

You do not escape these things for long, even by so catastrophic a proceeding as flying to London with a young lady of no wealth and inferior social position. The mists of noble emotion swirl and pass, and there you are, divorced from all your deities, and grazing in the meadows under the Argus eyes of the social system, the innumerable mean judgments you feel raining upon you, upon your clothes and bearing, upon your pretensions and movements.

Our world to-day is a meanly conceived one—it is only an added meanness to conceal that fact. For one consequence, it has very few nice little houses. Such things do not come for the asking; they are not to be bought with money during ignoble times. Its houses are built on the ground of monstrously rich, shabbily extortionate landowners, by poor, parsimonious, greedy people in a mood of elbowing competition. What can you expect from such ridiculous conditions? To go house-hunting is to spy out the nakedness of this pretentious world, to see what our civilization amounts to when you take away curtains and flounces and carpets, and all the fluster and distraction of people and fittings. It is to see mean plans meanly executed for mean ends, the conventions torn aside, the secrets stripped, the substance underlying all such Chester Cootery, soiled and worn and left.

So you see our poor dear Kippses going to and fro, in Hythe, in Sandgate, in Ashford, and Canterbury and Deal and Dover—at last even in Folkestone—with “orders to view,” pink and green and white and yellow orders to view, and labelled keys in Kipps’s hand, and frowns and perplexity upon their faces. . . .

They did not clearly know what they wanted, but whatever it was they saw, they knew they did not want that. Always they found a confusing multitude of houses they could not take, and none they could. Their dreams began to turn mainly on empty, abandoned-

looking rooms, with unfaded patches of paper to mark the place of vanished pictures, and doors that had lost their keys. They saw rooms floored with boards that yawned apart and were splintered, skirtings eloquent of the industrious mouse, kitchens with a dead black-beetle in the empty cupboard, and a hideous variety of coal-holes and dark cupboards under the stairs. They stuck their little heads through roof trap-doors, and gazed at disorganized ball-taps, at the black filthiness of unstopped roofs. There were occasions when it seemed to them that they must be the victims of an elaborate conspiracy of house agents, so bleak and cheerless is a second-hand empty house in comparison with the humblest of inhabited dwellings.

Commonly the houses were too big. They had huge windows that demanded vast curtains in mitigation, countless bedrooms, acreage of stone steps to be cleaned, kitchens that made Ann protest. She had come so far towards a proper conception of Kipps's social position as to admit the prospect of one servant. "But, lor'!" she would say, "you'd want a man-servant in this 'ouse!" When the houses were not too big, then they were almost always the product of speculative building, of that multitudinous hasty building for the extravagant swarm of new births that was the essential disaster of the nineteenth century. The new houses Ann refused as damp, and even the youngest of those that had been in use showed remarkable signs of a sickly constitution—the plaster flaked away, the floors gaped, the paper moulded and peeled, the doors dropped, the bricks were scaled, and the railings rusted; Nature, in the form of spiders, earwigs, cockroaches, mice, rats, fungi, and remarkable smells, was already fighting her way back. . . .

And the plan was invariably inconvenient—invariably. All the houses they saw had a common quality for which she could find no word, but for which the proper word is "incivility." "They build these 'ouses,"

she said, "as though girls wasn't 'uman beings." Sid's social democracy had got into her blood, perhaps, and anyhow they went about discovering the most remarkable inconsiderateness in the contemporary house. "There's kitching stairs to go up, Artie!" Ann would say. "Some poor girl's got to go up and down, up and down, and be tired out, jest because they haven't the sense to leave enough space to give their steps a proper rise—and no water upstairs anywhere—every drop got to be carried! It's 'ouses like this wear girls out.

"It's 'aving 'ouses built by men, I believe, makes all the work and trouble," said Ann. . . .

The Kippses, you see, thought they were looking for a reasonably simple little contemporary house, but indeed they were looking either for dreamland or 1975 A.D., or thereabouts, and it hadn't come.

§ 3.

But it was a foolish thing of Kipps to begin building a house.

He did that out of an extraordinary animosity for house-agents he had conceived.

Everybody hates house-agents, just as everybody loves sailors. It is, no doubt, a very wicked and unjust hatred, but the business of a novelist is not ethical principle, but facts. Everybody hates house-agents because they have everybody at a disadvantage. All other callings have a certain amount of give and take, the house-agent simply takes. All other callings want you; your solicitor is afraid you may change him, your doctor cannot go too far; your novelist—if only you knew it—is mutely abject towards your unspoken wishes; and as for your tradespeople, milkmen will fight outside your front door for you, and greengrocers call in tears

if you discard them suddenly ; but who ever heard of a house-agent struggling to serve any one ? You want a house, you go to him ; you, dishevelled and angry from travel, anxious, inquiring ; he calm, clean, inactive, reticent, quietly doing nothing. You beg him to reduce rents, whitewash ceilings, produce other houses, combine the summer-house of No. 6 with the conservatory of No. 4—much he cares ! You want to dispose of a house ; then he is just the same—serene, indifferent. On one occasion I remember he was picking his teeth all the time he answered me. Competition is a mockery among house-agents ; they are all alike ; you cannot wound them by going to the opposite office, you cannot dismiss them, you can at most dismiss yourself. They are invulnerably placed behind mahogany and brass, too far usually even for a sudden swift lunge with an umbrella ; to throw away the keys they lend you instead of returning them is larceny, and punishable as such. . . .

It was a house-agent in Dover who finally decided Kipps to build. Kipps, with a certain faltering in his voice, had delivered his ultimatum—no basement, not more than eight rooms, hot and cold water upstairs, coal-cellar in the house, but with intervening doors to keep dust from the scullery and so forth. He stood blowing. “ You’ll have to build a house,” said the house-agent, sighing wearily, “ if you want all that.” It was rather for the sake of effective answer than with any intention at the time that Kipps mumbled, “ That’s about what I shall do—this goes on.”

Whereupon the house-agent smiled. He smiled !

When Kipps came to turn the thing over in his mind, he was surprised to find quite a considerable intention had germinated and was growing up in him. After all, lots of people *have* built houses. How could there be so many if they hadn’t ? Suppose he “ reely ” did ! Then he would go to the house-agent and say, “ ’Ere, while you been getting me a sootable ’ouse, blowed if

I 'aven't built one!" Go round to all of them—all the house-agents in Folkestone, in Dover, Ashford, Canterbury, Margate, Ramsgate, saying that——! Perhaps then they might be sorry. It was in the small hours that he awoke to a realization that he had made up his mind in the matter.

"Ann," he said, "Ann," and also used the sharp of his elbow.

Ann was at last awakened to the pitch of an indistinct inquiry what was the matter.

"I'm going to build a house, Ann."

"Eh?" said Ann suddenly, as if awake.

"Build a house."

Ann said something incoherent about he'd better wait until the morning before he did anything of the sort, and immediately with a fine trustfulness went fast asleep again.

But Kipps lay awake for a long while building his house, and in the morning at breakfast he made his meaning clear. He had smarted under the indignities of house-agents long enough, and this seemed to promise revenge—a fine revenge. "And, you know, we might reely make rather a nice little 'ouse out of it—like we want."

So resolved, it became possible for them to take a house for a year, with a basement, no service lift, black-leading to do everywhere, no water upstairs, no bathroom, vast sash windows to be cleaned from the sill, stone steps with a twist and open to the rain, into the coal-cellar, insufficient cupboards, unpaved path to the dustbin, no fireplace to the servant's bedroom, no end of splintery wood to scrub—in fact, a very typical English middle-class house. And having added to this house some furniture, and a languid young person with unauthentic golden hair named Gwendolen, who was engaged to a sergeant-major and had formerly been in an hotel, having "moved in" and spent some sleepless

nights, varied by nocturnal explorations in search of burglars, because of the strangeness of being in a house for which they were personally responsible, Kipps settled down for a time and turned himself with considerable resolution to the project of building a home.

§ 4.

At first Kipps gathered advice, finding an initial difficulty in how to begin. He went into a builder's shop at Seabrook one day and told the lady in charge that he wanted a house built. He was breathless, but quite determined, and he was prepared to give his order there and then; but she temporized with him, and said her husband was out, and he left without giving his name. Also he went and talked to a man in a cart, who was pointed out to him by a workman as the builder of a new house near Saltwood, but he found him first sceptical, and then overpoweringly sarcastic. "I suppose you build a 'ouse every 'oliday," he said, and turned from Kipps with every symptom of contempt.

Afterwards Carshot told alarming stories about builders, and shook Kipps's expressed resolution a good deal, and then Pearce raised the question whether one ought to go in the first instance to a builder at all, and not rather to an architect. Pearce knew a man at Ashford whose brother was an architect, and as it is always better in these matters to get some one you know, the Kippses decided, before Pearce had gone, and Carshot's warnings had resumed their sway, to apply to him. They did so—rather dubiously.

The architect, who was brother of Pearce's friend, appeared as a small, alert individual with a black bag and a cylindrical silk hat, and he sat at the dining-room table, with his hat and his bag exactly equi-

distant right and left of him, and maintained a demeanour of impressive woodenness, while Kipps, on the hearthrug, with a quaking sense of gigantic enterprise, vacillated answers to his inquiries. Ann held a watching brief for herself, in a position she had chosen as suitable to the occasion, beside the corner of the carved oak sideboard. They felt, in a sense, at bay.

The architect began by asking for the site, and seemed a little discomposed to discover this had still to be found. "I thought of building just anywhere," said Kipps. "I 'aven't made up my mind about that yet." The architect remarked that he would have preferred to see the site in order to know where to put what he called his "ugly side," but it was quite possible, of course, to plan a house "in the air," on the level, "simply with back and front assumed"—if they would like to do that. Kipps flushed slightly, and secretly hoping it would make no great difference in the fees, said a little doubtfully that he thought that would be all right.

The architect then marked off, as it were, the first section of his subject, with a single dry cough, opened his bag, took out a spring tape measure, some hard biscuits, a metal flask, a new pair of dogskin gloves, a clockwork motor-car partially wrapped in paper, a bunch of violets, a paper of small brass screws, and finally a large distended notebook; he replaced the other objects carefully, opened his notebook, put a pencil to his lips, and said, "And what accommodation will you require?" To which Ann, who had followed his every movement with the closest attention and a deepening dread, replied with the violent suddenness of one who has lain in wait, "Cubbuds!"

"Anyhow," she added, catching her husband's eye.

The architect wrote it down.

"And how many rooms?" he said, coming to secondary matters.

The young people regarded one another. It was dreadfully like giving an order.

"How many bedrooms, for example?" asked the architect.

"One?" suggested Kipps, inclined now to minimize at any cost.

"There's Gwendolen!" said Ann.

"Visitors, perhaps," said the architect; and temperately, "You never know."

"Two p'r'aps?" said Kipps. "We don't want no more than a *little* 'ouse, you know."

"But the merest shooting-box——" said the architect. . . .

They got to six, he beat them steadily from bedroom to bedroom, the word "nursery" played across their imaginative skies—he mentioned it as the remotest possibility—and then six being reluctantly conceded, Ann came forward to the table, sat down, and delivered herself of one of her prepared conditions. "'Ot and cold water," she said, "laid on to each room—any'ow."

It was an idea long since acquired from Sid.

"Yes," said Kipps, on the hearthrug, "'ot and cold water laid on to each bedroom—we've settled on that."

It was the first intimation to the architect that he had to deal with a couple of exceptional originality, and as he had spent the previous afternoon in finding three large houses in *The Builder*, which he intended to combine into an original and copyright design of his own, he naturally struggled against these novel requirements. He enlarged on the extreme expensiveness of plumbing, on the extreme expensiveness of everything not already arranged for in his scheme, and only when Ann declared she'd as soon not have the house as not have her requirements, and Kipps, blenching the while, had said he didn't mind what a thing cost him so long as he got what he wanted, did he allow a kindred originality of his own to appear beneath the acquired professionalism

of his methods. He dismissed their previous talk with his paragramphic cough. "Of course," he said, "if you don't mind being unconventional——"

He explained that he had been thinking of a Queen Anne style of architecture (Ann, directly she heard her name, shook her head at Kipps in an aside) so far as the exterior went. For his own part, he said, he liked to have the exterior of a house in a style, not priggishly in a style, but mixed, with one style uppermost, and the gables and dormers and casements of the Queen Anne style, with a little roughcast and sham timbering here and there, and perhaps a bit of an overhang, diversified a house and made it interesting. The advantages of what he called a Queen Anne style was that it had such a variety of features. . . . Still, if they were prepared to be unconventional, it could be done. A number of houses were now built in the unconventional style, and were often very pretty. In the unconventional style, one frequently had what perhaps he might call Internal Features—for example, an old English oak staircase and gallery. White roughcast and green paint were a good deal favoured in houses of this type.

He indicated that this excursus on style was finished by a momentary use of his cough, and reopened his notebook, which he had closed to wave about in a moment of descriptive enthusiasm while expatiating on the unbridled wealth of External Features associated with Queen Anne. "Six bedrooms," he said, moistening his pencil. "One with barred windows, suitable for a nursery if required."

Kipps endorsed this huskily and reluctantly.

There followed a most interesting discussion upon house-building, in which Kipps played a minor part. They passed from bedrooms to the kitchen and scullery, and there Ann displayed an intelligent exactingness that won the expressed admiration of the architect. They were particularly novel upon the position of the coal-

cellar, which Ann held to be altogether too low in the ordinary house, necessitating much heavy carrying. They dismissed as impracticable the idea of having coal-cellar and kitchen at the top of the house, because that would involve carrying all the coal through the house, and therewith much subsequent cleaning, and for a time they dealt with a conception of a coal-cellar on the ground floor with a light staircase running up outside to an exterior shoot. "It might be made a Feature," said the architect a little doubtfully, jotting down a note of it. "It would be apt to get black, you know."

Thence they passed to the alternative of service lifts, and then, by an inspiration of the architect's, to the possibilities of gas-heating. Kipps did a complicated verbal fugue on the theme, "gas-heating heats the air," with variable aspirates; he became very red, and was lost to the discussion altogether for a time, though his lips kept silently moving.

Subsequently the architect wrote to say that he found in his notebook very full and explicit directions for bow windows to all rooms, for bedrooms, for water supply, lift, height of stairs and absence of twists therein, for a well-ventilated kitchen twenty feet square, with two dressers and a large box window-seat, for scullery and outhouses and offices, but nothing whatever about drawing-room, dining-room, library, or study, or approximate cost, and he awaited further instructions. He presumed there would be a breakfast-room, dining-room, drawing-room, and study for Mr. Kipps—at least that was his conception—and the young couple discussed this matter long and ardently.

Ann was distinctly restrictive in this direction. "I don't see what you want a drawin'-room and a dinin' *and* a kitchin for. If we was going to let in summer—well and good. But we're not going to let. Consequently we don't want so many rooms. Then there's

a 'all. What use is a 'all? It only makes work. And a study!"

Kipps had been humming and stroking his moustache since he had read the architect's letter. "I think I'd like a little bit of a study—not a big one, of course, but one with a desk and bookshelves, like there was in Hughenden. I'd like that."

It was only after they had talked to the architect again, and seen how scandalized he was at the idea of not having a drawing-room, that they consented to that Internal Feature. They consented to please him. "But we shan't never use it," said Ann.

Kipps had his way about a study. "When I get that study," said Kipps, "I shall do a bit of reading I've long wanted to do. I shall make a habit of going in there and reading something an hour every day. There's Shakespeare and a lot of things a man like me ought to read. Besides, we got to 'ave *somewhere* to put the Encyclopædia. I've always thought a study was about what I've wanted all along. You can't 'elp reading if you got a study. If you 'aven't, there's nothing for it, so far's *I* can see, but treshy novels."

He looked down at Ann, and was surprised to see a joyless thoughtfulness upon her face.

"Fency, Ann!" he said, not too buoyantly, "'aving a little 'ouse of our own!"

"It won't be a little 'ouse," said Ann, "not with all them rooms."

§ 5.

Any lingering doubt in that matter was dispelled when it came to plans.

The architect drew three sets of plans on a transparent bluish sort of paper that smelt abominably. He painted them very nicely; brick-red and ginger, and

arsenic green and a leaden sort of blue, and brought them over to show our young people. The first set were very simple, with practically no External Features—"a plain style," he said it was—but it looked a big sort of house, nevertheless; the second had such extras as a conservatory, bow windows of various sorts, one roughcast gable and one half-timbered ditto in plaster, and a sort of overhung veranda, and was much more imposing; and the third was quite fungoid with External Features, and honeycombed with Internal ones; it was, he said, "practically a mansion," and altogether a very noble fruit of the creative mind of man. It was, he admitted, perhaps almost too good for Hythe; his art had run away with him and produced a modern mansion in the "best Folkestone style." It had a central hall with a staircase, a Moorish gallery, and a Tudor stained-glass window, crenellated battlements to the leading over the portico, an octagonal bulge with octagonal bay windows, surmounted by an Oriental dome of metal, lines of yellow bricks to break up the red and many other richnesses and attractions. It was the sort of house, ornate and in its dignified way voluptuous, that a city magnate might build, but it seemed excessive to the Kippses. The first plan had seven bedrooms, the second eight, the third eleven; they had, the architect explained, "worked in" as if they were pebbles in a mountaineer's boot.

"They're big 'ouses," said Ann, directly the elevations were unrolled.

Kipps listened to the architect, with round eyes and an exuberant caution in his manner, anxious not to commit himself further than he had done to the enterprise, and the architect pointed out the Features and other objects of interest with the scalpel belonging to a pocket manicure set that he carried. Ann watched Kipps's face, and communicated with him furtively over the architect's head. "*Not so big,*" said Ann's lips.

“It’s a bit big for what I meant,” said Kipps, with a reassuring eye on Ann.

“You won’t think it big when you see it up,” said the architect; “you take my word for that.”

“We don’t want no more than six bedrooms,” said Kipps.

“Make this one a box-room, then,” said the architect. A feeling of impotence silenced Kipps for a time.

“Now which,” said the architect, spreading them out, “is it to be?”

He flattened down the plans of the most ornate mansion to show it to better effect.

Kipps wanted to know how much each would cost “at the outside,” which led to much alarmed signalling from Ann. But the architect could estimate only in the most general way.

They were not really committed to anything when the architect went away; Kipps had promised to think it over—that was all.

“We can’t ’ave that ’ouse,” said Ann.

“They’re miles too big—all of them,” agreed Kipps.

“You’d want—— Four servants wouldn’t be ’ardly enough,” said Ann.

Kipps went to the hearthrug and spread himself. His tone was almost offhand. “Nex’ time ’e comes,” said Kipps, “I’ll ’splain to him. It isn’t at all the sort of thing we want. It’s—it’s a misunderstanding. You got no occasion to be anxious ’bout it, Ann.”

“I don’t see much good reely in building an ’ouse at all,” said Ann.

“Oo, we *got* to build a ’ouse now we begun,” said Kipps. “But now supposin’ we ’ad——”

He spread out the most modest of the three plans and scratched his cheek.

§ 6.

It was unfortunate that old Kipps came over the next day.

Old Kipps always produced peculiar states of mind in his nephew—a rash assertiveness, a disposition towards display unlike his usual self. There had been great difficulty in reconciling both these old people to the Pornick *mésalliance*, and at times the controversy echoed in old Kipps's expressed thoughts. This perhaps it was, and no ignoble vanity, that set the note of florid successfulness going in Kipps's conversation whenever his uncle appeared. Mrs. Kipps was, as a matter of fact, not reconciled at all; she had declined all invitations to come over on the bus, and was a taciturn hostess on the one occasion when the young people called at the toy-shop *en route* for Mrs. Pornick. She displayed a tendency to sniff that was clearly due to pride rather than catarrh, and, except for telling Ann she hoped she would not feel too "stuck up" about her marriage, confined her conversation to her nephew or the infinite. The call was a brief one, and made up chiefly of pauses, no refreshment was offered or asked for, and Ann departed with a singularly high colour. For some reason she would not call at the toy-shop a second time when they found themselves again in New Romney.

But old Kipps, having adventured over and tried the table of the new *ménage* and found it to his taste, showed many signs of softening towards Ann. He came again, and then again. He would come over by the bus, and, except when his mouth was absolutely full, he would give his nephew one solid and continuous mass of advice of the most subtle and disturbing description until it was time to toddle back to the High Street for the afternoon bus. He would walk with him to the sea front, and commence *pourparlers* with boatmen for the purchase of one of their boats—"You ought to keep

a boat of your own," he said—though Kipps was a singularly poor sailor—or he would pursue a plan that was forming in his mind in which he should own and manage what he called "weekly" property in the less conspicuous streets of Hythe. The cream of that was to be a weekly collection of rents in person, the nearest approach to feudal splendour left in this democratized country. He gave no hint of the source of the capital he designed for this investment, and at times it would appear he intended it as an occupation for his nephew rather than himself.

But there remained something in his manner towards Ann—in the glances of scrutiny he gave her unawares, that kept Kipps alertly expansive whenever he was about; and in all sorts of ways. It was on account of old Kipps, for example, that our Kipps plunged one day—a golden plunge—and brought home a box of cummerbundy ninepenny cigars, and substituted blue label old Methusaleh Four Stars for the common and generally satisfactory white brand.

"Some of this is whisky, my boy," said old Kipps, when he tasted it, smacking critical lips. . . .

"Saw a lot of young officery fellers coming along," said old Kipps. "You ought to join the volunteers, my boy, and get to know a few."

"I dessay I shall," said Kipps. "Later."

"They'd make you an officer, you know, 'n no time. They want officers," said old Kipps. "It isn't every one can afford it. They'd be regular glad to 'ave you. . . . Ain't bort a dog yet?"

"Not yet, Uncle. 'Ave a segar?"

"Nor a moty car?"

"Not yet, Uncle."

"There's no 'urry about that. And don't get one of these 'ere trashy cheap ones when you do get it, my boy. Get one as'll last a lifetime. . . . I'm surprised you don't 'ire a bit more."

"Ann don't seem to fancy a moty car," said Kipps.

"Ah," said old Kipps, "I expect not," and glanced a comment at the door. "She ain't used to going out," he said. "More at 'ome indoors."

"Fact is," said Kipps hastily, "we're thinking of building a 'ouse."

"I wouldn't do that, my boy," began old Kipps; but his nephew was routing in the chiffonier drawer amidst the plans. He got them in time to check some further comment on Ann. "Um," said the old gentleman, a little impressed by the extraordinary odour and the unusual transparency of the tracing-paper Kipps put into his hands. "Thinking of building a 'ouse, are you?"

Kipps began with the most modest of the three projects.

Old Kipps read slowly through his silver-rimmed spectacles, "Plan of a 'ouse for Arthur Kipps, Esquire. Um."

He didn't warm to the project all at once, and Ann drifted into the room to find him still scrutinizing the architect's proposals a little doubtfully.

"We couldn't find a decent 'ouse anywhere," said Kipps, leaning against the table and assuming an off-hand note. "I didn't see why we shouldn't run up one for ourselves." Old Kipps could not help liking the tone of that.

"We thought we might see——" said Ann.

"It's a spekerlation, of course," said old Kipps, and held the plan at a distance of two feet or more from his glasses and frowned. "This isn't exactly the 'ouse I should expect you to 'ave thought of though," he said. "Practically it's a villa. It's the sort of 'ouse a bank clerk might 'ave. 'Tisn't what I should call a gentleman's 'ouse, Artie."

"It's plain, of course," said Kipps, standing beside

his Uncle and looking down at this plan, which certainly did seem a little less magnificent now than it had at the first encounter.

“ You mustn’t ’ave it too plain,” said old Kipps.

“ If it’s comfortable——” Ann hazarded.

Old Kipps glanced at her over his spectacles. “ You ain’t comfortable, my gel, in this world, not if you don’t live up to your position,” so putting compactly into contemporary English that fine old phrase *noblesse oblige*. “ A ’ouse of this sort is what a retired tradesman might ’ave, or some little whipper-snapper of a s’licitor. But *you*——”

“ Course that isn’t the o’ny plan,” said Kipps, and tried the middle one.

But it was the third one won over old Kipps. “ Now that’s a ’ouse, my boy,” he said at the sight of it.

Ann came and stood just behind her husband’s shoulder, while old Kipps expanded upon the desirability of the larger scheme. “ You ought to ’ave a billiard-room,” he said; “ I don’t see that, but all the rest’s about right! A lot of these ’ere officers ’ere ’ud be glad of a game of billiards. . . .

“ What’s all these dots?” said old Kipps.

“ S’rubbery,” said Kipps. “ Flow’ing s’rubs.”

“ There’s eleven bedrooms in that ’ouse,” said Ann. “ It’s a bit of a lot, ain’t it, Uncle?”

“ You’ll want ’em, my girl. As you get on you’ll be ’aving visitors. Friends of your ’usband’s, p’r’aps, from the School of Musketry—what you want ’im to get on with. You can’t never tell.”

“ If we ’ave a great s’rubbery,” Ann ventured, “ we shall ’ave to keep a gardener.”

“ If you don’t ’ave a s’rubbery,” said old Kipps, with a note of patient reasoning, “ ’ow are you to prevent every jackanapes that goes by starin’ into your drorin’-room winder—p’r’aps when you get some one a bit special to entertain?”

"We ain't *used* to a s'rubbery," said Ann mulishly; "we get on very well 'ere."

"It isn't what you're used to," said old Kipps, "it's what you ought to 'ave *now*." And with that Ann dropped out of the discussion.

"Study and lib'ry," old Kipps read. "That's right. I see a Tantalus the other day over Brookland, the very thing for a gentleman's study. I'll try and get over and bid for it. . . ."

By bus time old Kipps was quite enthusiastic about the house-building, and it seemed to be definitely settled that the largest plan was the one decided upon.

But Ann had said nothing further in the matter.

§ 7.

When Kipps returned from seeing his Uncle into the bus—there always seemed a certain doubt whether that portly figure would go into the little red "Tip-top" box—he found Ann still standing by the table, looking with an expression of comprehensive disapproval at the three plans.

"There don't see much the matter with Uncle," said Kipps, assuming the hearthrug, "spite of 'is 'earthburn. 'E 'opped up them steps like a bird."

Ann remained staring at the plans.

"You don't like them plans?" hazarded Kipps.

"No; I don't, Artie."

"We got to build somethin' now."

"But—— It's a gentleman's 'ouse, Artie!"

"It's—it's a decent size, o' course."

Kipps took a flirting look at the drawing and went to the window.

"Look at the cleanin'. Free servants'll be lost in that 'ouse, Artie."

"We must 'ave servants," said Kipps.

Ann looked despondently at her future residence.

"We got to keep up our position any'ow," said Kipps, turning towards her. "It stands to reason, Ann, we got a position. Very well! I can't 'ave you scrubbin' floors. You got to 'ave a servant, and you got to manage a 'ouse. You wouldn't 'ave me ashamed——"

Ann opened her lips and did not speak.

"What?" asked Kipps.

"Nothing," said Ann, "only I did want it to be a *little* house, Artie. I wanted it to be a 'andy little 'ouse, jest for us."

Kipps's face was suddenly flushed and obstinate. He took up the curiously smelling tracings again. "I'm not a-going to be looked down upon," he said. "It's not only Uncle I'm thinking of!"

Ann stared at him.

Kipps went on. "I won't 'ave that young Walshingham, f'r instance, sneering and sniffing at me. Making out as if we was all wrong. I see 'im yesterday. . . . Nor Coote neether. I'm as good—we're as good—whatever's 'appened."

Silence, and the rustle of plans.

He looked up and saw Ann's eyes bright with tears. For a moment the two stared at one another.

"We'll 'ave the big 'ouse," said Ann with a gulp. "I didn't think of that, Artie."

Her aspect was fierce and resolute, and she struggled with emotion. "We'll 'ave the big 'ouse," she repeated. "They shan't say I dragged you down wiv me—none of them shan't say that. I've thought—— I've always been afraid of that."

Kipps looked again at the plan, and suddenly the grand house had become very grand indeed. He blew.

"No, Artie. None of them shan't say that," and, with something blind in her motions, Ann tried to turn the plan round to her. . . .

After all, Kipps thought, there might be something to say for the milder project. . . . But he had gone so far that now he did not know how to say it.

And so the plans went out to the builders, and in a little while Kipps was committed to two thousand five hundred pounds' worth of building. But then, you know, he had an income of twelve hundred a year.

§ 8.

It is extraordinary what minor difficulties cluster about house-building.

"I say, Ann," remarked Kipps one day. "We shall 'ave to call this little 'ouse by a name. I was thinking of 'Ome Cottage. But I dunno whether 'Ome Cottage is quite the thing like. All these little fisherman's places are called Cottages."

"I like 'Cottage,'" said Ann.

"It's got eleven bedrooms, y' see," said Kipps. "I don't see 'ow you call it a cottage with more bedrooms than four. Prop'ly speaking, it's a Large Villa. Prop'ly it's almost a Big 'Ouse. Leastways a 'Ouse."

"Well," said Ann, "if you must call it Villa—Home Villa. . . . I wish it wasn't."

Kipps meditated.

"'Ow about Eureka Villa?" he said, raising his voice.

"What's Eureka?"

"It's a name," he said. "There used to be Eureka Dress Fasteners. There's lots of names, come to think of it, to be got out of a shop. There's Pyjama Villa. I remember that in the hosiery. No, come to think, that wouldn't do. But Maraposa—sort of oatmeal cloth, that was. . . . No! Eureka's better."

Ann meditated. "It seems silly like to 'ave a name that don't mean much."

“Perhaps it does,” said Kipps. “Though it’s what people ’ave to do.”

He became meditative. “I got it!” he cried.

“Not Oreeka!” said Ann.

“No! There used to be a ’ouse at Hastings opposite our school—quite a big ’ouse it was—St. Ann’s. Now *that*——”

“No,” said Mrs. Kipps with decision. “Thanking you kindly, but I don’t have no butcher-boys making game of me. . . .”

They consulted Carshot, who suggested, after some days of reflection, Waddycombe, as a graceful reminder of Kipps’s grandfather; old Kipps, who was for “Upton Manor House,” where he had once been second footman; Buggins, who favoured either a stern, simple number, “Number One”—if there were no other houses there, or something patriotic, as “Empire Villa;” and Pearce, who inclined to “Sandringham;” but in spite of all this help they were still undecided, when amidst violent perturbations of the soul, and after the most complex and difficult haggings, wranglings, fears, muddles, and goings to and fro, Kipps became the joyless owner of a freehold plot of three-eighths of an acre, and saw the turf being wheeled away from the site that should one day be his home.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

THE CALLERS.

§ I.

THE Kippes sat at their midday dinner-table amidst the vestiges of rhubarb pie, and discussed two post-cards the one o'clock post had brought. It was a rare bright moment of sunshine in a wet and windy day in the March that followed their marriage. Kipps was attired in a suit of brown, with a tie of fashionable green, while Ann wore one of those picturesque loose robes that are usually associated with sandals and advanced ideas. But there weren't any sandals on Ann or any advanced ideas, and the robe had come quite recently through the counsels of Mrs. Sid Pornick. "It's Art-like," said Kipps, but giving way. "It's more comfortable," said Ann. The room looked out by French windows upon a little patch of green and the Hythe parade. The parade was all shiny wet with rain, and the green-gray sea tumbled and tumbled between parade and sky.

The Kipps's furniture, except for certain chromolithographs of Kipps's incidental choice, that struck a quiet note amidst the wall-paper, had been tactfully forced by an expert salesman, and it was in a style of mediocre elegance. There was a sideboard of carved oak that had only one fault—it reminded Kipps at times of woodcarving, and its panel of bevelled glass

now reflected the back of his head. On its shelf were two books from Parsons' Library, each with a "place" marked by a slip of paper; neither of the Kippses could have told you the title of either book they read, much less the author's name. There was an ebonized overmantel set with phials and pots of brilliant colour, each duplicated by looking-glass, and bearing also a pair of Chinese jars made in Birmingham, a wedding-present from Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Pornick, and several sumptuous Japanese fans. And there was a Turkey carpet of great richness. In addition to these modern exploits of Messrs. Bunt and Bubble, there were two inactive tall clocks, whose extreme dilapidation appealed to the connoisseur; a terrestrial and a celestial globe, the latter deeply indented; a number of good old iron-moulded and dusty books; and a stuffed owl, wanting one (easily replaceable) glass eye, obtained by the exertions of Uncle Kipps. The table equipage was as much as possible like Mrs. Bindon Botting's, only more costly, and in addition there were green and crimson wine-glasses—though the Kippses never drank wine. . . .

Kipps turned to the more legible of his two postcards again.

"'Unavoidably prevented from seein' me to-day,' 'e says. I like 'is cheek. After I give 'im is start and everything."

He blew.

"'E certainly treats you a bit orf 'and," said Ann.

Kipps gave vent to his dislike of young Walshingham. "He's getting too big for 'is britches," he said. "I'm beginning to wish she 'ad brought an action for breach. Ever since 'e said she wouldn't, 'e's seemed to think I've got no right to spend my own money."

"'E's never liked your building the 'ouse," said Ann.

Kipps displayed wrath. "What the goodness 'as it got to do wiv 'im?"

"Overman, indeed!" he added; "Overmantel! . . .

'E trys that on with me—I'll tell 'im something 'e won't like."

He took up the second card. "Dashed if I can read a word of it. I can jest make out Chit'low at the end, and that's all."

He scrutinized it. "It's like some one in a fit writing. This here might be W-H-A-T—*what*. P-R-I-C-E—I got it! What price Harry now? It was a sort of saying of 'is. I expect 'e's either done something or not done something towards starting that play, Ann."

"I expect that's about it," said Ann.

Kipps grunted with effort. "I can't read the rest," he said at last, "nohow."

A thoroughly annoying post. He pitched the card on the table, stood up, and went to the window, where Ann, after a momentary reconnaissance at Chitterlow's hieroglyphics, came to join him.

"Wonder what I shall do this afternoon," said Kipps, with his hands deep in his pockets.

He produced and lit a cigarette.

"Go for a walk, I s'pose," said Ann.

"I *been* for a walk this morning.

"S'pose I must go for another," he added, after an interval.

They regarded the windy waste of sea for a space.

"Wonder why it is 'e won't see me," said Kipps, returning to the problem of young Walshingham. "It's all lies about 'is being too busy."

Ann offered no solution.

"Rain again!" said Kipps—as the lash of the little drops stung the window.

"Oo, bother!" said Kipps, "you got to do something. Look 'ere, Ann! I'll go orf for a reg'lar tramp through the rain, up by Saltwood, round by Newington, over the camp, and so round and back, and see 'ow they're getting on about the 'ouse. See? And look 'ere!—you get Gwendolen to go out a bit before I come

back. If it's still rainy, she can easy go round and see 'er sister. Then we'll 'ave a bit of tea, with teacake—all buttery—see? Toce it ourselves pr'aps. Eh?"

"I dessay I can find something to do in the 'ouse," said Ann, considering. "You'll take your mackintosh and leggings, I s'pose? You'll get wet without your mackintosh over those roads."

"Right-O," said Kipps; and went to ask Gwendolen for his brown leggings and his other pair of boots.

§ 2.

Things conspired to demoralize Kipps that afternoon.

When he got outside the house everything looked so wet under the drive of the south-wester that he abandoned the prospect of the clay lanes towards Newington altogether, and turned east to Folkestone along the Seabrook digue. His mackintosh flapped about him, the rain stung his cheek; for a time he felt a hardy man. And then as abruptly the rain ceased and the wind fell, and before he was through Sandgate High Street it was a bright spring day. And there was Kipps in his mackintosh and squeaky leggings, looking like a fool!

Inertia carried him another mile to the Leas, and there the whole world was pretending there had never been such a thing as rain—ever. There wasn't a cloud in the sky; except for an occasional puddle, the asphalt paths looked as dry as a bone. A smartly dressed man, in one of those overcoats that look like ordinary cloth, and are really most deceitfully and unfairly waterproof, passed him and glanced at the stiff folds of his mackintosh. "Demn!" said Kipps. His mackintosh swished against his leggings, his leggings piped and whistled over his boot-tops.

"Why do I never get anything right?" Kipps asked of a bright, implacable universe.

Nice old ladies passed him, refined people with tidy umbrellas, bright, beautiful, supercilious-looking children. Of course, the right thing for such a day as this was a light overcoat and an umbrella. A child might have known that. He had them at home, but how could one explain that? He decided to turn down by the Harvey monument and escape through Clifton Gardens towards the hills. And thereby he came upon Coote.

He already felt the most abject and propitiatory of social outcasts when he came upon Coote, and Coote finished him. He passed within a yard of Coote. Coote was coming along towards the Leas, and when Kipps saw him his legs hesitated about their office, and he seemed to himself to stagger about all over the footpath. At the sight of him Coote started visibly. Then a sort of *rigor vitæ* passed through his frame, his jaw protruded, and errant bubbles of air seemed to escape and run about beneath his loose skin. (Seemed, I say. I am perfectly well aware that there is really connective tissue in Coote, as in all of us, to prevent anything of the sort.) His eyes fixed themselves on the horizon and glazed. As he went by Kipps could hear his even, resolute breathing. He went by, and Kipps staggered on into a universe of dead cats and dust-heaps, rind and ashes—*cut!*

It was part of the inexorable decrees of Providence that almost immediately afterwards the residuum of Kipps had to pass a very, very long and observant-looking girls' school.

Kipps recovered consciousness again on the road between Shorncliffe station and Cheriton, though he cannot remember—indeed to this day he has never attempted to remember—how he got there. And he was back at certain thoughts suggested by his last night's novel-reading, that linked up directly with the pariah-like emotions of these last encounters. The novel lay at home upon the chiffonier; it was one about society and politics—there

is no need whatever to give the title or name the author—written with a heavy-handed thoroughness that overrode any possibility of resistance on the part of the Kipps mind. It had crushed all his poor edifice of ideals, his dreams of a sensible, unassuming existence, of snugness, of not caring what people said, and all the rest of it, to dust; it had reinstated, squarely and strongly again, the only proper conception of English social life. There was a character in the book who trifled with Art, who was addicted to reading French novels, who dressed in a loose, careless way, who was a sorrow to his dignified, silvery-haired, politico-religious mother, and met the admonitions of bishops with a front of brass. He treated a “nice girl,” to whom they had got him engaged, badly; he married beneath him—some low thing or other—and sank. . . .

Kipps could not escape the application of the case. He was enabled to see how this sort of thing looked to decent people; he was enabled to gauge the measure of the penalties due. His mind went from that to the frozen marble of Coote’s visage.

He deserved it! . . .

That day of remorse! Later it found him upon the site of his building operations and surveying the disorder of preparation in a mood near to despair, his mackintosh over his arm.

Hardly any one was at work that day—no doubt the builders were having him in some obscure manner—and the whole place seemed a dismal and depressing litter. The builder’s shed, black-lettered WILKINS, BUILDER, HYTHE, looked like a stranded thing amidst a cast-up disorder of wheelbarrows and wheeling planks, and earth, and sand, and bricks. The foundations of the walls were trenches full of damp concrete, drying in patches; the rooms—it was incredible they could ever be rooms—were shaped out as squares and oblongs of coarse wet grass and sorrel. They looked

absurdly small—dishonestly small. What could you expect? Of course the builders were having him, building too small, building all wrong, using bad materials! Old Kipps had told him a wrinkle or two. The builders were having him, young Walshingham was having him, everybody was having him! They were having him and laughing at him because they didn't respect him. They didn't respect him because he couldn't do things right. Who could respect him?

He was an outcast—he had no place in the society of mankind. He had had his chance in the world, and turned his back on it. He had “behaved badly”—that was the phrase. . . .

Here a great house was presently to arise—a house to be paid for, a house neither he nor Ann could manage—with eleven bedrooms, and four disrespectful servants having them all the time!

How had it all happened exactly?

This was the end of his great fortune! What a chance he had had! If he had really carried out his first intentions and stuck to things, how much better everything might have been! If he had got a tutor—that had been in his mind originally—a special sort of tutor, to show him everything right; a tutor for gentlemen of neglected education. If he had read more and attended better to what Coote had said. . . .

Coote, who had just cut him!

Eleven bedrooms! What had possessed him? No one would ever come to see them; no one would ever have anything to do with them. Even his Aunt cut him! His Uncle treated him with a half-contemptuous sufferance. He had not a friend worth counting in the world! Buggins, Carshot, Pearce—shop assistants! The Pornicks—a low socialist lot! He stood among his foundations like a lonely figure among ruins; he stood among the ruins of his future, and owned himself a foolish and mistaken man. He saw himself and Ann

living out their shameful lives in this great, crazy place—as it would be—with everybody laughing secretly at them, and the eleven bedrooms and nobody approaching them—nobody nice and right, that is—for ever. And Ann!

What was the matter with Ann? She'd given up going for walks lately, got touchy and tearful, been fitful with her food. Just when she didn't ought to. It was all a part of the judgment upon wrong-doing; it was all part of the social penalties that Juggernaut of a novel had brought home to his mind.

§ 3.

He let himself in with his latch-key. He went moodily into the dining-room and got out the plans to look at them. He had a vague hope that there would prove to be only ten bedrooms. But he found there were still eleven. He became aware of Ann standing over him. "Look 'ere, Artie!" said Ann.

He looked up, and found her holding a number of white oblongs.

His eyebrows rose.

"It's Callers," said Ann.

He put his plans aside slowly, and took and read the cards in silence, with a sort of solemnity. Callers! Then perhaps he wasn't to be left out of the world after all. Mrs. G. Porrett Smith; Miss Porrett Smith; Miss Mabel Porrett Smith; and two smaller cards of the Rev. G. Porrett Smith. "Lor'!" he said. "*Clergy!*"

"There was a lady," said Ann, "and two growed-up gels—all dressed up!"

"And 'im?"

"There wasn't no 'im."

"Not——?" He held out the little card.

"No. There was a lady and two young ladies."

“ But—these cards! Whad they go and leave these two little cards with the Rev. G. Smith on for? Not if 'e wasn't with 'em.”

“ 'E wasn't with 'em.”

“ Not a little chap—dodgin' about be'ind the others? And didn't come in?”

“ I didn't see no gentleman with them at all,” said Ann.

“ Rum!” said Kipps. A half-forgotten experience came back to him. “ I know,” he said, waving the reverend gentleman's card—“ 'e give 'em the slip; that's what he'd done. Gone off while they was rapping before you let 'em in. It's a fair call, any'ow.” He felt a momentary base satisfaction at his absence. “ What did they talk about, Ann?”

There was a pause. “ I didn't let 'em in,” said Ann.

He looked up suddenly, and perceived that something unusual was the matter with Ann. Her face was flushed, her eyes were red and hard.

“ Didn't let 'em in?”

“ No! They didn't come in at all.”

He was too astonished for words.

“ I answered the door,” said Ann. “ I'd been upstairs, 'namelling the floor. 'Ow was I to think about Callers, Artie? We ain't never 'ad Callers, all the time we been 'ere. I'd sent Gwendolen out for a bref of fresh air, and there I was upstairs, 'namelling that floor she done so bad, so's to get it done before she came back. I thought I'd 'namel that floor and then get tea, and 'ave it quiet with you, toce and all, before she came back. 'Ow was I to think about Callers?”

She paused. “ Well,” said Kipps, “ what then?”

“ They came and rapped. 'Ow was I to know? I thought it was a tradesman or something. Never took my apron off, never wiped the 'namel off my 'ands—nothing. There they was!”

She paused again. She was getting to the disagreeable part.

“Wad they say?” said Kipps.

“She says, ‘Is Mrs. Kipps at home?’ See? To me.”

“Yes.”

“And me all painty and no cap on and nothing, neither missis nor servant like. There, Artie, I could ’a sunk through the floor with shame, I really could. I could ’ardly get my voice. I couldn’t think of nothing to say but just ‘Not at ’Ome,’ and out of ’abit like I ’eld the tray. And they give me the cards and went, and ’ow I shall ever look that lady in the face again I don’t know. . . . And that’s all about it, Artie! They looked me up and down, they did, and then I shut the door on ’em.”

“Goo!” said Kipps.

Ann went and poked the fire needlessly with a passion-quivering hand.

“I wouldn’t ’ave ’ad that ’appen for five pounds,” said Kipps. “Clergyman and all!”

Ann dropped the poker into the fender with some *éclat*, and stood up and looked at her hot face in the glass. Kipps’s disappointment grew. “You did ought to ’ave known better than that, Ann! You reely did.”

He sat forward, cards in hand, with a deepening sense of social disaster. The plates were laid upon the table, toast sheltered under a cover at mid-fender, the teapot warmed beside it, and the kettle, just lifted from the hob, sang amidst the coals. Ann glanced at him for a moment, then stooped with the kettle-holder to wet the tea.

“Tcha!” said Kipps, with his mental state developing.

“I don’t see it’s any use getting in a state about it now,” said Ann.

“Don’t you! I do. See? ’Ere’s these people, good people, want to ’ssociate with us, and ’ere you go and slap ’em in the face!”

"I didn't slap 'em in the face."

"You do—practically. You slams the door in their face, and that's all we see of 'em ever! I wouldn't 'ave 'ad this 'appen not for a ten-pound note."

He rounded his regrets with a grunt. For a while there was silence, save for the little stir of Ann's few movements preparing tea.

"Tea, Artie," said Ann, handing him a cup.

Kipps took it.

"I put sugar *once*," said Ann.

"Oo, dash it! Oo cares?" said Kipps, taking an extraordinarily large additional lump with fury-quivering fingers, and putting his cup, with a slight excess of force, on the recess cupboard. "Oo cares?"

"I wouldn't 'ave 'ad that 'appen," he said, bidding steadily against accomplished things, "for twenty pounds."

He gloomed in silence through a long minute or so.

Then Ann said the fatal thing that exploded him.

"Artie!" she said.

"What?"

"There's Buttud Toce down there—by your foot!"

There was a pause; husband and wife regarded one another.

"Buttud Toce indeed!" he said. "You go and mess up them callers, and then you try and stuff me up with Buttud Toce! Buttud Toce indeed! 'Ere's our first chance of knowing any one that's at all fit to 'sociate with— Look 'ere, Ann! Tell you what it is—you got to return that call."

"Return that call!"

"Yes—you got to return that call. That's what you got to do! I know——" He waved his arm vaguely towards the miscellany of books in the recess. "It's in 'Manners and Rools of Good S'ity.' You got to find jest 'ow many cards to leave, and you got to go and leave 'em. See?"

Ann's face expressed terror. "But, Artie, 'ow *can* I?"

"'Ow *can* you? 'Ow *could* you? You got to do it, any'ow. They won't know you—not in your Bond Street 'At! If they do, they won't say nothing."

His voice assumed a note of entreaty. "You mus', Ann."

"I can't."

"You mus'."

"I can't, and I won't. Anything in reason I'll do, but face those people again I can't—after what 'as 'appened."

"You won't?"

"No!" . . .

"So there they go—orf! And we never see them again! And so it goes on—so it goes on! We don't know nobody, and we *shan't* know anybody! And you won't put yourself out not a little bit, or take the trouble to find out anything 'ow it ought to be done."

Terrible pause.

"I never ought to 'ave merried you, Artie, that's the troof."

"Oh, *don't* go into that!"

"I never ought to 'ave merried you, Artie. I'm not equal to the position. If you 'adn't said you'd drown yourself——" She choked.

"I don' see why you shouldn't *try*, Ann—— *I've* improved. Why don't you? 'Stead of which you go sending out the servant and 'namelling floors, and then when visitors come——"

"'Ow was *I* to know about y'r old visitors?" cried Ann in a wail, and suddenly got up and fled from amidst their ruined tea, the tea of which "toce, all buttery," was to be the crown and glory.

Kipps watched her with a momentary consternation. Then he hardened his heart. "Ought to 'ave known better," he said, "goin' on like that!" He remained for a space rubbing his knees and muttering. He

emitted scornfully, "I carn't, an' I won't." He saw her as the source of all his shames.

Presently, quite mechanically, he stooped down and lifted the flowery china cover. "Ter dash 'er Buttud Toce!" he shouted at the sight of it, and clapped the cover down again hard. . . .

When Gwendolen came back she perceived things were in a slightly unusual poise. Kipps sat by the fire in a rigid attitude, reading a casually selected volume of the "Encyclopædia Britannica;" and Ann was upstairs and inaccessible—to reappear at a later stage with reddened eyes. Before the fire, and still in a perfectly assimilable condition, was what was evidently an untouched supply of richly-buttered toast under a cracked cover.

"They've 'ad a bit of a tiff," said Gwendolen, attending to her duties in the kitchen with her outdoor hat still on and her mouth full. "They're rummuns—if ever! My eye!"

And she took another piece of Ann's generously buttered toast.

§ 4.

The Kippses spoke no more that day to one another.

The squabble about cards and buttered toast was as serious to them as the most rational of differences. It was all rational to them. Their sense of wrong burnt within them; their sense of what was owing to themselves, the duty of implacability, the obstinacy of pride. In the small hours Kipps lay awake at the nadir of unhappiness, and came near groaning. He saw life as an extraordinarily desolating muddle—his futile house, his social discredit, his bad behaviour to Helen, his low marriage with Ann. . . .

He became aware of something irregular in Ann's breathing. . . .

He listened. She was awake, and quietly and privately sobbing! . . .

He hardened his heart, resolutely he hardened his heart. And presently Ann lay still.

§ 5.

The stupid little tragedies of these clipped and limited lives!

As I think of them lying unhappily there in the darkness, my vision pierces the night. See what I can see! Above them, brooding over them, I tell you there is a monster, a lumpish monster, like some great clumsy griffin thing, like the Crystal Palace labyrinthodon, like Coote, like the leaden goddess of the "Dunciad," like some fat, proud flunkey, like pride, like indolence, like all that is darkening and heavy and obstructive in life. It is matter and darkness, it is the anti-soul, it is the ruling power of this land, Stupidity. My Kippses live in its shadow. Shalford and his apprenticeship system, the Hastings Academy, the ideas of Coote, the ideas of the old Kippses, all the ideas that have made Kipps what he is—all these are a part of its shadow. But for that monster they might not be groping among false ideas to hurt one another so sorely; but for that, the glowing promise of childhood and youth might have had a happier fruition: thought might have awakened in them to meet the thought of the world, the quickening sunshine of literature pierced to the substance of their souls; their lives might not have been divorced, as now they are divorced, from the apprehension of beauty that we favoured ones are given—the vision of the Grail that makes life fine for ever. I have laughed, and I laugh at these two people; I have sought to make you laugh. . . .

But I see through the darkness the souls of my Kippes as they are, as little pink strips of quivering living stuff, as things like the bodies of little, ill-nourished, ailing, ignorant children—children who feel pain, who are naughty and muddled and suffer, and do not understand why. And the claw of this Beast rests upon them!

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

TERMINATIONS.

§ I.

NEXT morning came a remarkable telegram from Folkestone. "Please come at once—urgent—Walshingham," said the telegram; and Kipps, after an agitated but still ample breakfast, departed. . . .

When he returned his face was very white, and his countenance disordered. He let himself in with his latch-key, and came into the dining-room, where Ann sat, affecting to work at a little thing she called a bib. She heard his hat fall in the hall before he entered, as though he had missed the peg. "I got something to tell you, Ann," he said, disregarding their overnight quarrel, and went to the hearthrug and took hold of the mantel and stared at Ann as though the sight of her was novel.

"Well?" said Ann, not looking up, and working a little faster.

"'E's gone!"

Ann looked up sharply, and her hands stopped. "*Who's gone?*" For the first time she perceived Kipps's pallor.

"Young Walshingham. I saw 'er, and she tole me."

"Gone! What d'you mean?"

"Cleared out! Gone off for good!"

"What for?"

"For 'is 'ealth," said Kipps, with sudden bitterness. "'E's been speckylating. He's speckylated our money, and 'e's speckylated their money, and now 'e's took 'is 'ook. That's all about it, Ann."

"You mean——?"

"I mean 'e's orf, and our twenty-four fousand's orf too! And 'ere we are! Smashed up! That's all about it, Ann." He panted.

Ann had no vocabulary for such an occasion. "O Lor'!" she said, and sat still.

Kipps came about and stuck his hands deeply in his trousers pockets. "Speckylated every penny—lorst it all—and gorn." . . .

Even his lips were white.

"You mean we ain't got nothin' left, Artie?"

"Not a penny! Not a bloomin' penny, Ann. No!"

A gust of passion whirled across the soul of Kipps. He flung out a knuckly fist. "If I 'ad 'im 'ere," he said, "I'd—I'd—I'd wring 'is neck for 'im. I'd—I'd—I'd——" His voice rose to a shout. He thought of Gwendolen in the kitchen, and fell to, "Ugh!"

"But, Artie," said Ann, trying to grasp it, "d'you mean to say he's took our money?"

"Speckylated it!" said Kipps, with an illustrative flourish of the arm that failed to illustrate. "Bort things dear and sold 'em cheap, and played the 'ankey-pankey jackass with everything we gct. That's what I mean 'e's done, Ann." He repeated this last sentence with the addition of violent adverbs.

"D'you mean to say our money's gone, Artie?"

"Ter-dash it, Yes, Ann!" swore Kipps, exploding in a shout. "Ain't I tellin' you?"

He was immediately sorry. "I didn't mean to 'oller at you, Ann," he said, "but I'm all shook up. I don't 'ardly know what I'm sayin'. Ev'ry penny." . . .

"But, Artie——"

Kipps grunted. He went to the window and stared for a moment at a sunlit sea. "Gord!" he swore.

"I mean," he said, coming back to Ann, and with an air of exasperation, "that he's 'bezzled and 'ooked it. That's what I mean, Ann."

Ann put down the bib. "But wot are we going to *do*, Artie?"

Kipps indicated ignorance, wrath, and despair with one comprehensive gesture of his hands. He caught an ornament from the mantel and replaced it. "I'm going to bang about," he said, "if I ain't precious careful."

"You saw 'er, you say?"

"Yes."

"What did she say 'xactly?" said Ann.

"Told me to see a s'licitor—tole me to get some one to 'elp me at once. She was there in black, like she used to be, and speaking cool and careful like. 'Elen! . . . She's precious 'ard, is 'Elen. She looked at me straight. 'It's my fault,' she said. 'I ought to 'ave warned you. . . . Only under the circumstances it was a little difficult.' Straight as anything. I didn't 'ardly say anything to 'er. I didn't seem to begin to take it in until she was showing me out. I 'adn't anything to say. Jest as well, perhaps. She talked—like a Call a'most. She said—what *was* it she said about her mother? 'My mother's overcome with grief,' she said, 'so naturally everything comes on me.'"

"And she told you to get some one to 'elp you?"

"Yes. I been to old Bean."

"O' Bean?"

"Yes. What I took my business away from!"

"What did he say?"

"He was a bit off'and at first, but then 'e come round. He couldn't tell me anything till 'e knew the facts. What I know of young Walshingham, there won't be much 'elp in the facts. No!"

He reflected for a space. "It's a Smash-up, Ann. More likely than not, Ann, 'e's left us over 'ead in debt. We got to get out of it just 'ow we can. . . ."

"We got to begin again," he went on. "'Ow, I don't know. All the way 'ome my 'ead's been going. We got to get a living some'ow or other. 'Aving time to ourselves, and a bit of money to spend, and no hurry and worry—it's all over for ever, Ann. We was fools, Ann. We didn't know our benefits. We been caught. Gord! . . . Gord!"

He was on the verge of "banging about" again.

They heard a jingle in the passage, the large, soft impact of a servant's indoor boots. As if she were a part, a mitigatory part of Fate, came Gwendolen to lay the midday meal. Kipps displayed self-control forthwith. Ann picked up the bib again and bent over it, and the Kippses bore themselves gloomily perhaps, but not despairfully, while their dependant was in the room. She spread the cloth and put out the cutlery with a slow inaccuracy; and Kipps, after a whisper to himself, went again to the window. Ann got up and put away her work methodically in the cheffonier.

"When I think," said Kipps, as soon as the door closed again behind Gwendolen—"when I think of the 'ole people, and 'aving to tell 'em of it all, I want to smesh my 'ead against the nearest wall. Smesh my silly brains out! And Buggins—Buggins, what I'd 'arf promised to start in a lill' outfitting shop in Rendezvous Street." . . .

Gwendolen returned and restored dignity.

The midday meal spread itself slowly before them. Gwendolen, after her custom, left the door open, and Kipps closed it carefully before sitting down.

He stood for a moment, regarding the meal doubtfully.

"I don't feel as if I could swaller a moufful," he said.

"You got to eat," said Ann. . . .

For a time they said little, and once swallowing was achieved, ate on with a sort of melancholy appetite. Each was now busy thinking.

"After all," said Kipps presently, "whatever 'appens, they can' turn us out or sell us up before nex' quarter day. I'm pretty sure about that."

"Sell us up!" said Ann.

"I dessay we're bankrup'," said Kipps, trying to say it easily, and helping himself with a trembling hand to unnecessary potatoes.

Then a long silence. Ann ceased to eat, and there were silent tears.

"More potatoes, Artie?" choked Ann.

"I couldn't," said Kipps. "No."

He pushed back his plate, which was indeed replete with potatoes, got up and walked about the room. Even the dinner-table looked distraught and unusual.

"What to do, I *don't* know," he said.

"O *Lord!*" he ejaculated, and picked up and slapped down a book.

Then his eye fell upon another postcard that had come from Chitterlow by the morning's post, and which now lay by him on the mantelshelf. He took it up, glanced at its imperfectly legible message, and put it down.

"Delayed!" he said scornfully. "Not prodooed in the smalls. Or is it smells 'e says? 'Ow can one understand that? Any'ow, 'e's 'umbugging again. Somefing about the Strand. No! . . . Well, 'e's 'ad all the money 'e'll ever get out of me! . . . I'm done."

He seemed to find a momentary relief in the dramatic effect of his announcement. He came near to a swagger of despair upon the hearthrug, and then suddenly came and sat down next to Ann, and rested his chin on the knuckles of his two clenched hands.

"I been a fool, Ann," he said, in a gloomy monotone.

"I been a brasted fool. But it's 'ard on us, all the same. It's 'ard."

"'Ow was you to know?" said Ann.

"I ought to 'ave known. I did in a sort of way know. And 'ere we are! I wouldn't care so much if it was myself, but it's you, Ann! 'Ere we are! Regular smashed up! And you——" He checked at an unspeakable aggravation of their disaster. "I knew 'e wasn't to be depended upon, and there I left it! And you got to pay. . . . What's to 'appen to us all, I don't know."

He thrust out his chin and glared at fate.

"'Ow do you know 'e's spckylated everything?" said Ann, after a silent survey of him.

"'E 'as," said Kipps irritably, holding firm to disaster.

"She say so?"

"She don't know, of course; but you depend upon it that's it. She told me she knew something was on, and when she found 'im gone and a note lef' for her, she knew it was up with 'im. 'E went by the night boat. She wrote that telegraf off to me straight away."

Ann surveyed his features with tender, perplexed eyes; she had never seen him so white and drawn before, and her hand rested an inch or so away from his arm. The actual loss was still, as it were, afar from her. The immediate thing was his enormous distress.

"'Ow do you know——?" she said, and stopped. It would irritate him too much.

Kipps's imagination was going headlong.

"Sold up!" he emitted presently, and Ann flinched.

"Going back to work, day after day. I can't stand it, Ann—I can't. And you——"

"It don't do to think of it," said Ann.

Presently he came upon a resolve. "I keep on thinking of it, and thinking of it, and what's to be done, and what's to be done. I shan't be any good 'ome s'arfernoon. It keeps on going round and round

in my 'ead, and round and round. I better go for a walk or something. I'd be no comfort to you, Ann. I should want to 'owl and 'ammer things if I 'ung about 'ome. My fingers 'r all atwitch. I shall keep on thinking 'ow I might 'ave stopped it, and callin' myself a fool." . . .

He looked at her between pleading and shame. It seemed like deserting her.

Ann regarded him with tear-dimmed eyes.

"You'd better do what's good for you, Artie," she said. . . . "I'll be best cleaning. It's no use sending off Gwendolen before her month, and the top room wants turning out." She added with a sort of grim humour, "May as well turn it out now while I got it."

"I better go for a walk," said Kipps. . . .

And presently our poor exploded Kipps was marching out to bear his sudden misery. Habit turned him up the road towards his growing house, and then suddenly he perceived his direction—"O Lor'!"—and turned aside and went up the steep way to the hill crest and the Sandling Road, and over the line by that tree-embowered Junction, and athwart the wide fields towards Postling—a little black marching figure—and so up the Downs and over the hills, whither he had never gone before. . . .

§ 2.

He came back long after dark, and Ann met him in the passage.

"Where you been, Artie?" she asked, with a strained note in her voice.

"I been walking and walking—trying to tire myself out. All the time I been thinking—what shall I do? Trying to fix something up, all out of nothing."

"I didn't know you meant to be out all this time."

Kipps was gripped by compunction. . . .

"I can't think what we ought to do," he said presently.

"You can't do anything much, Artie—not till you hear from Mr. Bean."

"No. I can't do anything much. That's jest it. And all this time I keep feelin' if I don't do something the top of my 'ead'll bust. . . . Been trying to make up advertisements 'arf the time I been out—'bout finding a place; good salesman and stockkeeper, good Manchester dresses, window-dressing. Lor'! Fancy that, all beginning again! . . . If you went to stay with Sid a bit—— If I sent every penny I got to you—— I dunno! I dunno!"

When they had gone to bed there was an elaborate attempt to get to sleep. . . . In one of their great waking pauses Kipps remarked in a muffled tone, "I didn't mean to frighten you, Ann, being out so late. I kep' on walking and walking, and some'ow it seemed to do me good. I went out to the 'ill-top ever so far beyond Stanford, and sat there ever so long, and it seemed to make me better. Jest looking over the marsh like, and seeing the sun set." . . .

"Very likely," said Ann, after a long interval, "it isn't so bad as you think it is, Artie."

"It's bad," said Kipps.

"Very likely, after all, it isn't quite so bad. If there's only a little——"

There came another long silence.

"Ann," said Kipps, in the quiet darkness.

"Yes," said Ann.

"Ann," said Kipps, and stopped as though he had hastily shut a door upon speech.

"I kep' thinking," he said, trying again—"I kep' thinking, after all, I been cross to you and a fool about things—about them cards, Ann—but"—his voice shook to pieces—"we 'ave been 'appy, Ann . . . some'ow . . . togever."

And with that he and then she fell into a passion of weeping.

They clung very tightly together—closer than they had been since ever the first brightness of their married days turned to the gray of common life again. . . .

All the disaster in the world could not prevent their going to sleep at last, with their poor little troubled heads close together on one pillow. There was nothing more to be done; there was nothing more to be thought. Time might go on with his mischiefs, but for a little while at least they still had one another.

§ 3.

Kipps returned from his second interview with Mr. Bean in a state of strange excitement. He let himself in with his latch-key and slammed the door. "Ann!" he shouted in an unusual note—"Ann!"

Ann replied distantly.

"Something to tell you," said Kipps; "something noo!"

Ann appeared apprehensive from the kitchen.

"Ann," he said, going before her into the little dining-room, for his news was too dignified for the passage—"very likely, Ann, o' Bean says, we shall 'ave——" He decided to prolong the suspense. "Guess!"

"I can't, Artie."

"Think of a lot of money!"

"A 'undred pounds p'r'aps?"

He spoke with immense deliberation. "*Over a fousand pounds!*"

Ann stared and said nothing, only went a shade whiter.

"Over," he said. "A'most certainly over."

He shut the dining-room door and came forward

hastily, for Ann, it was clear, meant to take this mitigation of their disaster with a complete abandonment of her self-control. She came near flopping; she fell into his arms.

"Artie," she got to at last, and began to weep, clinging tightly to him.

"Pretty near certain," said Kipps, holding her. "A fousand pounds!"

"I said, Artie," she wailed on his shoulder with the note of accumulated wrongs, "very likely it wasn't so bad." . . .

"There's things," he said, when presently he came to particulars, "'e couldn't touch. The noo place! It's freehold and paid for, and with the bit of building on it there's five or six 'undred pounds p'r'aps—say worf free 'undred for safety. We can't be sold up to finish it, like we thought. O' Bean says we can very likely sell it and get money. 'E says you often get a chance to sell a 'ouse lessen 'arf done, specially free'old. *Very* likely 'e says. Then there's Hughenden. Hughenden 'asn't been mortgaged not for more than 'arf its value. There's a 'undred or so to be got on that, and the furniture, and the rent for the summer still coming in. 'E says there's very likely other things. A fousand pounds; that's what 'e said. 'E said it might even be more." . . .

They were sitting now at the table.

"It alters everything," said Ann.

"I been thinking that, Ann, all the way 'ome. I came in the motor car. First ride I've had since the smash. We needn't send off Gwendolen; leastways, not till *after*. You know. We needn't turn out of 'ere—not for a long time. What we been doing for the o' people we can go on doing a'most as much. And your mother! . . . I wanted to 'oller, coming along. I pretty near run coming down the road by the Hotel."

“ Oh, I *am* glad we can stop 'ere and be comfortable a bit,” said Ann. “ I *am* glad for that.”

“ I pretty near told the driver on the motor—only 'e was the sort won't talk. . . . You see, Ann, we'll be able to start a shop, we'll be able to get *into* something like. All about our 'aving to go back to places and that—all that doesn't matter any more.”

For a while they abandoned themselves to ejaculating transports. Then they fell talking to shape an idea to themselves of the new prospect that opened before them.

“ We must start a sort of shop,” said Kipps, whose imagination had been working. “ It'll 'ave to be a shop.”

“ Drapery ? ” said Ann.

“ You want such a lot of capital for the drapery ; mor'n a thousand pounds you want by a long way—to start it anything like proper.”

“ Well, outfitting. Like Buggins was going to do.”

Kipps glanced at that for a moment, because the idea had not occurred to him. Then he came back to his prepossession.

“ Well, I thought of something else, Ann,” he said. “ You see, I've always thought a little bookshop—It isn't like the drapery—'aving to be learnt. I thought, even before this smash up, 'ow I'd like to 'ave something to do, instead of always 'aving 'olidays always like we 'ave been 'aving.”

She reflected.

“ You don't know *much* about books, do you, Artie ? ”

“ You don't want to.” He illustrated. “ I noticed when we used to go to that lib'ry at Folkestone, ladies weren't anything like what they was in a draper's: if you 'aven't got *just* what they want, its ' Oh no ! ' and out they go. But in a bookshop it's different. One book's very like another. After all, what is it ? Something to read and done with. It's not a thing that matters like

print dresses or serviettes—where you either like 'em or don't, and people judge you by. They take what you give 'em in books and lib'ries, and glad to be told *what* to. See 'ow we was—up at that lib'ry." . . .

He paused. "You see, Ann—— Well, I read 'n 'dvertisement the other day—— I been asking Mr. Bean. It said—five 'undred pounds."

"What did?"

"Branches," said Kipps.

Ann failed to understand. "It's a sort of thing that gets up bookshops all over the country," said Kipps. "I didn't teil you, but I arst about it a bit. On'y I dropped it again—before this Smash, I mean. I'd thought I'd like to keep a shop for a lark, on'y then I thought it silly. Besides, it 'ud 'ave been beneath me."

He blushed vividly. "It was a sort of projek of mine, Ann.

"On'y it wouldn't 'ave done," he added.

It was a tortuous journey when the Kippses set out to explain anything to each other. But through a maze of fragmentary elucidations and questions their minds did presently begin to approximate to a picture of a compact, bright little shop, as a framework for themselves.

"I thought of it one day when I was in Folkestone. I thought of it one day when I was looking in at a window. I see a chap dressin' a window, and he was whistlin', reg'lar light-hearted. . . . I thought—I'd like to keep a bookshop any'ow, jest for something to do. And when people weren't about, then you could sit and read the books. See? It wouldn't be 'arf bad." . . .

They mused, each with elbows on table and knuckles to lips, looking with speculative eyes at each other.

"Very likely we'll be 'appier than we should 'ave been with more money," said Kipps presently.

"We wasn't 'ardly suited——" reflected Ann, and left her sentence incomplete.

“Fish out of water like,” said Kipps. . . .

“You won’t ’ave to return that call now,” said Kipps, opening a new branch of the question. “That’s one good thing.”

“Lor’!” said Ann, “no more I shan’t!”

“I don’t s’pose they’d want you to even if you did—with things as they are.”

A certain added brightness came into Ann’s face, “Nobody won’t be able to come leaving cards on us, Artie, now, any more. We are out of *that*!”

“There isn’t no necessity for us to be Stuck Up,” said Kipps, “any more for ever! ’Ere we are, Ann, common people, with jest no position at all, as you might say, to keep up. No se’v’nts not if you don’t like. No dressin’ better than other people. If it wasn’t we been robbed—dashed if I’d care a rap about losing that money. I b’lieve”—his face shone with the rare pleasure of paradox—“I reely b’lieve, Ann, it’ll prove a savin’ in the end.”

§ 4.

The remarkable advertisement which had fired Kipps’s imagination with this dream of a bookshop opened out in the most alluring way. It was one little facet in a comprehensive scheme of transatlantic origin, which was to make our old-world methods of bookselling “sit up,” and it displayed an imaginative briskness, a lucidity, and promise that aroused the profoundest scepticism in the mind of Mr. Bean. To Kipps’s renewed investigations it presented itself in an expository illustrated pamphlet (far too well printed, Mr. Bean thought, for a reputable undertaking) of the most convincing sort. Mr. Bean would not let him sink his capital in shares in its projected company that was to make all things new in the world of books, but he could not

prevent Kipps becoming one of their associated booksellers. And so, when presently it became apparent that an epoch was not to be made, and the "Associated Booksellers' Trading Union (Limited)" receded and dissolved and liquidated (a few drops) and vanished and went away to talk about something else, Kipps remained floating undamaged in this interestingly uncertain universe as an independent bookseller.

Except that it failed, the Associated Booksellers' Trading Union had all the stigmata of success. Its fault, perhaps, was that it had them all instead of only one or two. It was to buy wholesale for all its members and associates and exchange stock, having a common books-in-stock list and a common lending library, and it was to provide a uniform registered shop-front to signify all these things to the intelligent passer-by. Except that it was controlled by buoyant young Overmen, with a touch of genius in their arithmetic, it was, I say, a most plausible and hopeful project. Kipps went several times to London, and an agent came to Hythe, Mr. Bean made some timely interventions, and then behind a veil of planks and an announcement in the High Street, the uniform registered shop-front came rapidly into being. "Associated Booksellers' Trading Union," said this shop-front, in a refined artistic lettering that bookbuyers were going to value, as wise men over forty value the proper label for Berncasteler Doctor, and then, "Arthur Kipps."

Next to starting a haberdasher's shop, I doubt if Kipps could have been more truly happy than during those weeks of preparation.

There is, of course, nothing on earth, and I doubt at times if there is a joy in heaven, like starting a small haberdasher's shop. Imagine, for example, having a drawerful of tapes (one whole piece most exquisitely blocked of every possible width of tape), or again, an army of neat, large packages, each displaying one sample

of hooks and eyes. Think of your cottons, your drawer of coloured silks, the little, less, least of the compartments and thin packets of your needle-drawer! Poor princes and wretched gentlefolk, mysteriously above retail trade, may taste only the faint unsatisfactory shadow of these delights with trays of stamps or butterflies. I write, of course, for those to whom these things appeal; there are clods alive who see nothing, or next to nothing, in spools of mercerized cotton and endless bands of paper-set pins. I write for the wise, and as I write I wonder that Kipps resisted haberdashery. He did. Yet even starting a bookshop is at least twenty times as interesting as building your own house to your own design in an unlimited space and time, or any possible thing people with indisputable social position and sound securities can possibly find to do. Upon that I rest.

You figure Kipps "going to have a look to see how the little shop is getting on," the shop that is not to be a loss and a spending of money, but a gain. He does not walk too fast towards it; as he comes into view of it his paces slacken and his head goes to one side. He crosses to the pavement opposite in order to inspect the fascia better, already his name is adumbrated in faint white lines; stops in the middle of the road and scrutinizes imaginary details, for the benefit of his future next-door neighbour, the curiosity-shop man, and so at last, in. . . . A smell of paint and of the shavings of imperfectly seasoned pinewood! The shop is already glazed, and a carpenter is busy over the fittings for adjustable shelves in the side windows. A painter is busy on the fixtures round about (shelving above and drawers below), which are to accommodate most of the stock, and the counter—the counter and desk are done. Kipps goes inside the desk, the desk which is to be the strategic centre of the shop, brushes away some sawdust, and draws out the marvellous till; here gold is to be, here silver, here copper—notes locked up in a cash-box

in the well below. Then he leans his elbows on the desk, rests his chin on his fist and fills the shelves with imaginary stock; books beyond reading. Every day a man who cares to wash his hands and read uncut pages artfully may have his cake and eat it, among that stock. Under the counter to the right paper and string are to lurk, ready to leap up and embrace goods sold; on the table to the left, art publications—whatever they may prove to be. He maps it out, serves an imaginary customer, receives a dream seven-and-sixpence, packs, bows out. He wonders how it was he ever came to fancy a shop a disagreeable place.

“It’s different,” he says at last, after musing on that difficulty, “being your own.”

It is different. . . .

Or, again, you figure Kipps with something of the air of a young sacristan, handling his brightly virginal account books, and looking and looking again, and then still looking, at an unparalleled specimen of copperplate engraving, ruled money below, and above bearing the words, “In Account with ARTHUR KIPPS (loud flourishes), The Booksellers’ Trading Union” (temperate decoration). You figure Ann sitting and stitching at one point of the circumference of the light of the lamp, stitching queer little garments for some unknown stranger, and over against her sits Kipps. Before him is one of those engraved memorandum forms, a moist pad, wet with some thick and greasy, greenish purple ink, that is also spreading quietly but steadily over his fingers, a cross-nibbed pen for first-aid surgical assistance to the patient in his hand, a dating rubber stamp. At intervals he brings down this latter with great care and emphasis upon the paper, and when he lifts it there appears a beautiful oval design, of which “Paid, Arthur Kipps, The Associated Booksellers’ Trading Union,” and a date, are the essential ingredients, stamped in purple ink.

Anon he turns his attention to a box of small, round yellow labels, declaring "This book was bought from the Associated Booksellers' Trading Union." He licks one with deliberate care, sticks it on the paper before him, and defaces it with great solemnity. "I can do it, Ann," he says, looking up brightly. For the Associated Booksellers' Trading Union, among other brilliant notions and inspirations, devised an ingenious system of taking back its books again in part payment for new ones within a specified period. When it failed all sorts of people were left with these unredeemed pledges in hand.

§ 5.

Amidst all this bustle and interest, all this going to and fro before they "moved in" to the High Street, came the great crisis that hung over the Kippses, and one morning in the small hours Ann's child was born. . . .

Kipps was coming to manhood swiftly now. The once rabbit-like soul that had been so amazed by the discovery of "chubes" in the human interior and so shocked by the sight of a woman's shoulder-blades, that had found shame and anguish in a mislaid Gibus and terror in an Anagram Tea, was at last facing the greater realities. He came suddenly upon the master thing in life—birth. He passed through hours of listening, hours of impotent fear in the night and in the dawn, and then there was put into his arms something most wonderful, a weak and wailing creature, incredibly, heart-stirringly soft and pitiful, with minute, appealing hands that it wrung his heart to see. He held it in his arms and touched its tender cheek as if he feared his lips might injure it. And this marvel was his Son!

And there was Ann, with a greater strangeness and a greater familiarity in her quality than he had ever

found before. There were little beads of perspiration on her temples and her lips, and her face was flushed, not pale, as he had feared to see it. She had the look of one who emerges from some strenuous and invigorating act. He bent down and kissed her, and he had no words to say. She wasn't to speak much yet, but she stroked his arm with her hand, and had to tell him one thing.

"He's over nine pounds, Artie," she whispered. "Bessie's—— Bessie's wasn't no more than eight."

To have given Kipps a pound of triumph over Sid seemed to her almost to justify *Nunc Dimittis*. She watched his face for a moment, then closed her eyes in a kind of blissful exhaustion as the nurse, with something motherly in her manner, pushed Kipps out of the room.

§ 6.

Kipps was far too much preoccupied with his own life to worry about the further exploits of Chitterlow. The man had got his two thousand; on the whole Kipps was glad he had had it rather than young Walshingham, and there was an end to the matter. As for the complicated transactions he achieved and proclaimed by mainly illegible and always incomprehensible post-cards, they were like passing voices heard in the street as one goes about one's urgent concerns. Kipps put them aside, and they got in between the pages of the stock and were lost for ever, and sold in with the goods to customers, who puzzled over them mightily.

Then one morning as our bookseller was dusting round before breakfast, Chitterlow returned, appeared suddenly in the shop doorway.

It was the most unexpected thing in the world. The man was in evening dress, evening dress in that singu-

larly crumpled state it assumes after the hour of dawn, and above his dishevelled red hair a smallish Gibus hat tilted remarkably forward. He opened the door and stood tall and spread, with one vast white glove flung out, as if to display how burst a glove might be, his eyes bright, such wrinkling of brow and mouth as only an experienced actor can produce, and a singular radiance of emotion upon his whole being—an altogether astonishing spectacle.

The bell jangled for a bit, and then gave it up and was silent. For a long, long second everything was quietly attentive. Kipps was amazed to his uttermost; had he had ten times the capacity, he would still have been fully amazed. "It's Chit'low!" he said at last, standing duster in hand.

But he doubted whether it was not a dream.

"Tzit!" gasped that most extraordinary person, still in an incredibly expanded attitude, and then with a slight forward jerk of the starry split glove, "Bif!"

He could say no more. The tremendous speech he had had ready vanished from his mind. Kipps stared at his facial changes, vaguely conscious of the truth of the teachings of Nisbet and Lombroso concerning men of genius.

Then suddenly Chitterlow's features were convulsed, the histrionic fell from him like a garment, and he was weeping. He said something indistinct about "Old Kipps! Good old Kipps! Oh, old Kipps!" and somehow he managed to mix a chuckle and a sob in the most remarkable way. He emerged from somewhere near the middle of his original attitude, a merely life-size creature. "My play, boohoo!" he sobbed, clutching at his friend's arm. "My play, Kipps! (sob). You know?"

"Well?" cried Kipps, with his heart sinking in sympathy. "It ain't——?"

"No," howled Chitterlow. "No. It's a Success!"

My dear chap! my dear boy! Oh! It's a—Bu—boohoo!—a Big Success!” He turned away and wiped streaming tears with the back of his hand. He walked a pace or so and turned. He sat down on one of the specially designed artistic chairs of the Associated Booksellers' Trading Union and produced an exiguous lady's handkerchief, extraordinarily belaced. He choked. “*My play,*” and covered his face here and there.

He made an unsuccessful effort to control himself, and shrank for a space to the dimensions of a small and pathetic creature. His great nose suddenly came through a careless place in the handkerchief.

“I'm knocked,” he said, in a muffled voice, and so remained for a space—wonderful—veiled.

He made a gallant effort to wipe his tears away. “I had to tell you,” he said gulping.

“Be all right in a minute,” he added, “Calm!” and sat still. . . .

Kipps stared in commiseration of such success. Then he heard footsteps, and went quickly to the house doorway. “Jest a minute,” he said. “Don't go in the shop, Ann, for a minute. It's Chitterlow. He's a bit essited. But he'll be better in a minute. It's knocked him over a bit. You see”—his voice sank to a hushed note as one who announces death—“'e's made a success with his play.”

He pushed her back, lest she should see the scandal of another male's tears. . . .

Soon Chitterlow felt better, but for a little while his manner was even alarmingly subdued. “I *had* to come and tell you,” he said. “I *had* to astonish some one. Muriel—she'll be first-rate, of course. But she's over at Dymchurch.” He blew his nose with enormous noise, and emerged instantly, a merely garrulous optimist.

“I expect she'll be precious glad.”

“She doesn't know yet, my dear boy. She's at Dymchurch—with a friend. She's seen some of my first

nights before. . . . Better out of it. . . . I'm going to her now. I've been up all night—talking to the Boys and all that. I'm a bit off it just for a bit. But—it Knocked 'em. It Knocked everybody."

He stared at the floor and went on in a monotone. "They laughed a bit at the beginning—but nothing like a settled laugh—not until the second act—you know—the chap with the beetle down his neck. Little Chisholme did that bit to rights. Then they began—to rights." His voice warmed and increased. "Laughing! It made *me* laugh! We jumped 'em into the third act before they had time to cool. Everybody was on it. I never saw a first night go so fast. Laugh, laugh, laugh, LAUGH, LAUGH, LAUGH" (he howled the last repetition with stupendous violence). "Everything they laughed at. They laughed at things that we hadn't meant to be funny—not for one moment. Bif! Bizz! Curtain. A Fair Knock Out! . . . I went on, but I didn't say a word. Chisholme did the patter. Shouting! It was like walking under Niagara—going across that stage. It was like never having seen an audience before. . . .

"Then afterwards—the Boys!"

His emotion held him for a space. "Dear old Boys!" he murmured.

His word multiplied, his importance increased. In a little while he was restored to something of his old self. He was enormously excited. He seemed unable to sit down anywhere. He came into the breakfast-room so soon as Kipps was sure of him, shook hands with Mrs. Kipps parenthetically, sat down and immediately got up again. He went to the bassinet in the corner and looked absent-mindedly at Kipps junior, and said he was glad if only for the youngster's sake. He immediately resumed the thread of his discourse. . . . He drank a cup of coffee noisily and walked up and down the room talking, while they attempted breakfast amidst

the gale of his excitement. The infant slept marvelously through it all.

“ You won’t mind my not sitting down, Mrs. Kipps. I couldn’t sit down for any one, or I’d do it for you. It’s you I’m thinking of more than any one, you and Muriel, and all Old Pals and Good Friends. It means wealth, it means money—hundreds and thousands. . . . If you’d heard ’em, *you’d know.*”

He was silent through a portentous moment, while topics battled for him, and finally he burst and talked of them all together. It was like the rush of water when a dam bursts and washes out a fair-sized provincial town: all sorts of things floated along on the swirl. For example, he was discussing his future behaviour. “ I’m glad it’s come now—not before. I’ve had my lesson. I shall be very discreet now, trust me. We’ve learnt the value of money.” He discussed the possibility of a country house, of taking a Martello tower as a swimming-box (as one might say a shooting-box), of living in Venice because of its artistic associations and scenic possibilities, of a flat in Westminster or a house in the West End. He also raised the question of giving up smoking and drinking, and what classes of drink were especially noxious to a man of his constitution. But discourses on all this did not prevent a parenthetical computation of the probable profits on the supposition of a thousand nights here and in America, nor did it ignore the share Kipps was to have, nor the gladness with which Chitterlow would pay that share, nor the surprise and regret with which he had learnt, through an indirect source which awakened many associations, of the turpitude of young Walshingham, nor the distaste Chitterlow had always felt for young Walshingham and men of his type. An excursus upon Napoleon had got into the torrent somehow, and kept bobbing up and down. The whole thing was thrown into the form of a single complex sentence, with parenthetical and sub-

ordinate clauses fitting one into the other like Chinese boxes, and from first to last it never even had an air of approaching anything in the remotest degree partaking of the nature of a full stop.

Into this deluge came the *Daily News*, like the gleam of light in Watts's picture, the waters were assuaged while its sheet was opened, and it had a column, a whole column, of praise. Chitterlow held the paper, and Kipps read over his left hand, and Ann under his right. It made the affair more real to Kipps; it seemed even to confirm Chitterlow against lurking doubts he had been concealing. But it took him away. He departed in a whirl, to secure a copy of every morning paper, every blessed rag there is, and take them all to Dymchurch and Muriel forthwith. It had been the send-off the Boys had given him that had prevented his doing as much at Charing Cross—let alone that he only caught it by the skin of his teeth. . . . Besides which, the bookstall wasn't open. His white face, lit by a vast excitement, bid them a tremendous farewell, and he departed through the sunlight, with his buoyant walk, buoyant almost to the tottering pitch. His hair, as one got it sunlit in the street, seemed to have grown in the night.

They saw him stop a newsboy.

"Every blessed rag" floated to them on the notes of that gorgeous voice.

The newsboy too had happened on luck. Something like a faint cheer from the newsboy came down the air to terminate that transaction.

Chitterlow went on his way swinging a great budget of papers—a figure of merited success. The newsboy recovered from his emotion with a jerk, examined something in his hand again, transferred it to his pocket, watched Chitterlow for a space, and then in a sort of hushed silence resumed his daily routine. . . .

Ann and Kipps regarded that receding happiness in silence, until it vanished round the bend of the road.

"I *am* glad," said Ann at last, speaking with a little sigh.

"So'm I," said Kipps, with emphasis. "For if ever a feller 'as worked and waited, it's 'im." . . .

They went back through the shop rather thoughtfully, and, after a peep at the sleeping baby, resumed their interrupted breakfast. "If ever a feller 'as worked and waited, it's 'im," said Kipps, cutting bread.

"Very likely it's true," said Ann, a little wistfully.

"What's true?"

"About all that money coming."

Kipps meditated. "I don't see why it shouldn't be," he decided, and handed Ann a piece of bread on the tip of his knife.

"But we'll keep on the shop," he said, after an interval for further reflection, "all the same. . . . I 'aven't much trust in money after the things we've seen."

§ 7.

That was two years ago, and, as the whole world knows, the "Pestered Butterfly" is running still. It *was* true. It has made the fortune of a once declining little theatre in the Strand; night after night the great beetle scene draws happy tears from a house packed to repletion, and Kipps—for all that Chitterlow is not what one might call a business man—is almost as rich as he was in the beginning. People in Australia, people in Lancashire, Scotland, Ireland, in New Orleans, in Jamaica, in New York and Montreal, have crowded through doorways to Kipps's enrichment, lured by the hitherto unsuspected humours of the entomological drama. Wealth rises like an exhalation all over our little planet, and condenses, or at least some of it does, in the pockets of Kipps.

"It's rum," said Kipps.

He sat in the little kitchen out behind the bookshop and philosophized and smiled while Ann gave Arthur Waddy Kipps his evening tub before the fire. Kipps was always present at this ceremony, unless customers prevented; there was something in the mixture of the odours of tobacco, soap, and domesticity that charmed him unspeakably.

"Chuckerdee, o' man," he said affably, wagging his pipe at his son, and thought incidentally, after the manner of all parents, that very few children could have so straight and clean a body.

"Dadda's got a cheque," said Arthur Waddy Kipps, emerging for a moment from the towel.

"'E gets 'old of everything," said Ann. "You can't say a word——"

"Dadda got a cheque," this marvellous child repeated.

"Yes, o' man, I got a cheque. And it's got to go into a bank for you, against when you got to go to school. See? So's you'll grow up knowing your way about a bit."

"Dadda's got a cheque," said the wonder son, and then gave his mind to making mighty splashes with his foot. Every time he splashed laughter overcame him, and he had to be held up for fear he should tumble out of the tub in his merriment. Finally he was towelled to his toe-tips, wrapped up in warm flannel, and kissed and carried off to bed by Ann's cousin and lady help, Emma. And then, after Ann had carried away the bath into the scullery, she returned to find her husband with his pipe extinct and the cheque still in his hand.

"Two fousand pounds," he said. "It's dashed rum. Wot 'ave I done to get two fousand pounds, Ann?"

"What 'aven't you—not to?" said Ann.

He reflected upon this view of the case.

"I shan't never give up this shop," he said at last.

"We're very 'appy 'ere," said Ann.

"Not if I 'ad *fifty* fousand pounds."

"No fear," said Ann.

"You got a shop," said Kipps, "and you come along in a year's time and there it is. But money—look 'ow it comes and goes! There's no sense in money. You may kill yourself trying to get it, and then it comes when you aren't looking. There's my 'riginal money! Where is it now? Gone! And it's took young Walshingham with it, and 'e's gone too. It's like playing skittles. 'Long comes the ball, right and left you fly, and there it is rolling away and not changed a bit. No sense in it. 'E's gone, and she's gone—gone off with that chap Revel, that sat with me at dinner. Merried man! And Chit'low rich! Lor'!—what a fine place that Gerrik Club is, to be sure, where I 'ad lunch wiv' 'im! Better'n *any* 'otel. Footmen in powder they got—not waiters, Ann—footmen! 'E's rich and me rich—in a sort of way. . . . Don't seem much sense in it, Ann—'owever you look at it." He shook his head.

"I know one thing," said Kipps.

"What?"

"I'm going to put it in jest as many different banks as I can. See? Fifty 'ere, fifty there. 'Posit. I'm not going to 'nvest it—no fear."

"It's only frowing money away," said Ann.

"I'm 'arf a mind to bury some of it under the shop. Only I expect one 'ud always be coming down at nights to make sure it was there. . . . I don't seem to trust any one—not with money." He put the cheque on the table corner and smiled and tapped his pipe on the grate, with his eyes on that wonderful document. "S'pose old Bean started orf," he reflected. . . . "One thing—'e *is* a bit lame."

"'E wouldn't," said Ann; "not 'im."

"I was only joking like." He stood up, put his pipe among the candlesticks on the mantel, took up the cheque and began folding it carefully to put it back in his pocket-book.

A little bell jangled.

"Shop!" said Kipps. "That's right. Keep a shop, and the shop'll keep you. That's 'ow I look at it, Ann."

He drove his pocket-book securely into his breast-pocket before he opened the living-room door. . . .

But whether indeed it is the bookshop that keeps Kipps, or whether it is Kipps who keeps the bookshop, is just one of those commercial mysteries people of my unarithmetical temperament are never able to solve. They do very well, the dears, anyhow, thank Heaven!

The bookshop of Kipps is on the left-hand side of the Hythe High Street coming from Folkestone, between the yard of the livery-stable and the shop window full of old silver and such-like things—it is quite easy to find—and there you may see him for yourself and speak to him and buy this book of him if you like. He has it in stock, I know. Very delicately I've seen to that. His name is not Kipps, of course, you must understand that; but everything else is exactly as I have told you. You can talk to him about books, about politics, about going to Boulogne, about life, and the ups and downs of life. Perhaps he will quote you Buggins—from whom, by-the-bye, one can now buy everything a gentleman's wardrobe should contain at the little shop in Rendezvous Street, Folkestone. If you are fortunate to find Kipps in a good mood, he may even let you know how he inherited a fortune "once." "Run froo it," he'll say with a not unhappy smile. "Got another afterwards—specky-lating in plays. Needn't keep this shop if I didn't like. But it's something to do." . . .

Or he may be even more intimate. "I seen some things," he said to me once. "Raver! Life! Why, once I—I *'loped!* I did—reely!"

(Of course you will not tell Kipps that he *is* "Kipps," or that I have put him in this book. He hasn't the remotest suspicion of that. And, you know, you never can tell how people are going to take that sort of thing.

I am an old and trusted customer now, and for many amiable reasons I should prefer that things remained exactly on their present footing.)

§ 8.

One early-closing evening in July they left the baby to the servant cousin, and Kipps took Ann for a row on the Hythe canal. The sun set in a mighty blaze, and left a world warm and very still. The twilight came. And there was the water, shining bright, and the sky a deepening blue, and the great trees that dipped their boughs towards the water, exactly as it had been when he paddled home with Helen, when her eyes had seemed to him like dusky stars. He had ceased from rowing, and rested on his oars, and suddenly he was touched by the wonder of life: the strangeness that is a presence stood again by his side.

Out of the darkneses beneath the shallow weedy stream of his being rose a question, a question that looked up dimly and never reached the surface. It was the question of the wonder of the beauty, the purposeless, inconsecutive beauty, that falls so strangely among the happenings and memories of life. It never reached the surface of his mind, it never took to itself substance or form; it looked up merely as the phantom of a face might look, out of deep waters, and sank again into nothingness.

"Artie," said Ann.

He woke up and pulled a stroke. "What?" he said.

"Penny for your thoughts, Artie."

He considered.

"I reely don't think I was thinking of anything," he said at last with a smile. "No."

He still rested on his oars.

"I expect," he said, "I was thinking jest what a

Rum Go everything is. I expect it was something like that."

"Queer old Artie!"

"Ain't I? I don't suppose there ever was a chap quite like me before."

He reflected for just another minute.

"Oo!—I dunno," he said at last, and roused himself to pull.

THE END.

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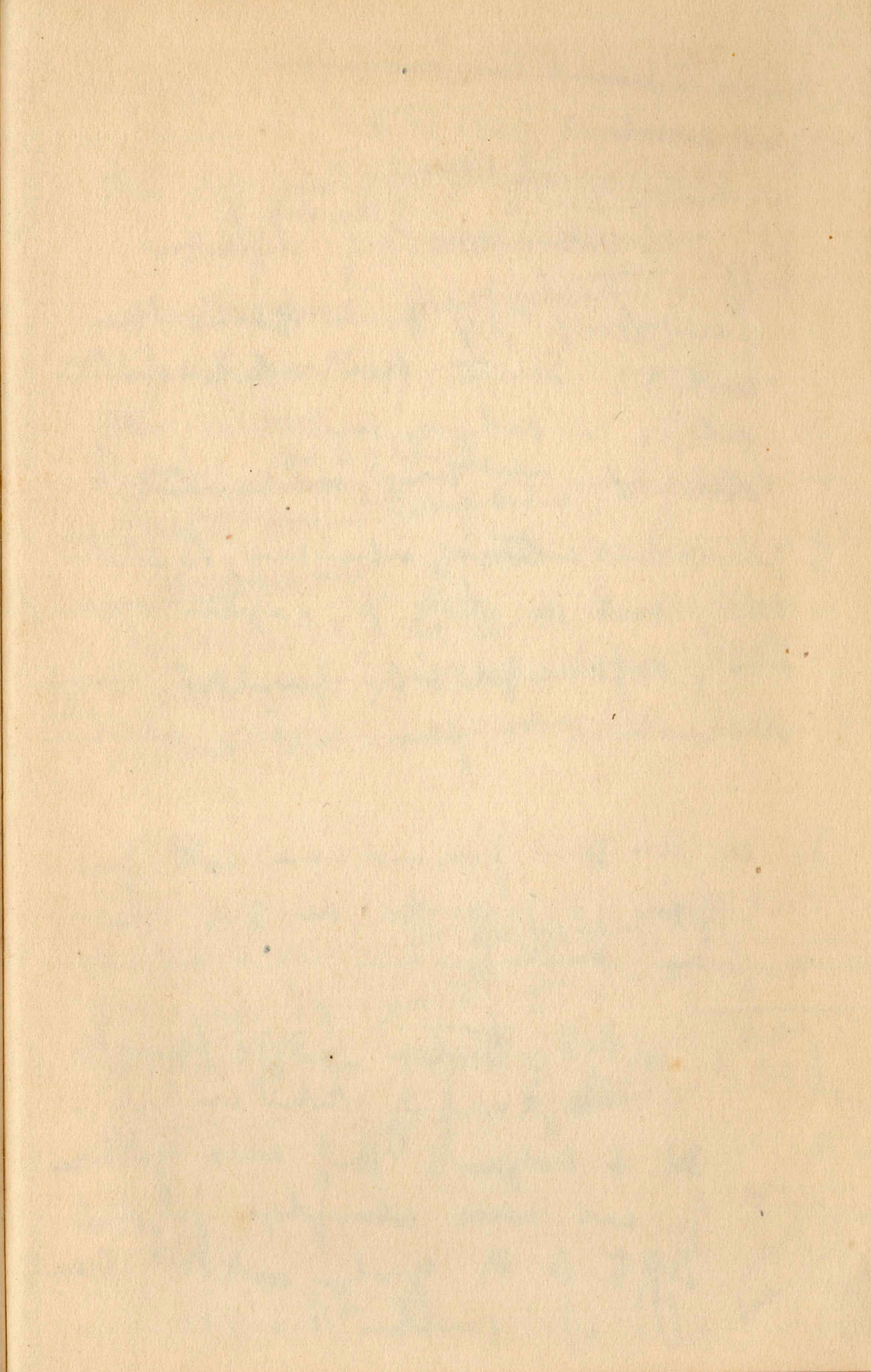
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hands, for the most part under his coat-tails, a long shiny bald head, a pointed aquiline nose a little askew, and a neatly trimmed beard. He walked lightly and with a confident jerk, and he was given to humming. He had added to exceptional business "push," bankruptcy under the old dispensation, and judicious matrimony. His establishment was now one of the most considerable in Folkestone, and he insisted on every inch of frontage by alternate stripes of green and yellow down the houses over the shops. His shops were numbered 3, 5, and 7 on the street, and on his bill-heads 3 to 7. He encountered the abashed and awe-stricken Kipps with the praises of his System and himself. He spread himself out behind his desk with a grip on the lapel of his coat and made Kipps a sort of speech. "We expect y'r to work, y'r know, and we expect y'r to study our interests," explained Mr. Shalford, in the regal and commercial plural. "Our System here is the best system y'r could have. I made it, and I ought to know. I began at the very bottom of the ladder when I was fourteen, and there isn't a step in it I don't know. Not a step. Mr. Booch in the desk will give y'r the card of rules and fines. Jest wait a minute." He pretended to be busy with some dusty memoranda under a paper-weight, while Kipps stood in a sort of paralysis of awe regarding his new master's oval baldness. "Two thous'n three forty-seven pounds," whispered Mr. Shalford audibly, feigning forgetfulness of Kipps. Clearly a place of great transactions!

Mr. Shalford rose, and, handing Kipps a blotting-pad and an inkpot to carry, mere symbols of servitude, for he made no use of them, emerged into a counting-house where three clerks had been feverishly busy ever since his door-handle had turned. "Booch," said Mr. Shalford, "'ave y'r copy of the Rules?" and a down-trodden, shabby little old man, with a ruler in one hand and a quill pen in his mouth, silently held out a small book