl; anyone else would rather be McKenzie's widow than his wife."

When Maggie's birthday came, there were more than the two letters of the year before

in the box by the gate. A parcel from Donovan contained the missing chessmen. She had asked him if he knew of anyone who could finish the set, and somewhat against her will he had undertaken the work himself. "He is certainly clever with his knife," thought Maggie as she turned them over in her hand. At first sight they were hardly distinguishable from the old ones; but on looking closer, she thought she saw signs of haste in the varnishing. There was a note from Donovan too. He had heard that Mrs. McKenzie had been busy making herself a birthday cake; he was sure it was a good one, and hoped her birthday would be the same, and that the chessmen would arrive in time to convey his greetings.

"I wonder how he knew about my birthday," thought Maggie, smiling; "Molly must have told him. This other letter is from her too; what in the world can have come over the girl?" As to the third letter a glance was enough to tell her who had written it and her cheek flushed an angry red. She would not read it; what would be the use, since she knew the contents? But of course she read it, sitting in her low chair by the fireside, listening in vain for the sound of horses' hoofs upon the road. It was all very absurd, love-making apart; of what use to her was this post-dated advice? He spoke too of things she did not understand, of the possibility of her breaking faith with him.

What right had he to talk like this, when she had always done her duty by her husband? It was madman's talk; his brain had softened before the end, as the doctor had half hinted it might. "Poor old doting fool," she thought. "I mustn't judge him too harshly, though he has spoiled my birthday."

. . . . .

The third year of Mrs. McKenzie's widowhood was not, strangely enough, as happy as the one that had gone before. Why, she could not tell. Mrs. Stillwell, the harsh mother of many children, would have said it was because the novelty was wearing off. Stillwell gave it as his opinion that the girl needed a change; she should go to town more often and stay in some boarding house where the company was lively.

But Maggie, though she did not understand what was the matter, knew at least that the Stillwells were wrong. For she was fonder than ever of the old place, the bare hillside, the creek, and the distant bush; each day the station buildings seemed more to her liking, the wide span of the woolshed roof, the verandah deep enough to give shade in the hottest summer noon, the big kitchen with its wonderful range. She had only to spend a month with friends in town to convince herself that the growing feeling of melancholy was not

due to her surroundings. Jim, with his honest red face reflecting all the good things of life, came up again on a visit. Maggie would have liked him to stop, but there was the difficulty of school—five and a half miles to the nearest, along roads that were none of the best. When he went the house was naturally more quiet, but still she was not lonely. The house was too old for that. Something of the spirit of the hard-working days long gone past seemed to cling to the place and keep it alive.

Maggie McKenzie did not see much of Donovan that winter; he was busy out at the back bush-whacking and only came down into the valley every other week for mails and stores. "That's the life," he would say, "to put a man in good condition. Plenty of fresh air, hard work, and an appetite that makes your tucker seem A1 even if it isn't really. And then how the tobacco tastes in the evening with a roaring fire going, and Bill Thompson playing all the latest tunes on his mouth organ. He's better than a gramophone any day. When is your sister coming up again, Mrs. McKenzie?" "Some time next month," Maggie answered. "Ada's in town at present, but as soon as she is back, Molly will be able to get away." But for one reason or other, the visit was postponed. It was an autumn morning, sharp and clear, that spoke of frosts to come, when Maggie drove into Carricksville to meet the train and

bring back Molly. She was more than half an hour late, for an old charred tree fallen across the track at the cross roads had obliged her to wait till the men in charge of the bullock waggons, piled high with flax from the swamp, had come up and cut it through. Molly she found in the kitchen at the Railway Hotel, dangling Mrs. McArthur's baby on her lap while waiting for the kettle to boil. She seemed a good deal older, Maggie thought; her figure had lost something of its girlish slimness; but her dress, if no neater, had greater pretensions to smartness.

"I'm thinking of letting Ada look after things at home," she said, as they drove back in the late afternoon. "It's too deadly dull at the flat nowadays—and the Williams girls think they could almost promise me a place in Merivale's in town. I'll give things three months to settle, and then try them, if it's only for a time. How's Donovan after his accident?" "What accident?" said Maggie, as she flicked at the mare, "I've heard nothing about it." "Oh, it's not much. Mrs. McArthur was telling me that he'd given his ankle a twist, bush-whacking, and would have to take things easy for a month."

It certainly could not have been anything serious, for, two days later, Donovan drove down to McKenzie's and spent the evening frightening both the girls with Australian

snake yarns, capped, when the right moment had arrived, by sufficiently well authenticated tales of Maori ghosts.

"Well, good-night," he said at last, "and never dream of trying to kill a snake with a stock whip. You're not used to them, you know. You'd only amuse the sarpint and hurt yourself. As for ghosts, tell them that you're too busy with life to attend to them at present and that they'd better look round in thirty or forty years' time, when we are all old."

There was nothing said or done that evening to cause a quarrel between the two sisters, but from some jest of Molly's, conceivably innocent of any double meaning, a dispute arose, which ended in her snatching up a candle a full hour before her usual bedtime and slamming the door not too loudly to prevent Maggie from catching some sneering generalization as to the selfishness of widows. Then, as Maggie sat by the fire, watching the sparks in the chimney die and suddenly spring to life again, the truth suddenly flashed upon her with dazzling clearness. They both loved Donovan; it might be a possibility with Molly, but for herself she knew that she loved him passionately. That then was the reason, and sufficiently strange it seemed, of those long weeks of restless activity, so different from the peaceful monotony of her early married life. For the first time she was able to guess some-

thing of what McKenzie's love had been. Not that she wasted time on that which was dead and gone; the only question for her was what Donovan thought. It was possible, of course, that he did not care for either of them in that sort of way. "Anyhow," she thought, "there's little use in quarrelling. It's not as if we could do anything to mend matters." And so next day they made it up. Molly repented at leisure for her hasty words, when she undertook to do the washing, while Maggie turned her hand (that day it was not as light as usual) to cakes and pastry; but when the afternoon came and each found fault with the other's work in words of more than sisterly candour, it became clear that the break between them was too great for mere convention to heal. A long week dragged out in an atmosphere of innuendo and curt reply, before Molly thought fit to remember that she would be wanted elsewhere.

Two days before Molly left (she had gone over to the Stillwell's to undertake some shopping commissions in town) Maggie happened to meet Donovan by the gate. They were hardly five minutes together, but something in what he said, perhaps it was only the turning of a phrase, made her hope.

"I have to go away for ten days or so on business," he said. "I'm half thinking of selling the place, and there's a man I've heard of who

would be willing to give me a decent price, though what anyone can see in this God-forsaken district beats me. But he's an old man, and with plenty of capital I suppose he could make the place pay. Well, good-bye, Mrs. McKenzie, and many happy returns of the day for next Friday, if it's not unlucky to wish in advance."

So Friday was her birthday. She had forgotten all about it; what was stranger still was that Molly remembered too.

"I may send you a line," she said, as they waited on the platform at Carricksville for the train long overdue. "All depends on what happens. I haven't enjoyed myself very much this time, but it hasn't been altogether your fault; and in any case you haven't much to grumble at with no mortgage on the land and a balance at the bank."

The three days that followed dragged slowly in the quiet house. Never before had Maggie anticipated a birthday with so much eagerness. It came at last, veiled by faint mists in all the hollows, a glorious autumn morning with a sky of cloudless blue. Maggie finished her housework by noon, and, in her impatience to receive the mail, which might lie for a couple of days at the post office before any one brought it out, she harnessed up the mare and drove into Carricksville. There were three letters waiting for her; two she had expected. She

had forgotten about the third, though the handwriting, stiff and legible, belonging to a past generation, was familiar enough. Anxious as she was to know what Donovan had to say to her, Maggie was sufficiently strong-willed to restrain her curiosity until she had reached home. Nor did she then immediately tear open the envelope; for the time being she felt sufficiently happy in its receipt. What remained of the household drudgery of the day could be accomplished more easily before reading the letter than after, and the contents, she thought, would be worthy of a clean swept hearth. The clock had struck seven when, after trimming the lamp, she sat down in the low chair by the fireside.

Maggie was glad afterwards that something (perhaps nothing more than the deep-rooted instinct to leave the best to the last) made her open Molly's letter first. It was cruelly short. She was to marry Donovan in Wellington in a few days' time. He had sold the run and they were going over to New South Wales for the honeymoon, where in all probability he would join his brother. The sting of the letter was in the postscript. "I have to thank McKenzie for this bit of luck. You see, Mike didn't know you'd have practically nothing if you married again, and, of course, he'd have liked the cash. When it came to the choice between you and the few hundreds of your own saving and me

and my nothing, it didn't take him long to decide. I've acted a bit mean, and I'm sorry for that, but a chance like this only comes once in a girl's lifetime and you've had yours."

Though there was no need to do so, Molly had underlined the last four words.

Donovan's letter covered only half a sheet and read as if it had been copied from one of many drafts—a model of unconscious artificiality. He said how happy he was and how surprised that Molly should have cared for him; that not the least part of his pleasure was in having found a sister as well as a wife.

Maggie was glad she had read that letter instead of having thrown it unopened into the fire, for it aroused in her a white hot flame of anger to cauterize her wounded pride.

"Poor Molly," she thought, trying in vain to shift the focus of her pity, "she's welcome to a dozen such husbands for all I care;" and she turned with a laugh that was half a sob to the third letter from a man who had really loved and who, she half believed, loved her still.

There was nothing inside the envelope but a sheet of notepaper, blank save for the date written almost illegibly in the corner. Between the folds something had slipped out, a thin lock of white hair. She rolled it between her fingers half unconsciously, and when she looked again, it lay wrapped around her wedding ring.

The night outside was dark, and the room with the blinds still undrawn felt chilly. With a shudder Maggie took down the candle from the shelf and went into the bedroom, her footsteps echoing through the empty house.

HYPOCRITES

DOLBERT the vicar had a maxim about judging men by their fences, and women by the two top shelves of the cupboard in the pantry. It was hard on Mrs. Dolbert, who was notoriously unmethodical, and it was a very easy thing for him to say since his congregation had paid for the fence round the vicarage garden, and Dolbert himself had nothing to do but plant the crimson ramblers.

To judge any one by his fences alone is as foolish as to judge him by his clothes. Money in the long run determines both; the reasonable man should be satisfied if the one keeps out the cold, and the other his neighbour's sheep.

The vicar, in spite of his faults, was consistent; he tried to act up to his maxims, and because a grasshopper sitting on the bottom wire of Robert Danks' boundary fence would probably have made it sag, he believed Danks to be altogether shiftless and lacking in enterprise. There he was wrong. For Danks had made his calculations, and had come to the conclusion that though the fence was not

what it should be, the general trend of sheep was from Kershaw's paddock to his own.

Danks and Kershaw were not the best of neighbours. William Kershaw was prosperous. He had plenty of good flat land where he could fatten his lambs on rape, and every year he stumped up an acre or two more to put under the plough. He it was who helped to start the creamery, and with five sons who seemed to have inherited something of their mother's unreasonably contented disposition, he had no trouble with the milking, making big cheques and generally heading the list for percentage of butter fat. He was a keen politician, and had supported the Government ever since they spent eight hundred pounds on the excellently graded road that ended blindly at the back of his run.

If Robert Danks was melancholy he had reason enough for so being. His land was poor—hardly worth clearing, most men would have said—and mortgaged heavily. Mrs. Dolbert constantly admired the hillsides ablaze with gorse, but Mrs. Dolbert knew nothing about sheep.

Danks was a bachelor. Like his neighbour he too was a politician, but since he saw no prospect of gaining anything from the Government and considered that the money he paid in taxes had been scandalously squandered on Kershaw's road, he supported the Opposition.

Kershaw with all the advantages he had, would have been prepared to forgive his neighbour his many faults had not Danks excelled him in two respects: he was an orator of more than usual fluency and a born breeder and trainer of dogs.

Now Kershaw was ambitious. Already a member of the County Council, he hoped some day to enter Parliament, but even his best friends agreed that he was a very heavy speaker. If he had gone far, he owed it to the fact that he had been carried along (like the old gentlemen of the eighteenth century) by his chairmen. Danks and he had put up together for the committee of the Farmers' Union. Everyone admitted that Danks knew little about farming, but his wonderful ideas on the conduct of the Universe in general, the strangely melancholy way in which he made his most humorous remarks, and the unanswerable questions he asked about roads (to Kershaw a subject personal and offensive) had together achieved the impossible. He owed the man another grudge arising out of his gift of eloquence. Danks was a supporter of Prohibition. His services as a speaker were often in demand. But Danks was by no means a teetotaller, and Kershaw who had always been one, declared that the man cared for nothing except the platform and the crowded hall.

He may have been right. Danks lived a

very lonely life and his four sheep dogs, though an undoubted stimulus to oratory, could hardly be expected to appreciate its higher flights.

Those dogs were the second great cause of Kershaw's dislike. They were by far the best team in the district—Danks himself admitted that they were not too bad—and there seemed to be nothing he could not do with them.

Few things annoyed Kershaw more when he rode home along the ridge top, stiff and tired after a long day's mustering, his throat dried up with ineffectual blasphemy, than to watch Danks and his dogs at work. Nowhere on his run had he such an abominable piece of ground as that eighty-acre paddock broken up by hill and gully, with patches of standing bush and fern eight feet high that could hide all trace of cattle, to say nothing of sheep. And there the man would be, talking to his dogs in a conversational voice as if they were a junior Sunday School class, and in a quarter of the time it would have taken Kershaw to do the job, he would have made a clean sweep and shifted every sheep into Mad Dick's paddock through the badly placed gate at the dip in the corner where a word at the wrong time might have smothered half the lot.

Kershaw had offered on various occasions as much as ten pounds for Rowdie, Mac, or Jess, but above all he coveted Sulky, mature in years, old in wisdom, a very paragon among dogs.

Robert Danks, who knew nothing about his own forbears, could trace back Sulky's ancestors for four generations. Not that the dog was well bred. His great-grandfather was a pedigree Scotch collie, the rest brainy mongrels; and to his great-grandfather Danks attributed without any apparent justification Sulky's one fault—his colour, a greyish fawn that made him less conspicuous than he should have been among sheep. He rarely praised his dog, and that never in its presence, but no one who had heard him could have doubted the genuineness of the man's eloquence.

It was rather the genuineness of the man's character that Dolbert doubted. When the chief speaker at the great No-Licence meeting was seen a week later riding home in the early hours of the morning obviously the worse for drink, it must be admitted that there was reason for the vicar's fears. Rumour, too, said hard things about Danks—that he drank like a fish whenever he was left alone with a bottle of whisky—that his sister spent so much of her time in Wellington because she was hardly safe when he had got beyond his second glass. And though in other respects his life was immaculate—he was a churchwarden and never swore—it was strange that he kept his banking account at Parataki, and always transacted his business there in person and never by post.

Rumour on this occasion was right. Danks

himself confessed that he was a hypocrite. He was certainly fond of drink and just as certainly he took pains to hide the fact from his friends. Why he hid it from Sulky would have been difficult to say. It might have been distrust of his own actions when in liquor, for he carried in his memory the picture of a drunken drover smashing up the ribs of his collie in a fit of senseless rage, but if anyone had told him that he was afraid of losing his dog's respect he would have laughed at the nakedness of the truth. Sulky, at any rate, never went beyond the boundary fence when Danks rode off to see his banker.

Such then were the two neighbours, alike only in their dislike of each other, which both believed to be completely concealed. But one thing they had in common. Old Jerry Coleman, who had long since left the district, had persuaded them both to put money into a gold-mining venture up in the Thames. No young wife could have paid her calls with greater regularity, but each had held on in the hopes that the other's patience would fail preferably just a month or so before the first dividends came in.

If for many years the relations between the two men had been strained, the breaking point came one day in March, when on the farthest corner of his run Danks came across the bodies of two sheep with mangled throats, wedged

in tightly between the bottom wires of his fence.

He knew at once that it was the work of one of Kershaw's dogs, probably the black yelping pup he had been trying to train for the last two months.

"That," thought Danks, "is the worst of being married. If it wasn't for those silly soft-hearted girls of his, Kershaw would have drowned half his dogs on the day they were born. Anyhow, the next that shows itself on my land, I shoot."

He was as good as his word. The dog was not one of Kershaw's, he wished it had been, but an Irish terrier belonging to Blake the butcher, that he caught sneaking in a suspicious manner along the ridge top. He wrote to Blake, half apologetically offering to replace it by the best pup of the next litter, and thought no more of the matter until a week later he found a third carcase swollen tight as a drum and eyeless.

"Kershaw's black pup," he said, and that evening he took down the gun from the two nails over the fireplace and oiled it carefully.

He went to bed soon after nine leaving Sulky, the privileged, stretched out full length before the embers, busy with his nightly mustering of dream sheep. As he drew out the back log to save for the morning fire, the dog

half cocked one ear and gave a wag of the tail eloquent of well-earned peace.

"I'm not sure that they haven't the best of life after all," thought Danks as he got into bed. "Work and sleep and food, and no conscience to trouble them at the end of the day."

Certainly things had not prospered with him of late. Feed had been unusually scarce after the long dry summer, and prices lower than he had known them for years. Then only that week some fool (it would prove, of course, to be one of Kershaw's boys) had started a fire over at the back, and a quarter of a mile of fencing had gone before he had been able to get it under.

"Still," thought Danks, "it's no use worrying;" but the reflection only gave rise to another chain of thought, no less disturbing, that started with Blake's Irish terrier and ended up with Kershaw's youngest, silliest, and softest-hearted daughter, who had removed its body to their orchard for burial.

It was half-past ten when he fell asleep and three when he awoke to find the room lit up by the pitiless rays of the full moon. Outside the dogs on their chains whined dismally.

Danks got out of bed, and crossing over to the corner cupboard, he unlocked the door and poured out half a tumbler-full of whisky; then he slipped into his coat and trousers and went

into the kitchen. He knew that it would be useless to try to sleep again, and he had never been able to find satisfaction by smoking in bed.

The fire had long since gone out but the room was unusually chilly. Danks quickly saw the reason. The window was wide open. He had never adopted precautions against burglars —any evening he would have welcomed them —but he was emphatic in his dislike of air unnecessarily fresh, and was moreover certain that the window had been closed when he went to bed. As he looked round the room he noticed that Sulky had disappeared, but a full minute passed before he guessed that the two things were connected. For there was a chair beneath the window, and on it the mark of paws.

Then a great fear took hold of Danks. He had known other dogs, and some of them good dogs too, that had broken out unexpectedly and taken to sheep-worrying, but Sulky whom he trusted as himself—surely the dog was safe from that.

He was not, however, proof against suspicion, for instead of lighting the lamp he drew his chair into the dark corner by the door and waited. Slowly the minute hand crept round the dial. Then as the clock struck four there came a rustling in the olearias outside the window, a sudden footfall on the sill, and Sulky was in the room. Without looking

round he went straight to the worn strip of drugget before the hearth and lying down began to lick his jaws.

Danks got up and closed the window. As he did so, the dog turned, his upper lip drawn back to show the eye teeth in a vicious snarl. There was a dull red light in the brute's eye that the man had never seen before. He reached down the gun.

"I'm going to see what you've been up to," he said, "and if I find that you've been fooling me, you know what to expect."

He laced up his boots with one eye on the bristling neck of the collie. Then passing out of the room, he slipped the chains from Mac and Rowdie and Jess, who greeted him with yaps and whines of pleasure.

The horse was in the old orchard where the grass had always been of more account than the fruit trees, and in five minutes Danks was riding with a heavy heart along the track that led up the hill. He could see that the sheep had been disturbed, and instinctively he slowed his pace. He had no wish to come upon the final proof. But whether he wanted it or not, there it was, a fine two-tooth ewe still warm, a slight froth drying on its lips. Danks, ever economical, took out his knife and ripped the skin from the body with the back of the blade and his thumb. Then, whistling to the dogs, he rode home in the light of dawn.

Sulky in the kitchen seemed either to have forgotten his misdeeds or to have determined to hide them with a hypocrisy more than usually audacious, for, after yawning and stretching himself at full length, he walked up to Danks, his tail wagging like a pendulum.

"Poor brute!" he said. "I only wish you could have deceived me, but it's too late in the day for that." He knew that there was only one thing to be done with the dog, and that to shoot him. Danks determined however to have done with reproach; after all, he would probably have done the same had he been in Sulky's place, and with a sigh he unlocked the corner cupboard in the bedroom and took down the bottle.

"The dog may as well enjoy himself too," he thought, and going to the meat safe, he took out the knuckle bone that was to have served him for dinner.

"Gorge yourself, you old reprobate," he said. "It's your last chance," and Sulky fawning at his feet took his master at his word.

It was, of course, impossible for Danks to do the thing in cold blood, so he drank, but the whisky only aroused golden memories of Sulky's incomparable past; he drank again, and deeper, to forget.

. . . . .

That morning at breakfast, Kershaw informed his family of his intention to ride over

to Danks's place to see whether he had begun to do anything about mending the fence. He had another reason. The night before, on calling for his mail at Carricksville, he had received, to his unbounded amazement, a letter from Jerry Coleman to say that they had struck a wonderfully rich patch on the old Yellow Boy at last. Kershaw, thanking heaven that he had not sold out, was anxious to find what Danks had done. The man had been melancholy enough of late, and Kershaw, as he rode up the valley, was surprised to find himself almost hoping that his neighbour would share in his good fortune. After slipping the bridle over the gate post amid a chorus of suspicious snarls, he knocked at the door, and receiving no answer pushed it open.

He saw at once the reason of the silence. Danks sat with his head resting on the table in a drunken sleep. At his elbow was an empty whisky bottle; in front of him on the table his old-fashioned breech loader lay at full cock. Sulky curled at his master's feet looked up with eyes full of regretful apology, while the wag of his tail seemed to deprecate all hasty criticism.

Kershaw was a man ever generous in attributing the worst of motives. He could only conceive a single interpretation of what he saw—that Danks encumbered by debt and tired of his own duplicity had decided to end

matters by escaping from a life that had no longer anything to offer.

"Thank God that I came in time," said Kershaw as he unloaded the gun, and he saw with complete clearness, not unmixed with satisfaction, the expression of pained incredulity on his wife's face when, in a couple of hours, seated at the dinner table, he would narrate to her the events of the morning.

"And a churchwarden too," he said, sighing.

"Give me the gun," said Danks wearily. "It's got to be done."

"Your life is not your own," began Kershaw, nervously sympathetic.

"Who the devil said it was? Hand me the gun and let's finish it. What in the name of thunder brought you here, you moon-faced idiot? Can't I be master in my own house?"

Danks without doubt was aroused. He pulled himself together, his eyes blazing with fury. Sulky, as if fearing for his safety, slunk across the room to Kershaw and rubbed his soft wet muzzle against the man's hand.

"Good dog," he said, "good dog!"

Then Danks smiled. He saw at last a solution to the problem.

"I'm off colour this morning," he said, "but we're neighbours and there's no sense in quarrelling. But what brought you here?"

"They've struck payable gold on the Yellow Boy at last," Kershaw answered. "I thought

I'd let you know since we're both in it. You haven't sold out?"

"No, I thought I'd hold on as long as you."

"That's all right then," said Kershaw with a slight sigh. "Coleman writes that the thing's bound to go ahead now. They'll be declaring dividends in six months."

"It's just as well. By the way, what about that quarter mile of fencing your boy burned down?"

"It wasn't my boy," began Kershaw.

"Your boys then, or your girls. Who's going to pay for it?"

"Well, I suppose the fire started on my property, so you can leave it to me."

"And what about the three sheep that the black pup you've got outside has worried?"

Kershaw thought by this time that his neighbour's interest in life had been quite sufficiently awakened.

"It's not my affair," he said. "Why do you say that it's my pup's doing? For all you know it might as well be Sulky here," and the dog nuzzled closer to Kershaw, wagging his tail.

"Well, wait and see," said Danks. "I've no special liking for that black pup of yours. There's nothing the matter though with the little ginger one. I suppose he's your favourite?"

Kershaw, the sandy-haired, felt uncomfortable.

"He's a good dog," he said. "His mother was that pink-nosed bitch of Holden's, so he'll

be a sort of nephew of your Sulky. Now if only you'd sell——"

Danks took out his pipe and filled it meditatively.

"I never like parting with a dog," he said at last.

"I'd give you twelve pounds for him."

"I'm pretty short of cash just now, but it would only be throwing money away."

"Well, I'll tell you what. Twenty pounds and that sandy-haired pup we were speaking of a minute ago."

Kershaw looked eagerly at Danks's face; his neighbour seemed lost in thought. Could it really be that he would at last sell Sulky?

"Done!" said Danks. "Twenty pounds and the sandy-haired pup. What do you call the little beast? Ginger? Carrots?"

"No," said Kershaw reddening. "I call him Nipper."

Half an hour later Kershaw rode off, Sulky padding morosely in the dust behind him. He was more than pleased with his morning's work. His neighbour had shown himself to be a bigger fool than he had expected in more ways than one. He would have laughed had he not remembered the loaded gun. As it was he smiled. "Things will go all right with him," he thought, "now that the Yellow Boy is working."

Danks too was satisfied, but to a less extent.

He had a slight headache and a very big heartache, and when at dinner time he went to the meat safe, he was naturally annoyed at remembering that the knuckle bone had gone over to Kershaw's place with Sulky. Nipper followed at his heels.

"Here you, dog," he said, "we must find you a new name. What shall it be? Ginger or Carrots? Ker will do pretty well, I reckon, because after all it's a currish trick for a man that's sober to sit down and pity a fellow that's drunk in his own house. Clear out, Ker! I don't allow dogs inside, that is, not ordinary dogs," and he kicked him not ungently to the door. From without came the snarling welcome of his new brothers.

"Poor old Sulky!" said Danks with a sigh. "I'm sorry for him. And I'm sorry for Kershaw's stud sheep too," he added. "I reckon he'll do for half a dozen before he's shot. He may get an odd one of mine too, but since the Yellow Boy has turned out well I can afford to be neighbourly," and his sigh changed into a long, low laugh.

JIMMY'S AUNT

THOUGH nearly everybody said that Jacob Holden was a terrible good judge of sheep, nobody made the mistake of supposing him to be really terrible.

True there were moments, when, bringing his melancholy mare to a standstill on the top of some grassy rise, he would swear by the living Jingo to pluck out, slice, and fry the livers of two black-faced, misbegotten dogs, that were doing their best to head off a mob of sheep far away in the paddock below him. But in reality he was the mildest of men; and, though no longer superintendent of the Sunday school, he made certain that his nephew Jimmy went regularly every week, and took credit to himself that for two years in succession the boy had secured the prize for regular attendance.

Many people had drawn wrong conclusions from Jacob Holden's meek disposition, but in one respect his will power was lamentably defective: he had absolutely no notion of managing his housekeepers; and, what was worse, he was beginning to fear them.

His married sister, Mrs. Transom, who had

a share in the control of a registry office in Wellington, knew by long experience exactly what he required, a steady, middle-aged woman, teetotaller, fond of children (that was where Jimmy came in), and a good, plain cook.

But the ideal woman was difficult to find. It seemed to Jacob, that one and all came determined to marry him. They went away at the first sign of such presumption. He had parted with his last housekeeper, Mrs. Merriman, because of her remarking incautiously that "we" wanted new curtains. It was the business or domestic *we*, rather than the matrimonial *we*, and the curtains, too, were almost falling to pieces; but Jacob, thoroughly alarmed and in no fit state to analyse the finer shades of meaning hidden in the first person plural, accused Mrs. Merriman of gross extravagance, hinted at secret commissions from the draper, and finally induced the good woman to give notice in a fit of righteous indignation.

As he waited outside the station for her successor Mrs. Boothroyd to arrive, Jacob gloomily passed his twelve housekeepers in review. They had all seemed wonderfully like each other as he had driven them up in the buggy, a big tin box or bulging dress basket tied on securely behind. Jacob had two stock remarks. As they turned out through the station gates into the road, he would say something about a long and tiring journey, to

which the housekeeper would reply: "Oh, not at all." Twenty minutes later, when they topped the hill, he would again break silence with, "I'm afraid you will find it very quiet here." This was of the nature of a leading question, and the future of the housekeeper depended very much upon her answer. Those with a wise economy of words would again reply, "Oh, not at all." Others, and of these he was suspicious, said they liked the quiet and the country air; but the worst thing of all was when the housekeeper sighed softly and said how lonely it must be in the winter evenings. Of course, before the winter evenings came, she had gone.

Jacob congratulated himself, as he waited, on his many wonderful escapes. He thought of Mrs. Flinders' strawberry tarts, of Miss McNaughten with the dark complexion and wonderful golden hair, of Mrs. Bannerman's plaintive singing of "Home, Sweet Home."

The train, long overdue, at last steamed in; the empty milk cans clattered, as they were rolled along the platform; Porrit handed over the mail bag; and Mrs. Boothroyd, with a small tin box and a large brown paper parcel, bursting to reveal its secrets, stepped out. She was a stout, comfortable-looking body. Without wasting any time she stepped across the rails in the rear of the train to where the buggy was standing.

"Mr. Holden?" she said to Jacob, as he took the box. "Yes," he answered, busy at work with the straps. "I'm afraid you've had a long and tiring journey." And all the old familiar feelings came back again when she answered, "Not at all."

"You'll find it terribly quiet here, Mrs. Boothroyd," he said, as the horse began to walk up the hill.

"I've been thinking so for the last half-hour, but I hope I shall be gone before winter."

Jacob, very much astonished, handed her the reins and got down to open the gate. She was the first housekeeper he had ever heard make such a remark, and, though pleased at her independence of spirit, he could not help thinking it was rather rude.

Still stranger was her treatment of his nephew, when he came in from milking. She did not run her fingers through his hair with a far-away expression in her eyes, as Miss McNaughten had done, or sigh, as she looked at the darn in his coat sleeve, like Mrs. Flinders, or give him her hand, like Miss Richardson, and hope that they would be good friends.

Mrs. Boothroyd hung the toasting fork on the hook by the fireplace, nodded at Jimmy, told him that the tea was waiting, and asked if he didn't mind taking off his boots, as wet mud made such a litter of the kitchen floor. "And when you go to bed, you'd better leave those

stockings with me to mend. You shouldn't wear them, when they start to go like that at the heels."

Jimmy—who was very tired—sighed. He too disliked housekeepers, and for reasons better than Jacob's.

How he wished next morning, as he trudged along to school, that they could live in peace. He was not angry with his uncle—he was too sickly a child for anger—but all the world, blue sky, green paddocks, and high-sailing clouds, seemed to have gone wrong.

Old Marco, the Italian, busy cleaning out the ditch and shovelling the loose earth and rubble into the deepest ruts on the road, stopped work to wish him "Good morning."

"How do you like your auntie?" he said, with a laugh; and Jimmy forgot the clever reply he had been thinking of all night to this question that he had long foreseen, and slunk along the road in silence. For shortly after Jimmy had come to live with his uncle, he had made an awful mistake. At that time Jacob had been trying, without success, to look after things for himself; and when Miss Entwhistle arrived to put domestic affairs in order once again, Jimmy, in his perfect innocence of housekeepers, had asked Rosy Conroy how she liked his new auntie. Rosy Conroy was the sort of little girl any little boy might have confided in, but she was old for her years and knew at

once that Jimmy had said something funny, though she could not have said of what the funniness consisted. She passed the joke on in whispers to her neighbour, and in a very short time it had become general property. When school broke up, he was greeted by their chant pagan:

Little Jimmy bandy legs,
How do you like your auntie?

Unlike many children's jokes, this was one that the elders appreciated to the full, and Jimmy's aunties soon became the usual way of referring to Jacob Holden's housekeepers.

Jimmy then had formed a very accurate idea of the reception he was likely to receive on the morning that followed Mrs. Boothroyd's arrival. As soon as he entered the schoolroom the whispered nudgings began. With much tittering they passed him little notes, which he did not open, because he knew exactly the question they asked. As soon as the dinner hour came, there was a general rush towards him. All hopes of escape vanished, as he was thrust into the middle of a circle of laughing children, intent only on fun.

"*Little Jimmy bandy legs,*
How do you like your auntie?"

He made a rush at the weakest link in the

chain, but the chain was revolving and the weakest link went round with it.

"Little Jimmy spindle shanks,
How do you like your auntie?"

It is hard to fight on an empty stomach; indeed, Jimmy would have found it hard at any time; but it was very easy to cry. Teddy O'Hara, the music maker, changed the chorus accordingly:

"Little Jimmy cry baby," he began.

"You be quiet, Ted," said one of the older girls, "or I'll tell Miss Sampson on you;" and Jimmy, openly thankful to Gracie Thompson, but secretly despising her as a teller of tales, ate his bread and jam in unbroken peace.

Though there was certainly more jam than Mrs. Merriman had been accustomed to put between the slices, and though both pieces of bread were buttered, his thoughts of Mrs. Boothroyd were anything but kind. He had still to meet the butcher and the baker and a host of other people, who would laughingly ask him the same question; and then, when things had settled down and life was again becoming bearable, there would be high words in the kitchen, a week of studied reticence on the housekeeper's part, when he knew she must have received notice by the gloomy way she went about her work as if there had been a

death in the house, and the whole miserable process would begin again.

As he trudged home, thankful that the worst was past, he began to think over a scheme so daring that he could scarcely believe himself to be the author of it. He would run away—not now, but in three months' time, when things would begin to be unsettled. Jimmy longed for what seemed to him the easy dignity of other boys, especially of Ted O'Hara. Nobody despised him; he could even cheek grown men; and lots of little girls were quite afraid of him. What a splendid thing it would be to arrive at Mrs. Transom's dusty and footsore, after many nights on the road, but with the priceless asset of a desperate reputation, on which he could draw whenever his courage was questioned. The prospect was as pleasing as the slice of treacle tart which Mrs. Boothroyd put on his plate at tea, and the boy he dreamed of that night was scarcely recognized by Jimmy as being himself, so defiant was his bearing, so straight and fat his legs.

Jacob Holden had few faults to find with Mrs. Boothroyd. The house was kept clean; the cooking was good; and, for so stout a woman, she seemed wonderfully active. From a habit she had of sighing at the end of every meal (washing up is not a task that grows easier with age), Jacob jumped to the conclusion that her life had been an unhappy one, and thought

what an unfeeling brute Boothroyd must have been. She was kind, too, to Jimmy; not unreasonably fond of him like Miss McNaughten —for her kindness took the form of sending him early to bed after a glass of milk, and taking care that he changed his stockings, when his feet got wet.

Once only were Jacob's fears aroused, when some six weeks after Mrs. Boothroyd's coming she took from her work-box a roll of canvas and several spools of brilliant Berlin wools. He watched her from behind the shelter of his newspaper with sinking heart. These were, he knew, the invariable ingredients for the making of carpet slippers. Instinctively he glanced at his own, noticed that one at least was shabby, and, slinking out of the room, hurriedly exchanged them for his best pair, that Mrs. Boothroyd might have no reasonable excuse for presenting them to him. But on the following evening he argued that to be seen in his best pair would be to admit that his ordinary slippers were worn out, and might consequently only precipitate Mrs. Boothroyd's offer. The situation was extremely delicate. "That's fine work of yours," he said to Mrs. Boothroyd at last, "but it must be very trying to the eyes. It's my belief that my old mother ruined her eyesight by too much sewing."

"Very likely," said Mrs. Boothroyd. "I'm going to make this up into a pair of slippers."

"Slippers," said Jacob, in an off-hand manner, "are things you want to be very careful about. Once you've got a comfortable pair, you never like any others. I'm very fortunate in having two that will, I hope and believe, last my lifetime."

"I don't often go in for this sort of work," Mrs. Boothroyd went on; "I've only made two pairs in my life. The first was for poor Mr. Boothroyd. I used thicker wool than this, since he always suffered from cold feet. These are for my brother."

"For your brother? He should be very glad to have them. They look a nice comfortable pair," said Jacob, as soon as he found that he could with safety be generous in praise. "She is an honest, unassuming woman," he added to himself, "and one must blame that brute Boothroyd if she is a little too self-centred."

Jimmy in the meantime had not given up his plans of escape. His motives were decidedly mixed. There was the fear that Mrs. Boothroyd's rule was too comfortable to last; but stronger perhaps was the overpowering desire to assert himself and be something else than a bandy-legged and very insignificant milker of cows. At the first sign of "presumption" on the part of Mrs. Boothroyd he determined to go. The only drawback was that Mrs. Boothroyd showed no inclination to presume, and Jacob Holden gloomily thought the same.

Three months passed and then suddenly, without even the fall in spirits that usually preceded these storms, the crash came, and from an unexpected quarter too, for Mrs. Boothroyd gave notice. Jimmy, as he lay in bed, heard it all through the wooden partition that separated his room from the kitchen. His uncle had come in to look for the last week's paper. He must have found Mrs. Boothroyd busy at work, for Jimmy heard him say something about there being no necessity for her to mend tablecloths at that hour of the evening. Mrs. Boothroyd agreed, but said she'd like to leave everything in as good order as what she'd found it.

"But you're not thinking of going?" gasped Jacob.

"On the first of next month, Mr. Holden. I should have given notice yesterday by rights, but I daresay you'll excuse the odd day. I've saved a little and I want to be settling down. I'm not as young as I was."

"Oh, no," said Jacob, meaning to be polite. "I mean, not at all," he added, fearing that a wrong interpretation might be put on his words.

There was silence for a minute, while inwardly he cursed his luck. He had almost begun to look upon Mrs. Boothroyd as the ideal housekeeper of his after-dinner naps.

"I'm sorry to hear it," he said at last,

"especially for Jimmy's sake. He'll miss you terribly, Mrs. Boothroyd, more than you can think."

"Poor innocent lamb!" said that lady compassionately.

"Thank you, Mr. Holden, I don't mind if I do," and there came through the wooden partition the sound of clinking glasses.

Jimmy got up in the morning filled with the zest of life. The glorious panorama opened out when he started to milk the cows: the whole world seemed to lie before him, a world whose hard lines were for the first time clothed in vivid colours; and though there was only the one road to Wellington that passed his uncle's door he saw hundreds that stretched like spokes of a wheel from himself as centre to the mysterious horizon. He determined to start that night. There was no moon, it was true, but that from the point of view of avoiding observation would be an advantage. At breakfast Jacob Holden was silent; and though Jimmy felt more than ordinarily talkative the conversation sank beneath the weight of Mrs. Boothroyd's ponderous commonplace. On the way to school he thought out the details of his escape. For ten days past Gracie Thompson, the good-natured girl who had rescued him more than once from his tormentors, had been reading in the dinner hour to Alice Figgis a most exciting book, called *Edna's Elopement*. He remembered how

Edna had placed a note announcing her flight on a pin-cushion in her father's dressing-room. Jimmy thought the idea strikingly happy and original. If Gracie Thompson ruled the lines for him, he thought he might do the same. One or two phrases in particular remained in his memory. Edna had said something about an intolerable scandal: that it was impossible for her to continue to live under the same roof with such a woman. Jimmy's idea of an intolerable scandal was very properly vague, and he had quite forgotten who the woman was with whom Edna could not live, though he supposed her to be some sort of housekeeper. With considerable difficulty the letter to Jacob Holden was written, the largest blots carefully drained with blotting paper—an occupation always fascinating to the inexperienced penman—and the envelope addressed. So pleased was Jimmy with his performance, so contented with the progress of his plans, that he went off to sleep during afternoon school, lulled by the rhythm of the multiplication table.

As he trudged home, he tried to picture the morrow's sensation, when the first instalment of the story of his flight would be published. How they would admire him, and how sorry they would be to have neglected the friendship of a boy so desperate. Marco, too, the roadman, and Parker at the store, would shake their heads and admit that they had

been mistaken in him. They might even call him a plucky young dog or a cute little devil.

When Jimmy finished milking he was very tired, but there was still a great deal to do. He took the smallest billy he could find, and then, as soon as Mrs. Boothroyd went out to feed the fowls, he ransacked the kitchen for provisions—a thick slab of fat bacon, a loaf, tea, sugar, and matches.

At the evening meal he was too excited to eat. Jacob Holden spoke gloomily to Mrs. Boothroyd of racial decay, punctuating his remarks with sighs.

"I wonder what they would do," thought Jimmy, "if they knew that this was the last meal they will ever have with me."

He went early to bed, complaining of a headache; pinned the note for Mr. Holden near the coloured text that Miss McNaughten had hung above his bed, and then lay listening to Mrs. Boothroyd sewing on the other side of the wooden partition. It must have been some stiff calico material, for her needle gave a shrill tearing noise every time it passed through the stuff, echoing the alternate clickings of the clock.

It was very hard to keep awake, lulled by so soothing a monotony, and it seemed to Jimmy that Mrs. Boothroyd would never go to bed. At last, when the clock struck half-past nine, the sewing ceased, the chair creaked, the cup-

board door squeaked on its hinges, and there was the sound of liquid gurgling from a bottle into a cup. Twenty minutes later Jimmy slipped on his clothes, buttoned up his coat (the night was cold), and with his bundle under his arm stole out of the house. The dogs recognized him by their silence, but thought it safer to escort him off the premises, wagging their farewell at the gate.

There was no moon, and the stars to Jimmy were only a crowd of strangers; but the darkness served his purpose well, for he had nearly a score of houses to pass before he found himself on the open road. Though there were lights in most of the windows, everything was very still. Only from the bootmaker's came the tip-tap of a hammer. The schoolhouse passed (he had never seen it so strangely silent), Jimmy began to whistle a year-old music-hall ditty about girls and soldiers in the park, swinging along the road at a good three miles an hour. But with the first hill came the need for economy in wind. Here, for the first time, he began to doubt his courage. The mopokes seemed to doubt it too. "Can't walk! Can't walk!" they said to each other in tones scornfully mocking, as if they had seen his spindle shanks in spite of the blackness of the night, and the news was passed from bough to bough ahead of him down the road. Hour after hour went by, and still Jimmy walked on. He was least afraid on

the level stretches of the road, but fear dogged his footsteps when it zig-zagged over the hills, and overtook him, walking by his side, when it plunged into dark valleys. For comfort he had the telegraph posts, a never-ending line of silent sentinels.

He had walked for what seemed like five hours—in reality it could only have been a little over three—before the weight of the billy made him think of tea. At the next stream, a trickle of water scarcely a foot wide that crossed the road, he stopped, unshipped his bundle with a yawn and set to work to collect sticks for his fire. In a quarter of an hour his billy had boiled. Wearily self-satisfied, he ate his bread and bacon, teased the embers into fresh flame for company's sake and fell fast asleep.

Jimmy had left home soon after half-past nine. At twelve o'clock Mrs. Boothroyd, going into his room in search of a bottle of toothache remedy, found the bed empty and the boy gone. She also found the letter pinned below the illuminated text, and prudently restraining her inclination to read it, hastily completed her toilet. Five minutes later Jacob Holden was awakened by a knocking at his door. His first thoughts on seeing Mrs. Boothroyd (he held an unnecessarily low opinion of woman's common sense) was that she had decided to leave her situation and had chosen

the hour of midnight as the one most calculated to embarrass and exasperate. Through an inch and a half of open door he demanded her business.

For answer Mrs. Boothroyd handed him Jimmy's letter, and then went into the kitchen, where she proceeded to light the fire and make preparations for a meal. Jacob Holden, completely puzzled, read his nephew's remarks about the intolerable scandal as he hurried on his clothes. In the kitchen they discussed plans.

"No," said Jacob, and Mrs. Boothroyd noticed that he did not offer her the letter to read, "he doesn't say where he's gone to; but of course it will be to my sister, Mrs. Transom's. You've met her, I think. She was always the sort of woman to spoil children, boys especially. I'll harness up the horse. He can't have gone far."

"Poor motherless babe," said Mrs. Boothroyd, as she poured out another cup of tea; "he can't go no distance with the legs he's got. I'll get my things on and come and help you find him. It may be necessary to spread."

"It's very late," said Jacob, tentatively; but somehow the idea seemed less objectionable than it would have done three months before. He saw nothing ludicrous in Mrs. Boothroyd spreading. On the contrary he was touched by her tenderness of heart.

Jimmy's legs, as Mrs. Boothroyd had re-

marked, being certainly not of the far-carrying sort, there was no need for hurry. Jacob lit his pipe, put on his coat, and went out into the paddock in search of the horse.

"There's one good thing," he said to himself, half apologetically, "the buggy always sits easier on the springs with two in it than with one."

"Now I wonder what it was," began Mrs. Boothroyd, as they jogged along the road, the reins hanging unusually loose, "that made the poor boy run away? It won't be that he's taken a dislike to me?"

Jacob spent a minute weighing the probable effects of a compliment. "Boys are strange things," he said at last, "unlike you or me, especially in their likes and dislikes. But he'll be glad enough to see us when we overtake him. Have some more of the rug, Mrs. Boothroyd; the night's chilly."

Mrs. Boothroyd's sigh was expressive of peaceful satisfaction. Jacob Holden echoed it and relit his pipe which had gone out.

"You ought to get some new curtains for the parlour," said Mrs. Boothroyd at last. "Those purple ones are just falling to pieces."

"What does a bachelor want with curtains?" Jacob flicked at the horse angrily with the whip.

"But your new housekeeper might want them."

"I don't want a new housekeeper. I'm tired of housekeepers."

"Oh, Mr. Holden, think of Jimmy!"

"I'm thinking of myself," he said. "What colour shall the curtains be?"

The mare seemed to realize that the matter was not one for haste, and zig-zagged down the road, leaving tracks that caused more than one passer by on the morrow to stare and wonder.

It must have been shortly after one—the Scorpion was already crawling seaward—when they came to the trickle that crossed the road. The dogs slunk out from beneath the buggy to investigate.

"What's wrong with them?" said Jacob Holden. "It can't be Jimmy. He ought to have got much further than this;" and he gave the reins to Mrs. Boothroyd.

Jimmy it was, of course, curled up by the cold embers, fast asleep. Jacob took him in his arms, not untenderly, and came back to the buggy. "He's got a billy there," he said. "What do you say to some tea, Mrs. Boothroyd—I mean, Rachel?"

"Rebecca," corrected that lady. "Not for me, thank you; and besides, I think we had better be getting home. There's no telling that the boy may not have caught his death of cold."

Jimmy moved restlessly.

"He's waking up," said Jacob. "Jimmy, my

boy, we've a surprise in store for you. How do you like your new auntie?"

Though Jacob Holden was ignorant of the fact, there was no novelty about the question.

"Go on!" said Jimmy, wearily, battling with the nightmare he knew would vanish with the dawn.

And they went on along the well-worn road, though the twinkling stars failed to show even the most obvious of the ruts, the boy dreaming of the dark mountains of adventure, the man and the woman quietly contented with the peaceful pastures of middle age.

SHEPHERDS AND KINGS

THE long ward was as dark as it would ever be that night, and as silent, but the bright light on the Sister's table, and the coughing of the man brought in an hour before by the ambulance, kept the wounded New Zealander awake.

"Not asleep yet?" said the night nurse as she stopped by his bed on her way up the ward. "Why don't you think of sheep jumping over a stile? And don't try to sleep; just follow the sheep and let yourself go with them."

"All right, nurse," he said, with a tired smile, "leave them alone and they'll come home bringing their tails behind them. I wish to God they'd take me home with them."

The night nurse looked at his dressing; there was no sign of blood, though she knew that there was the danger of a secondary haemorrhage.

"You follow them," she said, "and you'll be asleep in no time."

He watched her pass up the ward, watched her sit down at the Sister's table, and with her back towards him, bend over something that

she held in her lap. It looked like a splint that she was padding. Then, closing his eyes, he began to count the sheep.

They were not jumping over a stile—there were not many stiles in his memory—but they were wheeling, a great mob of them, in circles round the opening in the boundary fence which crested the range, until at last one broke through a gap, and the rest followed like a river in flood. Automatically he began to count them, and while half of his brain kept the tally, the other half took note of their condition. Their breed was Romney Marsh with a Leicester cross, fat and healthy too they were, as they should be with the paddocks green with cocksfoot. He wouldn't swap these ranges for the plain in spite of what folk said about gorse and bracken gaining the upper hand.

And what fleeces! There was a straggler that had missed last year's shearing, and there an old ram. However had he got in among them? A thousand and ten and fifteen and twenty.

Hullo! what was that? His mare had taken the fence and he was riding in the middle of the mob. Very well, let her have her head so long as she followed the sheep.

But what a mob of them there were! A thousand? There were tens of thousands that stretched ahead of him, a white road that cried aloud, and when he turned in his saddle to

look back, he saw that the hillsides too were white. He looked at the brands of those that were marked, only once recognizing his own. And those that were unbranded! Small wonder that no one wished to claim those bags of bones, those misbegotten mongrels.

"I never saw so many breeds," he thought, "Lincoln, Merino, Hampshire Down and Cheviot, tails docked, tails long, the sheep of all the world."

Slowly, in the midst of the sheep, his mare stepped lightly over the slippery grass. He saw that he was not the only shepherd there. To right and left of him were men on horseback riding the same way that he was going; just ahead of him was a beardless boy, mounted on a big white stallion, with laughter in his eyes, and, still farther ahead, rode a little grey-bearded fellow on a dun-coloured pony. Some of the men were on foot, queer-looking chaps, dressed as if they might have come out of a picture, but with a patient look about them as if they understood sheep and had handled sheep all their lives.

Dogs too! He hadn't noticed the dogs before. There were his own half-bred collies, Jess and Gipsy, padding by his side with an air of content and weary satisfaction in a task completed. But there were others too, by the score, by the hundred, lumbering old English sheep dogs, with the hair matted all over their eyes—dogs

in sheep's clothing—bastard terriers and spaniels, and a few great beasts such as he had never seen before, with jaws that could hold a wolf.

Many of the sheep were lame; some were scarred with the jagged cuts of clumsy shearers; from some came the foul smell of foot rot; some were fly blown. Yet all moved with quiet haste, as if drawn by the scent of hidden water, and that no spring, but a river where all might drink.

> " *Leave them alone and they'll come home*
> *Bringing their tails behind them.*"

The afternoon had passed into evening. Down in the valley shone a light.

"That will be the wool shed," thought the New Zealander. "It must be an acetylene flare that they are burning; it hangs so cold and white." He came down the valley singing. The boy on the white stallion was whistling *Tipperary*.

At last they reached the wool shed, the biggest wool shed he had ever seen, bigger than a cathedral. He pushed his way through the panting sheep to join the crowd of men, young and old, that stood outside the door. Some carried stockwhips, some tar-box and ointment, some crooks, and these not all of wood, for the crook of one white-bearded

man was of silver. Though they pressed round the door, they made room for the New Zealander, turning on him gentle understanding eyes. He wondered at their pity; he had come no farther than they, and looking at his dress to see if he could discern the cause in something strange in his appearance, he saw that there was blood upon his hands and clothing, blood that seemed to come from the bandages around his thigh. He had not noticed a wound before.

"Let this shepherd pass," he heard an old man at his elbow say.

The New Zealander stood on the threshold, his eyes straining into the warm darkness of the vast wool shed, searching for something he had not yet found.

From without came the bleating of countless sheep like the sound of mile-long waves breaking in a still August night on a sandy shore, when the tide is at the ebb. From within came the cry of a new born babe.

A great weariness came over the wounded soldier, and then as he sank down, a great peace.

"My God!" he said, "My God!"

MOODS
AND
TENSES

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By MARGIAD EVANS

Author of Country Dance

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