MOBY LANE

AND THEREABOUTS

BY **A. NEIL LYONS**

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THE MOBIES

Spring has many ushers, and is heralded by divers signs. Some people look for these signs among the hedgerows; others seek them in the sky, or listen for them in the night, whilst other people neither look nor listen, but go smelling about, or stand on hill-tops, tasting.

For my own part, I do not fatigue myself in this matter. I go about my lawful occasions with cold feet, smoking tobacco, avoiding clergymen, eating sausages, emitting letterpress. And sooner or later the Mobies come, wheeling in the spring; wheeling it to my very door on an old perambulator. I then know for certain that spring has arrived. I then know for certain that there are blackbirds in the thicket, and tits among the gorse, and that cowslips, lady-smock, and the lyrical manner are in season.

If anything happened to the Mobies and their old perambulator, I should have to fall back on my *Daily Mail*.

But —thank God! — the perambulator is yet

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sound and stable. It was made in those agreeable, far-off days, when perambulators were perambulators, and Coventry was Coventry, and works of fiction did not always smell of iodine. When I look at that old perambulator, and muse upon the changes which Time, and the portable baby carriage, and Sir Jesse Boot have wrought in the civic economy of my happy country, I-but let us pursue the Mobies. Let us cultivate the lyrical manner.

The Mobies have lifted the latch of my heart, and spring has entered in.

If you want to know who or what the Mobies are, they are a man and wife, properly authenticated, under nuptial law, with a seven-and-sixpenny licence, and with power to add to their number. They add to it yearly: for ground game is cheap, and bracken is everywhere, and your Mobilette is a hardy infant. All that he asks of God is rabbit stew, stout hedges, and a little pair of breeches.

The Mobies have been coming every year for seven years to the house which I inhabit. First of all, there were four Mobies: Mr. Moby, Mrs. Moby, the perambulator, and the sucking Moby. Now, there are seven Mobies, not counting the perambulator.

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Mrs. Moby wears a dress of faded tartan and an old, brown bowler hat. Mr. Moby wears trousers (lately the property of an author), a blue jersey, and a coat containing fourteen pockets. The little Mobies wear shirts and little breeches-all excepting Gertrude Moby, who only wears a shirt.

Gertrude Moby came to my door this morning. She uttered the usual speech, beginning, "Please, kind gentleman!" I ruthlessly amputated the extremities of this oration."

You can wash out all that," I said. "What is it this morning, Gertrude?"

"Please, kind gentleman, can you spare me a little bit o' cotton?" responded Gertrude. "Me bruvver's tored 'is trousers. He can't jump about or nuthin".

We supplied the necessary material for reconstructing Gertrude's brother on a sound progressive basis.

And muvver says," continued Gertrude Moby, " I was to see if you was the same gentleman as usual; and if you was then it's all right, and you can come across and speak to us. But I don't remember if you was the same gentleman or not. There was a gentleman gimme some bull's-eye suckers at this

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`ouse last year. But I can't remember the gentleman—not to look at. But I remember the suckers. They was they yaller uns."

I accepted Mrs. Moby's agreeable invitation, and walked across the road to a hawthorn bush, beneath which all the Mobies were assembled, in company with their perambulator, some discarded footwear, and a number of rabbit-skins.

Mr. Moby sat on the perambulator among the rabbit-skins, blinking at nothing in particular and picking away at his teeth. Mrs. Moby knelt on the earth, stewing tea-leaves over a little fire which was sheltered by the family chariot. All the little Mobies, in their ragged little breeches, pattered about among the flints in mid-lane, blowing hard at fool's parsley whistles, which were graduated in length and shrillness acording to the varying stature of the musicians. I observed that the family perambulator had been freshly painted, and that its ulterior panel was now adorned with letterpress, as thus:

Wm. Moby: Get'l Dealer.
Rabbit Skins, bottles, Rags,
Bones & cetra.
Licensed Pedlar.

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Mr. Moby, deferring his experiments in dentistry, sat up on the perambulator and waved a hand at me.

"Good mornin', me gentleman," said Mr. Moby. "We're 'ere again, ya see. Fetch out ya're bottles, fetch out ya're rabbit-skins. Mar, bring out the baby. There's another Moby, mister."

Mrs. Moby, in obedience to the command of her captain, produced from the adjacent undergrowth a bundle containing squirm. This package she carefully and deliberately unwound, exhibiting incipient Moby, masculine, plump, and rubicund.

"I did 'ope," said Mrs. Moby, "as Walter yere would be born beneath a roof. But 'e be cradled in a dick, the same as all the others."

"She's a discontented woman, Mrs. Moby is," said Mr. Moby.

"No, Will, no!" protested Mrs. Moby.

"Not discontented. On'y proud, like. Ya see, sir, I weer born inside a 'ouse meself. And I got a sister as is married to a man what work on the railway. All 'er children was born inside a 'ouse. I don't complain. I ain't discontented. But I must say I would like to rare 'em under cover—them what's yet to come."

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"Rare 'em under cover!" repeated Mr. Moby, with derision. "That's a woman to the life, that is! Look at them nippers there, sir. Did ever you see a 'ealthier set o' nippers? There ain't a moper in the bunch. There ain't a kid among 'em as isn't ditch- reared. Damn an' blast ya're 'ouses. Let'em lie 'ealthly in the fuzz, same as their father and 'is father done. Look at our Benny there— that yaller-' aired boy—did ever you see a better collared one? 'E've never lived in no 'ouse. Five year old 'e is, and e'll snare a grey-bird or stone a rabbit wi' the best o' them."

"Mr. Moby," stated Mrs. Moby, "'e talk a bit impatient, sometimes. " I areunt got naarthun to say agin the dick; on'y that would please me, that would, for to rare 'em under cover, just a dab-chick or two, if it's on'y to git upsides o' that sister o' mine—'er what's married the railwayman I—"

"All right, mother!" cried Mr. Moby. "We've heerd all that before. Don't overcome the gentleman. Tie up number seven, now. Put the little Moby in the fuzz. And give the gentleman a cup o' tea. And all you little Mobies, there; stop blowin' on they whistles. There's a chap in that halder bush as can whistle better nor you."

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All the little Mobies put their pipes away. All the little Mobies cocked their ears, standing barefoot on the flint. The artist on the alder bough put up his throat, and sang. He sang that little old thing of his in F: — "Did he do it? Did he do it? "
"Yes, he did!" cried all the little Mobies in reply: "Yes, he did! Yes he did!" Oh, they lifted the latch of my heart!

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II. YOUNG CRISPIN

This is a story for boys, and particularly for errand boys, and more particularly still for those red-faced, whistling, importunate errand boys who grace the elevated chariots of one's family butcher, and hold the reins of get- along, get-along, get-along ponies.
Now, Archibald Crispin was an errand-boy of this sort. But before he became an errand- boy, he was his mother's boy and a prize boy, having secured an award for "manliness" at the village school.
Archie Crispin's certificated character early attracted the notice and secured the regard of young women in this village; so that when he took his walks abroad, even during the period when he was still a private citizen, admiring whispers, joking epithets and sly looks frequently attended his progress up the village street.
But so soon as Archibald entered upon the professional stage of his career, the attention

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bestowed upon him by women became more formal. Archie Crispin, the manly boy, was considered fair sport for manly girls; but Young Crispin, of Bates's, in nut-brown leggings and a striped apron, deserved and won the homage of a more discriminating public.

Minnie Cook, the builder's daughter, was not too proud to be seen in company with young Crispin, of Bates's. I should just hope not! Archie Crispin was a perfect butcher's boy. I have been collecting butchers' boys for years, being, as it were, a collector of favourable British types. When I praise a butcher's boy, I know what I am doing. And I say, employing the cant of this vulgar age, that young Crispin was *some* butcher- boy!

Judged by the severest standards of his cult, he was a perfectly done specimen. From his nut-brown leggings and striped apron, to his wide, good-humoured mouth, his freckled nose and the large curl on his forehead, he was wholly and completely "done"—a finished butcher's boy.

I loved to watch him wallop his pony up and down hill on bright June mornings, and then pull the animal up with that sudden,

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unpremeditated jerk of the curbed bit which is sustained so cheerfully - within reason - by butchers' boys' ponies. Having surprised his pony and caused it, literally, to sit up, Young Crispin would light off smartly from his little, high, hard seat and spring to the back of the cart. I then loved to watch him slap open the back board of that equipage and bring forth his Dead; which, having festooned with white and blue tickets, he then slapped into a wooden trough, which he then slapped on to his shoulder and carried into some garden, crying sharply "Butcher!" He would soon emerge from the garden, carrying the trough, now empty, beneath his arm, throw it deftly, with one quick jerk, into the now depleted tumbril, slap-to his tail-board, spring up to his perch, beat his pony, and so away—right away, right away, right away, right away. A gay life

It was the gaiety of the life which proved Young Crispin's undoing; that and his pride. I had often observed in young Crispin that look of manliness upon which a department of State had set its seal; and I seemed also to perceive, beyond this property authorised characteristic, a further characteristic, one for which prizes are not awarded, although it is

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most often to be found in those whom the prize givers have delighted to honour. I refer to a certain sort of stuck-up look.

Young Crispin had not only the air of a young person in whom manliness dwelt; he had, further, the air of one who was conscious of affording accommodation to this admirable quality. He looked not merely like a manly young person, but like a young person who had cultivated manliness, as older persons cultivate the turnip, and who had obtained just recognition of his skill and industry.

I am, therefore, not inclined to share the theory which is generally held in this village that wanton depravity supplies the explanation of Young Crispin's fall. I believe that his manliness was to blame - that and the "Pictures" which have been established in a reformed stable at Blowfield.

If you are a manly butcher's boy and know that you are manly and that you are publicly known to be manly; if, further, it is practically a condition of your employment that you keep up a slap-dash style and nut-brown gaiters, then the builder's daughter naturally follows. When the builder's daughter happens to coincide with the opening of

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"Pictures" at Blowfield, what else can ensue, but the cultivation of a certain monetary recklessness which, when.t is combined with the complicated financial functions which have to be discharged by butchers' boys, leads inevitably to trouble?

And so it is officially recorded that Mr. Bates, young Crispin's master, found out, one morning, that he had been despoiled. He accordingly sent for Young Crispin, who was performing trade rituals in an outhouse, and that young gentleman and his nut-brown leggings having appeared before him, Mr. Bates spoke up. He said:-

"Now, then, Crispin. How's this? Gurney, of Pinfolds, has been in. We've gone into accounts, him and me, and I find you've paid in five-and-threepence short. Crispin, how's this? "

Young Crispin lifted a corner of his striped apron and rubbed a nut-brown legging with it. "I - I've paid in all I've 'ad," replied Young Crispin.

"You've paid in four-and-nine," said Mr. Bates. "There's my books to prove what you've paid in And Gurney, of Pinfolds, he've paid you over half a thick 'un. Told me so hisself, standin' here, in this shop"

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"I've paid in all I've had," repeated Young Crispin.

"Then, Gurney, of Pinfolds, is a liar. What'" retorted Young Cripin's master. "Don't you try to fool me, Crispin," continued that tradesmasn, growing warm. "Speak up, Crispin. Spit it out. Where's that five shillun? What else 'ave you took?"

"I've paid in all I've had." Young Crispin again uttered this monotonous response.

"Very well, then, " shouted Mr. Bates, "I'll take you round to Mr. Gurney. We'll see who's the liar then—him or you. We'll go into this. We'll go right into it. Get ye're jacket."

Young Crispin, still holding a corner of his striped apron, walked slowly to the outhouse where his jacket was hanging. He took the jacket from its hook, and matches and a cigarette from the jacket pocket, and he lit the cigarette and leaned against a chopping-block holding his jacket with a hot, light hand, and puffing hard at his cigarette. Then, as his master called, he picked up a sharp knife from the face of the block and walked out of the shed, holding his coat in one hot hand and the knife in the other.

"Come on Crispin. 'Urry up!" shouted Crispin's master.

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"Coming, sir; coming," responded Crispin; and he came, falling down at his master's feet.

"Christ!" cried Crispin's master. "If the boy ain't cut his throat!"

This the boy had done, and as he lay there the cigarette fell slowly from between his lips. And his nut-brown gaiters showed up clear with chintzy red splashes all over them.

Mrs. Bates was sent for, and Mrs. Bates pronounced the fear that Young Crispin s life had become extinct. "He can't stop here," said Mrs. Bates, adding: "For all the customers to see."

"No, he can't," assented Mr. Bates. "Send for old Rummery." And P.C. Rummery came and assisted Mr. Bates to remove Young Crispin to the outhouse, where the rest of Mr. Bates's meat was stored, and Mr. Rummery uttered expressions of horror. "Just look at it," said Mr. Rummery. "It's awful! All over 'is gaiters."

They closed the outhouse door on him, and Mrs. Bates administered brandy. I should be the last to deny that they needed it. And then they held a conference, the final contribution to which was uttered by Mrs. Bates, who said:

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"Depend upon it; there's more in this than five-and-threepence!"

* * * * *

Young Crispin became the object of general discussion and of State investigation. At last, after much delay and a great deal of formal deliberation and procedure, a hole was dug in the field beside our church, and Young Crispin was put inside it. This operation they performed at night by candle-light, with all the late friends and neighbours of Young Crispin looking on.

Old Mrs. Crispin, Archie's mother, and Mr. Crispin, the chicken farmer, Archie's father, were much touched by this proof of neighbourly feeling. They walked in and out among the company, shaking individuals by the hand, and saying: "Thank you! Thank you!"

And they cut out and caused to be framed a printed notice which had appeared in our *Sentinel*, wherein the burial of Young Crispin was described by an eloquent young writer, with a sense of euphemy, by whom the ceremony was stated to have taken place on "Tuesday evening" and the grave to be situated in "a new part of the churchyard."

This framed document now hangs in old

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Mr. Crispin's chimney-corner. And he has already developed a pride in it which will last throughout his litetime. All old Mr. Crispin's visitors are invited to inspect this trophy, and he says to them: —

"Read that. That's the account of poor Archie—our son, ye know. Him what there was all that talk about."

At these moments, old Mrs. Crispin leaves the room.

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III. A SHORT STORY

NOT only "a" short story: but the short story: the shortest which ever was written by a responsible author.

To make a longer story of it would spoil it.

It relates to Mr. Will Pepper, our village carrier, who came to my cottage at 7 p.m. with a York Ham, which had been expected to join us at breakfast. Mr. Pepper uttered confused apologies and unconvincing excuses. He also removed his hat. I then perceived that two lumps, or bumps, or knobs, or blobs, the size respectively of an orange and a tangerine, pertained to the forehead of Mr. Pepper.

"Pepper," I said, "you have sustained a blow."Yessir," responded Pepper: "'tis looking for a Night-jar done this.

"You got the jar all right," I suggested."

"'Tis a bird I'm speakin' of," said Mr. Pepper. "Some people calls it a corncrake.

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'Im what come out after dark and say: ` C-r-r-r-k! C-r-r-r-k!' I was lookin' for 'im with a comb. Me and Fred Tolputt."

"But how humane!" I interjected. "Do they wear their partings in the middle, these corncrakes, Pepper?"

"If you please, sir," answered Pepper, ''the idea of this comb, it is more in the nature of sport, sir. They will answer very often to a comb, sir, these here corncrakes. You

scritches it, so—C-r-r-r-k! C-r-r-r-r-k!—with the thumb, sir, and they mistakes it for their mate, sir, and comes to your ‘and. ‘Tis a ignorant bird, the corncraker, sir, though very tender eatin’.

“Me and Fred Tolputt, we drored one the first go off, sir. We found him along be Copperkin’s Wood, and ‘e answered to the comb as quick and ready ‘ sif it was the voice of his little old sweetheart in the thicket, sir.

“We crep’ along the edge o’ the wood, sir, me and Fred Tolputt, scritching the comb, ‘C-r-r-r-k! C-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-k!’ We crep’ and crep’, and we crep’ and the call from the wood it come closer, and plainer, and louder and longer:

“‘C-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-k!’

“There was a steep bank, like a wall, on

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One side of us, the edge o’ the wood like, with sycomore and hornbeam and that style o’ tackle growin’ out of it. Where the call come from, that was the steepest part of all, and we crawled up very cautious, scritching the comb. I worked the comb, and Fred he followed close be’ind me with a ash stick. He was breathing eager, so to speak. All of a sudden he whispers to me. `Steady!’ he says. And I stops. And there’s resserling among the leaves. And then, from before me very nose, as you might say, the last, long call come out:

“‘C-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-k!’

“‘*Now* you’ve got it!’ says Fred Tolputt. And, begod, I’ad: the same as you see, sir.”

Mr. Pepper removed his hat again and re-exhibited the bumps.

“Ye see, sir,” he explained, “young Bert Pusey, and that lot, they was out with their little comb and their ash sticks, and that seem s’if we’d sorter ‘tracted one another.”

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IV. THE SQUIRE

I HAVE just returned from Blowfield, a neigbouring parish, which I visited for the purpose of offering thanks to a certain Mr. Amos Pranklyn. This old person, who carried a swab-hook in the aboricultural interest, happened to have shown hospitality and kindness to a dog of mine, and I had marched that civil beast across the fields to pay his visit of digestion.

Mr. Pranklyn and I held council under the oaks in Blowfield Park. Mr Pranklyn is a person of observation, a noticing person to converse with whom is not to suffer intellectual humiliation. This cannot be said for some of the other inhabitants of Blowfield, the staple industry of which small village consists in groom-gardening for lieutenant colonels.

Mr. Pranklyn has noticed many things. He has noticed meteors and wood-mice and motor-cars, and he has observed the habits of Saturday afternoon photographers. He

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has also examined a number of other phenomena, including——. But, well, some other time, perhaps! What I want to put on record here is the fact that he has observed, amongst other things, his Betters. He had done this thing respectfully, of course, without impatience or emphasis, and with the reservations which become his humble mind and station. But still he *has* looked at the "gentry": he has noticed them.

This, when you think how thickly Mr. Pranklyn's path is strewn with gentry, is a remarkable circumstance: more remarkable, perhaps, than if you and I should take suddenly to noticing telegraph-posts.

When, therefore, Mr. Pranklyn began to offer me the fruits of his observation, I listened carefully. Mr. Pranklyn said:—

"'Tis a funny thing about the gentry, nowadays. That seem as if they was more simple, somehow, compared to what they be in my young days. There's our Squire: He say to me this mornin', he say: 'I see you areunt fixed up that trespass notice yet then, Pranklyn?' So I say to him, I say, 'Why, to be sure I are, then. 'Tis over yander,' I say, 'among they ellums. I fixed it to the she-ellum a-purpose,' I say, 'for the gaffer

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he don't look none too 'ealthy, an' 'twould be a pity,' I say, 'but what the oold board should stop up now 'e *be* up.'

"The Squire, he hike out his jingleums and light a cigar. 'Show me a ellum,' he say.

"That surprise me, for a person would think as any gentleman (Sussex gentleman, leastwas) might know a ellum without he be *shown* one. Such a well-growed pair as that be, too. Anyways, I give him a pointer with my swab-hook. '*That*,' say the Squire, puttin' in his glass eye, so's to git a close view o' they droopin' ash what stand top-side o' the medder, *'That?* Why, surely to goodness, that be a weepin' willer?'

"That seem a queer set-out to me," mused Mr. Pranklyn. "When I wor a lad, the gentry seemed to be more larned nor what they be to-day. And yet they tal me as our Squire have got the name for bein' quicker at figgers nor any man in this parish. Our late Squire, *he* be all for timber and damn ye're mathematics. He couldn't keep the sheriff out, for all that.

"There's another thing as puzzle me about the gentry, these times," continued Mr. Pranklyn. "'Tis so queer the way they snip the land about. Our Squire, he have kept

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his lot together pretty decent; but most of the other gentlemen, they seem as if the land about ain't naarthun to 'em. Live in villas, most on 'em do. They keeps a platt, or two, per'aps, and a bit o' wood—just two or three 'underd acre; enough to doddle round, cool marnin's. But they don't none of 'em seem to go in for *land*, if you unnerstand my meanin', sir. There's none of 'em got enough land to keep a gentleman *busy*, no sense. Just two or three 'underd acre, and a pheasant yere and a rabbut theer. 'Tis no wonder as they goos abroad. This villa life that be too close an' stuffy for 'em. A gentleman want enough land to kip him occupied; a farm or two, and some water and a bit o' rough—not a shrub 'ere and a rabbut there."

All this reminded me of something. I therefore said to Mr. Pranklyn:—

"Talking of gentlefolk, who was that little, round magnate whom I met in the Tenter-mead? A curly-headed magnate, with flat feet?"

"Magnate?" repeated Mr. Pranklyn. "What sort o' thing be that, sir?"

"A sort of gentleman," I replied. A rather excessive sort of gentleman. A Swell."

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Mr. Pranklyn nodded slowly to indicate that he had grasped the definition. He said, with a slight stiffening of his manner, as if he suspected me of an intention to cross the boundary which separates Enquiry from Disrespect:—

"We areunt got no gentry hereabouts as would answer to that picture, sir. At least, I hopes not, sir. Our Squire, to be sure, he do show a trifle short and broad in the bar'l, the same as be the fashion these times among the gentry; but—but—you couldn't mean our Squire, sir!

"What is the name of your Squire? "I inquired.

"Name? Why, Squire Kosky, to be sure," answered Mr. Pranklyn.

"Kosky," I reflected.

"They do say, sir," remarked Mr. Pranklyn, with a note of pride in his voice, "as Squire Kosky be the head o' the Corn Exchange in London. They say as he buy more corn in a week nor what all Sussex could grow in a year. A wonderful moneyed gentleman he be, sir. 'Tis said he pay a hundred and fifty *thousand* pound for the Hall here."

"The man I saw, Mr. Pranklyn, had a green, greasy face, a pot-belly, curly hair, an

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under-hung jaw, hand like a bunch of ripe bananas, a pink waistcoat, and——"

"I don't know naarthun about what you see in the Tenter-mead," said Mr. Pranklyn, quietly, picking up his swab-hook.

He turned his back on me, and fell to trimming hornbeam shoots. Presently, without turning round, he said, in the same quiet voice: "I can't let no one speak ill o' moi master."

I asked Mr. Pranklyn to forgive me, and he forgave me, and I called the dog, and we walked away.

As I walked up the hill, stopping occasionally to look over my shoulder at Mr. Pranklyn's patient back, the fear began to grow in me that I had done Squire Kosky an

injustice. I decided that he—Mr. Kosky—was probably quite unrelated to the awful little man from Hatton Garden whom I had seen, and whom I had suspected of feudal inclinations.

It did not seem possible that that flabby arm, those brown bananas, could hold a thing so strong and vital as the loyalty of Amos Pranklyn. Thus I thought, until.... I came to the hill-top, and there *it* was again... pink waistcoat and all.

It was leaning against a stile, receiving the

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obeisance and the salutes of a tall young Englishman, who spoke these words:—

"No, Squire, beggin' yere pardon, Squire: that beant oats nor that beant rye as be growin' in the field there. 'Tis barley, Squire."

So that, after all, I had done no man injustice. This person *was* Squire Kosky— "Head" of the Corn Exchange in London.

He put his bananas together and rubbed them, looking at the growing barley with a bland, accomplished smile.

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V. THE OLD BROWN LADY

AN old brown lady, wearing an old brown hat, and having three sacks upon her body and three chins upon her face, came to my cottage door this morning, and sang the song which follows:—

He swore that he would love me,
He swore he would be true:
He made his vow by the hawthorn bough,
He swore by the sky so blue.
But he boarded a ship and gave me the slip,
And I am left to rue!

O, all you rich ladies,
And you unmarried maidens,
And you damsels and courtiers,
And you innocent daughtiers,
And you bold and headstrong wenches likewise to:—

Come give me your pity,
And list to my ditty,
For I am left to rue!

He swore by all the stars above,
He swore in accents wild,
His eye was grey, his coat was gay,
My fond heart was beguiled.
And now my need is said indeed——
For, lo! I am with child.

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O, all you rich ladies,
And you unmarried maidens,
And you damsels and courtiers,
And you innocent daughtiers,
And you young and headstrong wenches, bold or mild:—

Come list to my ditty,
And give me your pity,
Alas! I am with child.

The old brown lady sang these words with great distinctness, in a penetrative voice. It was a wet day, and she was an old lady— ever so old a lady. And she sang her song

with such great distinctness that one had to take notice of it, and—well, considering one thing with another, her situation seemed sufficiently serious to warrant an act of charity. So I sent her out some cocoa.

Cocoa, I believe, is a beverage which clergymen and ladies value highly. It is a beverage possessing sound eleemosynary traditions. There is always cocoa in my house, and, thank God, I can always spare it. I bestowed at least a quart of it upon the old brown lady.

But the old brown lady despised my cocoa. At least, I suppose that she despised it, though she did not verbally declare that sentiment. What she did do was to come to my door, which I had partly opened in order

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to witness my benefactions, and push the jug of cocoa through the crack, saying firmly, but without anger:

"*No you don't.*"

I therefore opened the crack a little wider and discovered myself. 'Why, how is this?" I demanded, a little sternly, removing the banished beaker, which the brown lady had placed in a direct draught. "Why do you reject my cocoa, and in this terse manner? What is the matter with the cocoa? I'm sure—that is, I'm told—that it is very good cocoa."

"Very likely, my son," said the old brown lady. "*But it's cocoa*."

"Of course. Well...?"

" I'm not a Vegetarian, that's all, Sport," replied the old brown lady. "A little old-fashioned drop o' whisky is good enough for me."

Her wistful song was still ringing in my ears. She looked like a woman who needed whisky, who had been too long deprived of whisky. So I said to her:

"Well, mother, seeing that it is such a wet day, and that—ah—and that... Well, seeing what a wet day it is, I will give you some whisky."

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"Thanks, Sport,' said the old brown lady. She stood on the doorstep and sipped it, with gloating, miserly sips. And she peered at me through the crack of the door. And offered me a smile—a smile so broad, so roystering, so urgent, that I had to open the door to admit it.

"You got a nice little 'ome 'ere," remarked the old brown lady, regarding my modest dwelling-room with an appreciative and appraising eye. "Books, baccer-jar, candlestick, 'ats—*Oh!* a nice little 'ome. I s'pose ya don't 'appin to be in want of a 'ouse- keeper?

"Yes, of course," I said. (I feel, like everybody else, that a capable, middle-aged housekeeper is the only possible solution.) "Have you anybody in mind? "

"Certingly," replied the old brown lady. "Meself."

I stood and thought. The old brown lady was not at all the sort of housekeeper for whom I was seeking, but I did not like to tell her so. How could I look her in the eye, standing there on my own doorstep, and say: "You have too many chins and your sacks smell?"

I temporised.

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"Have you any qualifications?" I said. The old brown lady shook her head emphatically. "None whatever, thank God!" she replied. " Me 'usbin's dead an' me only child's a soldier, out in India."

"But... " I began, and, checking myself, relinquished that particular line of thought.

"You seem to have misunderstood my question," I continued. "What I wanted to know was whether you have any knowledge and experience of the housekeeping business?"

"Certingly I 'ave," replied the old brown lady.

"Can you cook?" I said.

"Certingly I can."

"What can you cook?"

Well, I kin fry potaters," said the old brown lady.

"What else can you cook? " I demanded.

"Bacon," answered the old brown lady. "I kin fry bacon."

"Fish at all in your line?"

"Y—e—s," rejoined the old brown lady, with a thoughtful air, "I kin fry a kipper."

I then made perquisition into her more general accomplishments. I asked if she could sew.

"Certingly I kin sew," she proclaimed, with

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a toss of the chins, "I sewed these sacks together."

"And you understand all the other branches of household management? Laundry, for instance?"

"Well," replied the old brown lady, "I worked for two years at a carpet cleaners. (Me glass is empty.)"

I relieved her of the glass. "Any other domestic accomplishments?" I inquired.

"Well," said the old brown lady, "I kin cut out paper roses. I'm a bit of a box-finisher. I kin shell walnuts and—so on."

"In short," I suggested, "you are qualified to take complete charge of a small house?"

"Well, I *oughter* be!" exclaimed the old brown lady. I've managed a marine store. Where's my glass got to?"

That vessel had got to the table. I remitted it to the old brown lady, having first carried it to the dresser.

I regret to say that shortly after receiving back her glass the old brown lady became a little boisterous. Her chins began to jiggle. They seemed to multiply. She began to utter compliments. She proposed toasts.

"Sport," she said, "I like yar ways. Here's

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wishin' you good fortune. "I'll come back here and be yar housekeeper. I will, straight. We'll get on well together, me an' you. I'll sing my songs to you. I knows a lot o' songs— old songs, new songs, comics— all kinds. I'll sing all day. Ya'll think ya got a gramaphone about the 'ouse. I'll pick out jigs for ya. I'll learn ye to play the ocherina."

"And will you, sometimes, wash the dishes, and make tea?" I inquired.

"That will I. Certainly I will," replied the old brown lady. "We'll 'ave srimps for tea."

"Oh yes," she continued, "I'll certingly be yar housekeeper. I'll come back in the latter time of the year. I woulden leave ya at all, on'y they're expectin' me in Kent. I ought to be 'oppin' now."

"Oh, surely you can stay a little longer?" I urged, genteelly.

"You've mistook my meanin', Sport," replied the old brown lady. "It ain't a 'op o' the foot I'm speakin' of. I'm speakin' of a 'op on a pole. 'Op, the vegetable; malting 'ops. You know, Sport—BEER!"

"So you're going hopping," I said. "Let me wish you fine weather and a pleasant holiday."

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"'Oliday! *'Oppin'!*" ejaculated the old brown lady. "Ya're jokin', ain't ya, Sport? (This glass could do with another rinsin'.) There's no 'oliday attached to 'oppin'; on'y 'ard work an' wet feet. Time I was younger, I thought different. I thought the same as what you do. I thought it was a sort o' pin-nic, this here 'oppin'. I thought they growed their 'ops on bushes, same as cherries or bananas. I thought ya walked among the bushes pickin' a 'op 'ere an' a 'op there. An' then ya drew yar money, an' then ya 'ad yar tea. But that was a dream, that was, Sport, the same as all the other notions what ya has when you are young. It's a 'airy, self-willed, ugly vegetable, is a 'op. It climbs up a pole an' ya gotter pull it off. Ya gotter pull all day. Ya gotter pull 'ard an' steady. Ya gotter make a *workin'* job of it. There's nothink in it, Sport—on'y the pay. Ya woulden ketch me 'oppin' if it wasen for the pay."

"Let's hope you'll earn a lot of pay, then," I proposed.

"Oh, I'll earn the pay all right, laddie, *and* spend it," replied the old brown lady. "See—I'm 'oldin' out me glass. It's a *nice* little 'ome," she added, irrelevantly.

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I didn't fill the glass again. But I gave her some smoked salmon and a little money. And the old brown lady wagged her chins and walked away—with difficulty—saying— ' "Good-bye, Sport. Good-bye, little' ome."

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VI. THE BED O' PATTIKEWS

I

Gideon Hemus used to live in Sloe Cottage, which stands at Sly Corner, near the crossroads, behind the blacksmith's, not far from Blowfield, in Sussex.

He is a hedger and woodman by craft. When I first knew him he worked for Mr. Isadore Kosky, our squire, who lives in the big Tudor house on the hill: a glorious old place, endeared to Mr. Kosky by fifty thousand ties—of gold.

Mr. Hemus, who began life as a farm lad in the employment of Squire Kosky's predecessor, and who is not a psychologist, often muses with simple wonder upon the altered habits which distinguish the new order of squire from the old.

Of course, he knows what is due to a squire, new or old. Gideon Hemus is no leveller. He knows his place. His place is not to inquire about things, but to accept and

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respect things. A squire is a squire. You salute him with the first two fingers of your right hand. You leave it at that. To do more is to presume. Meteorological comment of a respectful character may be offered to vicars and the lesser gentry, but curly-headed men like Squire Kosky, having once paid down their purchase money, get two fingers and the silent homage of unutterable humility. Still, even the humble can think about things. Gideon thinks about them. He said to me, once:

"The gentry nowadays that seem as if they was more short in the bar'l nor what they used to be. And shorter in the wind. 'Tis all this larnin', I spoose."

I first became intimate with Mr. Hemus in connection with certain mercenary transactions. I had been conducting barter with Ellen Mary Hemus, Gideon's wife, in

the matter of Campine cockerels. When Mrs. Hemus came out with the change to their cottage gate, she uttered the following strange speech:

"Hemus send his respects, sir, and will you please to walk inside. If it isn't taking a liberty, he would like you to look at his pattikews."

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"But I am not a doctor," objected your servant.

Mrs. Hemus regarded me with an expression of surprise.

"Cert'nly *not*, sir," she answered. "You be a gentleman. We know that."

"Isn't it a disease, then?"

"Sir?" queried Mrs. Hemus.

"This—ah—patticuse. It has a pathological sound."

"Cert'nly *not*, sir," replied Mrs. Hemus, with spirit. "I woon't *hear* of such a thing, that I woon't. Anybody's welcome to come into my house, that they be, and look for theirself."

I made apologetic noises. Mrs. Hemus reciprocated. She opened the gate, and I followed her into their little front garden. Mr. Hemus, extruding his head from an attic window, proclaimed that he was mending his trousers, but that in half a minute he would have completed that act of decency and could then join me. He requested me to be so good as to wait. I accordingly waited: and Boreas did blow.

When Mr. Hemus eventually descended—the process of rehabilitation had occupied much more than half a minute—a suspicion

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which had been gradually forming in my mind was confirmed. —The pattacuse—or pattikews, as I soon learned, under Mr. Hemus's direction, to call them—belonged to the race of vegetables. A horticultural work of reference, which I have since consulted, insists upon calling them hepatica. It says that this is a well-known name applied to a section of the anemone family, *Ord.* Ranunculaceae.

The pattikews, when I first beheld them, were clothed in their mid-winter *deshabille*. Mr. Hemus pointed to a vast bed of low- growing foliage, which occupied the best part of his front garden. A novice, such as I was, might have mistaken the plants for ground ivy, as I did—ground ivy which had succumbed to an attack of jaundice. Mr. Hemus stroking the leaves with his gritty blue fingers, invited me to do homage to them. I wondered (having at that moment no opportunity of consulting a horticultural work of reference) whether they constituted a salad.

"Did ever you see such pattikews as they be?" demanded Mr. Hemus.

I admitted that I never did.

"He have grown them," said the voice of Mrs. Hemus, in tones of soft affection, "according to a patent of his own. They

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areun't been allowed to flower this three yeer past, that they areun't. Oold Amos Pranklyn, the hedger—him over at Franklands—*he* rackon to grow pattikew. But——"

Mrs. Hemus finished her sentence with a derisive laugh.

"Amos," stated Gideon, "will find out what a pattikew really look like, come Easter. 'Tis no manner o' use to leave 'em bloom, not until the roots be got a-holt. So I are tal oold Amos; but th' oold beggar, he be that stubborn, he don't never listen to what anybody tal him. A pattikew that want two year, it do, to get a proper holt with its root. And even then, if a person rackon for to grow blooms as *be* blooms, he got to nip off the buds in the third year. Well, we'll see about it at Easter time. Oold Amos'll find out what a pattikew really look like, come Easter, shouldn't wonder."

"You see, sir," explained Mrs. Hemus, "he have growed them according to a patent of his own."

II

When I next heard of the pattikews, I heard a tragic thing. They had been trodden on. The treading was performed by a stag,

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three boys, a dozen men, half a dozen horses, and eight couple of hounds.

It seems that the staghounds had been invited by Squire Kosky to breakfast and other hospitalities, including the right of entry to Mr. Hemus's garden. Squire Kosky himself does not hunt stags, that pursuit being an active, very noisy and slightly dangerous one. But he does eat breakfast, and well he can afford to do so, being the Head and Brain of Kosky and Leverson, the Imperial mathematicians.

They brought the stag in a sort of window- less hearse, and, after they had breakfasted with Kosky, they opened the hearse and the stag jumped out and ran away.

After the stag (which, by the way, was a hind) had been allowed to run for a certain number of minutes, as recorded by the watch of a stout gentleman on a stout horse, who, at stated intervals, uttered the words: "Hounds, ladies and gentlemen, please!" they all ran after it and found it, after a brief search, in Gideon Hemus's garden, where it and the hounds and the horsemen and a detachment of peasantry and several highly illuminated servants with whips did not do much good to the bed of pattikews.

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I found, on offering my condolences to Gideon, that that husbandman treated the matter with admirable philosophy.

"'Tis a pity in one way," he confessed, "for they was fit to bloom, come another fortnight. But 'tis of no consequence in the main; for I can easy nip their buds off, to set them back again, and mulch 'em. The blooms'll be something to look at next year. You can't keep a pattikew back too long. The secret of growin' pattikew, that be to let their roots get a firm holt of the soil. I shouldn't wonder but what oold Amos Pranklyn find out what a pattikew look like, come the Easter arter next."

Mrs. Hemus exhibited less calm.

"They and their clumsy dargs!" she exclaimed. "Passel o' noisy gooks, stompin' all over the place with their tally ho and what not! And all because I give the pratty tame creature a drink o' water out o' my washbowl, poor dearr!"

The "Easter arter next" came round in due course, but I regret to say that Gideon Hemus's pattikews bore no blossom.

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You see, it was this way. Squire Kosky owns a cook, a husky German, whom he calls his "chef" The cook wanted to get married —the cook insisted on getting married. It therefore became necessary for Squire Kosky to provide the cook with nuptial accommodation. Gideon's cottage, in which Gideon had lived since boyhood, and in which Gideon's father and grandfather had lived, accordingly presented itself to the imagination of Squire Kosky as constituting an agreeable and conveniently situated enclosure for the cook.

A home was found for Gideon in a place called quite simply "The Hole." This place in bygone years, had been the scene of excavations for chalk or clay. A cavity had thus been formed, and in later, but still sufficiently distant years, an edifice had been constructed within the shelter of this cavity. Here, certain beasts and waggons had been housed. These the Squire caused to be accommodated with some galvanised iron; and, by the addition of plaster, Norwegian windows, a chimney, a cess-pool, a copper, and a sink, the old byre was converted into a roomy, unconventional habitation for Gideon.

Gideon received a week's notice to vacate Sloe Cottage, besides receiving a day's holiday

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and five shillings, on which and with which to perform the operation of "moving."

IV

He moved by instalments. I watched him in the smoky autumn twilight as he staggered past my window, backwards and forwards, carrying chairs and blankets and portions of mangle. Once, he carried a sixteenth-century Bible-box, filled with nails and rat poison. This I know, because I helped him to climb over the stile at Goddard's Piece. He did it clumsily, and the box, which was lashed to his back, became entangled with an elm

branch and its iron hasp came off and the lid came open and a shower of nails and rat poison descended upon my head. It struck me then how old and stupid Gideon was.

After climbing the stile at Goddard's Piece, he had to cross three meadows, which, at that season of the year, offered rather a weak resistance to the foot. All through that week, Gideon's boots seemed to grow bigger and bigger, so that his later pilgrimages presented quite a comic spectacle. Gideon is a blue-faced, wrinkled man, on the short side, and if you can imagine that sort of person

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jerking along with a table on his shoulders and a clay pudding on each foot, you can imagine how utterly ridiculous this one looked. But, then, of course, I can't help thinking that the mere act of being a Gideon is in itself a ridiculous thing. There is no "style" about these labourers.

There was an especial absence of style about Gideon. After a time, his shoulders, too, supported clay. He began to crawl by with great trug-baskets full of earth in which were imbedded certain jaundiced plants having a sort of resemblance to the ivy.

Mr. Hemus's habit of indifference to external events rather failed him at this time.

"The missus," he explained, "don't seem to care much for this moving. That seem as if the house in 'The Hole' don't please her. She say that it smell of rats. I believe that the pore oold gel'll take to hedge-mopin'. That'd be pity if she was drove to hedge-mopin'—all along of a foreign-born alliteration same as that Steinkop be. 'Tis a pity when anybody take to hedge-mopin', at sixty-three. There bean't no cure for hedge-mopin'. Once a hedge-moper, always a hedge-moper. Anybody what has rared cattle can tell you that."

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"What is your feeling about this—this change of residence?" I inquired.

"Me?" said Mr. Hemus. "Oh, that don't trouble *me* naarthun. What's the odds about it, any rood? 'Tis naarthun where you live. When I be a lad, me and one or two of us we 'listed into the milishy, and when we went to do our exercisin' they put us to sleep in a

cow-house. ‘Tis naarthun wheer you sleep. I was eighteen then. ‘Tis naarthun where you sleep.”

Mr. Hemus took out his pocket-knife and carefully removed a piece of clay which he had deposited upon the top bar of the stile which leads to Goddard’s Piece.

‘Tis naarthun to me,” he repeated, after shutting his knife. “‘Tis the missus don’t like it. Th’ oold gal areun’t never been broke in to a cow-house.”

V

I then asked him who had been barking the fruit trees at Sloe Cottage. He re-opened his clasp-knife and jabbed again at the stile.

Have they been spoilin’ they fruit trees, then?” he asked, with averted eyes. “They fruit trees was planted be moi oold father.

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Tis a pity if anybody are damaged them. The boys and young lads, they be ser saucy and mischievous nowadays. Moi father, *he* planted they trees—all exceptin’ the quince tree, and that weer put in be moi gran’father. ‘Tis a pity if anybody are damaged them. Hey? Well, I’ll be gettin’ on.” He lifted the basket of clay and leaves to his shoulder.

“These,” he said, with a sideways jerk of his head, “‘ull ‘ave to put up with it, same as me, I spoose. Their roots’ll have time to get a holt before the spring come, I shouldn’t wonder. They’ll ‘ave to go through with it now, whather or no. Oold Amos ‘e’ll git the laugh of me, if I don’t show a bloom *next* spring.”

But there was a further delay in the production of those remarkable flowers. On a night in January, there came one to my cottage who asked for a ladder. He said that the house in “The Hole” was burning, and that Gideon wanted to rescue his potatoes from the loft.

I returned with this man to the house in “The Hole,” which, I found, was burning well and brightly. Squire Kosky, with whom were the Misses Kosky, wearing theatre wraps, was present, and directed the salvage

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operations with much spirit and gesticulation. No fire engine had arrived, because the fire engine has yet to be invented which Gideon can carry on his shoulders.

It was a notable conflagration. Much of Gideon's furniture was destroyed by it, including the Bible-box; but they saved his potatoes, and Mrs. Gideon's mangle and her stuffed owl. My memory of the scene, as a whole, is confused, but I remember that Mrs. Gideon was the object of devoted attentions from a group of feminine convives, who offered her vinegar and ale. And I remember that Mrs. Gideon wept continuously. I remember also that the youthful population of the parish was very numerously represented and that its proceedings were the object of constabulary attention. I likewise remember that hoarse-voiced men kept telling other hoarse-voiced men to "look out," because the roof was certain to fall in, which it ultimately did, among a cascade of sparks, but with a singular avoidance of noise or fuss.

That which I chiefly remember, however, is the peculiar conduct of Gideon Hemus.

When I first arrived at the scene of this illumination, Gideon was not visible. Other members of the audience told me that he

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had retired to a distant knoll, with a basket containing dirt and roots. I looked for this knoll and found it, just as the roof fell in.

Gideon sat among his baskets, nursing a spade. He had lighted a pipe and was smoking it, thoughtfully, as he gazed at the spluttering ruins of the house in "The Hole."

During the whole period of his vigil, he only uttered one speech:

"That's well alight," he said. "Burning strong. Hey?"

Mr. Kosky objected to this behaviour. He said, and caused it to be known that he had said, that it was extraordinarily suspicious behaviour. He said, and caused it to be known that he had said, that Gideon's conduct might have to form the subject of inquiry. In the meantime, he commanded the Hemuses to inhabit a newly-erected cottage on the top of Abbot's Hill.

Here the wind is an important horticultural factor, and here the pattikews throve amazingly.

They were planted by Gideon in straight, bleak rows. The garden which they adorned was itself a singularly bleak and expressionless

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garden. It consisted of pure sub-soil, enjoying what is called an open situation. But the pattikews like it.

Gideon planted them in January. By the middle of March, they were in bloom. Not having ever seen a pattikew, and being curious to inspect the favourite flower of Mr. Hemus, I ascended that breezy height and looked at them.

I thought that they were interesting flowers; but a friend who was with me, and who is a Poet, used stronger language. "That isn't flowers," he said. "It's a piece of the sky which has fallen down."

He began to talk deliriously. Without pretending to countenance his unmanly emotion, I admitted that the flowers were nice. I even admitted that Gideon was perhaps right: that all this goodness was worth the trouble which he had been at to get it. I then opened the little gate which led to the garden.

"What are you doing?" demanded my friend.

"I am offering thanks," I replied, "to the man who grew these flowers." With that, I snatched a nosegay from the bed of pattikews.

We then walked to a house five miles away,

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at Cuckfield. In this house we found Gideon, who stated that he had left the house on Abbott's Hill, and was going to remain for the rest of his life at Cuckfield. His new and final habitation was called "The Cuckfield Workhouse."

I gave him the nosegay of pattikews, which he was very glad to receive. He said:

"Be they moi pattikews? They ha' took a-holt, then, arter all."

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VII. THE MERRY WAIT

"Waits!" exclaimed my pretty cousin Charlotte.

"Nonsense,' I answered; "that's the kettle wheezing."

"What an extraordinary kettle!" reflected Charlotte. "Does it always wheeze to the tune of 'Old Tom's Apple Tree'?"

"*Always*," I replied. "It's a patent kettle."

My cousin Charlotte, who was only lent to me for an hour while her father searched the darkling lanes for somebody with petrol in his pocket, looked extremely effective against the raddled bricks of my chimney corner. She has that soot and amber colouring which lights up so well; and I had piled on enough logs to light up twenty pretty cousins...." Old Tom's Apple Tree," I continued, "is one of its favourite tunes." I thought that if any old lie about a fourpenny tea-kettle would please my cousin Charlotte and reconcile her to my company in preference

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to that of a father with a defective petrol tank, she was welcome to it.

"With variations?" demanded cousin Charlotte.

"*With* variations," I asserted. "It is introducing these in your honour and—my Hat, what's that?"

"Those are the variations, I suppose," replied my cousin Charlotte. "They sound like a dentist's little grindstone, don't they?"

They did.

"Do you still pretend it's the kettle?"

I didn't: I couldn't. It would have been sheer folly to pretend that any kettle, even a patent one, could juggle with sound like that. "It *mus*t be the Waits," I confessed. "Listen."

We listened. It—whatever it was—grew suddenly shriller and more imminent; it seemed to be piping through the key-hole, via a hollow tooth. "It *is* the Waits!" we cried, and it was the Waits, and this is what they sang:—

Now, arl yew good people
What yerein doth dwell,
Come gather around
And my story I'll tell.
And wish you the joys of the season.

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Yere's a 'ealth to King George, O
And likewise his Queen,
Also the Royal Little Ones
Where e'er they are seen,
And I'm sure as I means no treason.

Long Life to you, Success to me,
And may our Hearts be full of Glee,
This Merry, Merry Ker-ist-mus!

The music ceased quite suddenly, but I felt instinctively that this was artifice—a feint. My cousin Charlotte looked at me with glistening eyes.

"Aren't they dears? Aren't they quaint? she demanded. "I do hope they'll go on."

"They'll go on all right," I assured her. "Listen; they are blowing through the keyhole now. That's to clear it. There you are! "—

Poor Lazarus he *sot* down
At Dives 'is door;
His limbs they was weary,
His feet they was sore,

And he begged for a mossel o' bread.

But Dives was stubborn:

He woon't gin 'im none,

Poor Lazarus fainted

His strength was all gone,

And when they come out, he was dead!

Long Life to you, Success to me,

And may our Hearts be full of Glee,

This Merry, Merry Ker-ist-mus!

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I took advantage of the temporary Ceasefire which ensued to ask my pretty cousin Charlotte whether she had had enough of it.

"*Enough*!" echoed that lady. "Why, we've hardly begun yet. They've got to come inside now and be entertained. You've got to give them plum-pudding and beer and hot wassail."

"That's awkward," I replied, "because my wassail's all on ice. However, if you command...!" I went to the Hall Door (which happens to be conveniently situated in my Breakfast Room and Parlour) and opened it, calling softly to the Waits. Then ensued a silence.

"Well?" inquired my pretty cousin Charlotte.

"There are no Waits," I answered, simply.

"Absurd!" exclaimed my cousin Charlotte, coming to the door. She peeped over—no, I won't own to that; not at Christmas time— she peeped *under* my shoulder, and cried out, in quite a vexed voice: "How aggravating! There really *are* no Waits."

"On'y me, miss," exclaimed a shrill voice, suddenly.

My shoulder was of use in this emergency to Cousin Charlotte. I am glad it was about

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just then. “Did you hear that?” exclaimed my cousin Charlotte, dramatically.

I confessed that I did; also that I would give much to know where it came from.

“So would I,” said Cousin Charlotte.

“Unless——what’s that on the ground?

That little, bright thing?”

“Here, Hullo! What’s that on the ground?” I demanded, in my Bay of Biscay voice.

“On’y me, sir,” replied the dentist’s file.

I looked again. This time I, too, seemed to perceive a small thing on the ground, a glittering, multichromatic object. It looked like a little flag.

“Who is ‘me’?” I inquired.

“Brown, sir. Eustize Willam Brown, sir, please, sir,” replied the shrill voice.

“Then, Eustace William Brown, come in!” I commanded. And Eustace William Brown came in. That is to say that the small bright object advanced towards us, and, when it reached the doorstep we saw that it was indeed a flag, a small, gay paper flag, and that it was attached to the cap of an extrenely minute boy. He came right in, and we shut the door behind him.

Eustize Willum Brown stood full in the glare of the big log fire and blinked at us.

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His four feet four of stature was crowned by an imperfect cap and by the solitary flag, which was rather torn. He did not offer to remove either the cap or the flag. He evidently regarded them as emblematic of his office and the season; as a mark of his official connection with Christmas and gaiety.

Master Brown possessed some peculiar physical attributes. His eyes were small, red-rimmed, and watery. He was bow-legged and humpy. His face was emphasised by a slight rash. He breathed in an unconventional manner, holding in his breath for several seconds in succession and then blowing hard at everybody. This idiosyncracy accounted for those elusive noises which we had associated with the keyhole. Eustize stated that he was fourteen years of age and that he did this sort of thing for pleasure and gain, but primarily for philharmonic reasons. He said:

“I knows a lot more, yit.”

"Then let's have some more," exclaimed my pretty, impulsive cousin. We therefore had this:—

Oh, the Mizzel-toe, Mizzel-toe,
Mizzel-toe Bough:
It was cut from the tree,
As the story tells how,
And it hung in the banqueting court,

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But the beautiful bride
Ran away that same night:
Nigh Twenty year later
Her corpse come to light
In a box where she'd 'idden for sport.

Long Life to you, Success to me.
And may our Hearts be full of Glee,
This Merry, Merry Ker-ist-mus!

"That's simply splendid," asserted my cousin Charlotte, when Eustize had subsided, blowing hard. "Have you any more?"

"Oh yes, miss," began Eustize. "I——"

But I would not be a party to this sweating practice. I pointed out to cousin Charlotte that Master Brown had walked at least two miles from the scene of his last triumph in order to accommodate us with his cheerful society, and that the barest considerations of hospitality prompted one to offer him food and drink. "I will go into the kitchen and fetch——"

"Oi woon' 'ave no plum-pudding, thank ye, sir, kindly, sir," said Eustize, hastily.

"Nor yet no mince-pies," he added.

"What would you like, then?" I inquired.

"Ser*deens*, if you please, sir," answered Master Brown. "Oi be partial to ser*deens*" With a sardine in his mouth, and another

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on his fork, and two on a plate, Mr. Eustize Willum Brown again addressed us. "Oi may's well gi' ye the next bit while Oi be eatin'," he said. "That don't make no difference to me, whether Oi be eatin' or no. I got it all be 'eart." Under the united stimulus of oil and zeal Master Brown then began, in a voice which was at least a full octave higher than his previous best:—

Of young William Corder
I now wish to sing;
Which turrible shame
On his parents did bring
Through killing his sweet-'eart so ter-ew.
To the Red Barn he coaxed 'er:
Then levelled 'is gun,
Maria fell dead,
Sayin: "What have you done?
Rash villain, this night you will re-ew!"

Long Life to you, Success to me,
And may our Hearts be full of Glee
This Merry, Merry Ker-ist-mus!

"Oi'll tal ye one thing, sir," added Master Brown. "Oi never wish to taste no better serdeens than these be, not if Oi live to ninety. Oi made a study o' serdeens. This is moi third box to-night."

"You've made a study of poetry and music, too," remarked my pretty (though impulsive) cousin.

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Eustize nodded. The sardines precluded speech.

"At the same time," I submitted, "if one may venture to criticise, your studies have been a little bit groovy. Variety is everything in art. Give us something pathetic for a change."

"I could gi' ye 'The Death of Nelson,'" said Eustize Willum Brown. He did:—

Theer once was a sailing ship
Went out to sea,
What roightly was called
H.M.S. Victory,
To foller the Foe o'er the Tide:
Her brave Captain Nelson.
He found them at last,
But the cowardly French
Fired a gun from the mast:
"Kiss me, Hardy," he murmured, and died!
Long Life to you, Success to me,
And may our Hearts be full of Glee
This Merry, Merry Ker-ist-mus!

I won't trouble you with any more of Master Brown's bright carols. His repertory, if not varied, was extensive; and my pretty, foolish cousin encouraged him to squander nearly the whole of his seasonable stock before permitting him to depart, accompanied by a shilling and two tins of sardines.

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After the departure of Master Brown, cousin Charlotte became sad. Our ardent, enthusiastic and happy little visitor had presented himself to her in the light of a pathetic subject. In the mood of melancholy which resulted from the cultivation of this theory she began to grieve for her absent father. I therefore suggested that we should go out into the night and look for that gentleman and his can of petrol. My cousin Charlotte

was pleased enthusiastically to accept this suggestion. “We shall have to go over the Common,” I explained; “but...”

“Oh, I don’t mind,” said my pretty cousin Charlotte.

All the same, it was dark on the common. My pretty cousin Charlotte had to take my arm. Still, if she didn’t mind, I didn’t. Presently we came to a solitary, twinkling window, which pleased and awed her.

“How pretty! How romantic!” said my cousin Charlotte.... “But how *lonely*! Who lives there?”

“Miss Sankey,” I said. “She is——” But

I was checked by a cry and a—pinch.

“Whatever is that noise?” exclaimed my cousin Charlotte: “That strange, unearthly noise.”[69]

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I listened for a moment. Then I said, calmly: “That strange, unearthly noise is the voice of your young friend, E. W. Brown. He is serenading Miss Sankey.”

“Oh, how amusing!” said my pretty cousin Charlotte, drawing closer to Miss Sankey’s window. “Who is Miss Sankey?”

I began again. “Miss Sankey is a Parish Worker. Just that. She is a Parish Worker by Heredity, Instinct, and Practice. She is also kind to cats. That is her calm, benignant face at the window.”

Miss Sankey had drawn aside the curtain at her window, and was looking forth with a gentle, welcoming smile, upon Eustize. That young gentleman sang to her. He sang of Old Jacob, the bad Jew pedlar:—

Now, Old Jacob, the Jew,
He was dressed very poor:
He come to the cottage
What stands on the Moor,
So lonesome, and silent, and cold.

Miss Hannah, the Spinster,
It was her abode,
She offered him alms;
He jumped in from the road
And strangled her there for her gold.

Long Life to you, Success to me,
And may our Hearts be full of Glee
This Merry, Merry Ker-ist-mus!

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Master Brown had scarcely concluded this verse when Miss Sankey closed her curtain, and her little gift of light was shut out from the Common.

Nothing further happened, except some feats of blowing from Master Brown. He blew and blew, but no sardines, no sixpences, came out to him. Presently we heard his queer flat feet crush into the grass as he walked away, still blowing, to look for other lonely souls whom he might gladden with his voice.

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VIII. "OUTSIDE"

AT the significant hour of eleven, I climbed the steps of my favourite little inn in my favourite little town, and turning round on the topmost step surveyed the people and dogs and oxen which were hurrying to and fro in the street beneath me. My mood was indecisive, as it always is at eleven o'clock, and my mind was heavily in labour, as it revolved the confusing alternatives which always present themselves to the human mind on those steps at that hour.

Whilst still immersed in these profound thought processes, I perceived, as with some spare sub-conscious sense, that an incident, if not incidents, had taken place in the

world below me. A certain young man had detached himself from the mass of cows and persons, and was ascending the steps whose summit I adorned.

He was a tall, fair, rather grave young man, wearing severely flattened flannel trousers and an air of diffidence; that modern sort of diffidence which seems to address itself to all

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the women in the universe with the admonition, “Oh, I say, chuck it!” He, in fact, bore all the marks and attributes of a quiet, gentlemanly, conscientious, popular young man.

He hesitated on reaching the step next to mine, and then spoke to me.

“Good day,” he said; “I am looking for a fellar. I suppose you haven’t seen a fellar about here? A red-haired fellar in a shabby sort of suit?”

I was unable to state with confidence whether I had or had not seen such a fellar as that described by the gentlemanly young man, but then, as I told the latter, I had not been thinking much about fellars. I had been thinking about drinks.

“If you had seen this fellar,” replied the young man, “I think you would remember it now, no matter how much drink you may have thought about. He’s a remarkable sort of fellar, because of his red hair and shabby clothes, and because the people throw things at him.”

“Why should they do that?” I inquired, having remarked what an even, unjoking head the young man had. “Well, you see,” replied that person,

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“this fellar is one of my fellars.” This statement he proffered in all good will as a complete answer to my question.

I judged therefore that this young man must be well-known and well-esteemed on these steps, and that by asking further questions, I should exhibit an ignorance which it would be prudent to conceal. I therefore asked no further questions. The young man asked me one. He said: “Will you. have a drink?” The answer to this question was in the affirmative.

"I am sorry to have troubled you about my fellar," said the young man, civilly, "but I thought you looked like the sort of fellar that might have seen this fellar. It was the way you were standing up here, you know. You had a sort of fixed, immovable look. You were starin' down at the market like a chap who's been lookin' at cattle and thinkin' about drinks for yaws and yaws and yaws. You looked like a man who was bound to notice everything, and you looked as if you were standin' here on purpose to answer questions. However, I am sorry to have troubled you. Let's have a drink." Whilst we were carrying out the process

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suggested by the young gentleman he again talked about his red-haired fellar.

"Of course I don't always walk about inquirin' for them," said the young man. "There are men in brass buttons to do that. But this particular fellar happened to be a particular chum of mine. He's one of these quiet, kind fellars, with a lot in reserve. He makes bird-cages and flower baskets out of osier twigs and sends them up to me. And he makes fool's-parsley whistles and all that sort of thing. He can splice a cricket-bat, too. He's one of these quietly clever fellars.

"I came to look for him because I'm afraid he'd have rather a miserable time out here. He's been at our place for nearly twenty years now, and he's much more plainly marked than some of the others are. His walking out has surprised everybody very much indeed. We thought he was quite to be trusted. The quietest and nicest of them take a- fit sometimes and walk out. They don't mean to run away, you know. They just want to look at the shops, and stare in at the smithy, and so on. They always come back again of their own accord. But the deuce of it is, you don't know just how they'll come back. *They* always behave all right; but you can't

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trust these outside people to behave. These outside people have a way of getting into one of their horrible sane furies as soon as they detect one of our fellars running loose."

By this time I began to realise what the tall, fair, grave young man was all about. He was some sort of official from some sort of institution, and he was looking for some sort of inmate who had played some sort of prank.

I was about to ask the young man to confirm these suspicions when that action was rendered unnecessary by the entrance of a bashful youth of the labouring class, who, addressing my young man, demanded to know if his name was Doctor Penny, and if he belonged to the county lunatic asylum.

My young man answered both these questions in the affirmative, and the labouring man then said:

"Well, doctor, will you please come outside at once, doctor? They've found that bloke you lost."

They had indeed found him, and there he was, all safely netted down in a cart. It was a strong, rough cart, and a stout pig net, and *he* was a frail little slip of a man, and the little white face which he pressed up against the pig net was bruised and blooded in divers

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places. Two men walked before the cart, and one man walked behind, eyeing the prisoner steadily, whilst maintaining a posture of acute self-defence.

One of the foremost men spoke to my young friend the doctor.

"We've found your lunatic, doctor," he said. "And what's more we've *caught* him. 'E didn't 'alf 'oller and kick out when I come up be'ind to put the sack over 'is 'ead."

"He would," said the doctor to your servant, in an aside. "Students of divinity do get excited if you put unexpected sacks over their heads. That's what this fellar is— a divinity student. It's the only thing that's wrong with him. He believes that his Redeemer liveth; he believes that Jesus walks and talks with him.

"Where did you find him?" he said aloud to the foremost of the three sane men who were with the cart.

"We found him on the old iron bridge," replied the man, a-spitting into the kinaul. So I dropped the sack on 'im, Billy 'ere knocked 'is feet from under 'im, and this other man, 'e lent us the cart and the pig net. Hi, doctor, steady on!"

The last exclamation had further reference

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to the pig net, which the doctor was slashing beyond hope with a big sharp knife. A fissure resulted, through which the doctor dragged his fellar, who, during the operation, and for some time afterwards, uttered and reiterated, without ceasing, the words, "Oh, doctor! Oh, doctor! Oh, doctor!"

He held the doctor's hand, and clung to the doctor's arm as a frightened child might do.

"Isn't this exactly what I warned you to expect?" said the doctor to his fellar. "I told you you'd be sorry if you ever went outside. People outside always behave like this."

"I beg your pardon, doctor," said the fellar. "I ought to have listened to what you said. I'll never run away again, I'll stay inside for the future and jabber along with the rest of them, and act kind and live gentle."

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IX. SWEET PEAS

Mr. Hannikin came to my house in the company of a dog-kennel. I had bought this article in Blowfield, and Mr. Hannikin, who is a wheelbarrow proprietor of that town, was engaged by the vendor to convey my kennel to its destination.

Mr. Hannikin looked feverish, having wheeled the barrow, the dog-kennel, his coat, his waistcoat, his collar, his tie, and an empty bottle all the way from Blowfield (which is five miles off) under a July sun.

I accordingly invited Mr. Hannikin to sit in the scullery and condense, which, having re-connected himself with the coat, the waistcoat, the collar, and the tie, Mr. Hannikin cheerfully consented to do. I was unable to offer Mr. Hannikin any beer, having recently had occasion to employ the talents of our local hedge-trimmer. But Mr. Hannikin, with little, if any, display of feeling, accepted bottled cider in substitution

"Norfolk, eh?" mused Mr. Hannikin,

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deciphering the text on the bottle. "That strikes a little mawkish on the palate, t'anybody what aren't been bred teetotal; but they say 'tis as good as a physic, if on'y a person can get over the taste. They pea blooms o' yourn look well, sir."

They did, although, of course, it wasn't for me to say so; but I admitted that I had seen worse.

"R,and so 'ave I," responded Mr. Hannikin, warmly. "At Blowfield 'All itself. I was in the garden at the 'All only yesterday, and the General's pea blooms, they don't shape no sense in compar'son with yourn. The General's sweet peas, they look like so many beanflowers in compar'son with yourn. Well, yes, sir, thank you, sir, seein' as it be so mild and beneficial. The same glass'll do, sir."

Mr. Hannikin, restraining an evident impulse to hold his nose, then benefited himself, in one determined gulp, to the extent of a standard pint. Having regained his breath, Mr. Hannikin then spoke again, with heightened colour, but with a subdued intonation:—

"There's somebody dead in this village, then?" said Mr. Hannikin.

Was there?I hadn't heard of it.

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"They been soundin' the bell, at all events," Mr. Hannikin declared. "'Tis a woman, simmingly," he mused; "for I took particular notice o' the music, and they sounded three times two. There's a wonderful lot of illness about." Mr. Hannikin sighed.

I filled his glass.

Mr. Hannikin emptied it—not with enthusiasm, but without effort—and sighed again. "Them as be'ant ill," he reflected, "be'ant well—not to say well. Some calls it the 'ay fever. Meself, I puts it down to all they 'ere germs and microbes. I be dreadful failed meself; compared to what I used to be."

I refused, in peremptory tones, to credit this statement, at the same time carelessly removing Mr. Hannikin's glass. Mr. Hannikin, who was a stout, pink man, in middle age, did not exhibit even the primary symptoms of breakdown. He followed the track of

his disappearing glass with a listless eye, and having witnessed its final abandonment in the sink, transferred his gaze to the fluttering congress upon the pea-vines.
"It don't do to judge o' a person's private interior from the outside view," Mr. Hannikin then proclaimed. "I buried a old aunt last Michaelmas. A nice old lady, as used to rare

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chickun and tomater at Cookstead. *She* be one o' the plump kind, much after me own fashion. If anybody was to judge o' 'er private interior from a outside view, they would put 'er down for a well-growed, 'ealthy woman. And 'ere we buries' er at sixty-four! She be one o' the failin' sort, 'earty to look at, but poor in 'erself. Sickens on Monday; lays up on Tuesday; sees the Doctor Wednesday; dies on Thursday. 'Tis in the blood o' our family. We're 'earty to look at; but we none o' us lives to be old. They pea-blooms is a wonder. They *be* blooms, they be."
"Could I offer you a handful?" inquired your servant, who was not unwilling to introduce a fragrant topic of conversation.
"You be very kind, sir," responded Mr. Hannikin. "I got the ole lady close by me, in the Simmetary at Blowfield. I goo theer pretty nigh reglar, of a Sunday arternoon, an' I don't reckon that'd come amiss if I was to strew a 'andful o' they blossoms upon the poor soul's grave. Such wunnerful blooms as they be!"
"I'll get the scissors," quoth your servant.
"Don't you trouble naarthun cutting 'em for *me*, sir," protested Mr. Hannikin, "Leave

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do the cuttin', sir. You kin trust me set about it ship-shape, sir. I shan't damage they vines, naarthun to speak of, if you leaves it to me, sir."
I accordingly delivered the scissors into Mr. Hannikin's hand.
"It were a cold, raw day we buried her," said Mr. Hannikin, presently, pursuing his reflections on the mortality of aunts. "About tea-time it weer. 'Tis new to me, this mornin' burial, same as you sim to go in for in this 'ere parish. 'Tis sharp work, boxin' 'em in afore twalve of a mornin'. 'Taint the custom anywheers else, ever I 'eered on.

'Tis to be 'oped as they don't do it reg'lar in this parish, oon'y on an emergency. There's one thing, tennerate, an' that's a sure thing—it don't do to stand on ceremony at this time o' year."

"If you will excuse me," I said, "I will leave you to deal with the sweet peas, while I go indoors to attend to some rather pressing business. Take your time and kindly cut off any dead blossoms which you may happen to find."

"You leave it to me,

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I accordingly left it to Mr. Hannikin. When, after watching for his departure, from the parlour window, for three-quarters of an hour, I ventured into the garden again with a view to assuring myself of Mr. Hannikin's existence and perfect well-being, I discovered that gentleman still in the act of dealing with the sweet peas. A pile of blossoms, one yard square and a foot high, which lay in a shady corner of the garden, provided me with evidence of Mr. Hannikin's zeal and industry. As I surveyed the multi-coloured mass of fragrance which Mr. Hannikin had deposited on the grass, my eye detected a splash of coral pink, and, hardly venturing to credit Mr. Hannikin with the audacity indicated by this discovery, I hastened to the heap of flowers. My God! Mr. Hannikin had indeed dealt with my sweet peas.

He had dealt with "Sterling Stent," "King Edward Spencer," and "Vicomte de Janzé."

These were my prize peas, grown for purposes of exhibition. They occupied special quarters, specially fenced in, at the far end of my little garden. The seeds from which these vines were grown had cost a shilling each. It had not occurred to me that Mr.

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Hannikin would venture to stray from the extensive general plantation of sweet peas into a domain so obviously limited and private.

However...he had done it. There was no use in complaining. Sweet peas, after all, are grown to be cut. I contented myself with suggesting to Mr. Hannikin that my floral

tribute to his deceased aunt's memory would benefit by immediate transference to a jampot and the sequestered coolness of the cemetery. Mr. Hannikin took the hint.

"If a poor man's gratitude is any use to you," said Mr. Hannikin, by way of valedictory utterance, "you got it. She weer oon'y a pore old lady, what growed chickun and tomater for her livin', but her spirit in Heaven will look down on you and bless you, same as I do now."

If another poor man's blessing is of any use to Mr. Hannikin, he will have to go somewhere else for it. I withheld it then, and I withhold it now.

You see, I had been preserving those exhibition flowers for a definite object—none other than that of exhibiting them.

The day succeeding that of Mr. Hannikin's visit was the day appointed for the Blowfield

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and District Flower Show. Sweet Peas grow quickly: but they don't grow from verdant bud to perfect flower in a single night. And verdant buds were all that the accursed Mr. Hannikin had left me.

I attended the flower-show, after a prolonged spiritual conflict, partly from brave and honourable motives and partly with a view to seeing what sort of trash would receive first prize (value £I) in the unavoidable absence of my own "exhibit."

Our Vicar accosted me at the entrance to the show.

"You are not exhibiting?" he said.

I explained to the reverend gentleman that an incident unparalleled in the history of horticulture had deprived me of that pleasure.

"The incident, whatever it was," replied our Vicar, "was, perhaps, a fortunate one. It has saved you from a public humiliation. Wait till you see the winning collection of sweet peas. Your blooms were well enough— pretty flowers: pretty flowers. But *these*— oh! Just you come and look at them."

It was certainly a stunning "exhibit." The flowers were badly staged, in sticky groups and dirty jars. But *what* flowers!

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I accepted defeat like a man. "This makes me feel happier," I said to our vicar. "Nothing but 'first' would have suited me, and I see now that I couldn't have got in These flowers beat mine. My flowers look like cutlet papers beside these flowers. Who exhibits them?"

The Vicar pointed to an official card, bearing a name which at that time was unfamiliar to me. "Who is he?" I asked.

"Hannikin?" replied the vicar—" Oh, a rather disreputable person. A working man. Lives at Blowfield. Something must have happened to his soul. Never knew him grow a potato before, let alone a flower. And such flowers! I wish the beggar luck; he deserves it. He's exhibiting again to-morrow at Cookstead."

A voice which, somehow, sounded quite unlike *my* voice, was then heard to address the vicar.

"Is he a middle-aged, pink man, with a fat face and a wheelbarrow?" demanded the voice.

"He is," said the Vicar. "Where are you off to? What's up?"

"A bloody combat," replied the voice.

I rushed out of the booth; I scoured the

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field. But Mr. Hannikin had fled. "Hannikin?" exclaimed a constable, whom, in the last extremity, I consulted, "why, they took him away an hour ago in 'is own wheelbarrer."

There remained to me the comforting thought that to-morrow was another day and that at Cookstead there was another pond. I went home and dieted.

But at Cookstead I missed him again. I did, as a matter of fact, just see him there. I saw the bald patch on his head as four triumphant convives lifted him into a tax-cart and galloped away at high speed. So I again went home and dieted. Next morning, at Blowfield, I resumed my search for Mr. Hannikin. I wanted him more badly than ever, for, thanks to his inconsiderate treatment of our "exhibit," it had only taken, second prize at Cookstead.

At Blowfield I found Mr. Hannikin. I found him in—the cemetery. On a grave. Toying with a bouquet; a bouquet of sweet peas. Our sweet peas, looking very tarnished.

I approached Mr. Hannikin unexpectedly, and without preface. At sight of me he rose to his feet and assumed a defensive attitude,

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waving the sweet peas wildly. He also spoke:—

"You wouldn't go for to strike a man on God's Acre?" said Mr. Hannikin. "And him just putting some blossoms on the grave of his pore old aunt?

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X. "VIADUCT VIEW"

It was the landlord of the Tiger Inn, at Pucklefield, who presented me to Miss Twose and her hard wooden chair.

The landlord of the Tiger, having closely scrutinised my shabby bicycle, my dirty face, and my dusty clothes, with their varicose excrescences (representing underwear and toilet ware and lunch), shook an extremely square, hard head at me.

"I am sorry to ill-convenience you," said the landlord of the Tiger Inn, "but I regret to say that there is not a room in the house which I can put at your disposal. Ya see, we don't reckon to take in travellers, not ordinary travellers, not in these days. We find there's more profit attached to a more gentlemanly trade: summer visitors, motor parties, luncheons, 'unt breakfasthes, and cetera. Besides, our prices are rather 'igh. And then again, I don't fancy ya'd be quite

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at 'ome, not with the company we got here now. Ya're a commercial, ain't ya?" He eyed my excrescences again. "Picture postcards. Eh?"

"No," I responded; "smoked salmon sandwiches."

"Well, well," proclaimed the landlord, an evident cosmopolitan, "there's no knowing what foreign fad will catch on nowadays. I can remember the time when the first celluloid collar was seen at Pucklefield. Now ya see them everywhere. I can remember the time when Australian Port was a novelty. I can

——— But I daresay ya're in a hurry to find accommodation. Ya'd like a wash, eh, and a brush-up?"

I confessed that I would like some beer and a bath.

"There's no trouble about the beer," replied the landlord. "We sell beer here— worse luck."

In response to the exclamation which was wrung from me by the unfamiliar spectacle of a publican denouncing beer, the landlord of the Tiger Inn explained that this beverage was associated in his mind with a vulgar sort of customer. He confessed to an enthusiasm for the light burgundies and gentility.

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He also told me that only one other inn existed in the village, and this he could not conscientiously recommend to me. It was kept by a retired prison warder. "A good enough man in himself," said the landlord of the Tiger, "but with a Government way about him and—from what I hear—with Government ideas of comfort. Now, it seems to me, pursued my obliging mentor, "that the best thing which you can do is to come along o' me to the house of a very pleasant, clean woman which I know of: a spinster, by the name of Miss Twose. We've recommended many young fellows like yourself to this lady, and they have always been wonderful pleased with the accommodation and cetera."

I accordingly permitted the landlord of the Tiger Inn to conduct me to a small and offensively red villa on the outskirts of Pucklefield. It was one of those utterly irrevelant villas which effuse quite purposelessly from the face of an otherwise spotless landscape, and strike the eye with a sense of incongruity, as if one's vicar came unexpectedly to tea in red socks. This villa had a name, and this name was Viaduct View. The name, so I subsequently learned, originated in the circumstances that by climbing to the attic window,

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with a telescope, one could command the prospect of a distant railway bridge.

Leaving me outside the fence of galvanised iron which protected the garden of Viaduct View from unauthorised inspection, the landlord of the Tiger entered that pleasaunce, and was shortly afterwards heard to be conducting a whispered conference with some person or persons unseen. He then reappeared and signified, with his thumb, that I might approach him. I did so, and was duly conducted to the entrance hall or vestibule of Viaduct View, on the right-hand side of which was situated the entrance to a tightly furnished alcove. "This," said the landlord of the Tiger, "is your sitting-room— the droring-room, in fact. Now, isn't it very nice?"

I expressed the opinion that it was, comprehending in a single appreciative glance, and a single ejaculation of pleasure, all its amenities, which consisted of a piano, an harmonium, an "overmantel," a mahogany table, a papier-maché table, a bamboo table, a sofa, two upholstered armchairs, two wicker-work armchairs, five smaller chairs, three mirrors, framed portraits of King Edward, Queen Alexandra, Sims Reeves, and

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Our Saviour, four pots of geranium, fourteen photographs, a paper fireplace ornament, four pieces of linoleum, and a smell of paraffin. I was fortunate in timing my encomium; for just as I uttered it, Miss Twose came into the room.

Miss Twose was a very bleached and shapeless little person, who, somehow, reminded one of an inferior dried fig. She looked as if she had formed part of a consignment of Miss Twoses who had all been packed flat in a wooden box. She walked with a stoop, and wore ringlets which, although they were of no particular colour, somehow succeeded in not matching at all with her hair, which likewise was of no particular colour. She rubbed her yellow hands together and hoped that I liked the room.

The landlord of the Tiger Inn replied to this inquiry. "The young man likes it very much," he said. "He was sayin', just when you come in at the door, that gettin' all these pieces of furnicher to stand in this room without touchin' each other was an art in itself.

... I been thinkin', Miss Twose: you can send the young man round to my place, when he's had a wash and brush-up. I daresay we can find him a bit o' dinner. He can

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eat it in our sitting-room. He wouldn't be comfortable in the public dining-room. It's evening dress in *our* dining-room."

I thanked the landlord for having imposed upon himself the trouble of devising this thoughtful plan, but confessed to a disinclination for further travel that night. "I can perhaps have a little supper here," I suggested; "Miss Twose will perhaps boil me an egg."

Miss Twose, with a fig-like gesture, intimated her willingness to perform this service. But the landlord of the Tiger Inn regarded me with a changed expression: an expression of disfavour.

"An agg?" he exclaimed. "An..... agg! A biled AGG!! Well, well! Ha! Ha"

He said no more; but with this bitter and mysterious laugh upon his lips, he turned and went away.

I then sat down in one of the upholstered armchairs. Miss Twose then screamed.

Miss Twose having uttered this distressing noise, I rose from the upholstered armchair, and ran about the room, feeling sure that wasps had entered it. But as soon as I got up from the chair, Miss Twose desisted from screaming.

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"Dear, dear" said Miss Twose: "What funny ideas people do get hold of! Fancy sitting down on a good new chair like that!"

I protested to Miss Twose that the chair in question was no newer than other chairs in the room.

"Of course not," replied Miss Twose. "All the chairs in here are new. That's why I think it's such funny behaviour to sit on them. There are plenty of other chairs in the house. I'll fetch you another chair."

With these words, Miss Twose went out of her "drawing-room," leaving me in a state of compression between the corners of the piano, the papier-maché table, and the harmonium. Within a few minutes, Miss Twose returned, bringing with her a small, hard, wooden chair, of the commonest Buckinghamshire variety. "You can sit on that," said Miss Twose.

I sat on it.

Miss Twose regarded me from between half-closed eyelids. "I think you'd better drar your legs in," said Miss Twose. "They toes o' yours might get scratching the pedals of the harmonium."

I drew in my legs.

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"I daresay," pursued Miss Twose, "as you look upon me as if I was a rather strict person. Well, anybody as wishes to keep a good 'ome around them, they got to be strict. Besides, I got a particular call to be careful. This home, it do not belong to me, not in a exact manner of speakin'. It belongs to all them there."

With a quick little jerk of her arm, Miss Twose indicated the fourteen photographs which decorated the walls and mantelpiece. A curt, disinterested glance at these portraits revealed to me the fact that they were, principally, of an equestrian character.

"Hi!" cried Miss Twose, suddenly, "take yere feet off that rug."

"And now," said Miss Twose, "you had better go and get a wash and a brush-up. When you come down again, I expect yere eggs and tea will be ready."

When I came down again, the eggs and tea were set out on a small tin tray, which stood on a small deal table, which had been forced into the "drawing-room" and was situated beside the wooden chair.

"Mind how you squeeze yere knees in," said Miss Twose. "I woulden like them to rub agin the harmonium. That don't belong

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to me, not properly speakin'. That belong to my nephew."

I nodded thoughtfully, being really rather more interested in my eggs. The first one showed evidences of having travelled from Ireland on a slow boat.

"This is my nephew," Miss Twose then said, taking down fourteen photographs from the walls and mantelpiece and placing them on the table before me. "He's in America. One o' the best young fellows they got there."

I looked at the photographs. They depicted a flat-faced young man in a variety of attitudes upon a variety of horses amid a variety of circumstances and in a variety of dress. The predominating costume was one familiar to all students of romantic literature. It was composed of a wide-brimmed, felt hat; a silly neckcloth; a shirt; two revolvers; a belt; gauntlet gloves; a corn cob pipe and hearthrug trousering. It reminded one of those arresting placards which adorn the frontages of "Picture Palaces."

Other photographs illustrated the daily pursuits and avocations of Miss Twose's nephew. In one of them, he was represented as pointing his revolver at an Indian; in another, he was waving a whip at some horses;

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in another he was throwing a rope's end at a cow and, in yet another, he was offering homage to a lady.

Some of the pictures presented Miss Twose's nephew in civic attire and amid urban surroundings. In one of these, he was seen to be riding in a motor car, with three young women, two of whom reposed their heads upon his respective shoulders and one of whom was seated confidentially upon his lap. Another photograph showed Miss Twose's nephew in full evening dress, and a straw hat, a bunch of roses adorning his button-hole, a parti-coloured ribbon athwart his chest, and a concertina in his hand.

"These are only some of them," said Miss Twose. "I got about a hundred more, upstairs. He's a fine young fellow, my nephew, ain't he? You don't see many chaps like him in Pucklefield."

I admitted that you didn't.

" It's seven years since he went away," continued Miss Twose. "He was coming home in three years, but he's had to keep on putting it off. They want him so badly over there.

It must be a great disappointment to him, having to stop on out there, roughing it in the wilds, instead of coming back here,

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to all the comforts of England, and the little home what I've got together for him. Do you mind not rubbing your sleeve up against the corner of that plant pot? It takes the paint off.''

I carried my offending limbs to the window, and placed them beyond temptation.

"It has took me three years," said Miss Twose, "to get this little home together. My nephew, he ain't got a friend or relation in the world, only me, and I ain't got nobody, only him. It's a pity they keep on keeping him out there in the wilds, when there's such a beautiful little home, and all the comforts waiting for him here, and me to keep him company. I want to keep the home all new and nice, so that he can get the full amount of pleasure out of it when he does come back. Such a pity as he's got to keep on putting it off. I'm afraid that the home'll be spoilt before he sees it. I have to take in a gentleman or two, so as to get a little money to put by for him. And some of the gentlemen are very careless. Would it be all the same to you if I was to ask you to set on the window sell? Your legs keep rubbin' up against that chair leg. Thank ya!

"The idea is for my nephew to take up some quiet position here, when he does come home.

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There's Mr. Tunks, of the general shop. He would be glad to find a travelled young man like my nephew to take charge of the tinned beef and the pineapple and that. Or there's Mr. Grist, of the Timber Yard.

"I orfen think of my nephew living quietly here, at home, with me, all among this beautiful furnicher.

"Week-days, he would go to his job until six o'clock, and then he would come home, and have his bit o' tea in the kitchen, and then read his paper a bit, and then talk to me, tellin' me about what's been goin' on in the timber yard, or else tellin' me stories about

his life out there, in the wilds. And then we'd have our bit of supper and then, per'aps, pick out a tune or two on the 'armonium.

"On Sundays, we could go to chapel together, and then go out for a little walk till two o'clock. "Then we'd 'ave our bit o' dinner. Then 'e could sit at 'ome and rest here, at 'Viaduct View.' He could sit in one o' these best chairs, per'aps, and 'ave a little nap, per'aps.

"And, after tea, he could get his telescope, and go up to the attic, and have a look out at the railway bridge and the trains, down there in the valley."

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XI. COURTSHIP

Those persons who do not know the hamlet of Montchalet, in Sussex (not Normandy), do not know a very curious and entertaining village, and are probably unacquainted with the Boot and Slipper Inn, as I was, until last Saturday. Until last Saturday, I was likewise unacquainted with Mr. Ralph P. Heathcote, of Europe, war correspondent, literary critic, actor-manager's adviser, and journalist.

Mr. Heathcote, seeing from the state of my boots that I had walked a matter of five-and-thirty leagues, was so obliging and charitable as to purchase for me a refreshing draught, consisting of a spirit called gin in combination with sour cider. Mr. Heathcote, of Europe, happened to be temporarily resident in the hamlet of Montchalet, in Sussex, he having a consumptive aunt with property, a striped dog, and a thirst for the society of favourite nephews.

Mr. Heathcote was kind enough to state these facts to me without the stimulus of

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inquiry. He remarked that Montchalet, in Sussex, was (generally speaking) a quiet place, but that it had its moments. One of these moments, he informed me, was now existing. It took the form of gipsy folk, a roundabout, goldfish, dart boards, cocoanuts, and swing boats, now to be seen in the tenter-mead.

With the gin and cider conducting revolutionary propaganda among the uplands of my soul, I took the arm of Mr. Heathcote, and, thus linked, we sought the tenter-mead.

Mr. Heathcote (did I say that he was a stout, well-nourished man of 40 years?), having cast a weather-beaten eye around the tenter- mead, then initiated an utterance. He said:—

"Now what we want, old lad, that is—I mean to say: Well, there's quite a charming —ah—well, look here: Suppose you just wait there a moment."

Without any further parley, this so-called friend forsook me. He strolled across the greensward, looking very fortyish and fine, and I saw him halt and bow before a brightly illustrated young woman, a young woman whose naked modesty was clothed in, concealed by, squashed poppies, salmon-coloured ribbons, and other less noticeable accessories.

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The salmon-coloured lady was accompanied, I perceived, by another female—one having great width and stature and a cow-like eye, and a plum-coloured face and freckles. I was thinking to myself how awkward it would be if one should find oneself in the position of having affronted this lady, when my meditations were interrupted by the return of Mr. Heathcote, who took me by the arm and whispered in my ear the following hasty confidence:—

"It's like this, old chap. She's a rippin' gal—a deuced rippin' gal, and quite friendly. Only, you see, she's got a pal with her, you see. And this pal, don't you see—well, it's like this, old man: If a gal's a decent gal, don't you know, she can't very well chuck over her pal at a minute's notice, to go off merry-go-rounding with a stranger. You do see, don't you? So I just said to her, I said, 'My dear young lady,' I said, 'don't you worry about that. Because,' I said, 'my friend here, the stout little fellar standin' ovah theyah by the swings, will be delighted to look after your pal. He will, *really*,' I said. And you will, won't you, old man?"

I took Mr. Heathcote by the arm. I led him forward. And, regardless of all the rules

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of chivalry, I pointed at the salmon-coloured girl's girl-friend, and I said:—

"Just look at her!"

Mr. Heathcote emitted a nervous cough. "I know, old man, I know," he said. "But —you know—I mean to say——" At that moment he seized me by the arm, muttering, carried me forward, and uttered rapidly certain phrases of introduction.

The next thing I remember is gazing vacantly before me at the swiftly-rotating form of Mr. Heathcote and the salmon-coloured one, while the salmon-coloured one's friend, planted firmly at my elbow, discoursed intelligently of meteorology and pleasure.

"It is a fine evening," I assented, the rules of courtesy demanding no less.

"Yaas," replied my fair companion. "I got a 'ole in moi tooth. Goin' ter 'ave it stopped a' Monday."

"Toothache," I hazarded, "is a very painful thing."

"Not arrrf," said the fair one. "Especially in dull weather. Although," she added, after a pause devoted to reflection, "I wouldn't swear but what the stomach-ache is pain-fuller."

That, I submitted, was as it might be. In

the meantime, could I not persuade her to follow the example of her attractive young friend and honour me with her company round and round the round-about.

She shook her head.

"Oi woulden roide 'pon one o' they things not for money, I woulden. *Pimmicky* le'l pastoime, *I* calls it. The amusement for *moi* fancy be the swing-boats. Ooh, yaas. Give me the swings!"

So, of course, I gave them to her.

"Be this a penny roide, or a tuppenny?" inquired Joanna (for that she confessed to be her name), as she clambered up the swing-man's little step-ladder. And I, in my spendthrift vanity, "Joanna," I said, "I will not stint you. Let us have a bob's worth."

Joanna seated herself heavily, and grasping a multi-coloured object which resembled a bell-rope, "There be one for you," she said, pushing across a similar accessory.

"When I be upwards, you pull yourn; and when I be downward, I pull moin. Let her go."

"Go it is," I replied. And away we went.

"It be foin fun swinging," observed Joanna.

"Ripping!" I replied.

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"Me brother Abraham," continued Joanna, chattily, "he are runned away and gone for a soldier."

"You do not say so?" I responded.

"We got a lodger in our 'ouse," pursued my entertaining friend.

"Oooooh!" I said.

"Hoo-oop!" shrieked the triumphant Joanna.

"Hoo! Oo!" I repeated.

"There be one pennorth gone," observed the lady.

"Not—more—than—than—that?" I gasped.

"What did you say?" chirped Joanna.

I said: "I said Hoo-oo-oo!"

"Hoo-oop!" screamed Joanna.

"Hoo-oop!" came in an echo from beside us.

And I beheld, as through a reeling mist, the salmon-coloured damsel and my beaming friend.

"Let's see who can stick it the longest," suggested that gentleman, in a cheerful roar.

"Two pennorth gorn," announced Joanna.

"Mean to say got to support 'nother t-ten pennyworth of this?"

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"Hoo-oop!" came the answer, in chorus.

"Whoi, you beant *'arrf* pullin'," complained my partner, in a tone of remonstrance.

"I — I — I — I Hoo-oo!" replied your servant.

"Just so!" said Joanna. "But that don't make no odds. Because I can easily pull for two!"

"Hoo-oop!" exclaimed the revellers at my side.

"Three pennorth gorn!" chimed in Joanna.

"Hoo! Oo! Oo!" I retorted.

"You be quite the sportsman."

"Thi-ink s-s-s-s-so?"

"Four pennorth gorn!"

* * * * *

"Six pennorth gorn!"

* * * * *

"Nine pennorth gorn!"

* * * * *

" G-r-r-r-r-r!"

"All over!"

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"A-a-ah!"

"And——"

"And——"

"And now, young fellar, it be *moi* turn. Jest you keep seated, and 'ave another six-pennorth along o' me!"

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XII. THE LAST OF THE GENTRY

This is the history of a psychological experience.

We had had cold duck for supper and folksongs to follow. At a subsequent hour the experience took place.

It took place in what I imagined to be my garden, although the darkness which prevailed at the time prevented me from forming any exact topographical ideas. Besides, I was dressed in a garment entirely unsuited to the time and place, and the lower part of my legs lacked even the meagre covering which that afforded. I wrapped it round them as well as I could. The grass appeared to be very wet. It tickled my bare toes. The dew fell gently on my head, reminding me of that fine old ballad, "The Amorous Financier":

> The pawnbroker stood at the trysting gate,
> With the wild rose wreathed in his hair,
> "Lieber Gott!" he exclaimed, "'tis a quarter to eight,
> Why tarries the Lady Clare?

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> "The dew, the gentle dew," quoth he,
> "Is falling everywhere:
> I am widowed and thirsty and sixty-three,
> And the top of my head is bare."

I am not a pawnbroker, nor am I sixty- three, but the life which I lead is as wearing as any pawnbroker's, and my physical apex as arid. I, too, cursed the dew. The Experience then manifested itself, saying, in a thin voice, "Oh, sir!"

At this I ceased to think about my own discomforts. I forgot about the dew, the wind, and the damp place I was standing on. The emotion of Curiosity took possession of me, and I looked at the place from which the Voice came from. I looked, and all that I

saw—at first—was a sundial pedestal. (This makes me feel sure that the whole thing happened in my garden—though what I was doing there at that.hour in that costume in dew, only the good God who made ducks can know.) However!

On looking again at the sundial pedestal, I perceived that it was now surmounted by some extraneous object. On looking yet again, I saw what that object was. It was a little man.

The little man was rather gaily attired. He

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wore green breeches, a red plush waistcoat, a green cut-away coat, and a little red hat. He was a very little man indeed, scarcely exceeding in stature the height of two breakfast cups. He stood on the dial-face, with his legs crossed, grasping the time-indicator, or "style," with his right hand. The top of the style reached up well up to his waist. All this I saw by the light of my cigarette— though why I should have been smoking in

that place at that time in that——However!

The little man addressed me. He said: "Good evening, friend. 'Tis cold work, eh—this waiting about for the night owl? He ought to ha' started an hour ago, the lazy oold raascal."

"The night owl is nothing to me," I said. The little man released the style and came to the edge of his pedestal, leaning forward and looking at me with evident curiosity. "Not waiting for the night owl?" he said. "Good gracious! What are you doing here,

then, at this time, in that——!"

"I am here," I answered, rather resenting his tone, "for a very good reason of my own. If it comes to that—what are *you* doing here, on my pedestal?"

"You don't need to ask me that," replied

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the little fellow, with a grin, "*you* know what I am."

"Yes, I think I know what you are," I answered. "You are—something I can't pronounce."

"Then spell it," said the little man.

"But I can't spell it."

"Then *try* to spell it."

So I tried to spell it—thus: "Leprachaun."

The little man threw up his face and sniffed. "You seem to take me for some sort of Irishman?" he suggested.

"Well," I replied, "it's an Irish idea, isn't it?"

"Don't you believe it," cried the wee person, hitting his metal platform with a little oak stick. "Your whole theory is about as wrong as a theory could be. To begin with, I'm not an idea at all. I'm a person—the oldest person in Sussex. My mother was a Sussex person, my father was a Sussex person; all their ancestors were Sussex persons. I've lived in Sussex myself for three hundred years. I'm the last of the Gentry. That's what they call us in Sussex: the Gentry. You ask old Peter Dumbrell, who mends your hedges. You ask him what he knows about the Gentry. He'll tell you lots.

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"As to our being an Irish idea, that's all nonsense: self-evident nonsense. We were going strong in all the old English songs and bogey-tales before Ireland was heard of. Why, I myself was turning Sussex milk and changing Sussex babies before they had a cow or a cradle in Ireland. What nonsense it all is! They'll be telling us soon that corpse lights are an Irish notion." "And aren't they?"

"Just listen to the fellow!" exclaimed the little green man, apostrophising the place where the moon ought to be. "Why, my own sister made the very last corpse lights which were seen in the British Isles—she made them herself, of sheep's fat and sulphur and tow, and the secret died with her, a hundred years ago. There never was a corpse light in Ireland at all. They stole the idea from Ashdown Forest, and pretended that it happened in their dreary bogs and made a lot of moaning songs about it. What place is this?"

"I think it is my garden." "It's a dull hole. Even the night owls seem to avoid it, confound them!"

"Why 'confound them'?" "Because I can't go away till the night owls

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come about. That's the rule, you know. I try to follow the rules as well as I can, being the last of the Gentry. If I didn't follow them, nobody would, and they'd simply die out. I'm sick of things dying out. It's jolly inconvenient for me, in some ways, I can tell you, this dying-out craze. Food, for instance. I haven't had a meal for thirteen years. Nobody puts down food for The Gentry any more. It's died out! It isn't long ago—eighty years, perhaps—so recently, at any rate, that even a young man like you ought to remember it—since *everybody* used to leave out a bit of supper for The Gentry. A saucer of milk, a sippet of bread, and a little white napkin to rub his bald head: that was the regulation plan. Why, a year or two ago, when you were a boy of thirty, perhaps, there wasn't a farmer in Sussex who would dare to lock up and go to bed before leaving my napkin, and my bread and my milk outside the dairy door. Nowadays they never even think of it.

"But, then, look at the people nowadays. That's what I say: *Look at them!* And look at the places where they live: Haywards Heath, Burgess Hill, Hassocks! Oh, it's well I'm the last of The Gentry. What

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would my old father say, or my old Gramp, if they came back and saw these rattle patches spreading, spreading everywhere, all over the big wild places where Gentry and weasels used to lie among the gorse?

"I'm glad to be the last of us, I tell you. The people have changed. Nowadays they laugh at Gentlemen like me. Therefore I don't often let the people see me. The last time anybody saw me was five years ago, and he was a man that made bricks, and we met each other suddenly, on a Saturday night, along the twitten that's over the hills, the twitten that leads to the sea. And when this fellow saw me, I thought he'd die—of

laughing! 'Ho, ho!' he says, 'Ha, ha! He, he! Why, there's a funny face!' And that was all he said.

"I tell you candidly, young man, it's *years* since anybody screamed at me. I wonder whether you would scream at me, just for old sake's sake?"

I couldn't refuse to oblige the little man, and so I screamed at him. He stood erect, defiant, peering proudly into the darkness. "Now another," he demanded when I had finished screaming. So I screamed again. This time the emotion of triumph overcame

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him, and he danced about on the dial-plate, waving his stick; and sparks flew up from beneath his little boot-heels. "One more! One more! "he cried, and I screamed a third time. At which he vanished—utterly. And dogs began to bark.

It then occurred to me that it was dark and cold, that dew was falling, and the grass was wet, and that I was imperfectly attired. And a Voice which I knew well spoke unto me saying:

"But whatever are you doing—on the lawn, at this time of night, in that——?"

"Cold duck,' I answered, and went to the kitchen door.

"And what are you doing now?" the Voice demanded.

"Locking up," I answered.

"Isn't it taking a very long time?" persisted the Voice.

I explained that the doorstep required to be dressed.

"*Door*step dressed!" echoed the Voice. "What with?"

"Oh, the usual dressing," I replied: "A saucer of milk, a sippet of bread, and a little white napkin to rub his bald head."

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XIII. BENNY DODD'S ADVENTURE.

Benny Dodd is our village postman: a round, short, solemn man, having withal a certain nimbleness. He sits his bicycle in a round, short, solemn manner, but he has an abrupt,

unexpected, authoritative way of ringing his bell, a quick, decisive way of jumping off, an impetuous way of jumping on. He is, in fact, despite his shortness and his roundness, an agile, jerky man. Many short, round men are like that.

One morning, there being a promise of sun in the sky, though a realisation of humid darkness in the wind, I worked my way to Goddard's Piece; and there I stood against a gate and brooded, puffing my pipe, stuffing my soul, and pretending, against all evidence, that August is as August was.

While I was pushing my heart against the gate, while I was watching the vapours rise from Goddard's Piece, the overhanging clouds were suddenly forced or prised apart and a little chink of sunlight elbowed its way

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through and illuminated Goddard's Piece. It disclosed to my vision a gaily lighted scene.

It showed me Goddard's Piece, a square of vivid green, backed by tall poplars, which formed a high screen of less vivid colour. In this screen there was a central opening, formed by the path, or glade, which leads to Bartlett's Mead—another green field—and to Copperkin's Wood, which lie beyond. Through this opening there issued suddenly into the sunlight a bright crimson object, jingling loudly. I thought at first that some sort of little fire-engine had come bursting out of Copperkin's Wood.

Then I looked again, and saw that the crimson object was nothing more unusual than Benny Dodd's official bicycle, which Benny was pushing—not riding—at high speed. As Benny, though noticeably agile, is not a professional acrobat, it did not surprise me to find that he had dismounted from his bicycle in order to propel it along the craggy and intricate paths which traverse our woods and fields. What did surprise me, however, was the extraordinary speed at which Mr. Dodd was pushing his bicycle.

Post-office bicycles are not light objects

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in themselves. Their perfectly "regardless" equipment of red paint must weigh something, to say nothing of their over-sized tyres and reinforced frames, to which must be added not less than two hundredweight of bulging mail-bag. But Mr. Dodd was shoving his little old bicycle along as though it was feather's weight. The mail-bags were flapping, the brackets, bells, and things were jingling. Mr. Dodd himself perspired and panted. Yet on they came, he and his bicycle, straining, leaping, bumping....A wreath of smoke, with which was associated a thudding sound and a booming noise, pursued them closely.

I thought at first it must be poison gas; but then I looked again, and saw it was a... cow—a piebald cow, all black and white, with steaming nostrils and red eyes. And then I looked again, and saw it was a *bull*.

Yea, it was a bull—a regular, right-down, royal bull, and no mistake about it. It emitted bellows, in addition to the steam and smoke—short, triumphant bellows.

It was a well-set-up sort of bull—broad shouldered, burly, massive. It had a hard, round, wide-nostrilled, indelicate, negroid face,

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surmounted by tufts of wool and two short horns. Its breast was profusely flecked with blobs of white foam, which it performed with its mouth in the intervals of uttering noises and issuing smoke.

Oh, it was a bull all right: a good, bull, fully grown, and every way equal to the standard set by the best Spanish illustrators. Every five yards or so it would stop, shoot a lot of smoke at Benny Dodd, roar loudly, shake its horns, and paw, pummel, or pound the earth with its forefeet. It would then resume the offensive.

In the meantime, Benny kept shuffling on. Grasping the Government bicycle firmly by its handle-bar, he buzzed it along, together with the Government mails, at an average speed of not less than fourteen miles per hour. His face was red and swollen. The Government mail-bags kept flapping back and hitting it. His breathing was laboured, stertorous, intense. Benny Dodd was hard pressed.

I leant against the gate. I held my breath. I let my pipe go out. I waved my stick. I cheered. "Buck up, Benny!" I exclaimed. "Only six yards more. You'll beat him yet."

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But Benny's strength was nearly exhausted. His pace began to flag. The bull gained on him. Horrible, gaspy, gurgling noises came out of Benny's mouth. His face was all distorted. His eyes were dull and glazed. I saw a fatal numbness overtaking him. I thought his time had come. So I gave him one cheer more.

But, *mirabile dictu!* Benny made another effort—a final, triumphant effort. My cheer, I suppose, had encouraged him.

When he had reached within two yards of the gate the bull had reached within two feet of him. The bull had got his head down. His horns were pointing straight at Benny's back. His eyes gave forth sparks, and smoke poured from his nostrils. I could see the Adam's apple working up and down in Benny's throat. I nearly fainted at my gate. Then... Benny came to life again.

With a sudden agile, unexpected movement, almost superhuman in its swiftness, force, and dexterity, Benny flung the bicycle away from him. It cleared the gate by a fraction, and cleared my cheek by half a fraction, and then fell, clattering to the road behind me. Almost at the same moment Benny himself leapt forward. He flung him-

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self across the gate and fell into my arms, gibbering, gasping, helpless, inert.... A second later the bull came crashing into the gate, smashing its cross-stay into a thousand splinters. But Benny was safe!

I laid him on the grass beside the road. I patted his hand. I blew on his forehead. He opened one eye weakly and gave me a glance of gratitude.

"My God!" I exclaimed, "he nearly had you, Benny."

Benny managed to gasp out a reply. "Yes," he said. "He nearly—h—has me *every*—morning!"

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XIV. THE HORSE-DEALER

He did not really live at Hailsham. He lived at a place which is remote from Hailsham. I call him "The Horse-Dealer of Hailsham," however, in order to throw my readers off the scent, and in order to achieve an alliterative effect.

The horse-dealer's name was Pennylove. He was one of those active young men of seventy, with red hair. The worst of red- haired horse-dealers is that they never die.

Mr. Pennylove explained that he was only a horse-dealer by accident. His true vocation was that of a plumber and undertaker.

I happened to find him on the roadside, courting, and I asked the way to Hailsham. In directing me to that hive of industry and true-blue sentiment, Mr. Pennylove took occasion to offer certain criticisms in reference to the pony and pony-waggon with which I happened to be equipped. Mr. Pennylove said:

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"That's a poor le'l pony you got there. Breed 'im yourself?"

I didn't attempt to deceive Mr. Pennylove. I told him the simple truth, which was that I had *not* bred the pony, but had bought him at auction for more than three pounds, and that he was a very good pony.

"Well," responded Mr. Pennylove, with remarkable acuteness, "I only got to look at 'im to see as 'e bean't one o' *my* breedin'. The ponies what I breed, they brings in forty guineas and more. I bin breedin' ponies for more'n thirty yeer. Breedin' ponies bean't my business, mind ya. I'm a plumber and undertaker, be rights. I buried our late Squire."

I congratulated Mr. Pennylove upon this feat, and asked the way to Hailsham.

"All in good time," said Mr. Pennylove. "The first time," he added, "as ever I begun to do much with 'orses—to say *do much*— that was five and thirty yeer ago come August. An old schoolmate o' mine—a man be name o' Thomas Tupper—he happened to be out o' work at the time, and I happened for to lend him a helping hand. I be allus one for lending anybody a helping hand——".

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‘‘Perhaps you could tell the way to Hailsham,” I interjected.

“All in good time,” answered Mr. Pennylove. “I be allus a one for doing good turns to people. On’y this very morning I walked a mile to the work’ouse, on purpose for to look at this very man what we be speakin’ of—this here Thomas Tupper, what be growed too old for work. ‘Good morning, Thomas,’ I says to him: ‘I areun’t forgotten you, you see. I be come here on purpose for to see as you be still live, and not more nuisance than you *got* to be.’ And Thomas, he say, ‘God bless you, sir, and thank you, sir; I bean’t dead yet.’“

“Do I turn to the left for Hailsham?” I ventured at this moment to inquire.

“All in good time,” responded Mr. Penny- love. “We’ll come to that presently. About this here Tom Tupper, now. I be allus one for showing kindness to any one, and I happened to be walking lame at the time, owing to a le’l accident which befel me coming down the steps at the King’s Head, and this here Tom Tupper, what was a old schoolmate o’ mine, he happened to be out o’ work at the time, and his missus feelin’ poorly, an another baby comin’; so I says to him,

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‘Tom,’ I say, ‘Old Mate’ I say, ‘this won’t never do,’ I say, ‘ you can’t go on like this. You’ll ‘ave to find some work to do,’ I say.

“Old Tom, he look at me sorrowful and he say: ‘That’s just what I wishes I *could* find, Mr. Pennylove.’ ‘Well, Tom,’ I tals ‘im, ‘if you can’t find the work, I got to find it for you. That’s all there is about it.’ And old Tom, he looks at me with tears in ‘is eyes, and he say: ‘God bless you, Mr. Pennylove!’

And—— What be you pullin’ that there ‘orse round for?” demanded Mr. Pennylove, suddenly. “That bean’t the rood to Hailsham. Jest you attend to me, and never mind about pullin’ that there ‘orse around. *I’ll* tal ye which rood to take when the time come.

“And so,” continued Mr. Pennylove, “the long and short of it be as I make old Tom a offer. ‘Now, look a-here, Tom,’ I say to him, ‘that sim to me as if I got to find some work for you to do. Well, Tom,’ I say, ‘the work’s a thing what I can find you easy.

‘Tis the wages what trouble me. I got a big business to keep up and a dozen men or more what I got to find employment for. But there’s a ‘orse-boy in the firm what don’t work ‘ard enough, and I don’t trust ‘is drivin’

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and I be lame, and somebody’s got to drive me. I thought o’ gettin’ rid of ‘im. You can come along if you like, Tom, and take on ‘is work, and I’ll give ye the same money—eight shillin’ a week we pays ‘im. ‘Tain’t a great lot o’ money, Tom, I know, but you be out o’ work and you bean’t the man you used to be. Take it or leave it. ‘Tis all I got to offer. I only offers it at all ‘cos you and me be old schoolmates.’

“Old Tom, he say: ‘God bless you, Mr. Pennylove!’ And so we made the bargain. What you boobin’ up and down for, Mister? May as well sit still. You won’t find out the Hailsham rood be boobin’ up and boobin’ down duck fashion.

“Now, let me see. Where be we? Ah! Old Tom. Well, Tom, he took on this job what I offered him, and he come into our yard for to look arter the horses, and to drive me about a bit and look arter *me*, me bein’ lame, same as I tal ye.

“Well, one day, when we be drivin’ out to a le’l village over beyand theer, for to measure a party for a corfin, old Tom he tal me as he know another party thereabouts what got a little horse for sale. ‘He want ten pound for it,’ says Tom. “Tis a poor le’l ‘orse to look

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at, but I know as ‘tis a good ‘un, and I know the man what it belong to and I know as he kept it dreadful poor. I know if that le’l ‘orse was to get a few weeks’ rest and grazing, as he would come on wonderful. That’s a twenty-guinea horse,’ says Tom, ‘if on’y he be properly looked after. You buy that le’l ‘orse, guv’nor, and you rest ‘im. It woon’t cost ye ‘ardly naarthun to graze ‘im, and if he don’t fetch his twenty pund in June, you can stop the difference out o’ my wages.’

“Well, I thought the matter over. Tom, he drove me to the man’s place what had the ‘orse, and I seed him. Tom, he say as that be a well-shaped le’l ‘orse. I turned the matter

over, accordin' to what old Tom had said, and I see as I didn't stand to lose naarthun; for even if the old 'orse didn't come up to Tom's idea of him, 'twas Tom would lose the difference, for I should stop it out o' his wages, same as he said.

"So I says to him, 'Well, Tom,' I say, 'I'll buy the 'orse!'

"And Tom, he says:" God bless you, Mr. Pennylove!'

"Well, sir," pursued the horse-dealer, "I bought that old thing, same as Tom advised me, and Tom he hitched him up behind our

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cart and we brought him home. I paid ten pound for the horse, and the man what he belong to, he give Tom a shilling for hisself, so I need 'ardly tal you as Tom were more than grateful to me.

"Well, sir, we got the 'orse 'ome, and that's the beginning of my story: that's 'ow I started for to breed 'orses. Don't fidget. I hates to tal a story to anyone what fidget. 'Ailsham don't lie where you be lookin'; so you may jest 'swell look at me—*and* listen.

"So soon as we be got 'ome with the horse, Tom he fetches out my wife—the one I had then: an obligin' woman—for to look at him.

"'Well,' says my wife, ''tis a poor-looken thing, and no mistake; but I'll say this for Tom, as 'e ain't ever wrong about a 'orse— leastways, I never knowed 'im be—and if on'y Tom can find the time to look arter 'im, I'll lay as he make something of him.'

"'Tom'll 'ave to *make* time,' I says, 'or else pay the penalty.'

"And Tom, 'e says, 'That's right, sir, thank you, sir.'

"Well, I will say this of old Tom, as 'e stood to 'is bargain. We be extraornarary busy at the time—that was a splendid yeer

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for mortality—and Tom he got more and enough to do lookin' arter his reg'lar employment—drivin' his master about and carin' for the beasts what we use in the business, without spendin' my time in the medder, arter this old 'orse. But Tom, he be a managing chap, and he find the opportunity in 'is *own* time. Night arter night, when

he'd done his reg'lar day's work, up at our yard, old Tom, he doddles off to the medder, and there he stops till arter dark, patting this old 'orse and brushing him and feeding him with corn and mash and God knows what.

"And at last, in the hay-making time, old Tom, he come up to the house one night, and he ask to see me, and then he tal as he have took the horse into the market that same arternoon, and he have sold him. Twenty- two-pun-ten he got for the horse, so wonderful improved that, be since I had had the owning of him.

"'Well, Tom,' I says, 'you been as good as your word and a bit over.' And I gives the man two shillun for 'isself. That didn't half please old Tom, I can promise you. You oughter ha' sin him go hoppen home to tal his old missus the story.

"But the best is yet to come. What ya

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looken at yare watch for? What's the hurry? Hailsham areun't gointer run away from the likes of you. If Isaac Pennylove got the patience to converse with you, I daresay you got time to listen to him.

"The morning after this day, when I made so good a price over the old 'orse, Tom, he come up to me again with a new notion in 'is 'ead. He tal me as a gentleman what used to live in the neighbourhood, in that big house back there as is now a school, have had a misfortune with a fine black mare of his what he paid sixty guineas for in the autumn for to drive in his phaeton along of his darters. 'One o' the young ladies,' says Tom, 'they've had 'er down in Flint Lane, and her knees look pretty awkward. Mr. Tunks—that be this gentleman's name—he talks of shootin 'her. Now, governor, you give me twenty pound and let me goo round to the gentleman's 'ouse and see what I can do about it. There bean't a better-bred mare of her size in Sussex,' says Tom, 'nor yet a better-looking one, and they knees of hers bean't neer so bad as what they seem to be. You buy the mare, guvernor, and breed from 'er. Time she've rested for a twal-months and 'ad her foal, you'll 'ave a mare worth thirty guineas

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and a colt worth double. Let me goo round now, governor, while the gentleman be in the mind to part.'

"Well, now, I'd been at the 'orse-dealin' long enough be this time to know as Tom were a man as I could trust; so arter thinkin' the matter over, I gives 'im the twenty pound, same as he said, and away goes Tom.

"Arter an hour or two, Tom comes back, and the mare with him. He'd bought her for eighteen guineas! I give him a trifle for hisself, and the pore chap fairly cried; and arter his work was done that night, off he trudges into Hailsham for to buy some chemicals to dress the poor mare's knees. When we come to look at them, there be only one of 'em as be damaged any sense at all, and Tom, he say as that bean't near so bad as some he've seen. Tom's wife, she tal me as she never 'ardly see the man all through that next fortnight. So soon as his day's work in the yard be over, up'd go Tom to the medder and stay till black dark, tendin' the poor mare's knees.

"Time the mare had her foal, nobody would believe, not unless they was to look at her knees through a telescope, as she had ever fell down in her life; and the foal, that was

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a reg'lar beauty. So soon as she was fit to work, Tom, he drove me out behind the mother, and we hadn't gone a mile from the house before a gentleman as met us orfered me forty guineas for her! But Tom and me, we knowed better than to part with her, seein' what class of foal it be as she was giving. But I didn't forget to mention the circumstances up at the inn, and they told me I could count meself a lucky man. 'Never mind moi luck,' I tals 'em. 'You put your money on moi *judgmen*t.' And Pennylove's judgment have been knowed and respected in this parish ever since."

"What do you judge to be the distance between here and Hailsham?" I then interpolated, "and which is the best way to get there?"

But the horse-dealer of Hailsham ignored this utterance, and continued to talk, wearing an entranced expression.

"I sold her foal for sixty guineas," said Mr. Pennylove, " and another one for eighty. That was a mare; and I bought her back again for thirty, two years later, arter they had

let her down, pore thing. And then my first old mare, she had a foal what I wouldn't sell at all, but kep' and showed him, and he

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took prizes everywhere; and what with him and his sister and one or two other things what I bought in, I was able to give old Tom the wish of his life and start my breed o' black hackneys, what is now so well beknown to every gentleman in Sussex. I reckon as my horse-breedin' has been worth as much as two thousand pound to me, taken from first to last. I been breedin' now for thirty yeers, and only made but one mistake; and that was poor old Tom's. He sold my first old mare for eighteen guineas, the same as I gave for her. She be more'n twenty yeer old at the time, but still a remarkable one to go and wonderful pretty to look at and wonderful kind.

"There was an old lady lived in the village then, what took a grand fancy to the old thing, and Tom was well disposed to this old lady, for she was in the habit of givin' him 'bacca. The upshot of it was as I allowed myself to be over-persuaded, and I sold this old mare to this lady for the same money what she had cost me twenty yeers before. It seemed a good price at the time. But a week arter I'd sold the creeture, I found as there was another old lady in the parish as would willingly have given me five guineas more for her.

"Well, I never said naarthun to poor old

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Tom about it; 'twould on'y have vexed the man. But I could see as he be growed a bit too old for his work, and as his missus were dead be this time and his children all growed up and able to look after theirselves, I just eased him off into the workus. He's livin' there now, and I be just come from visitin' him. I took him the news about a colt o' mine, the great-great-grandson of this old mare, what I've sold for a hundred guineas at the show. I thought the old fellar would ha' cried, he be that pleased to see me.

"Well, sir, that's the story of my horse- breedin'. What do you think about it?"

"I think," I answered, "that if you stand between me and Hailsham any longer, old Pennylove, I shall run you down." With that we went our ways.

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XV. BARCLAY'S SHOP

Ann Walstead—Ann Walstead II., I ought to call her: because, although her fickle mother is dead to me, she is not dead to all the world—Ann Walstead II. came to tea with me the other afternoon, and remarked in a distinct voice on the absence of seed cake.

I defended this omission with the old, old plea that there was plenty of plum. Ann Walstead II. made short work of that argument.

"Plum cake is not very good for people in hot weather," she said. "I am not supposed to eat plum cake, and besides, it *isn't* plum cake: it is currant cake. Only common people say 'Plum cake.' And it doesn't look like a very nice currant cake, and vere isn't much of it."

The truth of this statement was so obvious—Ann II.'s visit was unexpected, you see, and I had not had time to prepare for it—that I did not attempt to deny it. I adopted another line of defence, also an old one, I being a collector of antiques. I said:

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"The truth is, Ann, that I have been measured for a new piece of pl—currant cake, but it has not yet come home. The caker hasn't sent it yet. He says he won't send it until I pay for it, and I say I won't pay for it until next Saturday. I don't get my pocket money till Saturday."

This argument succeeded. Ann II. regarded me with a deeply sympathetic gaze. "You poor old fing," she said. "How dreadfully inconvenient! I know all about it, because I have to wait until Saturdays too. And ven they very often forget me. Do they ever forget you?"

"Often and often," I replied.

"Oh, rotten!" exclaimed Miss Walstead. She was silent for a little while, considering the situation in all its hollow decadence. At last, frowning thoughtfully, she spoke again.

"I don't understand," she said, "why a grown-up person like you are puts up wiv this pocket money business at all. When you are young, you have to take what you can get; but when I am as old as you are, I shall go to Barclay's shop in Blowfield, like Muggins does."

Muggins is Miss Walstead's father. "Why don't *you* get some money from Barclay's shop?" continued that young lady.

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"I don't think I know Barclay's shop—unless you are talking of the ban——"

"Of *course* you know Barclay's shop," insisted Miss Walstead. "Everybody knows it. Barclay's money shop, you know, in Blowfield. You write how much you want on a piece of pink paper and vey give it to you." "I think," I admitted, "that I do know the shop to which you refer."

"Of course you do," repeated Ann II. "Barclay's shop is a lovely big shop, and there is a long, brown, shiny table in it, and Mr. Barclay and all his sons vey stand behind this table all day long to give people money. Mr. Barclay has white hair and two or free chins, and vere is bits of white hair on vem, and his collar is made wide open, to show vem off. But Mr. Barclay's sons are *beautiful*. Vey are all very young, wiv lovely yellow hair, all stuck down flat. And vey have only got *one* chin, and vey wear tall, tight collars and pretty waistcoats. And Mr. Barclay has given each of his sons a little golden-coloured spade, and vey dig out the money with vese spades and ven vey weigh it in a golden- coloured weighing fing. Nannah and me, we often go to Barclay's shop wiv a bit of

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pink paper what Muggins has drawn words on. And when we go into the shop, Mr. Barclay's sons, vey all look very pleased and Nannah looks very red, and vey dig up pounds and pounds wiv veir little gold spades an' give vem to us for Muggins. And

when Mr. Barclay hears vem digging, *he* comes out. He comes out from ve little wooden house behind his sons, and *he* don't look at Nannah, but he looks at me, and he shows his teef to me and rubs his hands togever, and he says: 'Dear, dear! It's little Miss Walstead. And how is little Miss Walstead vis morning?'

"When I am as big as you are," continued Ann II., "*I* shan't bother waitin' about for Saturday. I shall buy some pink papers, like Muggins has got, and I shall change them for money at Mr. Barclay's shop."

"That's a jolly good idea," I cried.

"Ven why don't *you* do vat?" demanded Miss Walstead. "Ven you could have a nicer cake for tea?"

"I haven't got any pink paper," responded your servant. "And if I had it would be the wrong paper, or I should draw the wrong words on it, or something. I'm always unlucky in those things."

"You are like Mr. Rummery," said Ann II.

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"Am I indeed!" I replied. The tone in which I uttered this exclamation was perhaps a little frigid. Mr. Rummery is a husbandman, who is employed by Anne's father. He is a rather aged 'husbandman. He has bow legs and a squint, and he is toothless. His back is permanently cricked, there are knobs on his hands, and when he talks he bubbles. Like all professional writers, I have cultivated the art of seeming older than my years; but—but, dammit, I don't want to seem as old as Mr. Rummery.

"Mr. Rummery is unlucky in vose fings, too, ve same as you are," pursued Miss Walstead.

"I found vat out last week, when Mr. Rummery was digging in ve garden. It was Saturday, and Muggins had given him his pocket money. He often forgets my pocket money, but he never forgets Mr. Rummery's. He says vat Mr. Rummery works for his pocket money.

"And I spoke to Mr. Rummery, and I said: 'Why are you always digging, Mr. Rummery?' And he said to me, ''Tis how I gets me money, Miss.'

"And so I said to Mr. Rummery: 'But vat's a very tiresome way of gettin' money.

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Why don't you get your money from Mr. Barclay's shop in Blowfield, ve same as Muggins does?' And Mr. Rummery said, 'I can't hardly say I've ever fought of that, Miss.'

"I said to Mr. Rummery: 'You ought to go to Barclay's shop, in Blowfield, for your money. Vat is the way vat all *nice* people get veir money. Vey do not dig, and dig, and dig, all day, like you do, Mr. Rummery, and ven go round to ve study door on Saturdays for pocket money, ve same as if vey was a little girl. Vey goes to Mr. Barclay's shop, in Blowfield, wiv pieces of pink paper. And Mr. Barclay rubs his hands togever and gives vem money for ve paper. He gives vem lots of money. Pounds and pounds. He's got some lovely sons, wiv yellow hair, and vey digs out money wiv veir little golden spades and vey weighs it in a little golden weighing fing. *You* ought to go to Barclay's shop and get some money, Mr. Rummery.'

"Mr. Rummery laughed when I said that. 'Perhaps I ought, Miss,' he said, 'but then, perhaps I haven't got the proper bits of paper.'

"When Mr. Rummery said that," pursued Miss Walstead, "I felt so sorry. So I fetched

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a piece of the pink paper out of a book in Muggins' study, and I drawed some words on it. And ven I went to Mr. Rummery and made him leave off digging, and I made him hold my hand, and I took him over the hill and frough ve woods to Blowfield, and I took him into Mr. Barclay's shop. And ven I said to him:

"'Mr. Barclay's sons will dig you up a lot of money now, and ven *you* needn't go on digging any more.'

"But Mr. Rummery, he is unlucky in vese fings, like you are. Vey wouldn't dig out any money for him. Vey took the piece of paper what I had drawed words on and vey laughed and vey knocked at ve wooden house where Mr. Barclay lives, and Mr. Barclay he came out, and he rubbed his hands togever and he showed his teef to me and he said,

‘Dear, dear! And how is little Miss Walstead vis morning?’ But when he looked at ve piece of paper, he shook his head, and ven he tore ve paper up.

“Vey wouldn’t dig up any money, so Mr. Rummery and me, we went away. And Mr. Rummery, he made a lot of bubbles wiv his mouth, and said to me:

“‘Ah! I fought vere was a catch in it, somewhere.’“

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XVI.

BEFRIENDING HER LADYSHIP

Mr. Jesse Mutton has now come to reside within this parish, which is a great comfort, for we have lacked a competent shoemaker for some years. He has rented the daub-and-wattle cottage at Sly Corner—a ten-pound matter, with a decent garden—and he has brought with him his father’s father’s last. We do our best to keep him busy.

Mr. Mutton is by way also of understanding oak, and will repair you an old table with greater nicety and judgment than here and there a fellow plying the secondary craft of “Bodger.”

I have been able to offer Mr. Mutton some trifling employment in the bodging line. His feeling for wood is deep and sincere. He has a reverence for old timber, and an aptitude for imparting an appearance of maturity to that which is new. Such qualities and accomplishments as these were bound to secure for Mr. Mutton the regard of honest men. I think I can say without immodesty that Mr.

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Mutton is now my friend. Besides, we have up to a point, political sympathies in common. That is to say, Mr. Mutton is all for cheap leather and the preservation of footpaths. Also, he is kind to the rich.

I first heard of Mr. Mutton’s relations with the governing classes when I went to his cottage to discharge a debt of four shillings and oddpence, arising out of a surgical operation to a hen-house.

"They got a case o' sickness at the 'All," said Mr. Mutton.

"Indeed!" I murmured idly, counting four-and-sixpence into Mr. Mutton's palm. "I saw the little doctor-man from Blowfield driving that way in his gig."

"Ah!" assented Mr. Mutton. "That would be Doctor Pope. There's a penny-'a'penny change to come. Jes' you 'old on a minute while I look through me pockets. Dr. Pope, eh? But 'e would be drivin' to the gardener's lodge. They sim to rackon as they got some sickness *there* as well."

"Quite an epidemic!" I suggested.

"The woman at the lodge," continued Mr. Mutton," she be in such a trot as never anybody see, when I passed theer s'afternoon.

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"I weer visitin' the 'All for to look up a old carved chest which is missin' a rib or two. The lady at the 'All, she seem to 'ave a wonderful friendship for cottage folk—us carpenters and such like. Talks about callin' to see my missus and what not. But that chest of 'ern, I can't say as that's of much account. 'Tis a shop affair, same as is bought by all they made-o'-money folk as goo to London for their farm'ouse furniture.... Ah, now! 'ere be that 'a'penny. 'Old on another minute, sir, and I'll find the odd penny. 'Tis keeping' o' so many nails and knick-knacks in me pockets which muxes me up.

"When," continued Mr. Mutton, "I got to the 'All s'afternoon the gardener's wife, she come runnin' out to me in a state o' fair distraction, as the sayin' goo. 'Moi li'l boy,' she say, ''e got 'is li'l throat swelled up that unkid I think 'e be to die. I believe that be the typhide,' she say, ' or else diftheria.'

"The woman tal me," continued Mr. Mutton, "as she be out of 'er wits for to find out 'ow to git the doctor up.

"'I dursen leave this place,' she say, 'and Tom 'e dursen leave the gardens. Jesse Mutton,' she say, 'will ya do we a favour?

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Moi Tom would do as much for you' she say. 'Will ya ride into Blowfield, bein' as'ow you've got yar bicycle, and fetch the doctor up? The li'l mite,' she say, 'can't swallow nuthin', on'y some 'ot tomater sauce what I put with a 'addick for to tempt 'im dinner-time. Will ya fetch the doctor for we, Jesse?'

"I tal 'er," continued Mr. Mutton, "as I can do better nor that. 'They got a telephone up at the 'All,' I say. 'I kin talk through into Blowfield, and git the gentleman immediate.'

"But the woman at the lodge, she won't 'ear naarthun about no telephone. ''Twon't never do at all, that won't,' she say. 'The Colonel, 'e would never overlook a pice of impidence like that.'

"'What do the Colonel matter?' I ask 'er.

"''E matter a lot to we,' she gimme back. 'Tom would look pratty to be discharged from a gentleman's service without any character. Now, do as I arst you, Mr. Mutton, and ride into Blowfield. The poor li'l mite, 'e've got a dreadful chocked-up swaller.'

"Well," pursued Mr. Mutton, "I tal her to cheer up and keep smilin', and I will ride

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into Blowfield and fetch up Doctor Pope, same as she asked me. 'But 'twould be quicker and easier to talk along the telephone,' I say.

"'No, no!' she answered back. 'We dursen take a liberty like that!'

"So I leave it at that," said Mr. Mutton," and as I push me bicycle up the drive I wonder to meself why a woman so well- be'aved as that be should 'ave the impidence to bear any babies at all.

"Then I come to the big side door of the 'All, under the archway on the south; and so soon as ever I come there I see as there be sickness in *that* 'ouse, too.

"For Mrs. Gomme, the 'ousekeeper, she stand tiptoe on the doorstep, with boiled-lookin' eyes and a 'and on 'er lip, and she say to me: 'Oh, Mr. Mutton,' she say, 'please step in very quiet, for we got a li'l invalid inside.'

"'That's bad, marm,' I says to 'er, civil like.

"'The poor li'l dear,' say Mrs. Gomme, 'be swelled up dreadful with they stomach pains. It come on sudden in the middle o' larst night, and 'er ladyship, she took on dreadful.'

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"'Dear, dear!' I say.

"'The worst of it all' say Mrs. Gomme, 'be the findin' of anybody to attend to the poor mite. First we sends man o' nag-back into Blowfield, but 'e come back to say there bean't no one atome, on'y a servant. Then he tries to telephone to Lewes, but the line be out of order. At last' says Mrs. Gomme,' the Colonel, 'e send another groom to Blowfield for to fetch up a motor-car from the shop there where our own's a-mendin', since young Mister Cosmo, the Colonel's nephew, drove to the Yeomanry dinner. They sent a man from the shop there to go on the motor to Lewes, and at last 'e come back 'ere, at six o'clock this mornin', and bring the gentleman with him.

"'The gentleman be only gone this half- hour,' Mrs. Gomme ends up. ''E've been here all the day, tendin' the poor li'l mite wi' poultices an' chloroform to take the pain away.'

"Then," said Mr. Jesse Mutton, "I ask her, simple like, if 'twas her ladyship's li'l niece as be so poorly, for I knowed as 'er ladyship had none of her own, bein' too dressed-up for motherin'.

"And Mrs. Gomme, she look at me aslant.

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'Miss Marjory be well enough,' she say; ''tis not Miss Marjory that's ill. 'Tis—'tis——' ("Ah!" cried Mr. Mutton, "here be your other penny!") ''Tis Lovey-Loo, the spaniel dog, what's took so bad.'

"Arter that," continued Mr. Mutton, "I didn't seem to 'ave no stomach for bilin' glue. So I raises a tale about forgettin' a centre-bit, and gets upon me bicycle and rides to Blowfield, to find a poultice for the other li'l patient at the lodge.

"And as I'm ridin' down the drive, 'oo should I meet but 'er ladyship, cuttin' lilacs for the sick-room, and lookin' very wild and haggid. So I takes the liberty for to speak to her ladyship about the woman at the lodge. But she be that took up with 'er dam' dog she woulden 'ardly listen.

"'Oh, Mutton!' she say, 'you mustn't bring me any cottage troubles to-day; you really mustn't. My little dog is very ill, and I can't attend to any parish matters. I can't. I really can't.'"

Now, a few days later I happened to call at the daub-and-wattle domain of Mr. Mutton in respect to some new feet for an old mirror. Mr. Mutton was not at home. Mrs. Mutton

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was there, and the Mutlets or cutlets, but they were all so busy, so confused, and so shy that, for some minutes I was not able to state to them the object of my call. The reason why Mrs. Mutton and her children were busy, confused and shy was this:

There had come to a stand outside the cottage door, almost coincidentally with my arrival, a large green carriage, of the kind which is propelled by noise and smell. And there descended from this equipage a lady of impressive stature, who was likewise upholstered in green. She went into the Muttons', and when, a little later, I followed her, Mrs. Mutton was occupied in a remarkable duologue with this lady: a duologue conducted, on the part of Mrs. Mutton, by a series of spiritless monosyllables.

"I always call upon our new-comers," the lady was saying; "I like to make sure that they are happy and comfortable, and, sometimes, I am able to offer them advice about the management of their homes."

Mrs. Mutton placing the toe of one foot carefully upon a square of oil-cloth, and then replacing it by the other foot, laid a restless hand upon the head of either Mutlet, and answered simply: "Yaas'm."

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"I find," continued the lady, "that so many of my people are glad to be helped in the care of their children and their homes."

"Yaas'm," said Mrs. Mutton.

"There are," declared the lady, "so many little things in which I find that I am able to help my people."

"Yaas'm!" said Mrs. Mutton.

"I always like to feel sure," continued Mrs. Mutton's visitor, "that all my people realise the value of fresh air. There is nothing so good for all of us as fresh air.'

"Yaas'm," said Mrs. Mutton.

"And I thought, perhaps," said the visitor, at last proclaiming the vital purpose of her mission, "that you would like to take me over the cottage, so that I can see for myself that you all have plenty of fresh air, and are all happy and comfortable."

An expression of perplexity appeared on Mrs. Mutton's face.

"Beggin' your pardon, m'm," said Mrs. Mutton, "but did you mean to—to come inside *this* cottage, to come in *now*, to—goo all oover us?"

"I thought," repeated the visitor, "that perhaps you would like to show me your home. I find that I am often able to give my

people little hints about the care and management of their homes. So many of my people tell me that they are so grateful for the advice and help which I have been able to give them."

"Yaas'm," said Mrs. Mutton.

"And so," continued the visitor, forced into repetition, "I thought perhaps you would like to show me over your cottage. It *is* so important, you know, that we should all have plenty of fresh air, and should all be happy and clean."

Mrs. Mutton still looked perplexed. "Mr. Mutton be—be out s'afternoon," said Mrs. Mutton. "'Tis not a thing I would care to do when Mr. Mutton be out—to arst a lady in to goo oover us all."

The visitor, baring her teeth, performed a smile—one of those quick, genteel ones. "I am sure," she said, "that you do quite right to consider Mr. Mutton. I always encourage my people to be dutiful wives to their husbands. I will call again on Saturday. Perhaps Mr. Mutton will be at home on Saturday?"

"Yaas'm," said Mrs. Mutton.

There seemed little more to be said. But it was hot, and Mrs. Mutton had not once invited her visitor to be seated—an omission partly due, perhaps, to the fact that save

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for Mr. Mutton's working stool, which stood by his bench and last in a corner, the room was void of sitting places. Mrs. Mutton's visitor, fanning herself with *Country Life*, surveyed the apartment critically.

"I see," she observed, "that your husband keeps his work-bench in this room. I always think that these old cottage parlours ought to be filled with *pretty* things—dainty pieces of china, old-fashioned corner cupboards and nicely ochred flower pots."

"Yaas'm," said Mrs. Mutton.

"I always encourage my people to keep their parlours fresh and clean," stated the visitor. She moved, a little languidly, towards the door, still fanning herself, still keeping half an eye on the work-bench. "Then I will call again on Saturday, when Mutton is at home, and you can show me over," she finally declared.

"Yaas'm," said Mrs. Mutton.

So the fine green lady sailed out, and was duly encased within her great green carriage. And Mrs. Mutton, still perplexed, still changing feet, still caressing the sunny locks of the Mutlets, turned to your servant with a nervous:

"Y-yessir?"

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My requirements having been duly communicated to Mr. Mutton by his faithful wife, that craftsman duly waited on me, accompanied by some old oak-floor boarding and his glue pot.

The crippled mirror was given into his hand. He examined it with a slow and irritating smile. "Let me carry it to the light," he said, still smiling, "so that I can find out justly which be wood and which be tinder.

"This," said Mutton, after prolonged and careful scrutiny, "will be an eight-shillin' job." He repeated that smile.

I said to Mr. Mutton: "All right, then; fire ahead."

"All right," echoed Mr. Mutton, and he put his head upon one side and smiled. At which I foolishly gave way to temper.

"You do me the honour, Mr. Mutton, sir," I said, "to be amused."

"Eh?" queried Mr. Mutton.

"You are pleased," I explained, "to mock at my mirror."

"Me?" cried Mr. Mutton, growing suddenly very grave. "Me pook fun at your li'l oold mirror? Not at all, sir."

"Then why," I demanded, "do you wear that smirk?"

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"'Tis me thowts, sir," said Mr. Mutton quite simply.

"Then tell me the joke," I demanded quite plainly.

"'Tis—'tis——" began Jesse, but he was tripped up by an impediment in his throat, and for quite a while could do nothing else but stand and gurgle. "'Tis naarthun serious," he said at last, "on'y we 'ad a visitor to our 'ouse the other afternoon—a lady visitor."

"Indeed?" I murmured.

"A rather expensive lady," continued Mr. Mutton. "A big green motor-car, tortoise-shell spy-glasses, six or eight necklaces, gilt hair, and all the Brighton fixin's. She come round voluntary to look up me and the missis in our little 'ome."

"You surprise me!" I declared.

"Not at all, sir," protested Mr. Mutton. "'Tis a common enough thing what I be tellin' you. 'Tis a 'obby and a 'appiness and a Christian pleasure to such as she be for to be everlastin' actin' kind to such as we be. She say to my missis, she say"

I need not set forth Mr. Mutton's faithful repetition of what the lady said. We have had all that.

"When the missis got through with all the

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story," continued Mr. Mutton, "she say to me: 'Jesse,' she say, 'what be I to tal the lady when she come back agin on Saturday to goo all oover us, same as she 'ave promised?' And I tal the missis to lat'er in, an' welcome."

This surprised me. I had looked for more revolutionary behaviour from Mr. Mutton, and I permitted myself to tell him so.

"Well, well," said Mr. Mutton when I had quite finished, "no doubt you know what's best, sir. But we got a sayin' down 'ome which says: Civility don't cost naarthun.' And when a lady 'aves the kindness to come to your cottage so's she kin see for 'erself as your way of livin' suit 'er, 'tis bare civility to show the lady round. An' besides," added Mr. Mutton, resuming the smile of mystery, "I areun't done tallin' ye yet."

"Come!" I cried, employing a gesture of encouragement. "That's better!"

"Is it?" said Mr. Mutton. "Then let's make a start with that glue pot. We shan't be done 'fore midnight, not at this rate." While we were waiting for the glue to boil, Mr. Mutton threw out further shreds of narrative.

"When Saturday come," said Mr. Mutton, "the lady come likewise, true to 'er word.

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And very pleasant and 'omely she carried on, tellin' us where we had oughter fix our bedsteads so as to catch a 'ealthy draught.

"The next day bein' Sunday, I ran over it all again in me mind, along of a pipe. And all of sudden it come to me what a selfish chaps we be—us shoemakers—and what a lot of Christianity we could learn off of the rich.

"So next night, bein' Monday, and a clean shirt and a tin o' polish bein' 'andy, I made meself look 'andsome, an' done a neighbourly action on me own account.

"'Tis a pretty fair step from Sly Corner to the 'All, but I kep', so much as reasonable, to the long grass, and got there lookin' pratty decent. An' the butler, when I ask for 'er ladyship, 'e show me at once to a little front orfice—no questions arst.

"Bein' as it were dinner-time, I was sat alone in the little front orfice for a matter o' forty minutes. But I spent them to good advantage, lookin' at all manner o' stuffed birds what the Colonel, 'er ladyship's 'usband, 'ad travelled all over the world for to kill on account o' their prettiness.

"At last 'er ladyship come in, and though I be a decent man—for a shoemaker—I could *not* 'elp but remark 'ow poor a bosom

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that seem for anybody to make a public exhibition of.

"'"'Tis you, Mutton, then,' 'er ladyship say. 'I suppose you be in trouble? How very right and sensible to come and see me. I allus encourage my people,' she say, ' for to come an' tal me their affairs.'

"With that," said Mr. Mutton, blinking violently at the mirror, "I touches me eyebrow, same as is considered decent in a shoemaker, and I say to 'er ladyship, I say:

"'Beggin' your pardon, ma'am, it bean't so much me own affairs I come about as yourn. I be come round neighbourly,' I say, 'think- in' you would like me to goo oover the 'All, so as to make sure you got the proper quantity of fresh air, an' be all 'appy and comfortable.'

"She look at me with a sort o' wondering look. '*What* did you say, Mutton?' she say at last.

"'I was thinkin',' I tal 'er, 'as per'aps you would like to take me oover the 'All, so's I can give you some advice about fresh air,' I say. 'That *be* so important,' I say. 'Fresh air an' good soap, that be the sovereign remedy for all of us, an' I be one as like to feel sure that nobody goo without it for want of a little good advice. I thought per'aps——'"

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"'Mutton,' her ladyship say very crisp, 'do you mean to insult me?'

"'Not in the least, ma'am' I say. 'I be come round pure and neighbourly, thinkin' per'aps I could goo oover the 'All an' give you some advice. I thought per'aps you would like me to 'ave a look at the blankets and the children's underlinen; and I been wondering also if you got your bedsteads properly arranged for catchin' draughts, and I would like to make sure that——'"

Mr. Mutton broke off quite suddenly. He regarded me with earnest eyes, uttering no sound.

"Well," I demanded at last, "what are you stopping for?"

"Because *she* stopped me," explained Mr. Mutton. "She throwed 'erself at the door, same as if the devil be arter 'er, instead of a honest shoemaker strivin' to do a neighbourly action. An' she fling the oold door open, an' she scream for the butler. 'Er chops come fiery red, and she chatter and snivel for all the world like any ordinary female.

"That surprise me moreun all, that did, to see 'ow ordinary and 'omely she took on. I thought as they there brazen-breasted ones was reckoned to be above a common, oold-fashioned paddy. But, bless my soul, there

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wasn't no pride about this one—not when you touched it."

"What happened next?" I inquired.

"Mr. Bellchambers, the butler, 'e guided me to the door," said Mr. Mutton.

"And was that all?"

"Well, nearly all, sir," answered Mr. Mutton. "There's been a sort of a continuation since."

"Where? How?"

"S'afternoon, at Sly Corner," responded Mr. Mutton. "'Er ladyship come round to see my missis. An' she tal my missis as 'er and the Colonel, they 'ave talk things oover among theirselves. An' they be come to the conclusion as I are never meant to do no 'arm; I on'y acted ignorant.

"'The Colonel,' she say, 'is sure your 'usband never acted outer malice, and we may quietly overlook it. So there's no need for any of us,' she say, 'to say anything more about it—*especially not in the village*.' Where are you off to now, sir?" cried Mr. Mutton suddenly.

"I'm off to tea—at the Doctor's." I responded.

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IT!

I found it in the hedgerow, blown about and towsled, a thing of too early growth, like the February daffodils. Torn and battered by the winds, bedraggled, dirty, rain-bespattered, worn with privation, warped and misshapen, as all things become which are thrown too soon upon the mercies of this world, it had nevertheless, a certain beauty: a sudden, staring beauty, vivid, desperate— like daffodils in February.

It had no precise age, but its body was the body of a girl of fifteen, though its face was much older than that, and its mouth and eyes much younger, and its conversation inconsequent and inconsistent. It talked a jumbled talk—the talk of infancy, old age, and womanhood, all mixed up and wanton.

It had long hair, which hung about its shoulders in sticky and disordered strands. It wore an old, loose habit, made of sackcloth, and bearing, as it were by way of decoration and embroidery, certain printed

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characters which formed the words: "J. BATES, MALT." Pieces of rope, pieces of carpet, and smaller pieces of sackcloth were lashed about its body in different places. It had bare legs, but its feet were covered by a pair of big, men's boots, which age, misuse, and hard wear had caused to curl up at the toes.

It had an old, white face, as I have said, and round, wondering eyes, like those of childhood, and it had a thin mouth, with narrow red lips, and there was a look of pain about this mouth, so that it resembled a scar.

It came out of its hedgerow and stopped me, as I walked along the road, and it asked for money, in a steady practised manner, with a whining intonation, and all the time it spoke to me, it did not look at me, but looked far off. It said:

"Gawd bless ya, kind gentleman. Spare a copper, kind gentleman. It's very wet—very rough—very cold—kind gentleman. Spare a copper, kind gentleman."

There happened to be a few pieces of copper in an inner pocket of my oilskin, and these I bestowed upon its dirty little outstretched palm. It immediately resumed the whine.

"Gawd bless ya, kind gentleman. Good luck to ya, kind gentleman."

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I nodded, uncomfortably, as one does, and started to walk away, but it suddenly looked at me with its eyes and told me to stop.

"Wait a minute, kind gentleman," it said: "I got somethink for ya."

It fumbled amid the sackcloth and the carpeting and produced a small blue object, which it held towards me.

"'Old out yar 'and," it said.

I did as I was told, and received in my hand a—cold, wet thrush's egg—misshapen, small and muddy, like It itself, and like the February daffodils that were blinking here and there amid the slush.

"That's for you, me kind gentleman," it said.

Now, at Eastertide, one is braced up for this sort of thing, and carries it through without embarrassment. But at the windy end of February, one isn't and one can't. I felt, and looked, confused. It therefore offered me encouragement.

"That's for you," It repeated. "Take it 'ome an give it to yar little brother or yar little sister. Y'are a kind gentleman, so I'm givin' ya that."

The kind gentleman uttered his expressions of gratitude. At the same time, he admitted

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a flaw in his title to the thrush's egg, having neither little brother nor little sister to whom he could take home and give it.

"A sot of an orph'n gentleman, are you then?" suggested It.

"Not exactly that—but——"

"A sort of a bachelor gentleman, then?"

I couldn't even advance that claim to its commiseration. Without being precisely a bachelor or precisely an orphan, I yet was wholly destitute of little brothers and little sisters. That, perhaps, was why I had odd pennies to spare for Its.

"Well, kind gentleman, ya don't look much of a jolly sort. Keep it yaself an' be jolly. Ya ought to be jolly, now an' then. Everybody kin be jolly now an' then, if on'y their boots'll let 'em. Why don't you be jolly, kind gentleman?"

I pointed out to It that February was not just the psychological month in which to expect people to be jolly. I also ventured to remark that its own demeanour was, at best, not one of high mirth.

"R; but me boots is wore out," responded It.

I looked at the massive, curly, sodden things and rather hoped they were. And then

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I looked at my own feet, which, if I may so express it, were done rather neatly in tan golfers. And then an absurd and ostentatious idea presented itself to me. I offered to give It my shoes.

I could have thrown a stone at my own roof from where we stood, and I could have paddled to my doorstep across the wayside grass, with no greater discomfort than that involved in 60 seconds of wet feet. And having reached home, I could conscientiously have drunk hot whisky and gone to bed.

Let me tell you that to be able to do these things from conscientious motives in February is one of the most agreeable circumstances which can happen to one. And ever afterwards to be respectfully pointed at as a man who had given the boots off his feet to a beggar, on a very wet afternoon! That would indeed be happiness, and a very solid sort of happiness, too. For a man with a deed like that to his credit could grow stomach on stomach, and whisker on whisker, without rebuke to the end of his days. And little old ladies in Eastbourne would leave him continual small legacies in cash and kind—annuities, pony-carriages, cats. And the Christmas numbers would celebrate him in

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multichromatic splendour: He—that is I—would be presented, I hope, as a slender, rather boyish person, with a scholarly stoop and a lot of hair—a sort of R. J. Campbell,

but dressed in knickerbockers and having a slight sense of humour. I don't see the beggar-girl very clearly, but I am sure she would have crutches. I do see very clearly indeed the letterpress with which this work of art would be adorned. Above it, in large print, would appear the words: "An Author's Sacrifice": and underneath, in letters only one degree less large, an inscription having reference to the speech which I certainly did not utter. Thus:

"YOU POOR CHILD! TAKE MY BOOTS."

Anyhow, It did not accept the boots. It thanked me very gravely, and It gave me another thrush's egg, but It would not have the boots. It said:

"Now, kind gentleman, Gawd bless ya, and thank ya: Now, I wownt 'ave the boots. There's no use *two* of us walkin' sore. I'd rather 'ave a few more coppers, if you got any, kind gentleman, thank ya. You keep yar boots, an' be jolly. An' take this egg, too,

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an' keep it along of the other, for a curiosity, if ya ain't got no little sister to give it to. I got a little sister of me own, and it's time I went after 'er. Good-bye, kind gentleman."

"Where is your sister?" I said.

"Along of the van," It replied.

"And where is the van?"

"Along of my sister....Good-bye, kind gentleman. *Be* jolly."

It looked at me gravely and parted its lips, and I knew that in spirit, if not in fact, it had smiled at me. And then it stumped away, and I came home, carrying very carefully in each hand a wet, misshapen, premature thrush's egg.

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XVIII

SPRING SCANDAL

There are persons in this world who possess what I may call an early-morning mind: persons who not only are alert and intelligent at ten o'clock in the morning, but Who are cheerful and talkative at that hour, and even earlier; persons who chat at the

breakfast table: persons who *sing in their bath!* Let me begin this scientific discourse by stating, very clearly, that I am one of these persons.

That is why my breakfast is, to me, not so much a meal as an unquiet trance; that is why this morning, when sitting at the breakfast table, I awoke, as one might awake from a trance, to find that...people were talking. I had been pretending to eat from a steaming vessel which, as I now know, contained porridge: and I had been pretending to read a "leading article" which, as I now know, contained politics, and I had reached the stage of gently wondering why the dish was smoking, and what the gentleman was driving at, when...it occurred to me that

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people were talking. On waving the steam away I perceived that one of these people was that lady—the possessor of an outstanding example of the early-morning mind—who, under matrimonial licence, is irrevocably situated on the other side of the steam: and that her companion was a seared and grimy man, whose features were familiar to me.

This man was frowning at the lady. Only a low sort of man would frown at such a lady, particularly at breakfast time, when the dew is sparkling in her eyes. I accordingly looked carefully at the man, and recognised in him that ignoble parasite, Mr. William Tracey. Mr. Tracey is an old and uncultivated person of the working class, one of those sordid beings who can be tempted with money to stand out in the rain and dig. And as I looked at Mr. Tracey Mr. Tracey opened his mouth and uttered an extraordinary speech. Said Mr. Tracey:

"Queen Alexandra is all right, and King Edward is all right, and Earl Spencer is all right, and I won't say naarthun wrong about Mrs. Townsend. And if you must have Maude Holmes yere, I'll find a corner for 'er; but undestand this, marm: I will *not* pinch Maude Holmes. The more you pinch 'er, the

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worse she spread. So that's tallin' you. As for the Queen o' Spain, she's one o' these here deceivin' ones. If you want moi opinion of

the Queen o' Spain, she——"

But I did not hear Mr. Tracey's opinion of the Queen of Spain. No self-respecting Englishwoman stands this sort of thing from menials, and this one, performing a decisive gesture, quelled the Socialist.

"I can't allow you to insult the Queen of Spain, Mr. Tracey," said the lady, looking extraordinarily decisive, even through the steam. I know that she was badly sunburnt last year, but that was your fault. Look where you put her bed."

"She won't be sunburnt this yeer," said Mr. Tracey, grimly; "I'll make 'er bed up somewheres out o' sight. That *be* a pore creature, the Queen o' Spain, Oi rackon.

No flesh. No substance. No curl. If——"

"Oh, never mind," interpolated the lady. "Don't let's argue, Mr. Tracey. The poor thing can't help her flesh and substance being wrong. Besides, I don't profess to love her for her substance. It's her colouring I like. It lights up well. Now...about Arthur Unwin. Where are we going to find room for Arthur Unwin? You haven't got anything

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unpleasant to say about Arthur Unwin, I hope, Mr. Tracey?"

"Areun't I though?" responded Mr. Tracey. "There's a great, greedy, ugly-mannered old object, if ever there was one. Feed? Talk about feed—why, you could fatten a 'og on the stuff I give that chap last yeer. Proper good food, too. None o' yere soot and soapsuds. 'E fair eat the stuff. And ser ugly-mannered with it all! All over the place 'e is. 'Im an' that Maude 'Olmes, they'd make a proper pair. I'ate they' eavy feeders. What other names are you got wrote down there?"

"There's Mrs. Townsend," replied the Lady of the Mist. "She's going to be very popular this year, I believe. Everybody's talking of her. She's Phenomenal, really; but massive, and waved all over, with a fringe of ——"

"I see," interjected Mr. Tracey. "Another o' they fancy pieces. Ye areun't got e'er a straightforward name wrote down on that bit o' paper, I spoose?"

"Well," replied the lady, "there's Clara Curtis."

By this time the steam had subsided, by reason of my porridge having cooled, and

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the lady could now be clearly focussed. It seemed to me that her manner was hesitant, and her expression timid.

Mr. Tracey laughed harshly. "*Clara Curtis!*" he repeated. "No fear o' me leadin' a lazy life, then—not with Clara Curtis about the place. Clara Curtis be a very straightforward one—I don't think. Ye mean to find me some employment, then, I can see. Why, she want dressing six times a day, Clara do, if there's any wind about."

The lady opposite put down her teacup with a bang, and regarded Mr. Tracey with a flushed countenance and indignant eyes.

"I simply don't believe it," she exclaimed.

"Don't ya?" said Mr. Tracey. He approached her in a stealthy manner, putting a hand to his mouth, and...whispering....!

This scandalous breakfast table was evidently no place for me. I therefore left it, and repaired to the garden.

Here, regardless of the month of March, which was extremely prevalent, I sought the contemplative quiet of an arbour, and there I indulged myself in calm and ordered thought.

I suppose that my reader knows as well as

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I do what it feels like to receive a shock to one's moral senses? It is a dreadful feeling, isn't it? No wonder that clergymen, who are particularly subject to this trouble, have that look of frailty and discomfort.

My shock soon passed, however, the truth being mercifully vouchsafed to me during an inspired phase of the thinking process. That ill-assorted couple at the breakfast table were neither mad nor bad. They were merely talking business: Mr. Tracey's business. In short, and in fact...the Sweet Pea season had begun!

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XIX

MR. BLURR AND THE BLOOD-OAF

Mr. Blurr, a builder and contractor, is the allegorical hero, and young Bill, a common blood-oaf, is the allegorical villain of this allegorical piece.

If you are a Norfolk, a Suffolk, or an Essex man, or even a fellow from the eastern part of Kent, you will not require to be told what a blood-oaf is. But if you happen to be stuck in some more remote part of this island, you will perhaps feel grateful to me for mentioning that a blood-oaf is a bullfinch.

There may even be persons—persons living in Lancashire or in the heart of Middlesex— who don't know what a bullfinch is. I may inform such persons that a bullfinch is a bird: a little, square-set, bullet-headed bird, in red facings, who sits on the early plum trees, destroying all the buds and making absurd noises—cricky noises, like winding your watch up.

This, with a few similar performances, constitutes the natural occupation of the

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blood-oaf. He is a cheerful bird, of broad ideas and liberal sentiments. If there are no plum trees about your garden from which he can strip the fruit buds, he'll make himself happy in the shrub plot. He's a bit of a humanitarian, too. No long-suffering worms or helpless slugs for him. The run of a few apple orchards is all he requires to sustain him in health and cheerfulness. He likes a dust- bath now and then, and plenty of sunshine, and he likes to look at butterflies, and in his graver moments he appreciates a bout of conscientious effort among the currant bushes.

He is a jolly, bourgeois, contented, democratic bird: a bird utterly without ambition or vanity. But he is also a bird who, for no fault of his own, has been gifted with a peculiar talent or accomplishment. This does not bring him any luck.

The blood-oaf's special gift consists in the ability, under certain circumstances, to whistle like a man—like a man who whistles very badly. The blood-oaf, in respect of

his unusual accomplishment, has his human counterpart; for there are, among men, certain rare specimens of the race of men who have equivalent accomplishments. Such men can cheep like a robin, bark like a dog, or moo like a calf.

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And this gift does not bring luck to such men, any more than the gift of reproducing ragtime brings luck to blood-oafs. The same form of disaster overtakes both man and bird—a disaster in side whiskers and a black hat, named Mr. Blurr.

Mr. Blurr (who has built all the newest and reddest chapels in my country, which is remarkable for the newness and redness of its chapels) made up his mind about blood-oafs many years ago. He made up his mind that blood-oafs were all right in their place. And the place which Mr. Blurr proposed and defined as being proper for blood-oafs was his cellar. In this place these birds are privileged to minister to the entertainment and prosperity of Mr. Blurr.

Mr. Blurr is exceedingly intimate with the habits and customs of blood-oafs. He is accustomed to say that nobody can teach him nothing concerning blood-oafs. But young Bill taught him something. He taught how important it is to repair one's cellar-flaps.

Young Bill was an orphan bird. He therefore inhabited the smallest of Mr. Blurr's three cellars and had a cage to himself. Mr. Blurr, who had studied blood-oafs, who had read and, for all I know, written much about

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them, knew all the rules. He knew that a single blood-oaf has got to be kept in a single cage and must not be allowed to mix with other boys of his unhappy race.

Young Bill entered Mr. Blurr's household so soon as his feathers began to sprout. For Blurr knew the rules, and is it not written that:—

> When it is wished to bring up bullfinches by hand, the young must be removed from the nest as soon as their feathers begin to sprout, when they are easily reared on bread-and-milk and soaked rape seed. Be careful that both

> seed and bread-and-milk are perfectly sweet...or the birds will die very quickly?

Mr. Blurr took extraordinary pains to ensure the cleanliness of young Bill's bread- and-milk and pips. He did not wish young Bill to die very quickly. He viewed with horror the thought of blood-oafs dying young.

When young Bill first entered the household of Mr. Blurr that gentleman fed the bird himself, with great frequency and regularity. He fed him every two hours from early morning until dusk, employing for the purpose a

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pair of silver-plaited tweezers. You see, there was nothing paltry about Mr. Blurr. He spared no expense.

In order to ensure the safety and comfort of young Bill, Mr. Blurr put him into a little hair-lined box, which box he put into another and a larger box, having a lid and air holes. The lid of this box was kept tightly shut, and most of the light which might have reached young Bill through the air holes was intercepted by a thick piece of flannel, which served the double purpose of keeping Bill warm and blocking the intrusion of actinic rays. For it is written thus:

> These birds will feed better if kept almost but not quite in the dark.... If they do not hear the songs of other birds, they will learn a tune whistled to them or played to them on a flageolet.

Being thus protected from the inclemencies of light and air and from the moral and artistic dangers of freedom, young Bill grew up splendidly. That is to say, he grew up into just the sort of bird which the unsparing efforts of Mr. Blurr Were designed to create. He grew big enough to be put into a larger cage, to walk about on grit and sand; and to

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be fed upon canary seed and hemp, with apple-pips for dessert. Finally, he grew big enough to go down unto the cellar and be educated.

The cellar was almost perfectly dark—almost, but not quite, as the written instructions direct. The modifying factor—a single, narrow, jagged ray of light, which looked like a quivering icicle dependent from the black vault which young Bill imagined to be the sky—came through a crack in the cellar-flap. All day long, between his periodical feasts of hemp and canary seed, young Bill stood on one leg and looked at this icicle. But there were interludes of pleasantry, during which good old Mr. Blurr would visit young Bill and entertain him with a tune upon the flageolet. On these occasions young Bill stood on both legs, shut his eyes, and listened.

I say "a" tune advisedly. For Mr. Blurr had apparently lost all the tunes in his repertory save one, which he repeated continuously, hour after hour, day after day. It was not a long tune, as we count tunes, but young Bill, whose faculties of comparison and deduction had not been carefully developed, regarded it as the longest tune in the world. He also thought that it was an

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extraordinarily complicated tune. This was the tune:

"Of all the girls that are so smart,
There's none like pretty Sally.
She is the darling of my heart,
And she lives in our alley."

When he had heard this tune for the one thousandth six hundredth and forty-first time it suddenly occurred to young Bill that the tune was not so difficult and complicated as he had at first imagined it to be. And, in order to emphasise and give expression to this idea, young Bill put up his beak—that little beak which was so perfectly adapted for destroying plum trees—and whistled two little bits of the tune—two quite unrelated little bits.

At this the great Mr. Blurr became exceedingly elated, and ran from the cellar, calling "Maria! Maria!" And when Maria, who was matrimonially allied to Mr. Blurr, appeared before that happy gentleman, he said to her, waving his flageolet triumphantly:

"The young 'un has begun. He's give me a 'return!'"

From that day onwards, young Bill gave many returns to this kind instructor.

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Sometimes he gave them quickly, sometimes not. He has been known to keep Mr. Blurr down in that cellar for so long as two hours before vouchsafing to Mr. Blurr the snatch of melody for which he craved. But, as time went on, young Bill became more ready with his snatches. Moreover, these outbursts of melody grew gradually longer, more sustained, more intelligible. I am not going to flatter young Bill and say that there was anything particularly attractive about the manner in which he whistled these man-noises. There was a certain artificiality about the performance. It bore about the same relationship to real *whistling* which the official poems of a Poet Laureate usually bear to real poetry. The offering was not spontaneous.

Still, it was not bad—considering! And every day it grew better: more confident, more loud, more consecutive. Mr. Blurr was extremely pleased about it. He said that when young Bill had got over certain difficulties in the third line the performance would be perfect.

But alas for the hopes of mortality! Young Bill quite failed to accomplish this final fraction of the task demanded of him. Something happened to stop him.

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This something was a small bird in snuff- coloured vestments, and of undistinguished appearance, who happened one evening, to alight by accident on the exterior surface of the wooden cellar-flap which emitted that icicle.

The snuff-coloured bird had neither voice nor method, nor, indeed, had he "parts" of any kind. But he had assurance. And he knew a song. It was not, really, a good song; but it was longer than Mr. Blurr's song, whilst being decidedly less complicated. The

snuffy bird hopped about on the cellar-flap and sang it. He sang it all through, insistently. He sang it in a thin voice and an indecisive manner, except when he came to the last word in each verse, when he rather shouted. The song had three verses, which I will print in full:

I

Tit a pit

Tit a pit

Tit a pit

Tit a pit

Tit a PIT!

II

Tit a pit

Tit a pit

Tit a pit

Tit a pit

Tit a PIT!

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III

Tit a pit

Tit a pit

Tit a pit

Tit a pit

Tit a PIT!

Young Bill was looking moodily at his icicle out of one eye when this thin stuff came treacling down it. Young Bill then opened the other eye, and looked and listened hard.

I cannot tell you why young Bill should have enjoyed this noise, but he undoubtedly did enjoy it. I suppose that Mr. Blurr had not succeeded wholly in eradicating all the hereditary blood-oaf instincts of young Bill. Anyhow, this abandoned bird listened to

this song and, what is more, committed it to memory. Although it was a long song, it was not a complicated one, as you perceive. And having learned this snuffy little snatch, he never again would sing a line of Mr. Blurr's fine ballad.

For days after the snuff-coloured bird had flown away from the cellar-flap, Mr. Blurr sat tight in his cellar, blowing hard at his flageolet and perspiring freely. He played his ballad in a high key and in a low key and in two keys at once. But young Bill could not be

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coaxed or stimulated or vexed into offering a "return."

At last, after seven days of fruitless effort the *maestro* lost his temper, and striking a match, so that young Bill could clearly see that menacing performance, he threatened the bird with his flageolet.

Then young Bill, blinking furiously at the bright glare which illumined his cellar, put up his beak and gave forth the "return." And this was it:

Tit a pit
Tit a pit
Tit a pit
Tit a pit
Tit a PIT

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XX

THE OLD MAN OF ALFRISTON

He stood on a neat little footbridge, which was made of painted wood, and stared reminiscently into the soupy shallows of the Cuckmere. He was an Oldest Inhabitant of unimpeachable quality, with crow's feet, toothless gums, pneumatic mouth, and all

other appurtenances complete. So I said to him—this being, as every traveller knows, the opening move in any game with an Oldest Inhabitant:

"I suppose you have lived here a longish time?"

"Four and eighty yeer come *Jewly*," responded the Oldest Inhabitant, performing figures of eight with the pneumatic mouth. Whereupon (Move 2) I ventured to suppose that he had witnessed many changes in the town and neighbourhood of Alfriston during that period.

The Oldest Inhabitant threw up his hands and uttered a series of pneumatic sounds, expressive of astonishment. "Oh dear, yes!"

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he exclaimed, alternately inflating and deflating the mouth: "Changes areun't the word for it. Why, I can remember the time afore this here bridge was built!" He softly patted its slender hand-rail.

"That was many years ago?" I surmised.

"Many, many yeers ago," assented my venerable instructor. "That was afore I'd tinned sixty, anyways. That was in the time of Queen Victoria."

I closed my eyes for several minutes, and when I opened them, I had counted back to the old gentleman's birthday.

"You were born in 1828?" I suggested.

"Oh, before then," replied the old man, blowing up his mouth stone tight. "I be eighty-four, ye see."

"In that case, no doubt you can remember Queen Victoria's predecessor?"

"No doubt!" replied the Oldest Inhabitant, after a thoughtful pause. "That was just after they crowned 'er, I fancy. They said prayers in the church yere."

I began again. " You can remember King William?"

"Bless ye, yes," replied the aged man. "And Queen Victoria, and King Edward, and George the Fifth, and—and—one or two

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others as well. I can remember pretty nigh all ‘on em.”

“Battles?” I inquired (Move 3); “The Crimea? The Indian Mutiny?”

“Why, certainly, sir,” assented the Oldest Inhabitant. “I can remember the Battle of Trafalgar, too, and the Franco-Prussian and Spion Kop, and Mafeking, and the Bo-er War. I can remember all the wars.”

I congratulated my companion upon the excellence of his memory, and proceeded to Move 4. “I expect that all sorts of men and women have lived in this town during your time?”

“Yes,” assented the Patriarch: “that’s gen’ly been pratty full.”

“I dare say,” I continued, in a laborious effort to define the scope of my inquiry, “that some of them were very pleasant people and some were unpleasant, and that they were all remarkable in their different ways?

“Remarkable,” echoed the seer; “remarkable? Ah! I believe you. There was old Job Burtenshaw, for one.”

Ha! A goal at last. I invited the veteran to record the deeds of Mr. Burtenshaw. With a prodigious bubbling of the pneumatic department, he complied.

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“Job Burtenshaw,” said the Oldest Inhabitant, “he have a wonderful secret way about him. He live in a little, dark house, all among they thorns aside of the ‘ill there. ‘Tis pulled down, now, is Job’s ‘ouse. They had used to call it Deadman’s Hovel, I remember.

“Well, sir, this old Job Burtenshaw, what I be speakin’ of, he lived in this place all alone, he did. He was a misshapen man, he was, with red hair and crooked shoulders and a sort of a lump under the chin. The schoolboys didn’t ‘arf look at ‘im, whenever he come down from ‘is ‘ill. They had used to throw cinders and dirt and so forth at ‘is ‘ead. You know what schoolboys are for actin’ merry. The young chaps used to laugh at ‘im, too, whenever they seed ‘im about. I well remember as one on ‘em once throwed a glass of beer at ‘im, when ‘e went into the Goat to ‘ave a drink. And even the old men had used to hit ‘im.

"Well, sir, this Job Burtenshaw, 'e lived alone in this little dark cottage up among the thorns on the side of the 'ill. And he kept no company. He never went nigh nobody, and nobody never went nigh him. He was strange in his fancies, was Job, and

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he didn't seem to have no liking for the other old chaps of the place, nor yet no liking for the lads or the children. He was a strange man.

"Well, sir, one day the fancy took me for to goo and 'ave a look at Job Burtenshaw, livin' up theer all alone, in 'is dark little cottage aside of the 'ill, among the thorns. And as I fancied, so I done. I went to the cottage and I knocked at the door, and Job he come, when I knocked, and he opened the door and in I walked. He didn't seem partickler glad to see me, nor he didn't seem partickler sorry. Just so-so.

"Well, sir, to cut a long story short, time we'd been talkin' there a few minutes, Job 'e arst me if I'd like to look at a curiosity.

"'Certainly,' I tells 'im; By all means.' So Job e' tells me to foller 'im, and so I doos, until we be come to a regular underground cellar, all wet and moist like, and darker nor night. And Job, 'e strike a light, and 'e catch a-holt o' moi airrm and 'e lead me to a corner—the darkest and the wettest place of all, that be—and 'e 'old up a light, so's I can see what lie there, and I look and sees a bit of old sacking what lays across a lump on the floor. Well, sir, Job Burtenshaw, 'e

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lifts this bit o' sacking and what do you think he show me?"

I looked at the foam-flecked pneumatics which were bouncing about before me, and feared the worst. "Something dead?" I hazarded, at last.

The Oldest Inhabitant, softly smiling, shook his head. "That warn't ezackly dead," he replied. "Nor yet"—musingly—"you couldn't ezackly call it *alive*. To tell you the truth, sir, and to cut a long story short, that was a onion!"

"A *what*?" I demanded.

"A onion," repeated the Oldest Inhabitant; " a onion as large as a melon. Believe me, or believe me not, 'tis true, sir. A onion as large as a melon! 'Twas the most remarkable thing ever I seen. I could 'ardly believe me eyes.

"So you see, sir, old Job Burtenshaw, 'e warn't no fool, even though e' did live alone up there in that dark little cottage among the thorns. He larned to grow onions, anyways. Lord bless me, that warn't arf a onion. I could 'ardly believe me eyes!

"Oh yes, sir! I have seen some remarkable things in me time."

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XXI

PUCKLEFIELD MANOR

An extraordinary sort of dog, with black and yellow blobs on a white background, came into my garden this morning and behaved in a manner which was detrimental to my early narcissus. (Not "us"—"i." I beg everybody's pardon.) He behaved in a manner which was detrimental to my early narcissi.

It was V.I.M.D.T. who directed my attention to the advent of this horticultural critic. V.I.M.D.T. (Victoria Isabella Marion Drucilla Tunks) was hanging out cambric. Victoria Isabella Marion Drucilla Tunks is Commander-in-Chief of the household in which I happen to reside. She doesn't often hang out cambric. A steam-laundry, situated six miles away and employing an insistent motor- lorry, usually puts the perforations into my cambric. But this morning was one of those bitter cold mornings which are thought to be beneficial to cambric, so Victoria Isabella Marion Drucilla hung it all out, when the

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action of the frost caused it to become rigid, and it dangled and clattered like a large collection of curiously-shaped tin trays.

It became evident that this was the sort of dog which I have heard described as a "Rather" dog. He would rather do anything than respond to the human voice. One

shouted at him, one swore at him, one murmured at him, and V.I.M.D.T. made breathy noises. But he continued to linger fondly among my narcissi and to gaze with steadfast, earnest eyes in a direction geographically opposite to that from which our shouts and swears proceeded.

Even the somewhat erratic application of half-bricks failed to unsettle this dog. He seemed to regard them as a sort of "daylight fireworks" especially let off for his entertainment. He came at twelve o'clock, and at two o'clock he was still with us—still among the narcissi!

Something had to be done about it, and I engaged in consultations with V.I.M.D.T. That lady first of all examined the dog. Having studied the specifications, she proclaimed him to be a "hunting dog."

"Surely not a foxhound!" I exclaimed,

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remarking his elongated wheel-base and narrow track.

"Well," responded V.I.M.D.T., "some people might call him a foxhound, and then again they mightn't. He's what I calls a hunting dog."

"Not 'dog,' Victoria," I said—"'hound.' If he hunts, he's a hound. Even I know that."

"Perhaps you're right," assented Victoria Isabella Marion Drucilla Tunks. "Though some people calls 'em be a name of their own. A name in the nature of a bird's name. 'Beagle,' ain't it? That's it—'beagle.'

"Dear me!" I exclaimed, "is *that* a beagle? That blobby little chap! That free-and-easy little fellow, with the map-like markings and the natural manners is a beagle, eh? A beagle. Oh! Well, Isabella, what are we going to do about him?"

"I scarcely knows," said Isabella. "I've no doubt he's got hisself lost, away from his mates, so to speak, because this here frorsty weather is a bit of a detriment to their smell. I've no doubt as the rest of his mates, like, are been took back home. No doubt, he belong to Mr. Toovey-Turner, over at Pucklefield. He do go huntin' with a set o' these

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here beagles. Only the weather turning frorsty, I've no doubt but what he've took 'em home again. They was meetin' to-day at the Cock and Cony. But no doubt he've took 'em home again—all exceptin' Riggie here."

"Not Reggie," I protested—" Ranter, or Ringwood. What are we going to do about Ringwood?"

"Take him home where he belong," suggested Marion.

"Pucklefield," I mused. "Well, why not? It's a nice day for a brisk walk. Pray secure a piece of twine, Drucilla, and then secure Ringwood, and then affix the former to the latter. In the meantime, I will put on boots and mittens and things. When Ringwood is well and truly leashed, just let me know."

If I told the reader that I enjoyed the experience of leading this "Rather" dog about on the end of a piece of twine, I should be deceiving the reader. I did not enjoy the experience. It was an altogether painful and unpleasant experience, and it lasted for five- and-a-half miles.

The village, or hamlet, of Pucklefield, to which this hound was said to appertain, is one which I don't very often use. They

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fatten chickens at Pucklefield, and although the surrounding landscape is extremely beautiful, the places where they fatten chickens are not so. Also, their chicken-fattening has prospered, with the result that they have been able to afford an extraordinary number and variety of religions, with the result that seven different makes of galvanised iron and seven different species of harmonium have now been introduced into Pucklefield.

Pucklefield itself, however, is not an important feature of this narrative. I merely state the above facts in order to explain why I am not a constant visitor to Pucklefield, and to offer an intelligible reason for geting lost on the way to Pucklefield, together with the dog 'Ringwood.' Not that Ringwood, either, is important to this story. It is what he led up to that matters—sort of matters.

We arrived in the vicinity of Pucklefield about an hour later than we ought to have arrived in that vicinity, having been much delayed by natural obstacles—such as tree stumps. However, we did get within hail of the place at last, and a good job too, because the twine surrounding Ringwood's throat had become exceedingly constricted

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and Ringwood's tongue was protruding from Ringwood's throat in a manner calculated to suggest that Ringwood had had enough of it. So had I.

And, then, all of a sudden and quite without warning, our journey and our troubles came to an end. A twist in the road brought us within view of what is called a "stately pile," a building, an edifice, which I rightly conjectured to be none other than Pucklefield Manor, the home of Ringwood. What lent point to my conjecture and, in a sense, provoked it, was the fact that a compound or enclosure adjoined the building in question, which compound or enclosure was filled with dogs, or hounds, of a type identical with that of Ringwood. Associated with these quadrupeds was an aged person in a pink jacket.

This veteran, espying us from afar, at once advanced towards us at a fast stagger, evincing palpable signs of recognition and enthusiasm.

"So—so—you brought back little Dot, then!" he exclaimed, in a rather gaspy voice. "I'm sure we're very much obliged to you, sir. Master Willie *will* be pleased!"

I said, rather coldly: "If the word 'Dot'

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happens to be your name for this enterprising fellow here, I can only admit that I have brought him back. But, then, why Dot? And, on the other hand, why not? Everybody has heard of 'Dot and carry one.'"

"Just so, sir," replied the elderly person in pink.

"We shoulden' ha' liked to lose old Dot," continued this veteran. "Master Willie will be oncommon glad to hear as he've come home again. And so will Miss Murrl."

Not knowing anything about Master Willie or Miss Muriel, I naturally wondered where they came in. The aged one informed me that they Were the joint owners of Dot and of Dot's innumerable replicas, or replici, as the case may be.

"'Tis a jint pack," explained the veteran. "Miss Murrl and Master Willie, they be jint Master and jint Mistress....If you will have the kindness to wait here for half a throw, I'll go fetch Master Willie. I feel sure as he, and likewise Miss Murrl, will be wishful for to thank you for all your kindness in going to all the trouble o' walkin' all the distance, in this cold weather, with the going so hard, along o' the dog Dot here."

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I expressed my willingness not only to wait "half a throw" but for a multiple, or several multiples, of that chronological moiety. For it occurred to me that Master Willie could not do less than "exhibit" the drug Alcohol. And, after walking five-and-a-half miles at the other end of a string attached to a bounding beagle, I felt myself to be a suitable subject for experiment with the drug Alcohol.

Master Willie then appeared. But he did not produce any alcohol. What he did do was to invite me to tea—in the *nursery*!

Neither did Miss Muriel, who likewise appeared, refer even indirectly to this artificial stimulant—the curse of the country, God bless it! But she also invited me to take tea in the nursery.

Now, I'll own that a nursery tea was not exactly what I had been halving throws for. Not one little bit. On the other hand, tea, though not constituting what I call a drink, is perhaps less detrimental to the heart than other boiled beverages. And I am believed to have a weak heart. Besides...

I will confess that Master Willie and Miss Muriel amused me, and I wanted to see more of these surprising juveniles.

Master Willie was a young fellow of about

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forty-three, and a very fat young fellow, six feet tall, clean shaven, bald, and having no eyebrows. He had likewise lost the use of his letter "R." He said to me:

"You know, upon me word, you know, this is weally most awfully good of you. It would have been a tewible misfortune to lose poor Dotty. He wuns a bit wild at times. The last we saw of him, he had sepawated fwom the main gwoup, and he was wunning wound and wound those wocks in Wocky Lane. We are most awfully obliged to you, you know, we weally are. Now you have come so far, you weally must stop and have some tea with us. We have tea in the nursery."

Miss Muriel then spoke. She said:

"You've behaved like a sportsman, and that's all there is about it. You'll have to stop to tea. We insist. Buns and bannocks and things in the nursery. We always have tea in the nursery."

Miss Muriel was younger than her brother—a tom-boyish, bouncing young creature of about thirty-seven. Like her brother, she was constructed on massive lines. Nature had created her regardless of expense. She was dressed in a broadly checked skirt, with a tail-coat to match. A tall collar, a tall

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white stock, a gold pin and a striped waistcoat enshrouded her bosom and its environs. A black bowler hat, with a wide, flat brim surmounted her round, pink face and gilt hair.

We then walked into the house, Miss Muriel leading the way.

"First of all," said Miss Muriel, "you must say 'How-do-ye-do' to papa."

I did so. Papa, who appeared to be about one hundred and twenty years of age, inhabited a dark oak chair in a dark corner of a dark room. He wore a dark coat and a dark skull-cap. He was deaf, but grasped the words "hound" and "friend." He said:

"Glad to see you. Glad to see all their young friends. Splendid puppies, eh? Said to be the best pack in the county. Splendid sport! Good for the children. Keeps 'em away from barmaids and curates. Run along to tea now. Tea in the nursery. Always keep up nursery tea. Always have kept it up. Two nurses. Can't discharge 'em. Eatin' their heads off. Must find 'em employment. Besides, it keeps the children young—keeps 'em

modest. Glass of sherry and cigar here afterwards. None of your whiskey. None of your cigarettes."

After which the nursery did not tremendously

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surprise me. A long, high room, with many cupboards. Large fireplace. Netted fireguard as large as a chicken-run. Long table, at the head of which was seated an old, old lady in a starched cap and wristbands. At the opposite end of the table sat another lady, similarly uniformed and one degree less aged. The table was well spread with every kind of stomach-aching substance. Places were set for five or six. The crockery, I perceived, was of a suitable description, heavy and old, but of an entertaining nature, for it exhibited the adventures of Jack the Giant Killer, the Babes in the Wood, Little Red Riding Hood and The Sleeping Beauty, all of which historical personages were faithfully portrayed in Liverpool transfer, wearing Chinese hats and pigtails.

The lady who presided at this refection was called "Nannah." Her "Mr. Vice" was called "Nurse Charlotte." Nannah always spoke first, but Nurse Charlotte always spoke second, confirming Nannah's utterances. Nannah now said:

"It is your turn to say grace, Master Willie."

Nurse Charlotte said, "Yes. It is Master Willie's turn to say grace."

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Master Willie accordingly spoke these words: For what we awe about to weceive may the Lord make us twuly gwateful. Amen. No tweacle when it comes to my turn for cwumpets, Nannah, please."

Nannah then addressed herself to Miss Muriel, accompanying her speech with an oblique look at the humble historian of this event.

"Ask the young gentleman, Miss Muriel," she said, "whether he would like some milk and sugar with his tea."

The young gentleman having voted for both of these ingredients, was handed his tea by Nannah, who, while performing the act of transfer, looked very hard at him— or, rather,

at his hands. The young gentleman became embarrassed. He put them quickly into his pockets, but realising that this was not genteel, he hid them under the table, but realising that this was not practical, he tried to do conjuring tricks with a napkin. At length, realising the futility of all these expedients, and feeling that the eye of Nannah was unfalteringly upon him, burning a hot place all through him and making cinders of his spine, he relinquished all subterfuge and spoke up, as in days of yore. He said:

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"If—if—you please, Nannah, may I leave the table for a minute? I—I—I think my hands are rather grubby. I—I have been walking about with a dog. And I—I—think I would like to wash them."

Nannah signified her consent to my petition by a grave nod of the head. "At the same time," she said, "you might give your hair a brush. It wants it."

The rest of that repast was spoilt for me. I felt that I had disgraced myself, and not only myself but my family, and not only my family but my own, old, private Nannah, who was more particular about hands and hair than about anything else.

I lost my nerve so badly that this Nannah, loudly seconded by Nurse Charlotte, had to speak three times before I realised that she was speaking to me, and that I was being offered the honour of returning thanks for my good tea. This feat I then performed, in a somewhat faltering manner.

Still in imperfect possession of my faculties, I permitted Miss Muriel and Master Willie to lead me out of the nursery and back again into the dark oak room, where Papa again received me with kindness, directing me to a sideboard where the cigars and the sherry

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were in waiting. Proceeding dumbly to this place, I again lost touch with the realities, and, ignoring the wine and tobacco, went straight to the fruit dish, from which I abstracted an orange and a brazil nut, which I stuffed into my trousers pocket.

I thought that the old gentleman looked a little bit surprised at this, and so did Miss Muriel, and so did Master Willie. But they naturally did not express this sentiment in

words. Indeed, the sentiments which they did utter were those of kindness and hospitality. They asked me to come again to Pucklefield Manor and again to take tea in the nursery—an invitation which I very eagerly accepted, for I *like* Pucklefield Manor: I *like* having tea in the nursery. Also...

Well, also, I have my character to redeem, and that of my family, and that of my own, old Nannah. Next time, I will take care that my hands and hair are quite all right. And I will wear a better suit—something in black velvet, I think, with a wide lace collar. And I will learn up "The Wreck of the Hesperus" again. I always used to recite this poem in other people's nurseries. In our own they barred it.

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XXII

A TOY TRAGEDY.

Last year I organised a Christmas tree in this my native village. This year I am organising no Christmas tree. Our vicar wonders why.

I did not pay for the Christmas tree. Simon paid for it. Simon is a fat and simple man, who comes from Nicaragua, and who used to know my Uncle Benjamin. That is why he stayed with me last Christmas-time. That is why he thought it would be nice to entertain the village children. That is why he had to find out for himself how impossible it is to do such things in England.

Of course, when Simon gave me twenty pounds and asked me to arrange the thing, I could hardly refuse him. He used to know my Uncle Benjamin. So I wrote a letter to the vicar. I had to write a letter to the vicar because we had to borrow the village schoolroom. It was rather awkward, writing to the vicar, because I don't happen to be a

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member of his flock, and he doesn't recognise the existence of stray sheep. However, I told him where I lived (about fifty yards from the vicarage), and what my name was, and what I wanted. As I had then lived in the village eight years, I felt justified in

adding that almost any common person would be able to show him my house. I thought, perhaps, he would care to come and discuss the matter with me. He did care, and he did come.

He came on Saturday morning, looking like a man who had received a shock, but is determined to keep calm.

"I understand," said the vicar," that you are anxious to be allowed to send some toys and sweetmeats to the schoolroom to be distributed to the children. You would wish us to do this, I presume, on the occasion of our usual Yuletide festival?"

The reverend gentleman's understanding required correction. I explained to him that my position was that of an intermediary; that I was personally quite without anxiety on the subject; but that my friend, Mr. Simple Simon—whom I now presented to him—did indeed seek permission to borrow or hire the schoolroom.

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"I understand," said the vicar, turning his back on Simple Simon, "that you are the writah of the lettah which I received this morning? I should, therefore, prefah to discuss the mattah with you. It is my invariable practice to limit, so far as possible, the intrusion of extraneous counsel into questions relating purely to my parish work. I understand that you would like these toys to be distributed in our schoolroom?"

"We would like," I replied, "to borrow or hire your schoolroom, and to invite the children to tea there—

all the children, you understand, good and bad alike. We want the thing to be as little like a 'function' as possible; just a simple jollification, you know—tea and blind man's buff and a Christmas tree and crackers."

"I understand," said the vicar, "that my co-operation in this mattah will not be refused, although I perceive that it has not been distinctly invited."

We begged the reverend gentleman to cooperate with all his might.

"Exactly," remarked the vicar:" exactly. Then I understand that you will not be averse to my offering a few suggestions with a view to placing the mattah upon such a footing

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as will enable all classes in the parish to unite and make your little charity the success which it deserves to be"

The silent Simon here broke into speech. " Please don't call it a charity, sir," he said. "We don't want the kiddies to look at it in that light."

Our reverend visitor turned his head, and with the aid of a pair of eyeglasses endeavoured to see the author of this impertinence; but, failing to achieve success in that menial task, removed the eyeglasses, and resumed his speech.

"Then I understand," said the vicar, "that I am to consider myself entrusted with the preliminary arrangements of this entertainment. It seems to me, speaking, as it were, without reflection or inquiry, that the idea is one which might well be identified with our own little festival on the 10th of January. I will endeavour to enlist the services of a suitable committee of ladies, and I may even hope, although I cannot promise, that Mr. Quickly will be present. Good-day, gentlemen."

"Who may Mr. Quickly be?" demanded Simple Simon, when our good vicar had really gone.

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"He is a Parliamentary candidate," I replied.

"Why has he got to be invited to my party?'' inquired Simple Simon.

"I don't know," I answered; "but the local feeling is that he is indispensable."

"Dear me," said Simple Simon.

Two days later I received a letter from the vicar. It was a short epistle,.merely calling my attention to " the enclosed card of invitation," which, said the vicar, he proposed sending forth to " some few friends and sympathisers." These favoured persons were invited to support "our friend and neighbour," Mr. Thomas Randolph Quickly, prospective Imperialist candidate for the Blowfield Division of Sussex, when upon Saturday, the 10th instant, he would make his first public appearance in this parish, and would preside at a "Yuletide festival and temperance fete, to be held in the schoolroom at four o'clock p.m." Upon the base of the card in small italic type appeared the

following additional notification:—"A number of toys and sweets will, by the kindness of a local gentleman, be presented to the scholars in attendance."
When the appointed day arrived we went

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round to the schoolroom prepared for scenes of revelry. A youth called "Muffin," and another youth called "Puggy," two high- spirited young friends of mine, came with us, having been invited to see the fun, and to make themselves useful by handing out the toys, walking round with cakes, doing "blind man," and all that sort of thing.
We got inside the hall, to find the "committee of ladies" in possession with a lot of hammers and red baize and Union Jacks. One of these ladies—Mrs. Tollemache, by name—came forward and very politely inquired what she could do for us.
We thanked her, and explained that we had invited ourselves to the party.
"In that case," said Mrs. Tollemache, "you will be so kind as to take seats at the end of the hall! We are rather behindhand with the arrangements; and people moving about the platform do interfere so."
Then we further explained that we considered ourselves as forming part of the arrangements. We had come to administer the Christmas tree.
"That matter," Mrs. Tollemache assured us, "has already been attended to. The vicar has made most careful plans. You

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will excuse me now, won't you? Mr. Quickly will be here in less than half an hour."
A little later Mr. Quickly did arrive, in company with the vicar and a large number of ladies and gentlemen, who proceeded to group themselves round the Christmas tree upon a raised dais. Later, some of the ladies and gentlemen kindly made room for Simple Simon and his party.
Then a few more people arrived and came on to the platform, and then the party was complete—excepting, of course, for the children.

"They'll be bursting in on us pretty soon now, I suppose," suggested Simple Simon to the vicar. That gentleman replied that the children were even then awaiting a signal from him to enter. At the same moment he seized a bell-rope which depended from the roof of the schoolroom.

"Now for the rush," cried Simple Simon, in tones of delighted anticipation.

The big school bell boomed out. The big doors of the school, controlled by the unseen hand of the sexton, flew open. Then there burst in upon us—a solitary, diminutive, stout little man, who held in his hand an enormous cab whistle. The conscientious

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calm of a certificated teacher was written large all over him.

This person, having first bowed to the prospective honourable member for this division, and having then bowed to the vicar, turned his back upon the platform, and having produced an imperative scream from the cab whistle, addressed himself to an invisible audience beyond the doors.

"Now, children," exclaimed their little schoolmaster in a loud and unpleasant voice; "now, boys and girls, behave yourselves. When I blow one on the whistle you come to attention. When I blow two, quick march. When I blow loud and long you halt! Now then—are you ready?" Toot!

A shuffle of feet on the pavement without.

Toot! toot!

An orderly and dignified scrunching of feet. An orderly and dignified irruption of white- faced, round-eyed, over-washed children. A snarl from Simple Simon.

Simple Simon had broken out. "What is the meaning of all this tomfoolery?" he demanded of the vicar.

"All of which tomfoolery?" inquired the vicar.

"This—that! Marching in my guests

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under escort, as if they were a gang of convicts?"

"The children," responded our vicar, "have been marshalled in this manner with my full approval."

The face behind the cab whistle began again. "Now, boys and girls, listen to me. When I blow one, file off in twos and take your places at the forms beside the tea-table. Boys to the right of the room, girls to the left." Toot!

The children began to march off as directed. But one ill-mannered infant happened to laugh, whereupon the whole procession was tooted to a halt. "Children," cried the little man in a mournful voice, "behave yourselves. Remember I *rely* on you." Toot!

Having thus re-established decorum, and got the children to their places, standing at attention, the little man began again.

"Now, children, listen to me. When I blow one, sit down. When I blow two, sit up. When I blow two—one, hold out your mugs. Pupil-teachers, fall in with tea-cans. When——" and so forth.

"That chap thinks he's taming something," reflected my young friend Muffin in a subdued voice.

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The tooting continued on and off for about an hour. The little round man tooted them up while the vicar said grace, and down when he had finished it, and up again to an address on "The Truer Patriotism" from Mr. Quickly, and down again when their tea was cold, and up again because they didn't sit down smartly.

He tooted them in single file up to the Christmas tree. He tooted them into quarter column formation at the back of the hall, and demanded three cheers for Mr. Quickly. He then tooted them into silence while Mr. Quickly returned thanks, and the vicar extolled Mr. Quickly, and Mr. Quickly extolled the vicar, after which the children were tooted to attention, and commanded to utter three further cheers in favour of the vicar. They were then tooted into fours and marched out of the hall.

Then the vicar pointed out to Simple Simon that a large quantity of toys on the Christmas tree still remained there. "Since you have provided over-generously," said the vicar, "may I suggest that we should retain the residue for bazaar and raffle purposes?"

"I suppose so," said Simple Simon.

"There is no objection, I presume," added the vicar, "to Mrs. Tollemache taking home

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an engine for her little boy. The poor child has such a cold."

We followed the vicar and Mr. Quickly out of the hall. Just outside the door we came upon a crowd of very hungry, very dirty little children, who had had no toys at all.

Simple Simon broke out again. "What the devil does this mean?" he exclaimed.

The vicar said: "I conceive you to have addressed some observation to me, sir."

"You conceive me to be inquiring why these little beggars, these dirty, uncouth little beggars, were not invited to my party. The arrangements were in your hands."

"These children," explained the vicar, "are the children of undesirable parents. They have been excluded upon moral grounds."

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XXIII

SUETRY

In the part of England where I live the custom still survives among the native population of offering Christmas wishes by word of mouth and Christmas gifts by deed of hand.

Thus, Mr. Daniel Purkis, of Blowfield, came recently to my threshold bearing a pigeon on a plate. "With the compliments of the season, sir," said Mr. Purkis.

I am told by persons acquainted with the profounder mysteries of the Christian faith that the pigeon is an emblematic bird signifying that which is invisible and incomprehensible, but at the same time fundamental. This being the case, I have no doubt that spiritual as well as artistic motives governed Mr. Purkis in his choice of meat.

"Meat," I say; for Mr. Purkis' pigeon was

now definable as such, having been slain. It

lay in the middle of the plate, moist and pink
and naked—or nearly naked. The garment

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of down and feathers which enables live pigeons to support an appearance of decency had been stripped from this bird, but the resultant bleakness was partly relieved by a narrow red ribbon of silk, which had been tied across the chest of the deceased, who was further decorated with a sprig of holly, a sprig of mistletoe, and—oh, deft touch!—a sprig of maidenhair fern.

I took this offering from Mr. Purkis, bowing my acknowledgments. At the same time, I observed, as I always do, the fleshy, red thumb of Mr. Purkis, and I shuddered, as I always do, at this feature of Mr. Purkis' personality.

My objection to Mr. Purkis' thumb is a purely spiritual one. I can't define it in words. Mr. Purkis is a butcher.

If I didn't know that Mr. Purkis was a butcher, I probably shouldn't know that he had a thumb. But, having this knowledge of Mr. Purkis' vocation, I am unable to avoid his thumb. To my biassed vision, he consists exclusively of a thumb.

Having received the pigeon and averted my gaze from the thumb, I called for One who is kind enough to share my solitude—when at home. I said to her:

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"Come here, and look what Mr. Purkis has given us!"

She came. She looked. She smiled at Mr. Purkis. She regarded your servant. She opened her mouth, as if to utter becoming sentiments of gratitude. But, at that moment, the young lady to whom I refer with such masterly reticence, became suddenly and unaccountably afflicted with a paralysis of the organs of speech. In place of the becoming sentiments, there issued from her mouth a series of unbecoming noises, mingled with faint sobs and a distressing cough. She then turned her back on Mr. Purkis, uttering what sounded like a cry for help, and I supported her staggering form to a doorway and deposited it, inert and helpless, on the floor of an adjacent chamber.

And they ask one to admire the social resource and tact of women!

I returned to Mr. Purkis, a little shaken from the effects of the painful scene which we had both witnessed. Mr. Purkis offered me a few well-chosen words of sympathy. I thanked him.

"The plate comes back, if you please, sir," added Mr. Purkis.

I offered Mr. Purkis innumerable apologies,

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and, having caused other arrangements to be made for the lying-in-state of the pigeon, I gave him back his plate.

"Thank you, sir; much obliged, sir, I'm sure, sir," said Mr. Purkis. "I wouldn't ha' took the liberty o' troublin' you for it, sir, only my wife she tal me very particler to make sure and bring the plate back."

* * * * *

I remember experiencing a sense of shock when Mr. Purkis mentioned his wife. It had not occurred to me that that red thumb might be married. And yet, of course, one knows that butchers do have wives. You see them on Sundays, heavy women with earrings, being driven abroad by the thumbs in diminutive "governess cars," which are drawn by quick and agitated ponies.

It was Mr. Purkis' wife, no doubt, who laid out the pigeon. The nice adjustment of that sprig of fern was a feat beyond the arts of thumbing.

A little later, at luncheon, I said to one who is sometimes kind enough to share that repast with me:

"I suppose we shall have to return Mr. Purkis' present."

"Don't be absurd," replied the person to

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whom this question was addressed. "The best return you can make him is to pay his bill."

"Right!" I replied, making a note in my pocket-book.

"What have you written?" demanded my companion.

I replied that I was merely reminding myself to write a little story about Mr. Purkis, in settlement of his account. I then explained to the lady who shared these deliberations with me that the mere payment of Mr. Purkis' bill would not satisfy my extremely scrupulous sense of fairness. Mr. Purkis had come voluntarily to my house, bearing gifts. As an honourable man and a democrat, I felt that he had thus placed me under an obligation which could only be repaid in kind.

"What is the usual Christmas present for a butcher? Let it be something inanimate: something he can't——"

My counsellor, interrupting my speech, replied that there was no such thing as a recognised present for a butcher. The only person in the world who ever gave presents to a butcher was a butcher's wife, and she gives him striped aprons. If I insisted on making myself conspicuous by giving

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Christmas presents to a butcher, then my counsellor could only implore me, for the butcher's sake, not to make it aprons, and for her sake, not to make it cigars. No butcher ought to be encouraged to smoke.

"But," I submitted, "if you can't give aprons to a butcher and you can't give him cigars, what, in Heaven's sake, *can* you give him? Butchers don't play hockey, or hunt, or take photographs, or anything."

"You could give him a nice book," suggested the counsellor.

After thoroughly considering this suggestion I decided to accept it. I remembered that Mr. Purkis possessed a wife, and I accordingly took down from its shelf an attractive little volume called "An Ideal Husband," being a play by Oscar Wilde. I then mounted my bicycle and rode to Blowfield, where I gave Mr. Purkis this book and a small cheque, together "with the compliments of the season."

Mr. Purkis received the book with reverence, having previously applied the apron to both thumbs.

Having piously examined the volume, he looked up, exhibiting a countenance all shiny with lard and emotion. "Sir," he said,

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rather unsteadily, "I thank you: I thank you very much indeed. If there be one thing what pleases my wife, 'tis a pretty little story book to look at Sunday afternoons. I wonder—I wonder if you would allow me to ask you to shake 'ands with my wife?"

I readily assented to this charming suggestion, and at once walked to the small glasshouse, marked "CASH," situated at the end of the shop. It was one of those conservatories in which butchers always keep their wives, and I was surprised to find it empty.

"Ah, sir," exclaimed Mr. Purkis "'tis useless for to seek in there: quite useless. My wife, she've never set a foot in this shop since the day I married her!"

Mr. Purkis uttered this statement with dramatic emphasis. His voice became charged with a strange, new quality: a quality of emotion.

Mr. Purkis then conducted me to an upper chamber, wherein a very plump lady, having golden hair and a contented smile, sat enthroned amid wickerwork and ferns.

"This," exclaimed the thumbs, "is Mrs. Purkis. The gentleman is one of our customers, my dear: him what I've spoken of,

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as always have the shoulder halved. Mrs. Purkis has been married to me for nine years, sir, and I'm proud to say that, in all that time, she has never so much as *set foot* in the shop. No, sir: never so much as peeped into the place. I'm one of those men as believes in keeping the wife away from the meat. Purkis is a butcher: Mrs. Purkis is a lady. Since the day she married, Mrs. Purkis has never done an hour's work: not so much as to lift a needle, sir. We got a little daughter, what I'm bringing up to be a lady, likewise. And we got a little son what I'm bringing up to be a butcher. Mother, show the gentleman the Christmas photo of our Willie.

Stretching forth a languid arm, Mrs. Purkis selected a card from among several which lay on the adjacent table. It was a large and expensive card, embellished with golden horseshoes and scarlet berries. But that with which it was most signally embellished

was a photographic reproduction, representing the exterior of Mr. Purkis' shop. In the forefront of the picture lay a large dead pig, which had been deprived of its outer skin. A triumphant small boy, clad in his Sunday clothes, sat astride the pig, as one enthroned upon an accomplishment of art.

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I looked at Mr. Purkis, after looking at this picture, and perceived that the eyes of that stout fellow were filled with tears.

I then perceived that the soul of Mr. Purkis had a kind of sub-soul which was illumined by a kind of a glow—the glow of "Suetry."

" Suetry "—a word which I have invented, thus enriching the English language—is the rich, fat brother of poetry. It is poetry without hunger.

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XXIV

UNCLE ALF

"People's right." said Mrs. Piper—Mrs. *Tom* Piper: her what married the wheelwright. "People's right: this Fair ain't 'arf the 'go' it used for to be."

I looked at Mrs. Piper, who was surrounded by all her young, and by her old mother and by her sister Kate and by her cousin Annie from Croydon, and by a boy who had donkey rides for disposal and by another boy who canvassed for custom in the interest of roundabouts and by steam organs and by fried fish and by sticky, freckled men, in the "familiar " stage of gin and cider. I looked at Mrs. Piper, and decided that Mrs. Piper was right. Mrs. Piper looked at me, and blinked apologetically, for the sun was in her eyes. She dabbed at her harassed countenance with the end of a warm feather boa, which encircled her neck, and addressed a shrill and comprehensive rebuke to her young:

"Steady on, the lot o' you: 'old yere nise

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now, do!" cried Mrs. Piper. "What'll Uncle Alf say?"

"Where *be* Uncle Alf, mo'er?" piped a little Piper.

"He won't be long a-comin' now, Willie, so hold yere nise," replied his mother. "Yere Uncle Alf's what's *wanted,* 'ere. Per'aps this Fair' ll begin to look like a Fair when yere Uncle Alf comes. Yere Uncle Alf'll liven things up."

"Yes, mo'er," assented Willie, nodding wisely.

And, on thinking things over, it occurred to us that this was exactly what *was* wanted here—an Uncle Alf. A rubicund, jolly, prosperous, open-handed, bow-fronted Uncle Alf.

Suddenly he came. "There 'e be, mo'er!" called out all the articulate specimens of Mrs. Piper's young. "There's oold Uncle Alf." And there he was, quite positively.

But we should be deceiving you if we pretended that the Uncle Alf of fact corresponded exactly with the Uncle Alf of our vision. The Uncle Alf of fact was—well, different. He was not rubicund; neither was he rotund, nor was he manifestly jovial.

On the other hand, he was Uncle Alf, and

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seeing how urgently we needed an Uncle Alf, we decided to welcome him, even though he did happen to be an odd pattern.

He shambled up to Mrs. Piper, and made his salutations: a tall, uneven, undulating, beardless youth, with bad teeth and a chequered complexion: An ironmonger's apprentice type of youth, in tight blue suiting, yellow boots, a wide-brimmed hat, and a

NECKTIE!!!

An intensely earnest, very awkward youth, who was smoking a thin Virginian cigarette, with an air of not minding who noticed it. A youth with large red ears.

Well, there he was: *such* as he was. We raised three fingers and carefully blessed him.

"'Ere, mo'er—d'year that?" demanded the combined young, in ecstasy. "Oold Uncle Alf be gooiner 'ave a goo at they cocoa-nuts!"

Sensation!

Uncle Alf walks very deliberately, very calmly, up to the cocoa-nut man. Uncle Alf deposits sixpence. Uncle Alf receives in exchange an armful o' wooden balls, seven in number.

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"I'll oold yere 'at, uncle," exclaims his eldest nephew.

"'Ush!" commands that young gentleman's mother.

She and her young, the grandparent, the aunt, the cousin, dispose themselves fanwise in the immediate rear of Uncle Alf. That gentleman breathes hard.

He then throws a ball in the direction of a cocoa-nut. Nothing happens to the cocoa-nut, but the man who commands the cocoa-nuts starts back and regards Uncle Alf with an expression of deep and genuine sympathy. "'Ard lines, sir! " he exclaims.

Uncle Alf essays again (and again—and again!) to dislodge the cocoanut. At last, he has used up all his balls and the cocoa-nut man has uttered seven times his cry of sympathy and encouragement. But the cocoa- nut remains untouched.

"I was as near to it as this, that last time," says Uncle Alf to Mrs. Piper, tapping his finger-nail.

He then proceeds, amid an awe-stricken hush, to a little tent, where an Eastern gentleman, of extreme urbanity, conducts a little game of skill and patience called ''Covering the Spot." The Eastern gentleman,

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smiling softly, obliges Uncle Alf with a brief, but lucid, exposition of the principles of the game.

Within the Eastern gentleman's little tent there stands a little table, which is covered by a cloth, in the centre of which is painted a big red spot. The object of the game is to cover this spot with certain discs, identical in shape and size. The Eastern gentleman himself performs this feat with certainty and ease. He is willing, however, to pay you

five shillings if you can do likewise. He exacts a nominal entrance fee of twopence for each attempt.

Uncle Alf proves six times that he can nearly do it, and pays a shilling for the privilege of demonstrating this fact.

"I jolly nigh 'ad 'is oold fi' bob that *larst* toime," he says to Mrs. Piper, at the end of the ceremony. And the eldest nephew hastens to communicate this item of intelligence to his grandmother, crying:" D'year that, gran'-mo'er? Oold uncle, he jolly nigh 'ad the oold fi' bob that *larst* toime."

"Did he, now—the wicked lad!" exclaims the old lady, gazing at Uncle Alf with eyes which are illumined by the light of pride and love.

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Uncle Alf then purchases a shilling's worth of wooden rings. He flings them away from him with alarming celerity, aiming at all sorts of difficult targets; at marble clocks, tobacco-jars, and butter-dishes. One—two three—Pff! It is over.

"I nearly 'ad that pickle jar!" cries Uncle Alf.

"'Ard *lines*, sir!" exclaims the man who has had the shilling.

"Ah, well," says Mrs. Piper, hopefully, "there's still the dart board."

It seems to us that Uncle Alf has done enough: but Uncle Alf is bent on enjoying himself.

The dart board costs him eighteenpence. But—mark you this!—it does the trick for him. For, with his last throw, he hits the yellow spot and wins—a *stick of chocolate*!

"Well done, sir!" cries the dartman: "a very good throw! "

"'Ow's this?" cried Uncle Alf, exhibiting the stick of chocolate to his aged mother.

"'Ow's that, grannie?" cry the. little nephews.

"Oh, dear!" cries granny, looking very tenderly at Uncle Alf: "Ya're a wicked lad."

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XXV

THE CRAMMING SHED

Mr. Tim Gumbrill, the Chickun-fatter, of Highfield, in Sussex, entertained me this morning to an exposition of his art and his philosophy.

The scene of this ceremony was the long, low iron-roofed shed wherein Mr. Gumbrill pursues his highly profitable craft. This shed constitutes an admirable site for the prosecution of metaphysical inquiry, being dim and muggy. The dimness arises, firstly, from the dirt on the windows of the shed, and, secondly, from the smallness and fewness of those illuminants. These factors also contribute to the peculiar thermal quality of Mr. Gumbrill's shed; but the characteristic flavouring of the atmosphere is imparted to it by the iron roof and the hens.

The hens inhabit coops, which are ranged, tier upon tier, along the walls of this hot, dark cabin; and they are red-eyed, feverish, watchful hens. They watch with outstretched necks, their coops being so constructed as to

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discourage an erect posture. They watch the cracks of light which frame the doorway of Mr. Gumbrill's shed; and when this door is opened to admit Mr. Gumbrill, their outstretched necks stretch out a little farther, their eyes flame still more hotly, as they strain towards the light and air beyond the opened door.

Then Mr. Gumbrill enters his shed, leaving the door wide open, to illuminate the scene, and walks towards the centre of the shed, where his bench, his table, his baskets, and—other appliances are kept. And then all the hens avert their eyes from the doorway and look at Mr. Gumbrill, twisting their necks with a movement which is almost simultaneous, holding their heads a little slantwise, and uttering nervous noises.

The chief of Mr. Gumbrill's appliances is his "cramming machine," an object constructed of iron and shaped, roughly speaking, like a kitchen pump. A wooden treadle is attached to the base of this ingenious contrivance, and its upper works are provided with a length of rubber tubing. In front of his cramming machine, and in close proximity to the mouth of the tube, Mr. Gumbrill has caused a wooden trough to be

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erected; and this trough is invariably occupied by deceased hens—headless, featherless hens, who lie in a row, all trussed and naked.

I followed Mr. Gumbrill into his shed this morning at his invitation, Mr. Gumbrill having expressed a wish to demonstrate the art and mystery of chickun-fatting to me.

"There's a book could be wrote about chickun-fatting," said Mr. Gumbrill. "I've orfen looked at the picture papers in hopes to find some views of chickun-fattin', but they don't seem to 'a woke up to the beauty of it, not yet. I wonder as some young fellar like yo'self don't put them up to it. 'Tis a out-of- the-way profession, but full of artfulness and cleverness. Now, jist you watch me."

With these words, Mr. Gumbrill sauntered up to one of the coops, and, withdrawing a board from the front of it, lifted the lid and grabbed at one of the three hens which it contained. The hen came out unwillingly, uttering a sort of confused stammer; but all the other hens were silent. The chosen hen lapsed also into silence as Mr. Gumbrill tucked her beneath his arm and carried her to his Work bench. She remained quiet while Mr. Gumbrill made his preparations, eyeing the stark and naked row of her late convives with

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that air of silent apprehensiveness which is cultivated by hens. But when Mr. Gumbrill had completed his preparations and had brought his piece of tubing to the "ready," holding it firmly with his right hand and the hen's neck with his left, that illogical creature gave forth a single high-pitched squawk. Mr. Gumbrill then inserted his tube in her throat, thus disarming further utterance, and he then put his foot to the treadle and stamped upon it quickly, one—two! The tube was then withdrawn; the hen squawked huskily twice, in a subdued voice, and was restored to her coop, amid some clamour from the other hens.

The whole entertainment was then repeated, and went without a hitch, and was then again repeated, and again went without a hitch, conforming to precedent in every particular. Mr. Gumbrill then spoke.

"It's simple enough to look at, ain't it?" he remarked, pausing, with his foot lightly poised upon the treadle and a henful of tubing in his hand. "It's simple enough to look at. And yet there's a wonderful lot o' Art in it. More than anybody would believe. If you goos at it in the leastest shade too fearce, you bursteth their crops."

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"Ha! Ha!" I cried. "And *then* where are they!"

"Ha! Ha!" repeated Mr. Gumbrill. "'Tis true, though, what I be telling you. Many and many's the crop I've burst, when first I started fattin', afore I gained experience."

"What did they say about it?"

"Who? About what?" demanded Mr. Gumbrill.

"The hens. About your — ah — inexperience?"

"Ah! I foller you now," said Mr. Gumbrill, laughing gleefully. "Well, they didn't say much. A hen,' she areun't got a lot o' breath left, not to 'oiler with, time you bursteth 'er crop for 'er. They die, they do, then, and then ain't no good for nothin'—not with a burst crop. We eats them ourselves when the crop be bursted. It cause the flesh to look un'olesome, and that won't do for my customers. *They* want a properly fatted chickun, white and 'olesome, for to sell to *their* customers.

"It's a good trade," continued Mr. Gumbrill, "but there's a wonderful lot of art in it, and we got a lot to put up with. There's people allus interfering with us—or trying to.

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They say 'tis cruel, this here fattin'. And so they comes about here gawpin' at us, they does, these here people. *You* know, Mister: nosey people. Suffragettes and so forth."

"Of course, you tell them that it isn't cruel?"

"Of course I do. Why, the chickun *likes* it—arter a time. Everybody knows 'as they likes it—arter a time. 'Why it's the same as some o' you ladies,' I tells 'em, some o' these 'ere nosey ones—these Sufferagettes. 'They like it the same as you ladies do, what goes to prison on purpose for to git the same experience.'

"At the same time," pursued Mr. Gumbrill, as his face grew redder, "I could larn 'em *not* to like it, if I wanted to. Pity they don't call *me* into some of their prisons—me and moi le'l crammer here. I wouldn't 'arf give 'em forcible feedin'—moi God, I Wouldn't!"

As Mr. Gumbrill spoke he applied his foot to the treadle, and he applied it very hard. The creature which he grasped in his dirty hot hand writhed convulsively, and blood oozed out of her beak.

"Why, dammy if this 'un's crop bean't bursted now!" cried Mr. Gumbrill. "*She's* a Suffragette, shoulden wonder. Silly fool."

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He threw her among the other corpses—the naked ones—at which she had been privileged to gaze during the long period which Mr. Gumbrill had devoted to his preparatory exordium.

Mr. Gumbrill then fetched another hen, who performed the usual brief "squawk" as Mr. Gumbrill shoved the tube into her throat.

Mr. Gumbrill was now very red indeed, and blue veins showed prominently about his throat. Again he stamped upon the treadle, and again he stamped it hard.

"Why—so and so, and thus!" cried Mr. Gumbrill. "Gawd strike me dead if *this* 'un beant gorn now. 'Tis thinkin' o' these here women doos it....I seems to think...I got a woman here!

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XXVI

MILDRED'S SON

I could very reasonably begin this essay in the orthodox classical manner, with reflections about the fleetness of Time and the Melancholy which results from the irresistible progress of that old monster. But the orthodox and classical manner ought not to be lightly worn by comic writers. Let me therefore state, quite baldly, that

fourteen years have passed (and passed like lightning) since that starlight night at Wargrave when Mildred put her hand in mine and swore to wait for me. She was to wait indefinitely while I carved out a career. And at this distance of time I cannot remember precisely out of what material I proposed to carve it. Experience has shown me to be a poor carver, anyhow. But Mildred swore that she would wait for me: wait indefinitely. She then immediately married the son of a brewer, and *her* son, aged twelve, or twelvish, has just lunched with me.

I have known Mildred's son in all stages of

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his earthly progress. I can remember him in the days of his clammy infancy, when, at Mildred's direct command, I presented him with an expensive offering composed of gold and coral, which he sucked and bubbled at in a highly offensive manner. I can remember him as a sullen, heavy darling of three, who wore a holland smock and curls *à la Litterateur*, and who continuously punched holes in everything with a miniature reproduction (bell included) of a tram conductor's forceps. I can remember him as a manly little boy of eight, who played clock- golf upon the drawing-room carpet with his father's bat—I mean "mallet"—I should say "club"—and "I've been Roaming" on the drawing-room piano with two fingers, one of which was his mother's. I can also re-remember Mildred's son's first separation from Mildred, when he went away by train in pursuit of learning. Finally, I remember him as he is now, or was yesterday, when he came to luncheon by appointment, bringing with him a friend and convive, Rupert Somebody, who is acquiring culture at the same establishment in which the process of cultivating Mildred's son is being conducted.

Mildred's son has matured since Christmas,

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when I last saw him. His wrists and ankles have lengthened considerably, while his trousers and sleeves have shrunk. His features have matured, and now wear an expression of extreme solemnity and wisdom: his soul, too, has evidently matured, as

was proved by the distinctive and emphatic character of his tie. But it is the voice of Mildred's son which has most noticeably altered. His voice has acquired a sort of muffled quality: it is a jugged voice, and a speckled voice at that: bright alto spots on a background of gloomiest bass.

Really, I devoted the tenderest, most avuncular attention to Mildred's son, but I failed to extract from him a single intelligible utterance: only blue-bottle noises. And this was particularly unfortunate in that Mildred's son was the only articulate member of his party.

Young Rupert Somebody—a pleasant youth enough, with red hair and freckles—was what is called "reserved," being either extremely shy or extremely "breedy." It appeared to be contrary to etiquette to address any direct remarks to Rupert. You conversed with him through Mildred's son, who, having listened very gravely to your

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observations, then whispered hoarsely to Rupert. The converse method was employed upon those rare occasions when Rupert thought it necessary to convey a thought from himself to me.

The young gentlemen appeared and stood before me in a very severe attitude, each having the expression of being very much on his guard. I naturally hoped that their journey hither had been easily and agreeably accomplished, eliciting a mumble of assent from Mildred's son. I next ventured to suppose that they must be eager for lunch. At this point the process of cross conference was applied, Mildred's son turning his head to the right and young Rupert Somebody turning *his* head to the left. What subsequently surprised me about Rupert was the unerring accuracy with which he was able to interpret the muffled utterances of Mildred's son. At the conclusion of the conference, Mildred's son addressed these words to me:

"Mum mum very much mum mum mum all the same to you, mum mum mum mum mum mum air-gun."

"Then you had better run and wash your hands," I said—not at all without reason.

"No!" protested Mildred's son. "Mum

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mum mum mum mum mum mum mum mum mum mum mum air-gun."

Upon which, I said to Mildred's son, "*What*? Speak up, boy!"

Mildred's son then said it all over again, and by the method of checking him at every other word, and guessing the intermediate ones, I was at length enabled to understand him to intimate that if it were all the same to me they were not very hungry, and they would rather go out and look at my air-gun, he having described its quality and powers to Rupert, but Rupert having questioned the accuracy of that description. To this I responded, with a decisiveness which, I hope, is permitted to Courtesy Uncles:

"Nonsense, nonsense! There is a bird for lunch. Run and wash your hands."

At this, the two young gentlemen again conferred, at the conclusion of which conference Mildred's son again addressed me, saying:

"Mum mum mum mum mum. It hurts. Mum mum mum mum mum mum mum."

I again exhorted Mildred's son to speak up. This time I elicited the confession that they would rather not wash. It hurt. Their hands were not dirty. What I had mistaken for dirt was "chap."

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"Fiddlesticks!" I protested. "There's no such thing as a chocolate-coloured 'chap.'"

"There is," insisted Mildred's son, "really, mum mum mum mum mum mum mum. Mum mum mum mum mum gloves, if you like. His mother always mum mum mum mum gloves now."

This speech I understood to convey (I) an assurance, (2) a suggestion, (3) a statement of fact. Namely, (I) that their hands really were chapped, (2) that they would be pleased, if I thought it fitting, to put on gloves, and (3) that Rupert's mother now always insisted upon their wearing gloves at table.

Having again glanced hurriedly at their hands, I was compelled to side with Rupert's mother and to command that the gloves should be forthwith put on.

"Righto!" said Mildred's son, proceeding at once to execute this order. Then, at a sign from Rupert, a further conference took place, at the close of which Mildred's son was with difficulty understood to proclaim that Rupert had lost one of *his* gloves, but that he could easily conceal the other hand during luncheon. It appeared also that Rupert was an expert in single-handed trencher work, having sprained a wrist at hockey last Easter.

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It was a severe and silent meal, varied only by conferences when either boy was asked a question and by the joint reply which was invariably proffered by Mildred's son.

Thus when, at the close of the repast, I hesitatingly pushed the decanter towards Rupert, a prolonged discussion in committee ensued, at the termination of which Mildred's son said, indistinctly:

"Thanks: we don't drink port."

Both young gentlemen then unanimously rose from table and again conferred. Mildred's son then performed another mumble, by which I was led to infer that he proclaimed their intention of going out to look for the air-gun.

They went out. They remained out. At the end of three hours they returned and held out two chapped hands. And Mildred's son said:

"Munn mum mum mum air-gun. Rupert mum mum mum mum mum. Mum mum mum mum mum. Mum mum mum tomorrow."

Which, being interpreted, meant:

"It is a ripping good gun. Dreadfully powerful. Rupert admits that what I said was true. Goes clean through a deal board

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at fifty yards. If you like, we'll come again to-morrow and shoot with it. If you like, we'll bring some bottles."

I regretfully answered that I should have to be in London on the morrow.

"Oh, mum mum mum," answered Mildred's son. " Mum mum mum mum mum mum!"

The English of which was: "Oh, never mind about *that*. We'll manage to amuse ourselves."

The young gentlemen then conferred again, and Mildred's son, speaking for them both, said:

"Well: Pip! Pip!"

The young gentlemen then linked arms and walked away, in close and mumbling conference, like old, wise men.

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XXVII

ONE O' THE BOYS

It is more than two years now since Mr. Jonathan Dandy introduced himself to me. He came to my cottage door at ten o'clock on a hysterical March night, and sighed through the keyhole. Failing to startle me by this form of alarum (for I naturally confused it with the chorus of the elements), Mr. Dandy began to scratch the doorpost. This signal also was misinterpreted. I mistook it for the quince tree, which has a habit of tapping at my window pane. Finally, a sharp, gruff voice—a voice which was not that of Mr. Dandy at all, a voice which I rather badly wanted to hear—gave forth a quick, impatient summons.

We don't embarass ourselves, where we live, with entrance halls, or vestibules, or lobbies, or whatever they call them. There is a door, and there is a parlour, and you walk right in. At the sound of that deep, familiar voice, I jumped to the door; and when I had pulled it open, the owner of the voice jumped in,

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knocking down two chairs and a jar of daffodils. His name is Pluto, and he is the largest boar- hound in Sussex.

Pluto's arrival was heralded by more than I cared for of the rude breath of Boreas, which I tried to shut out. But the door refused to close. Inquiry showed that a piece of

stout blind-cord was lodged between the door and the jamb, and that one end of this cord was attached to Pluto's collar.

My curiosity about the other end led me quite into the garden, all among the violently gesticulating quince boughs. I struggled on, feeling my way along the cord, until suddenly my fingers closed on something warm and gritty. It was a human hand. I looked a little higher, and then, by the light of a peep-bo moon, I perceived a time-worn, expressionless face, quite blue in colour, sparsely whiskered and profusely wrinkled. This face, I presently learned, belonged to Mr. Jonathan Dandy.

"I are brought you back yeur le'l oold darg, sir," said Mr. Dandy.

Mr. Dandy, being warmly entreated to come inside and receive my thanks, at length permitted himself to cross the threshold. He stood with his back pressed very

tight against the door, holding his cap against his mouth, and looking from side to side of the room with apologetic and rather anxious eyes. His right hand still grasped the other end of Pluto's cord.

Pluto had been missing since daybreak. There was no affectation about the gratitude which I offered to Mr. Dandy for bringing him safely home to me.

"That's all right," said Mr. Dandy, "he's one of the boys."

"Where did you find him?" I inquired.

Mr. Dandy, with a sly jerk of his head, indicated the far north. "He knows his way about," said Mr. Dandy. "I found 'im gone to bed in the fowl 'ouse, along o' my chickun. We should ne'er a knowed about it if 'twarn't for our oold cat. It was 'er as give us the alarm."

I asked if the dog had done any damage.

Mr. Dandy's sidelong glance became more apologetic than ever. He uttered conciliatory noises.

I insisted upon receiving a plain answer. Mr. Dandy, stretching out the gritty hand, stroked Pluto's ear.

"'Tis of no consequence," said Mr. Jonathan Dandy. "I don't justly know, sir, what

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damage he *did* do. 'Tis of no consequence. What breed do they call him, sir?"

"They call him a Great Dane," I answered, "the English for which is boarhound. What damage did he do?"

"Ah!" mused Mr. Dandy. "We got the rights of it now, at all events. Great Dane! That'll surprise young Amos when I tal him. Young Amos Pranklyn, sir—him what work in the brick'ard. I see him this evenin' outside the Cock and Coney as I come along. He tal me as what this be a Japanese lap-dog. I say to myself at the time, I say: 'Why, 'tis a very funny thing,' I say, 'for 'tis surely a larger dog than anybody would care to take on their lap.' 'Ow did you learn 'un for to pick up and kerry things the same as 'e do, sir?"

I said: "He wasn't 'learned' at all, so far as I know. I suppose it's instinctive. What damage did he do?"

"Never learned at all, sir? Oh dearr! Oh dearr! That's a queer set-out," reflected Mr. Dandy. "Larned it 'isself, I s'pose, o' winter evenings when he'd naarthun else to do. I *see* as he be a painstaking darg the way he chawed into that rope the time we stood outside here awaiting for the door to open."

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"Waiting," I repeated. "How long were you waiting?"

"I don't justly know how long we *did* wait," responded Mr. Dandy. "Perhaps it weer ten minutes, perhaps it weer twenty. 'Tis of no consequence."

"Why didn't you knock?"

"I scruffled, sir, and I whistled. But 'tis of no consequence."

I remembered then. That mournful, soughing noise—those intermittent scratches.

"'Tis not much of a whistle, I'll own, sir: you see, I've lorst some of my teeth since I weer young," explained Mr. Jonathan Dandy.

I asked him again to report the damages. Again he evaded the question.

"A few shrubs an' that, a handlight or two—'tis of no consequence. You'd better see the missus about it, sir. Here's your very good health, and the same to the—the young gentleman there, sir (this was Pluto), and I'll be saying good night."

I warned him as I held the door open that "the missus " must expect a visit from me. Pluto is not a negligible object at any time. In a garden his presence is apparent, and I might even say palpable. I insisted

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upon a prompt and business-like statement of accounts.

"Ah, well," said Mr. Dandy, as he stepped into the lively night, " damage or no damage—he's one o' the boys!" The old man put out his hand.

Pluto looked at it, yawned, and turned away.

The cottage which Mr. Dandy is permitted to inhabit is a single-storeyed structure of daub and wattle. It stands in a clayey hollow, which is situated amidst a trackless expanse of gorse and bracken, to which the name of "The Wilderness" has been suitably applied.

I found the Wilderness with difficulty, and with more difficulty I found the clayey hollow. And then, with comparative ease, I found the lop-sided habitation of Mr. Dandy.

A wild plantation of briar and bramble surrounds Mr. Dandy's residence, forming a sort of hedge; and a gap in the zareba is occupied by a ramshackle arrangement of barbed wire and nut stems, which forms a sort of gate. Behind this gate a woman stood and yawned, regarding with distaste the gorse and bracken. She was a stout

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woman, in the period of late middle age, having thick red arms, a red face, a button nose, and a determined mouth. The dog Pluto, who, for obvious reasons, accompanied me on this mission of Apology, saw this woman and left my heel, and ran to her, and licked her thick red arm. And the woman spoke. She said:—

"Oh dearr! Here's Ugly back again. I thought we had got rid of he. Goo 'way, Ugly!"

Ugly, whose great black tail was wagging to and fro, regardless of barbed-wire remonstrances, continued to beslaver the thick red arm. And having, by this time, approached within shouting distance, I spoke to the red- armed lady, saying:—

"Good morning, Marm! I have called round with this bad fellow to apologise for his behaviour, and——"

"Take him away, then, the great Ugly," cried Mrs. Dandy—for this evidently was she—interrupting me; "we don't want no great dargs here." Pluto licked her arm.

"I thought, perhaps," pursued your servant, having now approached quite close to Mrs. Dandy, "that—ah—well, I thought, perhaps, you would allow us to offer you a little

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compensation for the broken hand-lights, and

—and——"

"And the chickun," supplemented Mrs. Dandy. "Two chickun. What he layed down on. The great, clumbersome, ugly thing. Gurr! Goo 'way!" Mrs. Dandy shook her stout fist at Pluto. Pluto licked it.

"Well," said I, extending a crude and obvious hand to Mrs. Dandy, "this ought——"

"Fair is fair," responded Mrs. Dandy, putting her hand in mine, and removing it with a quick and accomplished jerk.

"I'll thank you," she added, "not to leave that darg goo loose agen. He's a sight too clumbersome—breakin' lights an' layin' down on chickun. Take 'im 'oom an' kip 'im 'oom, th' ugly great thing." Pluto, lying at her feet, paddled the grass with his great tail and gently nozzled the hem of her skirt.

"Goo 'way, Ugly!" cried Mrs. Dandy. She picked up a withered stick and flung it at the dog. He caught it in his mouth.

Having carried the trophy in his mouth for an appropriate period, walking majestically round and round, with his tail held aloft in military style, Pluto suddenly dropped

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both tail and trophy and bounded at Mrs. Dandy. Mrs. Dandy extended an excommunicative arm. Pluto welcomed it with an ecstatic tongue.

I realised then how extraordinarily apt was Mr. Dandy's simile. Pluto is indeed "one 'o the boys."

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XXVIII
THE SIDNAPPERS

As I steered my bicycle through the cow- thronged High Street of Blowfield, on a warm evening of July, certain manifestations of the Unusual presented themselves to my notice. Blowfield is always unusual on Thursday, because that is its market day. But on this particular Thursday there was a new thrill in the Blowfield atmosphere, a new smell in the wind, a new sort of break in the drovers' voices, and a new sort of boredom in the eyes of their cows.

People were exhibiting animation. They stood on doorsteps and nodded to each other across impassable gulfs of New Season's Lamb. Young ladies were wearing their white-serge Sunday skirts, their beaded reticules, and their knitted coats of deepest "tango." The entire junior male Executive of Haffenden's Great Hardware House was out amongst the swab-hooks, scythes, and lawn-mowers, gesticulating, exclaiming, or standing tip-toe upon the drums of Insecticide,

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with that strained and hopeful look which young men wear when they stand tiptoe upon drums of Insecticide and wait and watch.

"It is an aeroplane!" I said to myself, and at once lit off from my bicycle and listened for the hum. But I heard no humming. All that I heard was a distant tapping noise, an intermittent hammering, and all that I saw upon looking upwards into the amber emptiness of the evening sky was one single, brilliant, multichromatic blob—the flag of my country, bobbing defiant above the topmost terra-cotta turret of Mr. Goldmann, who inhabits an island site in the market square, upon which he has erected a new and fashionable edifice, the façade whereof is illustrated in letters of pure gold and great size with the ancient Syrian motto: "TEETH! TEETH! TEETH!"

So I spoke to Mr. Burtenshaw, the peace officer. I said:

"You have your eye on us, Mr. Burtenshaw. Ha! Ha! What? You've not got any thinner. They've not made you a Superintendent yet, then? Ha! Ha! What? Some good beasts in to-day. What?" To all of which assertions and inquiries the

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veteran of many Petty Sessions responded aptly, but in terms having no historical importance.

Having instituted the *pourparlers*, I then put a series of direct questions to Constable Burtenshaw. I said:

"You have an Excitement on to-night, I see. What is it: the Foresters, the Buffaloes, the Salvation Army, the National Reserve, or a full-dress parade of Territorials?"

"None 'o them. Better nor them," answered Mr. Burtenshaw.

"Then it's the Fire Brigade," I suggested.

"Better nor that," said Mr. Burtenshaw.

"The Good Templars' Prize Band," I then hazarded, after deep thought.

"Better still!" exclaimed the Constable. "It's Sankey's Great Circus!"

This "did it," as the Master of Balliol might say. I sprang to the saddle and rapidly seceded from the constabulary orbit. One doesn't waste one's precious leisure in discourse with the Overfed when there are circuses around.

I rode to the place where their circuses are done, and got there just in time to superintend the final rites and ceremonies connected with the upraising of that mammoth

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awning within the dim heart whereof the great Mr. Sankey excels himself. The turf had been cut and lifted to form a narrow, circular track, round which the untamed Mexican Mustang performs his nocturnal staggers. This wild animal, who appears at night in a white head-stall, having his hoofs newly blackened and his piebalds freshly pipe-clayed, is publicly known as Mephisto; but in moments of privacy Mephisto the

Mexican becomes plain Mike, when he has to suppress his artistic temperament and work very hard in the capacity of a domestic drudge.

On these occasions Mephisto dispenses alike with hoof-blacking and pipe-clay. He gets extremely dusty and his tongue hangs out, and he pulls a very large *kervan*, or house-wagon up very steep hills, and he has to submit to being accelerated by little noisy, brown-faced boys with jagged sticks. To look at Mephisto at these moments is to shake one's confidence in the infallibility of the Press as represented by the Great Mr. Sankey's small bills and giant posters.

There are other of Mr. Sankey's creatures whom to behold in their *déshabille* is a faith-shattering experience. Of such is

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Mademoiselle Esmeralda, the Lady Bareback Rider and Fearless Equestrienne. When she is wearing her spangled skirt and pink stockings, and her auburn hair is all done up in knobs, there does not exist in all England a Mademoiselle Esmeralda who looks more like it. But when you see her in an old black dress and spotted apron, with the hair all anyhow, and a sunburnt nose, assisting the Great Mr. Sankey, by gesture and speech, to discourage little boys from obstructing the steps which lead to his living wagon or Box Office, you can hardly believe, especially when you hear her sending out for beer in fluent English, that she is identical with that haughty, accomplished, beautiful, and foreign young lady whom all the young gentlemen from Mr. Haffenden's flock by night to see.

Even the Great Sankey himself seems different, somehow. Sitting there on the steps of his van, in corduroy trousering, hobnailed boots, a red neckcloth and a heavy flush, poking all about with a long ash-pole and saying repeatedly, "Nah then, boys, d'year me? Push off!" he has little in common with the urbane, affable, amusing gentleman in top boots, frock-coat, silver buttons, and innumerable diamonds, who

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cracks his long whip and even longer jokes in the paraffin-perfumed arena.

Well, I like that Great Mr. Sankey, and I like Mademoiselle, and I like the Mexican Mustang, and I like them all, whether they are tidy, untamed, and talented by night or whether their tongues hang out by day. But I like them best of all at home in their stuffy living wagons, where they swallow beer and utter lies and laugh without restraint, being there remote from public scrutiny.

So having seen the turf turned back, the petroleum flare-lamps hauled into their places upon the centre-pole of the marquee, the old red carpet well and truly laid upon the deal foundation of the eighteenpenny stalls, I booked my seat and went away to prepare for a night of pleasure.

In connection with these preparations I returned to the High Street, to the vicinity of Haffenden's great hardware house, and the Teeth! Teeth! Teeth! There is situated hereabouts an establishment which offers for sale a variety of articles which it describes as "Men's wear and gentlemen's requisites." I entered this establishment in order to buy a briar pipe and an ounce of shag tobacco. These things add to the pleasures of repose in

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Mr. Sankey's eighteenpenny stalls. Indeed, it might almost be said that they represent an absolute necessity to any person seeking undisturbed enjoyment of Mr. Sankey's hospitality.

A very neat and highly-oiled young gentleman received me at the door of the establishment which I have mentioned, and I need hardly say that without so much as a second look at my refined and superior figure, he at once conducted me to the mahogany recess which is inhabited by gentlemen's requisites. His face became less cheerful, I thought it assumed the baffled expression of a face which has guessed wrong, when I demanded shag. But it resumed its natural colour on receiving notice of my further requirements, and its owner became exceedingly alert, and ascended unaided, an eight-foot ladder, and descended the same acclivity at speed, bearing, single- handed, a massive mahogany drawer, in which he displayed before my envious gaze his entire stock of wooden piping.

I selected a specimen of super-gentlemanly design, and tendered the young man my thanks, my shilling, and my congratulations. The last had reference to his feats of activity. With a deprecating smile and some slight

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flavour of the Cockney accent, he responded thus:—

"That's nothin', o' man. It comes of this kentry life. Climbin' trees an' that. Jumpin' ditches an' so forth, You learn to be aggile, livin' in the kentry."

I was pleased with his word *aggile*, and was better pleased anon to find that it was not unique. For in expressing his view of Mr. Sankey's great circus, the alert young gentleman declared that, when tested by metropolitan standards, the Mexican Mustang was too doakile.

"Ya see," said the young gentleman, "these here kentry entertainments may be all right for them as has not been bred up to appreciate no better. I'm London bred meself. If ever you've 'eard of Great Titchfield Street, that's where I useder live, along of my people, which was rather old-extablished in the fried etceteras line, until father got beyond 'isself and went in for speculation and trotting donkeys and so forth. Well, Titchfield Street is on'y a matter o' ten minutes' stroll from 'Engler's Circus, as I daresay you know. 'Engler's Circus, as was, I meantersay. Well, a chap as has been bred up to 'Engler's Circus, he can't be

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expected to git up much enthusiasm over one o' these here one-night tent arrangements. Well—can 'e?"

I supposed that he couldn't.

"An' then there's another thing," pursued the alert young gentleman. "These here sort o' chaps what travels with these here tents and caravans and so forth, they're a bit too rough and tricky like and so forth for a chap o' *my* tastes. I'm a refined sort of individual meself, I am, but I ain't been brought up in London for nothink, and I can be as wide as any of 'em when it comes to the Pinch. They found that out last year.

"I 'ad a Experience last year, and I'll tell you about it, an' that will show you, that will." The alert young gentleman then rested his arms upon the counter, and assuming a grave and confidential air, narrated the following dramatic circumstance.

"There's a certain friend o' mine, be name of Sid Wilkinson. He's a London young gentleman, the same as meself. See? Well, this young party he come to stay down 'ere larse year for 'is hannual 'oliday. See? He come to stay along 'o me, in the same lodgin's.

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See? Well, the woman's very clean an' that, and she ain't over nor above expensive, and—— Well, it made a bit o' company for
us both. See?

"Well, while Sid's stayin' down here, along o' me, this same lot lo' Gyppos and Willies and what not, they come along here on their hannual visit, with the same ole ackeribacks and the same ole tight-rope an' the same ole 'orses and so forth. Well, Sid's a bit of a dare-devil, he is, and he puts the proposition before me, he does, as we should put on straw 'ats an' a cigar and so forth and go to this here show and 'ave a look at the Gals and the Tights and etcetera.

"Mind you, I told 'im my opinion of the idea. I told 'im straight. 'Sid,' I says, 'you mark my words and look arter yaself,' I says. 'They're a bit thick, these 'ere Gyppo's,' I says. ' They're tricky,' I says; 'they're *wide*. You look after yaself!' But Sid, 'e on'y laughs at me.

"Well, to cut a long story short, we goes to this 'ere show. An' Sid, 'e goes beyond 'isself. 'E put on brown boots, a straw 'at, an' thirty shillin' flannels. We sits in the eighteenpenny seats—Sid payin' the exes for us both—and we smokes our Borneo cigars

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as free as anybody. And Sid, e' brings a pair of Hopera glasses and 'e sits back there, in the Eighteenpennies, puffin' 'ere, spit- tin' there, peepin' everywhere, as if 'e was the Prince o' Wales. I tell ya, 'e was a bit O.T., was Sid.

"But presently the lady bareback rider comes along—this here Esmeralda, what all these Haffenden lads go balmy over. And then Sid, he fairly surparses hisself. He peeps at her through his Hopera glasses, he waves his stick at her, he throws her the wallflower out of his button-'ole, and then, to crown it all, Go' bless my soul if he don't kiss 'is 'and to 'er!

"Mind you, I warned 'im about it at the time. You can trust yar 'umble to put anybody wide about these here Gyppos. 'Sid,' I says, 'be careful. Ya're goin' beyond yaself. Ya're gettin' rash. They're a tricky lot, is these here Willies what travels with the caravans. You look arter yaself. You be careful!'

"Well, while I'm speakin' a funny thing accrues. What is it, d'ya think, this here funny thing what accrues? I feels a tickerlin' be'ind me leg. I looks acrorst me shoulder, downwards, and what d'ya think

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I sees? I sees a little boy. A dirty little boy. And in 'is 'and—a dirty little 'and— 'e's got a dirty little paper. And 'e gives this here paper up to me, and there is wrote on it, in lead pensle, as follows:—

> *To the young gent with yellow ribbons on his straw. I am the young lady what rides the horses. I will meet you outside at 10-15. Don't you be too saucy, or I shan't like you.—Esmeralda. (Emma for short.)*

"Well, I showed this paper to Sid. And then didn't 'e 'arf go beyond 'isself! But, mind you, I warned 'im. I didn't arf warn 'im. I told 'im about these Gyppos. I told 'im all I knowed about them. I told 'im about their tricky ways. But Sid, 'e on'y laughed at me. And 'im with fifteen shillun in 'is pocket!

"Well, when it come to goin' out arter the Comic Finarley, arter the clown had eat the soap, I went out very cautious. There was seven-an'-threepence in *my* pocket, never mind about Sid's! I took hold o' Sid by the arm and I done me best to hold 'im. But anybody might jest as well ha' tried to 'old a 'urricane. 'E was a fair dare-devil,

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was Sid. When we got outside the tent, there was that woman, that here Mamselle, a-waitin' for 'im. 'Come along, Chummie,' says she to Sid. 'We got some port wine in our wagon.'

"Well, Ole Man, I caught hold o' Sid by his coat-end, but he wrenched hisself away from me and he fair 'opped it. He 'opped it along o' that 'ere Gyppo woman. He 'opped into 'er wagon. And believe me or— believe me not—this is a true story what I'm tallin' you—*I ain't seen ser much as the shadder of Sid Wilkinson ever since*. 'E's lorst. They done 'im in!"

The alert young gentleman finished off his story with a sigh of phenomenal bulk. He had just arrived at its concluding, or tremolo phase, when the shop door opened, emitting as it did so a harsh, laconic, and unsympathetic clang. There entered a stout young fellow in velveteens, having a brown face, white teeth and an infectious smile. He smiled at the alert young gentleman. He spoke to him, saying—

"Cheero, Auntie!"

"Go' bless my soul!" exclaimed the alert young gentleman. 'Ere *is* Sid. Sid 'isself!"

"That's right," responded the stout young

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fellow. He held in his hand a piece of paper—a piece of paper of the size and appearance and having the authentic crackle of a five-pound note. This he cast indifferently upon the counter, saying, very loudly:

"Change that, Auntie. And gimme a gold-mounted meershum pipe and a pund o' shag!"

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XXIX

HIS EMMY CERT

I had supposed that young "Reddy" Piper was in prison again. What else could I suppose in view of the fact that neither Yip nor Tinkabell had been combed for a fortnight?

Yip and Tinkabell are diminutive members of an old Yorkshire family, who do me the honour to reside in my house, and to be combed and parafinned on Sundays by Reddy Piper, when Reddy Piper is not in prison.

When Reddy Piper is not in prison he is about the best comber and parafinner which this county can produce. He scorns the costly appliances with saddlers and harness-makers provide for the accommodation and beautification of snap-dogs. Reddy Piper employs those simple aids to beauty – a tenpenny nail and the palm of his hand. The results of his efforts bear testimony to Reddy's wisdom. Yip and Tinkabell emerge from their sabbath-day closetings with Reddy

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(when Reddy is not in prison) more smooth and oily than Jews or Griffons.

But, seeing that Reddy had failed to appear on three successive Sundays—with the reault that Yip and Tinkabell had definitely and as it appeared, irretirevably resumed their natural affinity with the hedgehog—I naturally concluded that Reddy had again gone into residence at that severely classical edifice which forms so dominant a feature of our County Town.

You see, Mr. Piper had inherited from some remote Piper a gust, or passion, for forbidden foods; for woodcock, teal or pheasant. He has cultivated a habit of acquiring these birds by Direct Action. And the only sure thing, as we all know, about Direct Action, is its trick of putting its apostles into gaol. But to-day, being Sunday, the third after his previous Advent, Reddy has reappeared. What is more, he has reappeared with marks and tokens of Reform rather prominently displayed upon his person. He has reappeared in a collar! It is a celluloid, washable collar, with stripes; and it bears unmistakable evidence of having entered into Reddy's possession at second-hand; but it is nevertheless and obviously and demonstrably

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—a collar! Reddy had also instituted reforms in connection with his coiffure—to which feature of his personality we are indebted for the bye-name by which he is familiarly greeted in four parishes. Reddy had dealt with his hair as he would deal by Yip and Tinkabell: he had subjected it to ordeal by nail and palm and paraffin. The result was a triumph of neatness and gloss.

I said to Reddy: "But how is this? I thought you were in prison."

And Reddy answered: "Not at all, sir. I been biding atome in Blowfield, along of my oold mother. The le'l dargs quite well, sir?"

I replied that the little dogs were as well as could be expected, seeing that they had been for so long deprived of tenpenny nails and the paraffin.

Mr Piper showed his sense of responsibility for the famine in these commodities by blushing. "Very s-sorry, sir," he stammered, "but you see, I been at work."

"At *work*," I repeated the words in a crude falsetto. So would you if you knew Reddy.

"Yes, sir," insisted that young gentleman. "I goes to work at Blowfield, sir. Gardener to a gentleman, sir."

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"*Gardener!*" I repeated; and so would you if you knew Reddy. "Gentleman? What gentleman? Why you can't be eighteen yet."

"No, sir, not yet," admitted Reddy with hesitation. "'Tis a old gentleman and new garden. 'Tis mostly wheelin' barrers I ha' hed to do so fer. The flower-growin' and so forth, that be yet to come. I took the liberty for to tal the oold gentleman for to write to *you* for my character like for flower-growin', sir." Mr Piper brought forth his nail and breathed on it, and rubbed it, and I whistled for the little dogs.

"'Ave you 'eard, sir," pursued my young friend, presently, blowing hard, as he applied the unwilling nait to Tinkabell's innumerable knots. "'Ave you 'eard about my little fish-shop, sir? I are started a fishshop in Blowfield, along o' my old mother."

I had not heard this important piece of news, and asked for further and fuller particulars. It was a shop without a window, I learned, and they were fishes without ice. They came from London, smoked, in wooden boxes, and the profit on six boxed amounted to two shillings. Mr Piper often sold six boxes in a week.

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"Of course," mused Mr. Piper, "it's a game that wouldn't do for ev'rybody owin' to by reason of the smell what's attched to it; but moi old mother don't notice naarthun, and Oi be out at work all day—gardinering to this here gentleman. And we don't give they a chance to grow musty, no sense: for if we find as one be growin' musty, whoi, we takes and eats it, pretty quick. Whoi, there's 'addick for tea at our 'ouse pretty nigh every night. She do be pretty well tangled up in the coat, and no mistake. Rackon I'll 'ave to find a new nail for t'other one. Did you 'ear I'd stared in the coal line, sir?"

This piece of news had also failed to reach me.

"Wel, sir, it's true," said Reddy Piper. "Me and moi oold mother we started the business in co. We gets it in five 'undred-weight a time, and sells it be the pennorth. We reckon that bring in about three-and-sixpence on the ton. And we can sell as much as a ton in the fortnight. It help the fish trade, too. Them as come for coal will often stop and buy a bit of fish: and them as come for fish will often take a bag of coal."

This wisdom and the steadiness of purpose implied by its practical application were such

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new elements in Mr. Piper, that I naturally began to wonder what had happened to that young gentleman. I naturally started my wondering form the usual point. "I suppose you're in love, Reddy?"

"Me?" exclaimed Mr. Piper: Not at all. Why do you think a thing like that?"

"Because you appear to have altered in character."

"'Ow d'ya make that out?"

"You've left off poaching: you're keeping out of prison."

"That's true," admitted Mr. Piper.

"You've gone into regular employment and taken to commercial speculation, and a clean collar. You've combed your hair."

"That's true, too, Oi racken," said Reddy.

"Then what's the meaning of it all?" I argued. "People don't go 'reformed' for nothing at all."

"Well, if you wanter know," said Mr. Piper, "I wanter save a bit of money."

"Precisely!" I assented. "But *why* do you want to save money? Own up. Tell me her name."

Mr. Piper muttered two words.

"Emmy *which*?" I demanded.

"Emmy Cert," repeated Mr. Piper.

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"Emmy *who*?" I again demanded.

"EMMY CERT," said Mr. Piper, rasing his voice.

"Who *is* Emmy Cert?" I inquired.

"It ain't a person," responded Mr. Piper; "it's what ya buy. I tell ya, I'm savin' up for me Emmy Cert."

"Saving—up—for—an—Emmy Cert," I repeated slowly. "But what *is* it?"

"Emmy Cert," said Mr. Piper.

I looked at him blankly.

"What you get to go abroad," he added, after profound inward cogitation

* * * * *

Slow witted though I am I could not fail to find out at last what Mr. Piper was talking about. He was talking about something called and "Emigration Certificate."

God knows what an Emigration Certificate may be. Mr. Piper used the phrase to describe the whole machinery of foreign settlement. When he talked of saving up for an Emmy Cert, he meant that he was saving money to defray the cost of his travel to a very distant country.

I laughed continuously for several minutes, and Mr. Piper wondered why. I could not tell him why. But I will tell you.

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The joke is this: The sentiment which had inspired Mr. Piper to become a law-abiding English citizen, was... the ardent hope of soon ceasing to be an English citizen at all.

XXX

THE WIDOW OF WADHURST

SHE does not really live at Wadhurst, but at a village which is situated not very far from Wadhurst—not very, *very* far from Wadhurst. I call her "The Widow of Wadhurst," however, because Wadhurst and widow both begin with "W," and I am a professional writer.

Her name is Mrs. Bunner, and she is one of the most respectable women in her native parish. She is a widow of fifteen years' standing, but she has been respectable for much longer than that. The local chemist and gnat-bite specialist, who is quite an aged man, admits that he can't remember the time when Mrs. Bunner wore a fringe or had an ankle.

Mrs. Bunner lives at Ivy Cottage, a residence conspicuous by reason of the fact that it is semi-attached to the post-office, where I bought onions and an alarm clock and more gnat-mixture. Mr. Smee, the postmaster—a polite young man, and no doubt an agreeable

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one, when onions are not in season directed—me to Mrs. Bunner for eggs and milk. Mr. Smee informed me that he had officiated as postmaster for eleven years, and had indulged his natural aptitude for growing onions throughout the whole of that period. The postmaster before him had grown dahlias, and was a friend of Mrs. Bunner, who regarded him (Mr. Smee) as an interloper and upstart, although, as he assured me, with tears in his eyes, he was in no sense responsible for the death of his predecessor, who had died quite unexpectedly at the age of eighty-seven. "However," admitted Mr. Smee, "Mrs. Bunner have got a little more used to me at last. She don't sim to treat me as a stranger anymore, not like what she used to, six or seven years ago."

Mrs. Bunner was kind enough to receive my application for eggs and milk in an agreeable spirit, and she even consented to sell me a pot of tea and a lump of cake. I was invited to enter the front parlour to partake of this feast, which I did, and was provided with a seat in front of a majestic portrait of the late Mr. Bunner. Mr. Bunner, when on earth (I learned), was a land bailiff and a Baptist.

We discussed with great earnestness the

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views and character of Mr. Bunner, with especial reference to his opinions on the exact science of brewing tea. We were thus engaged, Mrs. Bunner having lifted down the portrait for my better inspection, when somebody performed a sudden, nervous knock upon the front door. Mrs. Bunner, springing up withsome signs of agitation, implored me to sit still.

"The girl Alice," she assured me, "shall run see. Whatever it can be come gawping here to interfere with people at their teas, Ican't think. 'Tis strange. The girl Alice shall run see."

"Alice," cried Mrs. Bunner, "where be you?"

"I be curlin', marm," replied the voice of Alice, from aloft.

"Then quit your curlin'," commanded Mrs. Bunner, "and run quick see what can it be is knockin' at the door."

"If anybody was to cut theirselves into a thousand million pieces," the voice of Alice was heard to surmise, "then, perhaps, some people would be satisfied."

But Mrs. Bunner did not hear this handmaidenly retort. She was busy with scouting operations behind her parlour curtain.

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'Why, bless my soul!"cried Mrs. Bunnerat last, having performed a successful reconnaissance,"if that don't be the new post master!"

Alice, in the meantime, had stepped withsteps of martyrdom to the front door, andnow returned with a short and defiant mannerto publish the results of her inquiries.

"'Tis Mr. Smee," said Alice. "He want to borrow the garden roller."

"He want to borrow *what*?" cried Mrs. Bunner.

"The garden roller," repeated Alice. "Be careful. He standeth just behind me."

"Walk in, Mr. Smee," said Mrs. Bunner. "You aren't ever stepped in this house afore, nor I aren't ever arst you; but you be welcome. Our late postmaster have set in my parlour many a time."

Mr. Smee came in and, speaking hurriedly, stated his errand. " Bin makin' a bit of a grass lawn, marm, be'ind our quince, and I thought—that is, Mrs. Smee she told me—or rather, we was 'opin'—as per'aps you would be so very kind as to lend us the loan of your roller."

Mrs. Bunner coughed abruptly.

"Mr. Bunner," she said, " was very

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particular about our roller. He say, after the last time we loan it, as he would never loan it any more. He tell me I was not to loan it."

"Of course, marm," urged the postmaster, "we should treat it very careful."

"Of course!" repeated Mrs. Bunner. "Anybody would. Sich a splendid roller as that be!"

"I wouldn't allow no one to lay a 'and on it on'y myself," continued Mr. Smee.

"The last time we loaned our roller," mused Mrs. Bunner, "that was to our late pastor—the pastor before our late pastor, I should say—and Mr. Bunner he say then, 'Never no more,' he say; for the roller it come 'ome that dusty nobody wouldn't hardly reckernise it. Mr. Bunner, he say to me at the time: 'This is too good a roller to go lendin' about,' he say."

"I am one," represented Mr. Smee, "as ought to understand a roller. We 'ad a good one at my old 'ome."

"Did you oil it down the crack, then? " demanded Mrs. Bunner.

"Of course. By all means. Certainly. Oh yes," replied the supplicant.

"Ah!" cried Mrs. Bunner, "I guessed as

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much! You aren't got the *look*, somehow, of a man what's been bred to such things. Now, Mr. Bunner, he always say as the very worst thing what anybody can do to a roller is to oil it down the crack. That cause the dust fly up, he say, and lodge between the jints. Oilin' the crack was one o' the things what our late pastor done wrong to the roller."

"Well, marm," responded Mr. Smee, "I can promise to take great care of the machine. I will treat it the same as Mr. Bunner 'isself."

"You will have to study hard, then," answered Mrs. Bunner. "Mr. Bunner he know all there was to know about our roller. He was a studied man."

"Can I have the roller then?" said Mr. Smee.

"Mr. Bunner, he set more store by that roller, he valued it more, than he did our garden shears, and that's to say a lot. What was your idea about movin' it? 'Ow was you goin' to get it out and home again?"

"I thought I would push it," replied the postmaster.

"Or pull it," suggested Mrs. Bunner. " Mr. Bunner he allus say as on'y a old woman

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would walk *behind* a roller. The proper way to git about with a roller, he say, is to walk in front and pull. You got a proper oil-can for oilin' the balance-weights, I hope?"

"Can't say as I have," admitted Mr. Smee, "not without you could see your way to be so kind as to lend me one."

"There I drors the line!" responded Mrs. Bunner, definitely. " Mr. Bunner, he loaned a brand-new oil-can to the pastor, and we aren't never set eyes on it since. 'Tis a risk you run along of all they there le'l losables. A roller is more safe, in a manner o' speakin'. 'Twould puzzle anybody to lose a garden roller, especially with me so close at 'and. Well, then, and if I lend it?... Well, then,... and if I lend it...?"

"Thank you kindly, marm," said Mr. Smee.

"Let you foller me, then," commanded Mrs. Bunner. "'Tis in the le'l shed there, along o' Mr. Bunner's saw and potting tackle. Mind you, I didn't ought to do it. Mr. Bunner he say we wasn't never to lend that roller again, not after the tricks our pastor served it."

We opened the door of the potting shed, and amid impressive silence Mrs. Bunner

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disclosed the nesting place of the roller. Having unkennelled the roller, we conducted it, under the personal supervision of its owner, so far as the garden gate. At which point a difficulty presented itself. The step!

"Mr. Smee, Mr. Smee, Mr. Smee, what in ever be you aimin' at?" cried Mrs. Bunner, when this obstacle was reached.

"I be aimin' for to bump her down the step, marm," answered Mr. Smee.

"*Indeed*, now! Be you?" exclaimed Mrs. Bunner, with emphatic irony. "Let you just be careful! I be still in time to change me mind, mind. Mr. Bunner he was most partickler bidding folk beware o' steps and stones. They be death to a garden roller, he allus say. Quit this bumping. Let you find a timber board and ease 'er down."

At last the roller was conveyed, without mishap, to the adjoining mound of turf, which represented Mr. Smee's garden. Mrs. Bunner had left me and was clinging to her side of the fence, gazing over it with a fixed and anxious look. My tea had no doubt got quite cold. So I went away.

But as I passed the postmaster's gate, I heard the voice of Mrs. Bunner raised in protest.

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"Man alive, be careful o' they flints!" I heard her exclaim. "'Tis dreadful bad for a roller to bring it nigh a flint. Mr. Bunner he allus say as flint drar the very heart out o' the iron. Man alive, be careful!"

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XXXI

TUPPER

WHEN first I saw Tupper he reminded me of Smike, an imaginary character created by the late Mr. Charles Dickens. He has been reminding me of Smike ever since.

I never realised, until I saw Tupper, how severely realistic Dickens' s portraits were. It is commonly thought, I believe, that Dickens' s characters in general were "

exaggerated," and that Smike is a particularly striking instance of this fact. To any reader who may hold this opinion, I can only extend a cordial invitation to come and look at Tupper.

This animal has been recently adopted into a household with which I am closely acquainted. The members of this household are what is called " intellectual " people. They do not hit it off at all well with Jemima Ann, who does not hit it off at all well with them, because they are the sort of people who treat Jemima Ann as an equal, which is a liberty that Jemima Ann resents.

And so this household, actuated partly by

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scientific curiosity, partly by motives of kindness, and chiefly by a desire to discover an inexpensive substitute for Jemima Ann, has adopted Tupper.

I will now tell you what Tupper is. He is a human being; a young man; a British citizen. He is eighteen years of age, and 4 feet 10 inches high, being descended from a town-dwelling ancestry. He is a criminal epileptic. That fact I perceived directly I saw him, for I happen to possess an English translation of a work on criminology written by an eminent Italian scientist named Lombroso, and containing 246 illustrations of criminal epilepsy in all its forms. The face, and especially the forehead and eyes, of Tupper are like unto any of the faces, foreheads, and eyes which appear in Signor Lombroso's entertaining text-book.

My diagnosis was not accepted unreservedly by Tupper' s new mistress.

"He is a criminal epileptic," I said.

"Criminal fiddle-sticks," she replied. "See how he's polished that floor."

Tupper comes from some sort of reformative institution. Here, he has been "trained" by State officials to do housework and gardening. I do not suppose that Tupper is really

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his name. Even his mistress admits that they probably changed his name after he had choked the baby.

"Not that I believe he did choke a baby," that lady has declared. "The most poor Tupper ever did was to lose himself, or somebody else's postage stamps; six ha'penny stamps, I expect, belonging to some nasty little tradesman who worked him to death and kicked him. You have only got to watch the way he stares at a calf to see that he never was a *bad* boy."

Tupper has a wizened little face, absolutely void of colour or expression. I expect that they explained to him at his "school" that only good boys are allowed to smile or look sorry. At any rate, you never saw a face so grave, so infinitely old as his.

This Reformatory, or whatever they call it, seems to have reformed the very sweat out of Tupper. You cannot imagine what a dried-up, involuntary animal he is. For all ordinary purposes he is sightless, deaf and dumb. The most obvious things are invisible to him; he cannot feel the most commonplace sensations. He has been 048, and has marched in step for so many childish years, which are such long years, that he has no use at all for

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Freedom and the unfettered use of his legs. The thought that he has now no number and nobody to keep step with, evidently appals him. He is hopelessly afraid of his Freedom, of his new task-masters, of himself.

I have noticed (since I am so intimate with this house and household) that he is particularly afraid of the scullery. You can feel him feeling, in his dim way, that anything might happen in the scullery.

He slinks about at his mistress's heel, sniffing for concealed traps. He feels less distrustful of this lady, his mistress, than of other free and booted persons, because she cooks his dinner. Not to feel distrustful is the nearest approach which Tupper is capable of making to that emotional state which *un*reformed humanity calls love, or liking.

Therefore, he walks at his mistress's heel, cocking his head a little sideways and peering up at her out of one eye, like any other animal. If she moves, he moves; if she stands still, he stands still. When stationary, he is able to concentrate his faculties, which he does by pressing either dwarfish hand against his stomach, throwing back his head, and squinting.

This Tupper, this Smike, does not even

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know the things which a decent puppy knows. He has never seen lump sugar; he has never seen a teapot; he has never tasted treacle. He understands about one in every twenty words which are addressed to him. But he nods or shakes his head to all of them; rather, the words shake it for him, for he begins that palsied process so soon as you open your mouth. When (about twice a day) something is said which he really does understand, it is wonderful to see the dead leaves stirring in his brain.

For example, the words "Meat Pie" were uttered in his presence. He rose to the occasion, putting his head on one side, and blinking.

"Ha!" he said; " Meat-pie *Thursdays*!"

He saw a brass candlestick lately, and touched it, saying, "Ha! Globe!" a recondite utterance, the significance of which will, perhaps, be appreciated by housewives.

When he said this word he knew that he had said something of exceptional pertinence, and tried to put his head on both sides at once.

But the strangest thing about this boy is the most hopeful thing about him. He is vain.

They "squared" him in the school. They planed him flat; they rolled him, and they

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milled him. They extracted all the nonsense, all the goodness, all the boyhood from him. But there was one little seed in him which even all their wheels and rollers could not crush the seed of vanity, which, after all, is not merely a human characteristic but the most potent, the most fruitful of all the human senses.

I saw him to-day in the shadow of the woodshed, behind a heap of garden refuse. He had gone there privily to look upon, and feel, and touch, the horrible new coat of shoddy tweed in which his late comtrollers had equipped him for his entry into unclassified society.

The coat was an absolute and palpable misfit. Its checks were "loud" and fratricidal; it stank of moth, and camphor, and the sweating shop. But it was a *new* coat, and his own coat, to don or put off as he chose; to cherish or tread on as he chose.

He chose to cherish it. He stroked, and patted, and pinched it; finally, he lifted a baggy sleeve up to his face and rubbed his cheek against it.

As he did so, the make-believe of a sun peeped over the wood-shed and cast a tremulous beam upon the nape of his criminal little neck.

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XXXII

BILL POTTER EXPLAINS

AT the Hanover Arms, an inn, which is in Blowfield, which is in Sussex, which is in Eng., Yurrup, I was lately an humble petitioner for bread and cheese and beer. A super-gilt landlady, having received this petition, not with enthusiasm, directed me to an obscure closet, where, she said, if I chose to wait until her coffee-room visitors had received the firstfruits of her hospitality, I might ultimately hope to be "obliged" with that mean fare which I had offered to purchase, and which she existed to sell.

The obscure closet smelled of antimacassars. This seemed to interfere with my respiratory processes, which, humble and impoverished as I know myself to be, are yet of basic importance to my existence, and not less so than if I came from Philadelphia and drove a motor car, and dined in coffee-rooms.

At the same time I freely admit that this is no argument. Obscure closets and antimacassars and Klaustrophobia and bread and

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cheese and beer are for English journalists. The coffee-room, the boiled salmon, the Californian Hock (Jehosophat!), the bottled peas, and the sulphuricated Gorgonzola are for rich and noble Philadelphians.

On the other hand, one needn't submit to suffocation if a mere act of volition will prevent it. I needn't, and I didn't. I separated myself from those antimacassars, and

walked about in the court or stable yard of this inn pending the production of my ignoble feast.

While I was thus occupied, I beheld strange sights. I beheld the illustrious and distinguished Bill Potter, head stableman at the Hanover Arms, and I beheld Mr. Bertie Phipps, of the Manor House, Pyklehurst.

There is nothing essentially strange about either of these Englishmen unless you count Mr. Bertie Phipps's waistcoat or Bill Potter's straw. Mr. Phipps' s waistcoat is, perhaps, more freely spotted and luxuriously buttoned than many waistcoats in common use. Bill Potter's straw is, perhaps, more aged and fruity than the straws which you or I are accustomed to chew.

It was the behaviour and conversation of Bill Potter and Mr. Phipps which struck me as being strange.

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Bill Potter, when I first beheld him, was peering over the half-door of a hay barn, or granary. All I could see of Bill Potter was the back part of the lower portion of his personality. The rest of him was swallowed up by the black mouth of the hay barn. But within that dim orifice there were dimly to be seen certain dim movements. Bill Potter's elbow seemed to be in motion. Bill Potter seemed to be jerking his elbow backwards and forwards, as if he were prodding at something with a stick. In point of fact, when Bill Potter subsequently withdrew his elbow, I saw that he had been prodding at something with a pitchfork. And that something was Mr. Bertie Phipps.

"Now, then, Mr. Bertie, come along!" said Bill Potter. "It is time you got about, Mr. Bertie. Wake up, Mr. Bertie."

"Curse ya, Pottah! " said Mr. Bertie Phipps, and with these words he came out into the public view, having first kicked open the half-door, and in so doing very nearly kicked Bill Potter and Bill Potter's pitchfork into a duck pond.

"And so," said Mr. Bertie Phipps, "you grudge mah the use of yahr mildewed straw."

"Beggin' yere pardon, sir," replied Bill

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Potter, touching his cap, "but 'tis gone one o'clock, sir."

Mr. Bertie Phipps then frowned. He frowned with extreme expressiveness and in a prolonged and undulating manner. Mr. Bertie Phipps was an attenuated person, with an elongated jaw. His long, thin legs were clad in tight breeches and constricted gaitering. His exiguous middle was en shrouded in a brilliant waistcoat, the colour of a very pink sweet -pea, and having buttons in great number, each one of which exhibited the miniature representation of a fox's head, framed in gold. A short-tail coat of an emphatic tweed pattern and a little round tweed hat completed Mr. Phipps's costume. His long, green face, with its wrinkled forehead, middle-aged decorum, and wee dark tuft beneath the chin, suggested the popular portraits of Don Quixote. If you can imagine what Don Quixote would look like in cub hunting kit, and frowning from his eyebrows to his elbow, you can imagine what Mr. Bertie Phipps looked like when he came out of his straw-barn and frowned at Bill Potter.

"And so," said Mr. Bertie Phipps, "I have lived to be grudged an armful of mouldy straw by a diseased ostler?"

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"Yessir, if you please, sir," responded Bill Potter, touching his cap.

"In that case, Pottah," rejoined Mr. Phipps, "I have nothin' to say, except to request you to give yaself the trouble of pickin' the wheat-husks out of my collah."

Mr. Phipps, as he uttered these words, sighed deeply, and assuming, not without difficulty and with certain creakings at the knee, a stooping posture, tendered his neck to Bill Potter, who extracted from it and from Mr. Phipps's hair innumerable souvenirs of the straw-barn. During this operation, which was not a brief one, Mr. Phipps continued to express emotion by varied movements of the eyebrow.

The coarser and more obvious accretions having at last been removed from Mr. Phipps, and that gentleman having with further creakings resumed a perpendicular attitude, he then called loudly for his horse.

"Bring out the old mare, Bill Potter," he commanded. "Bring her out quick!"

Bill Potter hastened to obey this order, while Mr. Phipps, folding his arms and nibbling the knob of his riding-switch, stared with dull, resentful eyes at a certain yellow chicken (which stared back at him from between his

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and put in some heavy work with the eyebrows.

Then Bill Potter appeared with the old mare, duly saddled, and then Bill Potter assisted Mr. Phipps to ascend to the summit of this quadruped, and received a shilling in the face for doing so. And then the horseman rode away, and Bill Potter picked up the shilling and bit it, and then Bill Potter, with an air of suitable humility, made all things plain to me—at least he explained why Mr. Bertie Phipps, of the Manor House, Pyklehurst, had been sleeping in a straw-barn. He said: —

"Ya see, sir, this is an affair, like, between Mr. Bertie and me, like, and I woulden wish it to go no further him an' me havin' dug out many a farrit together in days gone by. But you seen Mr. Bertie creep out o' the barn, like, and you seen me pick him over, like, and you seen it all, so to speak, and I woulden wish to deceive you and I woulden wish the matter talked about, the same as anybody might do if they happened to be curious about the ins and outs of it all. Ya see, sir, it's a funny position, like, for a gentleman to be found in sleeping in a straw-barn, with thirty bedrooms in his father's house, not four

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miles off, and a commercial and family hotel next door, as you might say.

"Well, sir, I woulden wish it to go no further, but the long and the short of it is, as Mr. Bertie come here last night for a game o' billiards, like, and he stayed here for several games, like, and he had a bit o' dinner here an' what not, an' the truth o' the matter is as he exceeded hisself, like, so to speak. He come out here at eleven o'clock, which is Closin' Time, in a manner o' speakin', and he tal me for to saddle his oold mare, which I had had her saddled for three hours or more, and he call me a few nicknames, in the way o' pleasantry, like, and fiddle about with his stirrup, like, and then it strike me like as he want a little help—you know what gentlemen *are*, sir what we *all* are in a manner

o' speakin', as the sayin' goo, like. Well, I gives 'im a leg up, so to speak, and so there he is—a-sot up atop of his oold mare, and a lookin' down at me, oold-fashioned like. And then he speak to me, and he say: —

"'Bill Potter,' he say, 'for the love of heaven,' he say, 'take a-holt o' the oold mare's bridle an' lead her out of all these courtyards.'

"There was on'y one oold yard, ser fur as

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I could see, but I humoured Mr. Bertie like, seein' what gentlemen are, and I took a-holt o' the oold mare's bridle and I lead her out o' the yairrd. And then Mr. Bertie he say to me, he say: —

"'Tis a dam dark noight,' he say: 'Jes' take a-holt o' the oold mare's bridle an' lead her up High-strit,' he say. So I take a-holt o' the oold mare's bridle and I lead her up High-strit. An' when we git to the top o' High-strit I say to Mr. Bertie, civil like, I say: 'Mr. Bertie,' I say, 'I'll bid you goodnight, I say, 'for 'tis time I weer got back to see all shipshape at the inn,' I say.

"But Mr. Bertie he say to me: 'Why, sure-*ly*, Bill Potter,' he say, 'you'll lead the oold mare up Fox Hill? 'Tis a cursed steep hill,' he say.

"So I lead the oold mare up Fox Hill, and when we be come to the top I say to Mr. Bertie, I say: 'I'll be biddin' you goodnight here, sir. 'Tis time I weer got back to see all shipshape at the inn.'

"But Mr. Bertie he say to me: 'Oh, dash it, Bill Potter—*be* a sport. Lead the oold mare along the lane here. 'Tis a cursed crooked lane'

"So I lead the oold mare along the lane

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—a crooked lane it is, to be sure, and Mr. Bertie not ridin' out o' the way steady, so to speak, but sittin' up theer a bit unconscious like, speakin' poetry to 'isself, and in between whiles speakin' sharp to me. 'Steady on, Bill Potter, steady on, he'd say, swaggin' about in his saddle. 'Look where you be gooun. You're drunk, Bill Potter.'

"At last we be come to the end o' the lane, and then I bids Mr. Bertie good-night once more. For 'twas fully time as I be got back to the inn, to see all shipshape for the night. But Mr. Bertie, he don't see the justice of it, so to speak.

"'Oh, come, Bill Potter,' he say: 'you beant a-gooun to leave the oold mare now? You'll lead her on up Poacher's Hill,' he say. 'Tis a wusser hill nor Fox Hill.'

"But I tell him as 'twere time I be got back to my duties.

"'Stuff, Potter!' he say. 'Be reasonable, an' lead the oold mare up Poacher's Hill.'

"But I stick to moi arguement, an' tal him it weer time as I be got back to the inn, to see all shipshape for the night.

"'Then you woon't lead the oold mare up Poacher's Hill?' says Mr. Bertie.

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"'Not to-night, sir, if 'tis all the same to you, sir,' I tal him, very civil like.

"'Oh!' says Mr. Bertie, 'you woon't lead the oold mare up the hill, woon't you? Then I'll tal you what, Bill Potter: You can dam well lead her back again!'

"An' so I done."

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XXXIII
THE STOCKINGS

SUSAN'S god-aunt came to tea with Susan's mother at Polecat Farm, where Susan is allowed to live and labour and (sometimes) to sit down. The latter privilege, however, is accorded to her on the strict understanding that she speaks when she is spoken to and sticks to needlework.

For Susan is one of those question-asking, book-reading, star-gazing girls who let the butter spoil. This sort of girl can never be cured, but it can be kept under. Susan is kept under.

Susan's god-aunt sniffed at her tea distastefully. "That don't seem over-biled!" she said.

"Susan made it," explained that maiden's mother, with a short but expressive laugh.

Susan, fumbling with her work in a dark corner, made no sound.

Susan's god-aunt peered into the corner with an air of stern inquiry.

"Susan Winch," she demanded, "what be you a-doin' of?

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"Darning," responded Susan.

"Botching," said Susan's mother.

"'Tis a wonder," said god-aunt, "as she bean't reading, or lookin' at pictures."

"Or settin' there with 'er mind full o' fancies," suggested Susan's mother.... However, us've burnt the most of 'er readin', and the rest be locked up. There's no 'oldin' 'er under unless you be cunning."

"I should 'a' thought," observed godaunt, "as 'er Uncle David would 'a' bin a warning to 'er. 'Tweer on'y this readin' and writin' and mooning about what got poor David into trouble."

"That and marrying two wives," assented Susan's mother.

"Whatever *be* it as Susan are got there? Fiddlin' and faddlin'! You wouldn't think a fool like she be could own a sister so bright as Ettie."

'That you wouldn't," assented Susan's mother. "There be more sense in Ettie's li'l finger than that girl got in all 'er big, fat 'ead.... 'Tis Ettie' s stockings as she be reckonin' to mend."

"*Mend!*" exclaimed god-aunt, with a significant uplifting of her three chins.

"Botch, then," said Susan's mother.

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"Ettie," asserted the visitor, "would 'a' *mad*e they stockings in the time that sad creature take to 'eel them. 'Ow long she bin a faddlin' with them?"

"Since two o'clock," said Susan's mother.

God-aunt put up her chins again. " Stockings—at tea-time!" she exclaimed....

"All the young ladies I ever heerd on would think it becoming to get on to the *white* work be tea-time."

"Not," exclaimed a low, uncertain voice from the dark corner, "not—if they had to spend their morning p—pick—pickerling runners."

Having eliminated Susan with an awful stare, god-aunt turned to Susan's mother.

"So she's taken to answering back, now?" said god-aunt.

"Susan," commanded Susan's mother, "be'ave yourself. Don't speak until you are spoke to. Let's see you get on with they stockings."

So Susan got on with the stockings.

"'Tis a good job she got a good mother to try and teach 'er proper manners," mused god-aunt, keeping a furtive eye on the corner in expectation of a further outbreak. But no further sound came out of the dark corner.

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"There's one thing," reflected god-aunt, "little Ettie know 'ow to be'ave 'erself if other people don't."

"You be right there," said Susan's mother. "The Misses Tinker, from Blowfield Place, they past the remark to me on'y last week how wonnerful pretty mannered that child do show. 'So different from yere darter Susan,' they say."

"Ettie's got a better 'eart, too," remarked god-aunt.

"R!" said the mother of this perfect damsel; " and a more takin' face. She be gettin' on great wi' the piano lessons."

God-aunt nodded sagely. "I shall send you some money for more lessons," she said. "Anybody don't grudge a girl a sensible 'obby like that be. When Ettie was at our 'ouse last week there was a bit o' music wrote down on a bit of noospaper what the steak come wrapped up in, and she thumbed that out on our old organ so nat'ral you wouldn't believe. But this Susan, with 'er readin' an' studyin', she fair sickens me, for that don't give no entertainment to nobody. Nor it don't bring in no money. That ain't no manner o' use at all, on'y to bring on idle ways and sore eyes."

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"I be sure as Ettie will be 'earty thankful for any 'elp 'er godmo'er's pleased to give 'er," said Susan's mother, steadily.

"And she be 'earty welcome," asserted god-aunt, responding to the lead. "Little Ettie, she shan't want for *naarthun*, so long as her pore ole godmother be alive. There's a future in front o' Ettie so soon as she get 'er 'air up!"

"Meaning young W.? " suggested Susan's mother.

"Now then!" commanded god-aunt, erecting a prohibitory forefinger and smiling fatly; "no tales!"

"Bless you," responded the indulgent mother, "I never aims to make no tittletattle. What's it matter if five or six o' them do 'appen to be crazy over Ettie? The pore child can't help 'er pretty face.... I kin remember when 'er god-mo'er be just sich another little girl, and when—"

"Now!" cried god-aunt, archly, again erecting the forefinger.

"Well, there's one thing," reflected Susan's mother, "there's no fear as the boys'll ever crowd too thick around Susan. Boys don't like they readin' sorts. What the boys value is gentility and good manners and pratty looks."

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'Where *be* Susan?" suddenly demanded god-aunt, who had been peering into the corner with an eager and solicitous eye.

"Bless me!" cried Susan's mother, also peaking anxiously into the corner, "if the creature aren't sneaked out. She must 'a' took the opportunity of us exchangin' these few words to creep up and steal along and sneak out.... Susan—where be you?"

"Here, mo'er—'longside the pig trough."

Susan's mother got up and passed through an open door into the scullery, and through another open door into the farmyard, closely followed by Susan's god-aunt.

"What do you reckon to be doin'?" demanded Susan's mother.

"Looking at the sky, mo'er," said Susan.

Susan's mother turned to Susan's god-aunt, and Susan's god-aunt turned to Susan's mother. The lips of both ladies worked silently, repeating without speech Susan's extraordinary confession. " Looking—at—the *sky!*"

"Come inside at once!" commanded Susan's mother. And Susan silently obeyed her.

"What about they stockin's?" cried Susan's mother.

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"I've finished *them*," said Susan.

"Then what about the pickle crock?"

"I've filled that full."

"Aren't ye got ne'er a piece o' white to sew?"

Susan shook her head.

"Then gimme they stockings." Susan picked up three black lumps from off the chair which she had lately occupied, and handed them listlessly to her mother.

Her mother rapidly unrolled a pair of stockings, and while Susan's god-aunt nodded approvingly, cut a great hole in either heel with a pair of scissors.

"Let you sit down and put new heels to them," said Susan's mother.... "You idle, up-started she!

"Looking at *the sky!*" said Susan's mother. "If there's one thing I do 'ate to see 'tis to see a person actin' useless."

To which sentiment Susan's god-aunt accorded another nod of approval.

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XXXIV
BERT

YOUNG Mr. Bagshaw entered our railway carriage at Victoria Station. He was escorted thither by a pretty young woman, who had been crying, and he was further accompanied by a stout cardboard box, a fan, ingeniously contrived so as to resemble a cigar when closed, and by an emphatic and inexhaustible odour of Clove Humbugs.

Young Mr. Bagshaw was dressed in tight knickerbockers, stockings, stout boots, a bright blue jersey, a white turned-down collar, and a yellow bow. A piece of stout whipcord encircled young Mr. Bagshaw' s neck, to which was attached a knife—that sort of knife which is technically termed a "Scout knife." It was an extremely large and serious weapon—or collection of weapons—for its equipments comprised a penknife, a

pruning knife, a stabbing knife, a pair of tweezers, a bradawl, a corkscrew, and an ingenious contrivance for removing stones from horses' hoofs. Young Mr. Bagshaw clearly attached importance to this article

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of his wardrobe, for he was constantly fumbling for it with both hands, as if to assure himself of its continued possession.

There was further attached to young Mr. Bagshaw's person a common luggage label. This he wore on the left forearm, with which it was connected by tapes. This label served the double purpose of testifying to Mr. Bagshaw's identity and proclaiming his destination, thus;

BERT BAGSHAW.
Passenger to Blowfield.
—
Will be met by Mrs. Kenward,
Stoats Farm, Blowfield Green.
—
LUGGAGE:
One hat-box. Cap under jersey.

The young woman who had been crying put Mr. Bagshaw into a corner seat and his hatbox underneath it. She then addressed a series of admonitions to the young gentleman. She said:

"You'll be'ave yaself, now won't ya, Bert: ya'll be a good boy? And ya'll leave yar cap where it is, till ya get out at the station. Ya won't want a cap in the puff-puff. And ya'll mind and send a post-card, and ya'll mind

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and wash all over and ya won't torment nobody. Ya will, Bert, won't ya? " Bert, after groping apprehensively about his bosom, found the Scout knife and grasped it.

"All right, mum," he exclaimed in response to his mother's not uncomplicated exordium.

The lady who had been crying then addressed herself, quite unexpectedly, to my companion, who happened to belong to the same intelligent sex. Said the lady who had been crying:

"I daresay you won't mind lookin' arter him, just as far as Blowfield. See as he gets out at Blowfield, please. There's a lady will meet him at Blowfield. And perhaps you won't mind watchin' as he don't git too close to the window. And this is his ticket. And he gits out at Blowfield, please, and there's a lady will meet him. His bit o' luggage is under the seat, and he's got a cap with him, but I've poked it up his little jersey, for safety, because he won't need a cap, not while he's travellin' and he would on'y take it off, and then he would leave it behind, because he's a terror over losin' his caps. And see as he don't torment nobody, please. And see as he gits out at Blowfield. If there's any mistake, you'll find the full address on his arm.

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I daresay you'll be kind enough to look arter him, just as far as Blowfield."

My companion told the lady who had been crying that she would be charmed to perform these numerous offices of humanity; and the lady who had been crying told my companion that Bert had been ill and that he was visiting the "kentry" under medical auspices and would reside there, for a period of not less than three months, under medical supervision. The lady who had been crying also published the apparently irrelevant opinion that three months seemed to be a very long time.

The lady who had been crying then walked away from the carriage door, and stationed herself beside an automatic delivery machine, which was situated on the platform, at a point far removed from our carriage but in direct alignment with it. And the lady who had been crying rested a shoulder against the machine and performed nervous gestures, alternately clasping and unclasping her hands, whilst she regarded our compartment (No. 2030909) with a fixed, unnatural smile.

Young Bert, who, I am glad to state, looked rounder, healthier, and happier than might have been expected, in view of his recent severe indisposition, gazed contentedly

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at all the varied objects which had been displayed for his enjoyment upon this platform of Victoria Station: the stout porters, the newspaper boys, the taxi-drivers, the clergy men, the loosely-clad young gentlemen, the tightly-clad young ladies, the other Mums who had been crying, the other pale-blue jerseys, the other Scout knives....

Then a very large person, in very bright buttons, blew a very loud whistle and waved a very green flag, and our engine coughed and our carriages hiccupped, and we slowly but decisively lumbered off, after grinning kindly at our mama, who had been crying, and who leaned against a toffee machine, regarding us fixedly, with a tight, ungenial smile.

We continued to grin in a kindly manner at all our travelling companions in turn until the train reached Purley Oaks, after which moment fields and brooks began to happen. They were smoke-stained fields, much worn, and productive of little save sardine tins. They were oily brooks, upon whose sluggish bosoms old boots floated stately. But still, they *were* fields and they *were* brooks, and when we saw them our grins gave place to big-eyed, wonderful sighs. And we began to fidget in our seat.

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Suddenly, with a decisive squirm, we left our seat, and confidently placed ourselves in somebody's lap—the lap of somebody who happened to occupy the opposite corner-seat, and who has already been introduced under the pseudonym of "my companion."

All these "we's" are beginning to confuse one. We will therefore drop them, and employ a less elusive turn of phrase. Let it be said, therefore, that the boy Bert, having placed himself in the lap of my companion, who was female, immediately helped himself to a yard or two of the chain which adorned her neck, and also uttered disconcerting speeches. He said:

"That lady there, what's sitting in the next seat, when you laugh at her, she don't laugh back. She's a very strict-looking lady, she is. I laughed at 'er free times, but she never laughed back. I fink she don't like little boys."

The lady thus indicated gave no sign of having heard this speech, or (if having heard it) of being in any way affected by it. She possessed herself, with a resolute air, of the seat which young Bert Bagshaw had vacated, and having closely examined, one by one, the faces of her fellow-travellers,

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she contemptuously closed her eyes and slumbered.

"We got a old aunt atome just ve same as 'er," proclaimed young Mr. Bagshaw. "*She* don't like to be jolly, neither."

Mr. Bert Bagshaw, having well and truly wound himself in his new girl's neck-chain, and having audited and found correct her bangles, brooches, bags, and other accoutrements, then concentrated his attention on the landscape. "But look here," said Mr. Bagshaw, suddenly, after holding his breath in the face of Nature, for quite five minutes, "but look here—where do they hang their washin' out?"

This and cognate problems occupied the mind of Mr. Bagshaw all the rest of the way to Blowfield. When the train slowed down at that important junction—where its journey to the sea was first interrupted—Mr. Bagshaw uttered a direct compliment to his lady friend. He said:

"Well, you've looked arter me all right. I think you're a decent lady. Are you the lady what's meetin' me here?"

My companion regretfully confessed that she was not this fortunate being.

"Well," said Bert, slowly absolving himself from the neck-chain, "I'm sorry. It's

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a bit sickening, like, because I likes you, and per'aps I shan't like '*er*"

We all got out at Blowfield, and escorted Mr. Bagshaw up the platform, where he stood and waited, amid a sharp breeze, which ruffled his hair and disturbed the luggage label which was tied to his arm. And no lady came to meet him.

When we had awaited the arrival of this lady for quite ten minutes, and had begun seriously to contemplate the obligation of taking him home with us—this blue-jerseyed, bareheaded boy, with the protuberant cap in his middle and fluttering label on his arm—a thin, grey-whiskered man came up, who was not very clean and not very sober, and who carried in his hand a short, stout whip.

This person glanced interrogatively at Bert's young lady. "Name o' Bagshaw?" he demanded. "Stoats Farm? To be met?"

"This is he," we had to admit.

"Then 'op up into moi cart, Boy," replied the grey-whiskered man. "There's pigs there as will amuse ye. Give us a-holt o' that box."

But this compulsory gentleman, and his whiskers, revolted Bert.

"Where's the lady was to meet me?" demanded that traveller.

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"'Op up among the pigs, moi son, and we'll soon foind some ladies!" replied Greywhiskers.

"No," replied Bert, holding his girl by the hand. "There was a lady to meet me here. I ain't a-goin' 'ome wiv you. I'd raver go 'ome with this young woman here."

This was what is called a dead-lock!

But Bert, being of London, showed himself susceptible to sporting offers, and readily accompanied us—the grey-whiskered man and myself—to (oh, Tothill Street!) a publichouse, where Bert drank ginger-beer, and where was enacted the solemn farce of tossing for Bert in ha'pennies. Grey-whiskers won the toss, and Bert, not happy, but not afraid, was lifted into Greybeard's cart, where the pigs immediately engaged his attention, to the stifling of sorrow.

"They're real pigs—they're *alive*!" proclaimed young Bert.

"I should think so," we assented. "Won't you have a gay time, riding home with real, live pigs!"

"Ye-e-es!" admitted Bert, as Greybeard shook his reins and the old horse sauntered off. "Yes; but I'd raver ride home wiv our young woman."

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XXXV

MRS. PYE'S COMFORTER

"So you've shrouded the pore old gentleman at last? " said Mrs. Plummer. "Well, m'm, you must aim to be cheerful."

My neighbour, Mrs. Pye, nodded gravely in acknowledgment of the force of this suggestion. She is not a refractory old lady, though self-willed and entirely chargeable to the parish. Private charity, in default of communal benevolence, had provided her with suitable evidences of mourning, and she stood at her gate now, bony and palsied, swaddled in black crêpe, and blinked at the setting sun.

"Yes, m'm," pursued Mrs. Plummer, dabbing at her three red chins with a humid kerchief, "you must aim to be cheerful. You aren t got a *great* while longer to live, no doubt, but so long as you do be up and about, that becomes you to keep cheerful."

Mrs. Pye, my neighbour, gravely wagged her head again. Her new black bonnet was

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studded with dancing ornaments of jet, and these had much vivacity and sparkle.

"I be told," continued Mrs. Plummer, "as 'e died 'ard. That surprise me when I 'ear it, for the pore old gentleman had got to be so slow and deaf and foolish that anybody wouldn't 'ardly credit as 'e would notice any difference between dying and living. At the same time, I dare say as life was sweet to 'im, the same as it might be to any of us young and 'earthy ones. At the same time, it's a good thing to die easy if you can, and that's the reason why I tells all the old ladies the same thing as I tells you, Mrs. Pye—keep cheerful. Them as lives cheerful will die cheerful. Take my word for that, Mrs. Pye."

My neighbour took it, nodding solemnly.

"That's what I be come for, really—to cheer you up," continued Mrs. Plummer. " I say to Plummer, I say, 'Now that the pore old gentleman have really died at last, the pore old lady will need a cheering word,' I say. Plummer, he say to me, 'Well, old girl,' he say, 'you'll 'ave to goo quick if you reckon to git a look at the old chap, for 'tis bound to be a quick funeral, this time o' year,' he say. Be the corp on view?"

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Mrs. Pye, my neighbour, blinking at the sunset, slowly shook her head.

"Ah, well," mused Mrs. Plummer, "'tis a good job, shouldn't wonder. That don't be a axtry cheerful business, viewin' anybody's corp. And I be one as like to keep cheerful.

"They do say, mind you," reflected Mrs. Plummer, "as anybody don't need to *dream* of a corp if on'y they got the sense to touch its forehead. 'Tis a thing I doos regular meself, and 'tis a certain thing as I 'aven't never 'ad a nightmare yit, on'y from eatin' duck. But then I be one o' the cheerful sort. Naarthun don't trouble me o' nights, on'y duck. Duck and moi stomach, they don't agree.... Well, m'm, the pore old gentleman be gone, and nobody couldn't grieve over it more'n I do. But he weer sadly aged and wore out, and no doubt he have gone to a happier place, where you and him will meet again ere long. So it becomes you to cheer up, Mrs. Pye. Take a lesson from me, m'm."

Letting go of the sunset for a moment, my neighbour blinked at Mrs. Plummer.

"Take a lesson from me," repeated that philosopher. "I are buried moi mother; I are buried moi father; I are buried Plummer's father and Plummer' s brother, and two little

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children of our own. And yit, Mrs. Pye, you don't see *me* lose 'eart."

Mrs. Pye reverted to the sunset.

"I are sin some very sad deaths," continued Mrs. Plummer. "Young Robert Plummer, now—moi 'usband's brother—he died axtryornerary 'ard. He died, as you might say, Mrs. Pye, from his feet up. His legs and his limbs they was perished for hours before his mind give out. I remember how he lay theer, with the Bible in 'is 'and and—but theer, I didn't ought to stop 'er chattering away like this.

"I ought to be getting back to the cross roads and look after moi l'el boy. He *be* sich a harum-scarum 1'el boy; there's never no knowin' what manner o' mischief he doosn't be up to. They tell me as a motor car was nearly a-top of him the day before yisterday. Believe me, Mrs. Pye, there's death in that child's face. Oi sin it clearly many a noight-time, as 'e lie alongside of us, sleepin' so sound and innercent. But theer! Whatever be the good o' losin' 'eart? Keep cheerful: that's what *Oi* say. Be cheerful. That's *moi* motter.

"That's all I come round for, really, to cheer you up, m'm. A sadly old creature

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same as you be can't afford to lose 'eart, for your own time, that be surely pretty nigh, and 'tis 'arf the battle to die easy. Poor young Robert, now, *he* died 'ard: 'e died uncommon ' ard. 'Put yere' and on me shoulder, Sis,' he say: 'Put yere 'and on me shoulder, Lel, and cheer me up. You be allus a cheerful one, old girl,' he say.

"I done as the pore lad tell me," said Mrs. Plummer, "but still 'e died 'ard: 'e died axtryornerary 'ard.

"But theer! " continued this indomitable woman, "we bean't all on us called upon to die so young and 'earty as pore Robert. Them as be old may well die easy, so long as they keep up their cheerfulness and doosn't lose 'eart. That's what I come round for, Mrs. Pye, to cheer you up. You aim to be cheerful, m'm, the same as I be.

"And now I'll be gettin' 'ome to see if my 1 el boy are got run over."-

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XXXVI

SWEEP OH!

I SAID to them: " Can you tell me which is the cottage where Mr. Toovey lives—Mr. Toovey the chimney sweep?"

They said to me: "Do you mean Toovey the fish 'awker?"

I said to them: "No; I mean Toovey the chimney sweep."

"A 'eavy, square-shouldered man? " they inquired. "Got a old grey beard?"

"That's the man!" I agreed.

"Then it's *George* Toovey 'e want," they said. "It's *George* Toovey you want, sir."

"Is it?" I said.

"That's right," they asserted. "*George* Toovey you want— 'im that mends boots."

"And 'awks fish," added one of them.

"That's right," cried all.

"What I'm really looking for," I confessed, "is a Toovey that sweeps chimneys."

"Well," replied the brightest of them, "I daresay George would sweep a chimney."

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"I've 'eered tell," remarked another, "that that be the trade he weer apprenticed to."

"Apprenticed or no," retorted the bright one, "I sin 'im 'awking fish at Blowfield oon'y larse week."

"'Twas wood you see 'im sellin', 'Arry, not fish," declared a convive. "I know 'twas wood, for 'e are bought they faggot stacks cover at Theobald's, and 'e aren't 'ad no time this three weeks past to goo fish 'awkin'."

"In any case," I now ventured to ask, "where does he live?"

"Oh, he *live* cover yander," they answered, "but there's no knowing where you'll *find* 'im."

"Perhaps," added the bright one, "they could tell you at the Cock. You can't go fur wrong if you ask for Mr. Toovey at the Cock."

"That's right!" assented all; "you can't go fur wrong if you ask at the Cock."

So I thanked them all for their help and walked a mile to the Cock Inn, where I asked to be directed to Mr. Toovey, the chimney sweep.

"Which Mr. Toovey did you want?" they demanded at the Cock.

"Mr. George Toovey," I replied. " George Toovey—oh!" they reflected.

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"That's 'im what used to rare pheasants up at the 'All, ain't it, Miss?"

Miss thought so.

"The genelman want a chimney sweep, Miss," they continued. "That would be Fred Toovey, wouldn't it, Miss?"

"Fred Toovey's dead," replied the landlord's daughter.

"Then what about young 'Arry Toovey?" they inquired.

"'Arry Toovey's gorn to America," replied the landlord's daughter.

"Then," they mused, "that on'y leave George to reckon with. That must be George, then, what the genelman's inquiring for. 'E'll find George Toovey up at Theobald's, won't 'e, Miss?"

"That's right?" assented the landlord's daughter.

They then very kindly told me where to look for George. "You'll find Mr. Toovey up at Theobald's," they said. "'E are bought they faggot stacks what stand in the yard there. Are you got a chimbney afire, then?"

I said, "No."

They said, "*No*?... Oh!... Well, you'll find Mr. Toovey up at Theobald's."

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So I thanked them and walked a mile to the scene of my original researches, and inquired for Mr. Toovey at Theobald's.

But I found no Mr. Toovey.

A man who was tying sticks together in the yard told me that Mr. Toovey would be found at his house the third past the signpost after you turn Sly Corner. A le'l, oldfashioned, lop-sided house: stands back from the road. Got a quince tree and some chickun in the front. They call it "Thatched Cottage," but if I was to ask anybody to direct me, they would know it by the name of "Kenward's." Couldn't tell me why it was known by that title, but had heard his mother say that, when she was a girl, an old genelman named Brown used to live there. Grew remarkable fine strawberry. Perhaps he called it "Kenward's." "Thatched Cottage," however, was the name on the gate. Mr. Toovey would be sure to be at home, because his wife had gone to Worthing, where her daughter was in service, and Mr. Toovey would have to mind the place. If it wasn't for

haven't to mind the chickun at "Kenward's" Mr. Toovey would doubtless be visible here at Theobald's, for he had bought they faggot stacks. But he was minding the

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chickun and the place at "Kenward's," where I would certainly find him. "Thatched Cottage" was the name on the gate.

I found Kenward's Cottage after some inquiry, and I found Mr. Toovey, who was minding it. He explained this so soon as I appeared.

"'Tis Mrs. Toovey you wants, I expect, he suggested. "I be on'y minding the place while she's away in Worthing, where our daughter live."

I assured Mr. Toovey that it was he and no other person whom I wanted to see. "I want you to come to my cottage to-morrow morning," I said, "and sweep out the parlour chimney."

Mr. Toovey shook his head. "You'll 'ave to see the missus about that," Mr. Toovey said. "We're so busy, you see. 'Tis ever so long since I swep a chimbney—not since my eldest boy went orf to America."

"You have given up chimney sweeping, then?" I inquired.

"Oh no, sir," answered Mr. Toovey. "That be my trade. I weer apprenticed to the chimbney sweeping."

"You have, at any rate, discontinued chimney sweeping for the present?"

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"I won't say that, sir," answered Mr. Toovey. "No, I won't say that! That be my trade, you see, sweeping chimbneys."

"Then why not sweep my chimney?" I persisted.

"You see, sir," explained Mr. Toovey, "I aren't swep' neer a chimbney for months and months—not since my eldest boy went orf to America. I doos a bit o' cobberlin' and I doos a bit o' 'iggerlin' and sometimes I sells fish and wood. But I reckens to be retired from business, really. My wife could tell you more about it than I can, on'y my wife she be at Worthing, where our daughter live."

“Anyhow, I can’t depend on *you* to sweep my chimney, Mr. Toovey.”

“I wouldn’t say that, sir. You see, I reckons to be a chimbney sweep be trade. On’y I got some wood to attend to—they faggots over at Theobald’s. I ought to be attendin’ to them now, on’y me wife she be away and I gotter stop and mind the place yere.”

“I see that I’m not to expectyou to-morrow, Mr. Toovey, but perhaps,” I suggested, “you could come and clean my chimney some other morning when you are free to leave this place.”

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“ Free to leave this place! “ echoed Mr. Toovey. “Oh, I daresay, come to that, I’m as free to leave my place as what any body else is. Only I *choose* to stop ‘ere. You had better come again, young man, and see the Missus.”

“You think, then,” I ventured to assume, “ that you will be able to come some other morning and —“

“I can’t say naarthun about that,” said Mr. Toovey. “I aren’t swep’ a chimbney out for ever so long—not since my eldest boy went orf to America. You’ll ‘ave to see the missus about it.”

“Perhaps,” I said, “you can recommend me to some other chimney sweep, Mr. Toovey?”

“Mr. Toovey shook his head. “That I caan’t,” he replied. “I be the on’y proper chimbney sweep this side o’ Lewes. You won’t better me if you walk five miles.”

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XXXVII

THE “RETREAT”

CERTAIN fine, black horses are to be observed upon the roads of this parish—horses which pull great painted carts. These carts are loaded to the eyebrows with ripe grain or mellow hops, and they—the horses, the carts, the grain, the hops are all the ostensible property of Esther Gabriel.

And who is Esther Gabriel? I do not know. I have often wondered. I am told that Esther Gabriel is nobody in particular; that she is merely the embodiment of an idea. I am told that the house and lands upon the hill from whence these horses come, and the horses themselves, and the painted carts, and the jolly hops, are not the property of any single person, but belong to the Pope, at Rome, and are vested, theoretically, in a spiritual daughter whose "bridal name" is painted upon the tail-board of His Holiness' s waggons because Sergeant Plummer, our local Headman, has commanded this thing to be done.

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Now, I love fine horses and gay waggons, so I always stand at my window to watch these chattels of Sister Esther Gabriel go by. And, naturally enough, I fall to wondering about Miss Gabriel. I wonder whether she is old or young, ill-looking or pretty. I wonder what worldly joys and dignities were hers, not long ago, ere she elected to try the mysteries of re-birth. She was a wife, perhaps, and a mother, or a cotton-broker's widow, or a marchioness, or an actress, or an author. At any rate, we know who she now is: Esther Gabriel, a daughter of the Church. The disguise is a good one. It hides her real name and state completely, just as herself is hidden by the convent walls and her face by the convent veil.

I followed one of Esther's waggons the other morning, and sat on a gate by Esther's rickyard and beheld the silent kingdom of this silent woman.

From my perch I could see it all—five hundred fat acres, dotted with big oaks and plump coverts. At the foot of the hill, where the oaks are finest, there is a sheet of water. In the old days, there were boats on this water, which were used by gentlemen as an aid to the destruction of fish and water-fowl.

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Now, in early August, the surface of the lake is covered with water-lilies—white and scarlet and yellow. These are more fitting to the latter-day character of the estate, which now they call "St. Anthony's Retreat." But twenty years ago, and from three hundred

years before that, they called it "Culver's Close," and the coverts which are now so silent were given over to the unceasing clamour of sportsmen and dogs.

I caught myself thinking—not a very pretty thought, perhaps—that I had rather see these lumbering butchers back again than see their erstwhile haunts so silent and forsaken.

The silence of the place was more than an ordinary August silence. It was a supernatural silence, rendered more poignant by the steady, ceaseless booming of a bell: an invisible bell, with a lifeless voice. Presently, as if in answer to its persistent nagging, a silent, slow procession of black-robed persons came winding out of a coppice and wound itself unhappily towards the summit of a hill.

I turned my head and looked for comfort at the lake, with its bright patches of white and yellow and scarlet.

But by the side of the lake there had quietly gathered another depressing smudge of black:

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a solitary smudge which travelled slowly to and fro, to and fro, in harmony with that dreadful bell. I have never listened to a more unsatisfying bell. Its voice was like the echo of an echo of a voice. St. Anthony's Retreat is certainly conducive to spiritual searchings. But I did not want any. I wanted to run away.

Suddenly, however, my eye was attracted by a new, an unexpected object in the picture: a tiny, human object, in a pink pinafore. It was apparently conversing with the waterlilies. It was apparently "larking" with the water-lilies. It danced and leapt and laughed, and did not seem to fear the black thing. This strange spectacle so interested me that I climbed off the gate and invited myself to make a close inquiry.

When I reached the lilies and the lake, and had crossed the little bridge which spans that piece of water at its narrowest part, I was able to see that the pink pinafore contained indeed a human child. I was able also, to look at a new, unsightly tower of yellow brick which is the casket or caddy or sepulture of that confounded bell. I was able, likewise, to examine the new yellow chapel of St. Anthony and another horrible procession of

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the sad, mute sisters of St. Anthony. Finally, I was able to look, at close quarters, upon two quite different women.

One of these was dressed in black, and travelled slowly, to and fro, in harmony with the thumping of a bell. The other woman was dressed in pink and purple and other bright hues which do not live together in tyarmony. She was a fat woman, with moist, red cheeks, and she exhibited signs of breathless energy, puffing hither and thither about the lake-bank, gathering nothing in particular, losing half of that which she did gather, and stuffing the residue with a feverish and entirely motiveless haste into a fat, green basket which she carried. This lady's name is Mrs. Pett. She is a talkative, untruthful, bustling, lazy inhabitant of this parish. She and I are old friends, by reason of the fact that for years Mrs. Pett had "obliged" me with the use—at 3d. per hour—of her domestic and culinary talents. I don't particularly like Mrs. Pett. She is untruthful, as I have said, and lazy: she is also unclean and unscrupulous. But, by God! she is alive. And, finding her in that dead place, I became exceedingly glad, and clasped her hand with heartfelt warmth.

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My Mrs. Pett explained her presence in this land of dead women thus:

"Me and my littlest gal, we be come here to get some air and see the water-lilies. Did ever you see finer, sir? Such wunnerful bright colours. That lady what walketh over there," continued my Mrs. Pett, a little inconsequently, "she belongeth yere. A 'Nun,' they calleth her."

There was no escaping this "Nun." I looked at her again. I saw that she was tall and slim, and that she wore a purple sash. I wondered: " Why the sash? " I could not see her face, for her head was bowed, and, moreover, it was hooded. She carried in her hands a little book, from which she did not lift her eyes. She was walking straightly to and fro, to and fro, in harmony with the thump—thump—thump—thump of the bell.

"She do not seem," remarked my Mrs. Pett, "to take no notice o' the lilies. They be better nor any books."

The bell continued thumping.

"Nor," said Mrs. Pett, "she do not take no notice of my Elsie. Not so much as squinteth at her! That be a gleeful le'l maiden, too: one as get took notice of be everybody."

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The "Nun" continued walking to and fro, with her eyes upon the book.

"That seem," mused Mrs. Pett, "as if she *can't* look up. As if the *will* was took away from her."

The big oak door of "Culver's" opened as she spoke, and yet another queue of these mute women issued forth and dragged itself across the gravelled walk which led to the chapel door.

"Elsie!" cried out suddenly my Mrs. Pett. "Elsie, come 'ere."

My Mrs. Pett, holding her child by the hand, looked nervously, shuddering, from that queer stream of living creatures to the solitary, perambulating figure by the water-side.

"They got no 'air," said Mrs. Pett; "'tis all shaved off. Elsie, come along 'ome."

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XXXVIII

GOD LOVE US ALL

OLD Mr. Rummery has been inquiring into the principles of Progressive Thought, and the process has left him with dim eyes and a sort of giddiness.

Mr. Rummery is a beekeeper by calling and inclination, but by necessity and local acclaim a trimmer of hedges. It was whilst occupied in layering a rebel growth of hazel upon the northern heights of my estate that old Mr. Rummery first hinted to me of his intentions.

"Sir," said Mr. Rummery, quite without warning, "what be this a-here Socialism?"

"It's—it's—a theory of government," I answered rapidly.

"Accordin' to what I read in my 'Daily Megaphone,' " submitted Mr. Rummery, "that be an arrangement for starving the poor."

"It is not entirely wise," I answered, " always to believe everything which is printed in the comic press. I happen to have in the house a copy of another publication which

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will, perhaps, afford you some more reliable information on the subject."

"Be that 'The Trumpet'? demanded Mr. Rummery.

This question rather startled and confused me. "What do you know about 'The Trumpet'?" I said at last.

"I see one last week, time I burned your muck," responded Mr. Rummery. "It was on'y keepin' some tea-leaves together, so I took the liberty o' takin' it 'ome to read. Squire Kosky, up at the 'All, 'e seen it a-pokin' out o' moi pucket next mornin', when I goo there 'urdle bindin', and the Squire 'e didn't airrf lay out about it. 'What do ye mean?' he say. 'How dare ye?' he say. 'You be the last man, Rummery,' he say, 'as ever I expect to see goo walkin' about moi land with a lyin' rag like that in ye' re pucket. Take it away and burn it,' he say."

"What did you do?"

"I touch me cap to him," said old Mr. Rummery.

"What did you do then?"

"I 'ide up the paper and read it on the quiet, at 'ome."

"You see, sir," continued Mr. Rummery, "I never knowed as there' d be any 'arm

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attaching to it. And even now I read it, I don't see any 'arm in the paper—on'y a lot o' long words. Moi son up in London, young Cyrrle, 'e tal me about it first set orf. 'E tal me as there be some long, long wroitin's o' yourn in it."

I hung my head. "But tell me, Mr. Rummery," I said, by way of diverting the conversation into less awkward channels, "what would you do supposing I took a lesson in manners from the Squire and the station master and people like that? Suppose I were to tell you that, being a religious man, I object to those blaspheming pictures which are

sticking out of your pocket now, and suppose I tell you that unless you burn or destroy them I will give you no more work on my land? What will you do then?"

"Do as I done to the Squire," responded Mr. Rummery: "'ide the paper up and read it through atome."

"That's what you had better do," I said, "because some little child might see it. And, in the meantime, I will fetch you a copy of 'The Trumpet,' which you can look at to-night, side by side with your 'Daily Megaphone.'"

But Mr. Rummery erected a detaining arm. "Don't you trouble naarthun about no

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'Trumpets,' sir," he said. "I seen enough o' the paper to know as that bean't no manner o' use to me. I aren't got the scholarship. 'Tis too full o' wroitin'. Give me moi 'Megaphone.' That have got pictures in it; I can *read* a picture.

"See," continued Mr. Rummery, producing a crumpled page of his precious "Magaphone," and spreading it out before me: "See! Look at this a-here: a man aren't got to be a sc'olar to find out the meanin' o' this a-here. There's the pore children, lyin' cold and 'ungry in their bed: there's the pore mother gatherin' up their le'l bits o' clothes to take away and sell, so's she can buy the imps a mossel o' food and a mossel o' firin'. And there be a picture o' these a-here miner chaps, what woon't goo to work. There they be a-feedin' o' their dargs on steak and whiskey. There they be a-racin'; there they be a-footballin'. 'Tis all told so plain in these a-here pictures. Words bean't no use to a old man off the land."

I took the paper away from Mr. Rummery and tried to summon and assemble a verbal host which should prevail against this visible array. But how can you fight with phrases, with ideas, against apparent devils?

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Old Mr. Rummery broke in upon these bitter musings.

"I be gooun to London Toosday," he said, "for to spend the day along o' young Cyrrle. I shall show him this picture and hear what he got to say about it. He rackon to be a

sc'olar, he do. Even when he was a little lad, we had to buy him spectacles; and I don't ever seem to recollect 'im at all when 'e couldn't answer twenty words ta anybody else's one."

When Mr. Rummery came on the following Wednesday morning to mutilate some more of my saplings, the visit to London and to Cyril had been accomplished.

But Mr. Rummery wore a dazed expression; his eyes were dull, as with a sort of hopeless wonder. He frequently patted his bosom.

"That be a queer set-out, this Socialism," said Mr. Rummery. "Naarthun to eat on'y bean and pips; naarthun to drink on'y barleywater. 'Tis a queer set-out. They be set agin pretty nigh all the food and all the lickers ever I 'eard on. Aye, and agin amusements, too."

"You aren't got to eat no meat, nor yet no salt, nor yet no milk nor butter, nor yet no bread what's made with yeast; you aren't

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got to drink no beer, nor yet no spirit, nor yet no tea, nor yet no coffee what's made with coffee. You aren't got to go to no theatres, nor you aren't got to go to no pictures. I'd made me mind up for to reg'lar enjoy meself at the pictures time I was in London; but my boy, 'e wouldn't 'ear o' *that*. They be agin all readin', too—on'y this a-here." Mr. Rummery produced from his pocket a slender pamphlet bound in green paper.

Its title was: "Fabian Tract, No. 40."

"'Twas a queer set-out," repeated Mr. Rummery. "The corn and barley what they give me, that aren't arf made me feel queer. And y'oughter a' seen the comic clothes what our young Cyrrle was dressed in! And 'is face! That be the colour of a turnip root. *I* don't make naarthun at all o' this a-here Socialism."

There was much which one could say; but on the whole I deemed it best to leave it all unsaid. I went to a cupboard, instead, and brought forth clean clay pipes, some good tobacco, and a bottle full of—sin. "This also is Socialism," I remarked.

"Is it, now! "cried Mr. Rummery, looking very glad. "God love us all!