and think of those receding days when I was so near the centre of our eddy of greed and enterprise. I see again my uncle's face white and intent, and hear him discourse, hear him make consciously Napoleonic decisions, "grip" his nettles, put his "finger on the spot," "bluff," say "snap." He became particularly addicted to the last idiom. Towards the end every conceivable act took the form of saying "snap!" . . .

The odd fish that came to us! And among others came Gordon-Nasmyth, that queer blend of romance and illegality who was destined to drag me into the most irrelevant adventure in my life, the Mordet Island affair; and leave me, as they say, with blood upon my hands. It is remarkable how little it troubles my conscience and how much it stirs my imagination, that particular memory of the life I took. The story of Mordet Island has been told in a government report and told all wrong; there are still excellent reasons for leaving it wrong in places, but the liveliest appeals of discretion forbid my leaving it out altogether.

I've still the vividest memory of Gordon-Nasmyth's appearance in the inner sanctum, a lank, sunburnt person in tweeds with a yellow-brown, hatchet face and one faded blue eye—the other was a closed and sunken lid—and how he told us with a stiff affectation of ease his incredible story of this great heap of quap that lay abandoned or undiscovered on the beach behind Mordet's Island among white dead mangroves and the black ooze of brackish water.

"What's quap?" said my uncle on the fourth repetition of the word.

"They call it quap, or quab, or quabb," said Gordon-Nasmyth; "but our relations weren't friendly enough to get the accent right. . . . But there the stuff is for the taking. They don't know about it. Nobody knows about it. I got down to the damned place in a canoe alone. The boys wouldn't come. I pretended to be botanizing." . . .

To begin with, Gordon-Nasmyth was inclined to be dramatic.

"Look here," he said when he first came in, shutting the door rather carefully behind him as he spoke, "do

you two men—yes or no—want to put up six thousand—for a clear good chance of fifteen hundred per cent. on your money in a year ? "

" We're always getting chances like that," said my uncle, cocking his cigar offensively, wiping his glasses and tilting his chair back. " We stick to a safe twenty."

Gordon-Nasmyth's quick temper showed in a slight stiffening of his attitude.

" Don't you believe him," said I, getting up before he could reply. " *You're* different, and I know your books. We're very glad you've come to us. Confound it, uncle ! It's Gordon-Nasmyth ! Sit down. What is it ? Minerals ? "

" Quap," said Gordon-Nasmyth, fixing his eye on me, " in heaps."

" In heaps," said my uncle softly, with his glasses very oblique.

" You're only fit for the grocery," said Gordon-Nasmyth scornfully, sitting down and helping himself to one of my uncle's cigars. " I'm sorry I came. But, still, now I'm here. . . . And first as to quap ; quap, sir, is the most radio-active stuff in the world. That's quap ! It's a festering mass of earths and heavy metals, polonium, radium, ythorium, thorium, carium, and new things too. There's a stuff called Xk—provisionally. There they are, mucked up together in a sort of rotting sand. What it is, how it got made, I don't know. It's like as if some young creator had been playing about there. There it lies in two heaps, one small, one great, and the world for miles about it is blasted and scorched and dead. You can have it for the getting. You've got to take it—that's all ! " . . .

" That sounds all right," said I. " Have you samples ? "

" Well—*should* I ? You can have anything—up to two ounces."

" Where is it ? " . . .

His blue eye smiled at me and scrutinized me. He smoked and was fragmentary for a time, fending off my questions ; then his story began to piece itself together. He conjured up a vision of this strange forgotten kink in the world's littoral, of the long meandering channels that

spread and divaricate and spend their burthen of mud and silt within the thunder-belt of Atlantic surf, of the dense tangled vegetation that creeps into the shimmering water with root and sucker. He gave a sense of heat and a perpetual reek of vegetable decay, and told how at last comes a break among these things, an arena fringed with bone-white dead trees, a sight of the hard blue sea-line beyond the dazzling surf and a wide desolation of dirty shingle and mud, bleached and scarred. . . . A little way off among charred dead weeds stands the abandoned station,—abandoned because every man who stayed two months at that station stayed to die, eaten up mysteriously like a leper—with its dismantled sheds and its decaying pier of worm-rotten and oblique piles and planks, still insecurely possible. And in the midst, two clumsy heaps shaped like the backs of hogs, one small, one great, sticking out under a rib of rock that cuts the space across,—quap!

"There it is," said Gordon-Nasmyth, "worth three pounds an ounce, if it's worth a penny; two great heaps of it, rotten stuff and soft, ready to shovel and wheel, and you may get it by the ton!"

"How did it get there?"

"God knows! . . . There it is—for the taking! In a country where you mustn't trade. In a country where the company waits for good kind men to find it riches and then take 'em away from 'em. There you have it—derelict."

"Can't you do any sort of deal?"

"They're too damned stupid. You've got to go and take it. That's all."

"They might catch you."

"They might, of course. But they're not great at catching."

We went into the particulars of that difficulty. "They wouldn't catch me, because I'd sink first. Give me a yacht," said Gordon-Nasmyth; "that's all I need."

"But if you get caught," said my uncle. . . .

I am inclined to think Gordon-Nasmyth imagined we would give him a cheque for six thousand pounds on the strength of his talk. It was very good talk, but we didn't

do that. I stipulated for samples of his stuff for analysis, and he consented—reluctantly. I think, on the whole, he would rather I didn't examine samples. He made a motion pocketwards, that gave us an invincible persuasion that he had a sample upon him, and that at the last instant he decided not to produce it prematurely. There was evidently a curious strain of secretiveness in him. He didn't like to give us samples, and he wouldn't indicate within three hundred miles the position of this Mordet Island of his. He had it clear in his mind that he had a secret of immense value, and he had no idea at all of just how far he ought to go with business people. And so presently, to gain time for these hesitations of his, he began to talk of other things.

He talked very well. He talked of the Dutch East Indies and of the Congo, of Portuguese East Africa and Paraguay, of Malays and rich Chinese merchants, Dyaks and negroes and the spread of the Mahometan world in Africa to-day. And all this time he was trying to judge if we were good enough to trust with his adventure. Our cosy inner office became a little place, and all our businesses cold and lifeless exploits beside his glimpses of strange minglings of men, of slayings unavenged and curious customs, of trade where no writs run, and the dark treacheries of eastern ports and uncharted channels.

We had neither of us gone abroad except for a few vulgar raids on Paris, our world was England, and the places of origin of half the raw material of the goods we sold had seemed to us as remote as fairyland or the forest of Arden. But Gordon-Nasmyth made it so real and intimate for us that afternoon—for me, at any rate—that it seemed like something seen and forgotten and now again remembered.

And in the end he produced his sample, a little lump of muddy clay speckled with brownish grains, in a glass bottle wrapped about with lead and flannel—red flannel it was, I remember—a hue which is, I know, popularly supposed to double all the mystical efficacies of flannel.

"Don't carry it about on you," said Gordon-Nasmyth. "It makes a sore."

I took the stuff to Thorold, and Thorold had the exquisite

agony of discovering two new elements in what was then a confidential analysis. He has christened them and published since, but at the time Gordon-Nasmyth wouldn't hear for a moment of our publication of any facts at all; indeed, he flew into a violent passion and abused me mercilessly even for showing the stuff to Thorold. "I thought you were going to analyse it yourself," he said with the touching persuasion of the layman that a scientific man knows and practises all the sciences.

I made some commercial inquiries, and there seemed even then much truth in Gordon-Nasmyth's estimate of the value of the stuff. It was before the days of Capern's discovery of the value of canadium and his use of it in the Capern filament, but the cerium and thorium alone were worth the money he extracted for the gas-mantles then in vogue. There were, however, doubts. Indeed, there were numerous doubts. What were the limits of the gas-mantle trade? How much thorium, not to speak of cerium, could they take at a maximum? Suppose that quantity was high enough to justify our ship-load, came doubts in another quarter. Were the heaps up to sample? Were they as big as he said? Was Gordon-Nasmyth—imaginative? And if these values held, could we after all get the stuff? It wasn't ours. It was on forbidden ground. You see, there were doubts of every grade and class in the way of this adventure.

We went some way, nevertheless, in the discussion of his project, though I think we tried his patience. Then suddenly he vanished from London, and I saw no more of him for a year and a half.

My uncle said that was what he had expected, and when at last Gordon-Nasmyth reappeared and mentioned in an incidental way that he had been to Paraguay on private (and we guessed passionate) affairs, the business of the "quap" expedition had to be begun again at the beginning. My uncle was disposed to be altogether sceptical, but I wasn't so decided. I think I was drawn by its picturesque aspects. But we neither of us dreamt of touching it seriously until Capern's discovery. . . .

Nasmyth's story had laid hold of my imagination like one small, intense picture of tropical sunshine hung on a

wall of grey business affairs. I kept it going during Gordon-Nasmyth's intermittent appearances in England. Every now and then he and I would meet and reinforce its effect. We would lunch in London, or he would come to see my gliders at Crest Hill, and make new projects for getting at those heaps again, now with me, now alone. At times they became a sort of fairy-story with us, an imaginative exercise. And then came Capern's discovery of what he called the ideal filament, and with it an altogether less problematical quality about the business side of quap. For the ideal filament needed five per cent. of canadium, and canadium was known to the world only as a newly separated constituent of a variety of the rare mineral rutile. But to Thorold it was better known as an element in a mysterious sample brought to him by me, and to me it was known as one of the elements in quap. I told my uncle, and we jumped on to the process at once. We found that Gordon-Nasmyth, still unaware of the altered value of the stuff, and still thinking of the experimental prices of radium and the rarity value of cerium, had got hold of a cousin named Pollack, made some extraordinary transaction about his life insurance policy, and was buying a brig. We cut in, put down three thousand pounds and forthwith the life insurance transaction and the Pollack side of this finance vanished into thin air, leaving Pollack, I regret to say, in the brig and in the secret—except so far as canadium and the filament went—as residuum. We discussed earnestly whether we should charter a steamer or go on with the brig, but we decided on the brig as a less conspicuous instrument for an enterprise that was after all, to put it plainly, stealing.

But that was one of our last enterprises before our great crisis, and I will tell of it in its place.

So it was quap came into our affairs, came in as a fairy-tale and became real. More and more real it grew until at last it was real, until at last I saw with my eyes the heaps my imagination had seen for so long and felt between my fingers again the half-gritty, half-soft texture of quap, like sanded moist-sugar mixed with clay in which there stirs something——

One must feel it to understand.

§ 5

All sorts of things came to the Hardingham and offered themselves to my uncle. Gordon-Nasmyth stands out only because he played a part at last in the crisis of our fortunes. So much came to us that it seemed to me at times as though the whole world of human affairs was ready to prostitute itself to our real and imaginary millions. As I look back, I am still dazzled and incredulous to think of the quality of our opportunities. We did the most extraordinary things; things that it seems absurd to me to leave to any casual man of wealth and enterprise who cares to do them. I had some amazing perceptions of just how modern thought and the supply of fact to the general mind may be controlled by money. Among other things that my uncle offered for, he tried very hard to buy the *British Medical Journal* and the *Lancet*, and run them on what he called modern lines, and when they resisted him he talked very vigorously for a time of organizing a rival enterprise. That was a very magnificent idea indeed in its way: it would have given a tremendous advantage in the handling of innumerable specialities, and indeed I scarcely know how far it would not have put the medical profession in our grip. It still amazes me—I shall die amazed—that such a thing can be possible in the modern state. If my uncle failed to bring the thing off, some one else may succeed. But I doubt, even if he had got both those weeklies, whether his peculiar style would have suited them. The change of purpose would have shown. He would have found it difficult to keep up their dignity.

He certainly did not keep up the dignity of the *Sacred Grove*, an important critical organ which he acquired one day—by saying "snap"—for eight hundred pounds. He got it "lock, stock, and barrel"—under one or other of which three aspects the editor was included. Even at that price it didn't pay. If you are a literary person you will remember the bright new cover he gave that representative organ of British intellectual culture, and how his sound business instincts jarred with the exalted pretensions of a vanishing age. One old wrapper I discovered the other day runs :—

"THE SACRED GROVE."

A Weekly Magazine of Art, Philosophy, Science and Belles Lettres.

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I suppose it is some lingering traces of the Bladesover tradition in me that makes this combination of letters and pills seem so incongruous, just as I suppose it is a lingering trace of Plutarch and my ineradicable boyish imagination that at bottom our State should be wise, sane and dignified, that makes me think a country which leaves its medical and literary criticism, or indeed any such vitally important criticism, entirely to private enterprise and open to the advances of any purchaser must be in a frankly hopeless condition. These are ideal conceptions of mine. As a matter of fact, nothing could be more entirely natural and representative of the relations of learning, thought

and the economic situation in the world at the present time than this cover of the *Sacred Grove*—the quiet conservatism of the one element embedded in the aggressive brilliance of the other; the contrasted notes of bold physiological experiment and extreme mental immobility.

§ 6

There comes back, too, among these Hardingham memories an impression of a drizzling November day, and how we looked out of the windows upon a procession of the London unemployed.

It was like looking down a well into some momentarily revealed nether world. Some thousands of needy ineffectual men had been raked together to trail their spiritless misery through the West End with an appeal that was also in its way a weak and unsubstantial threat: "It is Work we need, not Charity."

There they were, half-phantom through the fog, a silent, foot-dragging, interminable, grey procession. They carried wet, dirty banners, they rattled boxes for pence; these men who had not said "snap" in the right place, the men who had "snapped" too eagerly, the men who had never said "snap," the men who had never had a chance of saying "snap." A shambling, shameful stream they made, oozing along the street, the gutter waste of competitive civilization. And we stood high out of it all, as high as if we looked godlike from another world, standing in a room beautifully lit and furnished, skilfully warmed, filled with costly things.

"There," thought I, "but for the grace of God, go George and Edward Ponderevo."

But my uncle's thoughts ran in a different channel, and he made that vision the text of a spirited but inconclusive harangue upon Tariff Reform.

CHAPTER II

Our Progress from Camden Town to Crest Hill

§ 1

So far my history of my aunt and uncle has dealt chiefly with his industrial and financial exploits. But side by side with that history of inflation from the infinitesimal to the immense is another development, the change year by year from the shabby impecuniosity of the Camden Town lodging to the lavish munificence of the Crest Hill marble staircase and my aunt's golden bed, the bed that was facsimiled from Fontainebleau. And the odd thing is that as I come to this nearer part of my story I find it much more difficult to tell than the clear little perspective memories of the earlier days. Impressions crowd upon one another and overlap one another; I was presently to fall in love again, to be seized by a passion to which I still faintly respond, a passion that still clouds my mind. I came and went between Ealing and my aunt and uncle, and presently between Effie and clubland, and then between business and a life of research that became far more continuous, infinitely more consecutive and memorable than any of these other sets of experiences. I didn't witness a regular social progress therefore ; my aunt and uncle went up in the world so far as I was concerned as if they were displayed by an early cinematograph, with little jumps and flickers.

As I recall this side of our life, the figure of my round-eyed, button-nosed, pink-and-white Aunt Susan tends always to the central position. We drove the car and sustained the car, she sat in it with a magnificent variety of headgear poised upon her delicate neck, and—always with that faint ghost of a lisp no misspelling can render—commented on and illuminated the new aspects.

I've already sketched the little home behind the Wimblehurst chemist's shop, the lodging near the Cobden statue, and the apartments in Gower Street. Thence my aunt and uncle went into a flat in Red-gauntlet Mansions. There they lived when I married. It was a compact flat, with very little for a woman to do in it. In those days my aunt, I think, used to find the time heavy upon her hands, and so she took to books and reading, and after a time even to going to lectures in the afternoon. I began to find unexpected books upon her table; sociological books, travels, Shaw's plays.

"Hullo!" I said, at the sight of some volume of the latter.

"I'm keeping a mind, George," she explained.

"Eh?"

"Keeping a mind. Dogs I never cared for. It's been a toss-up between setting up a mind and setting up a soul. It's jolly lucky for Him and you it's a mind. I've joined the London Library, and I'm going in for the Royal Institution and every blessed lecture that comes along next winter. You'd better look out." . . .

And I remember her coming in late one evening with a note-book in her hand.

"Where ye been, Susan?" said my uncle.

"Birkbeck—Physiology. I'm getting on." She sat down and took off her gloves. "You're just glass to me," she sighed, and then in a note of grave reproach: "You old *Package!* I had no idea! The Things you've kept from me!" . . .

Presently they were setting up the house at Beckenham, and my aunt intermitted her intellectual activities. The house at Beckenham was something of an enterprise for them at that time, a reasonably large place by the standards of the early years of Tono-Bungay. It was a big, rather gaunt villa with a conservatory and a shrubbery, a tennis-lawn, a quite considerable vegetable garden, and a small disused coach-house. I had some glimpses of the excitements of its inauguration, but not many because of the estrangement between my aunt and Marion.

My aunt went into that house with considerable zest, and my uncle distinguished himself by the thoroughness with which he did the repainting and replumbing. He had all

the drains up and most of the garden with them, and stood administrative on heaps—administrating whiskey to the workmen. I found him there one day, most Napoleonic, on a little Elba of dirt, in an atmosphere that defies print. He also, I remember, chose what he considered cheerful contrasts of colours for the painting of the woodwork. This exasperated my aunt extremely—she called him a "Pestilential old Splosher" with an unusual note of earnestness—and he also enraged her into novelties of abuse by giving each bedroom the name of some favourite hero—Clive, Napoleon, Cæsar, and so forth—and having it painted on the door in gilt letters on a black label. "Martin Luther" was kept for me. Only her respect for domestic discipline, she said, prevented her retaliating with "Old Pondo" on the housemaid's cupboard.

Also he went and ordered one of the completest sets of garden requisites I have ever seen—and had them all painted a hard clear blue. My aunt got herself large tins of a kindlier hued enamel and had everything secretly recoated, and this done, she found great joy in the garden and became an ardent rose grower and herbaceous borderer, leaving her Mind, indeed, to damp evenings and the winter months. When I think of her at Beckenham, I always think first of her as dressed in that blue cotton stuff she affected, with her arms in huge gauntleted gardening gloves, a trowel in one hand and a small but no doubt hardy and promising annual, limp and very young-looking and sheepish in the other.

Beckenham, in the persons of a vicar, a doctor's wife, and a large proud lady called Hogberry, "called" on my uncle and aunt almost at once, so soon in fact as the lawn was down again, and afterwards my aunt made friends with a quiet gentlewoman next door, *à propos* of an overhanging cherry tree and the need of repairing the party fence. So she resumed her place in society from which she had fallen with the disaster of Wimblehurst. She made a partially facetious study of the etiquette of her position, had cards engraved and retaliated calls. And then she received a card for one of Mrs. Hogberry's At Homes, gave an old garden party herself, participated in a bazaar and sale of work, and was really becoming quite cheerfully entangled in

Beckenham society when she was suddenly taken up by the roots again by my uncle and transplanted to Chislehurst.

"Old Trek, George," she said compactly, "Onward and Up," when I found her superintending the loading of two big furniture vans. "Go up and say good-bye to 'Martin Luther,' and then I'll see what you can do to help me."

§ 2

I look into the jumbled stores of the middle distance of memory, and Beckenham seems to me a quite transitory phase. But really they were there several years; through nearly all my married life in fact, and far longer than the year and odd months we lived together at Wimblehurst. But the Wimblehurst time with them is fuller in my memory by far than the Beckenham period. There comes back to me with a quite considerable amount of detail the effect of that garden party of my aunt's and of a little social misbehaviour of which I was guilty on that occasion. It's like a scrap from another life. It's all set in what is for me a kind of cutaneous feeling, the feeling of rather ill-cut city clothes, frock-coat and grey trousers, and of a high collar and tie worn in sunshine among flowers. I have still a quite vivid memory of the little trapezoidal lawn, of the gathering and particularly of the hats and feathers of the gathering, of the parlour-maid and the blue tea-cups, and of the magnificent presence of Mrs. Hogberry and of her clear resonant voice. It was a voice that would have gone with a garden party on a larger scale; it went into adjacent premises; it included the gardener who was far up the vegetable patch and technically out of play. The only other men were my aunt's doctor, two of the clergy, amiable contrasted men, and Mrs. Hogberry's imperfectly grown-up son, a youth just bursting into collar. The rest were women, except for a young girl or so in a state of speechless good behaviour. Marion also was there.

Marion and I had arrived a little estranged, and I remember her as a silent presence, a shadow across all that sunlit emptiness of intercourse. We had embittered each other with one of those miserable little disputes that seemed so unavoidable between us. She had, with the help of Smithie,

dressed rather elaborately for the occasion; and when she saw me prepared to accompany her in, I think it was a grey suit, she protested that silk hat and frock-coat were imperative. I was recalcitrant, she quoted an illustrated paper showing a garden party with the King present, and finally I capitulated—but after my evil habit, resentfully. . . . Eh dear! those old quarrels, how pitiful they were, how trivial! And how sorrowful they are to recall! I think they grow more sorrowful as I grow older, and all the small passionate reasons for our mutual anger fade and fade out of memory.

The impression that Beckenham company has left on my mind is one of a modest unreality; they were all maintaining a front of unspecified social pretension, and evading the display of the economic facts of the case. Most of the husbands were "in business" off stage—it would have been outrageous to ask what the business was—and the wives were giving their energies to produce with the assistance of novels and the illustrated magazines, a moralized version of the afternoon life of the aristocratic class. They hadn't the intellectual or moral enterprise of the upper-class woman, they had no political interests, they had no views about anything, and consequently they were, I remember, extremely difficult to talk to. They all sat about in the summer-house and in garden-chairs, and were very hatty and ruffley and sunshadey. Three ladies and the curate played croquet with a general immense gravity broken by occasional loud cries of feigned distress from the curate. "Oh! Whacking me about again! Augh!"

The dominant social fact that afternoon was Mrs. Hogberry; she took up a certain position commanding the croquet and went on, as my aunt said to me in an incidental aside, "like an old Roundabout." She talked of the way in which Beckenham society was getting mixed, and turned on to a touching letter she had recently received from her former nurse at Little Gossdean. Followed a loud account of Little Gossdean and how much she and her eight sisters had been looked up to there. "My poor mother was quite a little Queen there," she said. "And such *nice* Common People! People say the country labourers are getting disrespectful nowadays. It isn't so—not if they're properly

treated. Here of course in Beckenham it's different. I don't call the people we get here a Poor—they're certainly not a proper Poor. They're Masses. I always tell Mr. Bugshoot they're Masses, and ought to be treated as such." . . .

Dim memories of Mrs. Mackridge floated through my mind as I listened to her. . . .

I was whirled on this roundabout for a bit, and then had the fortune to fall off into a *tête-à-tête* with a lady whom my aunt introduced as Mrs. Mumble—but then she introduced everybody to me as Mumble that afternoon, either by way of humour or necessity.

That must have been one of my earliest essays in the art of polite conversation, and I remember that I began by criticizing the local railway service, and that at the third sentence or thereabouts Mrs. Mumble said in a distinctly bright and encouraging way that she feared I was a very " frivolous " person.

I wonder now what it was I said that was " frivolous."

I don't know what happened to end that conversation, or if it had an end. I remember talking to one of the clergy for a time rather awkwardly, and being given a sort of topographical history of Beckenham, which he assured me, time after time, was " Quite an old place. *Quite* an old place." As though I had treated it as new and he meant to be very patient but very convincing. Then we hung up in a distinct pause, and my aunt rescued me. " George," she said in a confidential undertone, " keep the pot a-boiling." And then audibly, " I say, will you both old trot about with tea a bit ? "

" Only too delighted to *trot* for you, Mrs. Ponderevo," said the clergyman, becoming fearfully expert and in his element ; " only too delighted."

I found we were near a rustic table, and that the housemaid was behind us in a suitable position to catch us on the rebound with the tea things.

" Trot ! " repeated the clergyman to me, much amused; " excellent expression ! " and I just saved him from the tray as he turned about.

We handed tea for a while. . . .

" Give 'em cakes," said my aunt, flushed but well in hand, " Helps 'em to talk, George. Always talk best after

a little nushment. Like throwing a bit of turf down an old geyser."

She surveyed the gathering with a predominant blue eye and helped herself to tea.

"They keep on going stiff," she said in an undertone. . . . "I've done my best."

"It's been a huge success," I said encouragingly.

"That boy has had his legs crossed in that position and hasn't spoken for ten minutes. Stiffer and stiffer. Brittle. He's beginning a dry cough—always a bad sign, George. . . . Walk 'em about, shall I?—rub their noses with snow?"

Happily she didn't. I got myself involved with the gentlewoman from next door, a pensive, languid-looking little woman with a low voice, and fell talking; our topic, Cats and Dogs, and which it was we liked best.

"I always feel," said the pensive little woman, "that there's something about a dog——. A cat hasn't got it."

"Yes," I found myself admitting with great enthusiasm, "there *is* something. And yet again——"

"Oh! I know there's something about a cat too. But it isn't the same."

"Not quite the same," I admitted; "but still it's something."

"Ah! But such a different something!"

"More sinuous."

"Much more."

"Ever so much more." . . .

"It makes all the difference, don't you think?"

"Yes," I said, "*all*."

She glanced at me gravely and sighed a long, deepfelt "*Yes*."

A long pause.

The thing seemed to me to amount to a stale-mate. Fear came into my heart and much perplexity.

"The—er, Roses," I said. I felt like a drowning man. "Those roses—don't you think they are—very beautiful flowers?"

"Aren't they!" she agreed gently. "There seems to be something in roses—something—I don't know how to express it."

"Something," I said helpfully.

"Yes," she said, "something. Isn't there?"

"So few people see it," I said; "more's the pity!"

She sighed and said again very softly, "*Yes.*" . . .

There was another long pause. I looked at her, and she was thinking dreamily. The drowning sensation returned, the fear and enfeeblement. I perceived by a sort of inspiration that her tea-cup was empty.

"Let me take your cup," I said abruptly, and, that secured, made for the table by the summer-house. I had no intention then of deserting my aunt. But close at hand the big French window of the drawing-room yawned inviting and suggestive. I can feel all that temptation now, and particularly the provocation of my collar. In an instant I was lost. I would——. Just for a moment!

I dashed in, put down the cup on the keys of the grand piano and fled upstairs, softly, swiftly, three steps at a time, to the sanctuary of my uncle's study, his snuggery. I arrived there breathless, convinced there was no return for me. I was very glad and ashamed of myself and desperate. By means of a pen-knife I contrived to break open his cabinet of cigars, drew a chair to the window, took off my coat, collar and tie, and remained smoking guiltily and rebelliously, and peeping through the blind at the assembly on the lawn until it was altogether gone. . . .

The clergymen, I thought, were wonderful.

§ 3

A few such pictures of those early days at Beckenham stand out, and then I find myself among the Chislehurst memories. The Chislehurst mansion had "grounds" rather than a mere garden, and there was a gardener's cottage and a little lodge at the gate. The ascendant movement was always far more in evidence there than at Beckenham. The velocity was increasing.

One night picks itself out as typical, as in its way marking an epoch. I was there, I think, about some advertisement stuff, on some sort of business anyhow, and my uncle and aunt had come back in a fly from a dinner at the Runcorns'. (Even then he was nibbling at Runcorn with the idea of our great Amalgamation budding in his mind.) I got down

there, I suppose, about eleven. I found the two of them sitting in the study, my aunt on a chair-arm with a whimsical pensiveness on her face, regarding my uncle, and he, much extended and very rotund, in the low armchair drawn up to the fender.

"Look here, George," said my uncle after my first greetings, "I have just been saying; We aren't Oh Fay!"

"Eh?"

"Not Oh Fay! Socially!"

"Old *Fly*, he means, George—French!"

"Oh! Didn't think of French. One never knows where to have him. What's gone wrong to-night?"

"I been thinking. It isn't any particular thing. I ate too much of that fishy stuff at first, like salt frog spawn, and was a bit confused by olives; and—well, I didn't know which wine was which. Had to say *that* each time. It puts your talk all wrong. And she wasn't in evening dress, not like the others. We can't go on in that style, George—not a proper ad."

"I'm not sure you were right," I said, "in having a fly."

"We got to do it all better," said my uncle, "we got to do it in Style. Smart business, smart men. She tries to pass it off as humorous"—my aunt pulled a grimace—"it isn't humorous! See! We're on the up-grade now, fair and square. We're going to be big. We aren't going to be laughed at as Poovenoos, see!"

"Nobody laughed at you," said my aunt. "Old Bladder!"

"Nobody isn't going to laugh at me," said my uncle, glancing at his contours and suddenly sitting up.

My aunt raised her eyebrows slightly, swung her foot, and said nothing.

"We aren't keeping pace with our own progress, George. We got to. We're bumping against new people, and they set up to be gentlefolks—etiquette dinners and all the rest of it. They give themselves airs and expect us to be fish-out-of-water. We aren't going to be. They think we've no Style. Well, we give them Style for our advertisements, and we're going to give 'em Style all through. . . . You needn't be born to it to dance well on the wires of the Bond Street tradesmen. See?"

I handed him the cigar-box.

"Runcorn hadn't cigars like these," he said, truncating one lovingly. "We beat him at cigars. We'll beat him all round."

My aunt and I regarded him, full of apprehensions.

"I got idees," he said darkly to the cigar, deepening our dread.

He pocketed his cigar-cutter and spoke again.

"We got to learn all the rotten little game first. See? F'rinstance, we got to get samples of all the blessed wines there are—and learn 'em up. Stern, Smoor, Burgundy, all of 'em! She took Stern to-night—and when she tasted it first——. You pulled a face, Susan, you did. I saw you. It surprised you. You bunched your nose. We got to get used to wine and not do that. We got to get used to wearing evening dress—*you*, Susan, too."

"Always have had a tendency to stick out of my clothes," said my aunt. "However——. Who cares?" She shrugged her shoulders.

I had never seen my uncle so immensely serious.

"Got to get the hang of etiquette," he went on to the fire. "Horses even. Practise everything. Dine every night in evening dress. . . . Get a brougham or something. Learn up golf and tennis and things. Country gentleman. Oh Fay. It isn't only freedom from Goochery."

"Eh?" I said.

"Oh!—Gawshery, if you like!"

"French, George," said my aunt. "But *I'm* not old Gooch. I made that face for fun."

"It isn't only freedom from Gawshery. We got to have Style. See! Style! Just all right and one better. That's what I call Style. We can do it, and we will."

He mumbled his cigar and smoked for a space, leaning forward and looking into the fire.

"What is it," he asked, "after all? What is it? Tips about eating; tips about drinking. Clothes. How to hold yourself, and not say jes' the few little things they know for certain are wrong—jes' the shibboleth things." . . .

He was silent again, and the cigar crept up from the horizontal towards the zenith as the confidence of his mouth increased.

"Learn the whole bag of tricks in six months," he said,

becoming more cheerful. "Eh, Susan? Beat 'em out! George, you in particular ought to get hold of it. Ought to get into a good club, and all that."

"Always ready to learn," I said. "Ever since you gave me the chance of Latin. So far we don't seem to have hit upon any Latin-speaking stratum in the population."

"We've come to French," said my aunt, "anyhow."

"It's a very useful language," said my uncle. "Puts a point on things. Zzzz. As for accent, no Englishman has an accent. No Englishman pronounces French properly. Don't you tell *me*. It's a Bluff. It's all a Bluff. Life's a Bluff—practically. That's why it's so important, Susan, for us to attend to Style. Le Steel Say Lum. The Style it's the man. Whad you laughing at, Susan? . . . George, you're not smoking. These cigars are good for the mind. . . . What do *you* think of it all? We got to adapt ourselves. We have—so far. . . . Not going to be beat by these silly things."

§ 4

"What do you think of it, George?" he insisted.

What I said I thought of it I don't now recall. Only I have very distinctly the impression of meeting for a moment my aunt's impenetrable eye. And anyhow he started in with his accustomed energy to rape the mysteries of the Costly Life, and become the calmest of its lords. On the whole I think he did it—thoroughly. I have crowded memories, a little difficult to disentangle, of his experimental stages, his experimental proceedings. It's hard at times to say which memory comes in front of which. I recall him as presenting on the whole a series of small surprises, as being again and again, unexpectedly, a little more self-confident, a little more polished, a little richer and finer, a little more aware of the positions and values of things and men. There was a time—it must have been very early—when I saw him deeply impressed by the splendours of the dining-room of the National Liberal Club. Heaven knows who our host was or what that particular little "feed" was about now!—all that sticks is the impression of our straggling entry, a string of six or seven guests, and my uncle looking about him at the numerous bright red-shaded tables,

at the exotics in great Majolica jars, at the shining ceramic columns and pilasters, at the impressive portraits of Liberal statesmen and heroes, and all that contributes to the *ensemble* of that palatial spectacle. He was betrayed into a whisper to me, "This is all Right, George!" he said. That artless comment seems almost incredible as I set it down; there came a time so speedily when not even the clubs of New York could have overawed my uncle, and when he could walk through the bowing magnificence of the Royal Grand Hotel to his chosen table in that aggressive, exquisite gallery upon the river, with all the easy calm of one of earth's legitimate kings.

The two of them learnt the new game rapidly and well; they experimented abroad, they experimented at home. At Chislehurst, with the aid of a new, very costly, but highly instructive cook, they tried over everything they heard of that roused their curiosity and had any reputation for difficulty, from asparagus to plovers' eggs. They afterwards got a gardener who could wait at table—and he brought the soil home to one. Then there came a butler.

I remember my aunt's first dinner-gown very brightly, and how she stood before the fire in the drawing-room confessing once unsuspected pretty arms with all the courage she possessed, and looking over her shoulder at herself in a mirror.

"A ham," she remarked reflectively, "must feel like this. Just a necklace." . . .

I attempted, I think, some commonplace compliment.

My uncle appeared at the door in a white waistcoat and with his hands in his trousers pocket; he halted and surveyed her critically.

"Couldn't tell you from a duchess, Susan," he remarked. "I'd like to have you painted, standin' at the fire like that. Sargent! You look—spirited, somehow. Lord!—I wish some of those damned tradesmen at Wimblehurst could see you." . . .

They did a lot of week-ending at hotels, and sometimes I went down with them. We seemed to fall into a vast drifting crowd of social learners. I don't know whether it is due simply to my changed circumstances, but it seems to me there have been immensely disproportionate develop-

ments of the hotel-frequenting and restaurant-using population during the last twenty years. It is not only, I think, that there are crowds of people who, like we were, are in the economically ascendant phase, but whole masses of the prosperous section of the population must be altering its habits, giving up high-tea for dinner and taking to evening dress, using the week-end hotels as a practice-ground for these new social arts. A swift and systematic conversion to gentility has been going on, I am convinced, throughout the whole commercial upper-middle class since I was twenty-one. Curiously mixed was the personal quality of the people one saw in these raids. There were conscientiously refined and low-voiced people reeking with proud bashfulness; there were aggressively smart people using pet diminutives for each other loudly and seeking fresh occasions for brilliant rudeness; there were awkward husbands and wives quarrelling furtively about their manners and ill at ease under the eye of the waiter—cheerfully amiable and often discrepant couples with a disposition to inconspicuous corners, and the jolly sort, affecting an unaffected ease; plump happy ladies who laughed too loud, and gentlemen in evening dress who subsequently "got their pipes." And nobody, you knew, was anybody, however expensively they dressed and whatever rooms they took.

I look back now with a curious remoteness of spirit to those crowded dining-rooms with their dispersed tables and their inevitable red-shaded lights and the unsympathetic, unskilful waiters, and the choice of "Thig or Glear, Sir?" I've not dined in that way, in that sort of place, now for five years—it must be quite five years, so specialized and narrow is my life becoming.

My uncle's earlier motor-car phases work in with these associations, and there stands out a little bright vignette of the hall of the Magnificent, Bexhill-on-Sea, and people dressed for dinner and sitting about amidst the scarlet furniture-satin and white enamelled wood-work until the gong should gather them; and my aunt is there, very marvellously wrapped about in a dust-cloak and a cage-like veil, and there are hotel-porters and under-porters very alert, and an obsequious manager, and the tall young lady in black from the office is surprised into admiration, and in

the middle of the picture is my uncle making his first appearance in that Esquimaux costume I have already mentioned, a short figure, compactly immense, hugely goggled, wearing a sort of brown rubber proboscis, and surmounted by a table-land of motoring cap.

§ 5

So it was we recognized our new needs as fresh invaders of the upper levels of the social system, and set ourselves quite consciously to the acquisition of Style and *Savoir Faire*. We became part of what is nowadays quite an important element in the confusion of our world, that multitude of economically ascendant people who are learning how to spend money. It is made up of financial people, the owners of the businesses that are eating up their competitors, inventors of new sources of wealth such as ourselves; it includes nearly all America as one sees it on the European stage. It is a various multitude having only this in common; they are all moving, and particularly their womenkind are moving, from conditions in which means were insistently finite, things were few and customs simple, towards a limitless expenditure and the sphere of attraction of Bond Street, Fifth Avenue, and Paris. Their general effect is one of progressive revelation, of limitless rope.

They discover suddenly indulgences their moral code never foresaw and has no provision for, elaborations, ornaments, possessions beyond their wildest dreams. With an immense astonished zest they begin *shopping*, begin a systematic adaptation to a new life crowded and brilliant with things shopped, with jewels, maids, butlers, coachmen, electric broughams, hired town and country houses. They plunge into it as one plunges into a career; as a class, they talk, think, and dream possessions. Their literature, their Press, turns all on that; immense illustrated weeklies of unsurpassed magnificence guide them in domestic architecture, in the art of owning a garden, in the achievement of the sumptuous in motor-cars, in an elaborate sporting equipment, in the purchase and control of their estates, in travel and stupendous hotels. Once they begin to move they go far and fast. Acquisition becomes the substance

of their lives. They find a world organized to gratify that passion. In a brief year or so they are connoisseurs. They join in the plunder of the eighteenth century, buy rare old books, fine old pictures, good old furniture. Their first crude conception of dazzling suites of the newly perfect is replaced almost from the outset by a jackdaw dream of accumulating costly discrepant old things. . . .

I seem to remember my uncle taking to shopping quite suddenly. In the Beckenham days and in the early Chislehurst days he was chiefly interested in getting money, and except for his onslaught on the Beckenham house, bothered very little about his personal surroundings and possessions. I forget now when the change came and he began to spend. Some accident must have revealed to him this new source of power, or some subtle shifting occurred in the tissues of his brain. He began to spend and "shop." So soon as he began to shop, he began to shop violently. He began buying pictures, and then, oddly enough, old clocks. For the Chislehurst house he bought nearly a dozen grandfather clocks and three copper warming-pans. After that he bought much furniture. Then he plunged into art patronage, and began to commission pictures and to make presents to churches and institutions. His buying increased with regular acceleration. Its development was a part of the mental changes that came to him in the wild excitements of the last four years of his ascent. Towards the climax he was a furious spender; he shopped with large unexpected purchases, he shopped like a mind seeking expression, he shopped to astonish and dismay; shopped *crescendo*, shopped *fortissimo*, *con molto expressione* until the magnificent smash of Crest Hill ended his shopping for ever. Always it was he who shopped. My aunt did not shine as a purchaser. It is a curious thing, due to I know not what fine strain in her composition, that my aunt never set any great store upon possessions. She plunged through that crowded bazaar of Vanity Fair during those feverish years, spending no doubt freely and largely, but spending with detachment and a touch of humorous contempt for the things, even the "old" things, that money can buy. It came to me suddenly one afternoon just how detached she was, as I saw her going towards the Harding-

ham, sitting up as she always did rather stiffly in her electric brougham, regarding the glittering world with interested and ironically innocent blue eyes from under the brim of a hat that defied comment. "No one," I thought, "would sit so apart if she hadn't dreams—and what are her dreams?"

I'd never thought.

And I remember too, an outburst of scornful description after she had lunched with a party of women at the Imperial Cosmic Club. She came round to my rooms on the chance of finding me there, and I gave her tea. She professed herself tired and cross, and flung herself into my chair. . . .

"George," she cried, "the Things women are! Do *I* stink of money?"

"Lunching?" I asked.

She nodded.

"Plutocratic ladies?"

"Yes."

"Oriental type?"

"Oh! Like a burst hareem! . . . Bragging of possessions. . . . They feel you. They feel your clothes, George, to see if they are good!"

I soothed her as well as I could. "They *are* Good, aren't they?" I said.

"It's the old pawnshop in their blood," she said, drinking tea; and then in infinite disgust, "They run their hands over your clothes—they paw you."

I had a moment of doubt whether perhaps she had not been discovered in possession of unsuspected forgeries. I don't know. After that my eyes were quickened, and I began to see for myself women running their hands over other women's furs, scrutinizing their lace, even demanding to handle jewellery, appraising, envying, testing. They have a kind of etiquette. The woman who feels says, "What beautiful sables!" "What lovely lace!" The woman felt admits proudly: "It's Real, you know," or disavows pretension modestly and hastily, "It's not Good." In each other's houses they peer at the pictures, handle the selvage of hangings, look at the bottoms of china. . . .

I wonder if it *is* the old pawnshop in the blood.

I doubt if Lady Drew and the Olympians did that sort

of thing, but there I may be only clinging to another of my former illusions about aristocracy and the State. Perhaps always possessions have been Booty, and never anywhere has there been such a thing as house and furnishings native and natural to the women and men who made use of them. . . .

§ 6

For me, at least, it marked an epoch in my uncle's career when I learnt one day that he had "shopped" Lady Grove. I realized a fresh, wide, unpreluded step. He took me by surprise with the sudden change of scale from such portable possessions as jewels and motor-cars to a stretch of countryside. The transaction was Napoleonic; he was told of the place; he said "snap"; there were no preliminary desirings or searchings. Then he came home and said what he had done. Even my aunt was for a day or so measurably awe-stricken by this exploit in purchase, and we both went down with him to see the house in a mood near consternation. It struck us then as a very lordly place indeed. I remember the three of us standing on the terrace that looked westward, surveying the sky-reflecting windows of the house, and a feeling of unwarrantable intrusion comes back to me.

Lady Grove, you know, is a very beautiful house indeed, a still and gracious place, whose age-long seclusion was only effectively broken with the toot of the coming of the motor-car. An old Catholic family had died out in it, century by century, and was now altogether dead. Portions of the fabric are thirteenth century, and its last architectural revision was Tudor; within, it is for the most part dark and chilly, save for two or three favoured rooms and its tall-windowed, oak-galleried hall. Its terrace is its noblest feature, a very wide, broad lawn it is, bordered by a low stone battlement, and there is a great cedar in one corner under whose level branches one looks out across the blue distances of the Weald—blue distances that are made extraordinarily Italian in quality by virtue of the dark masses of that single tree. It is a very high terrace; southward one looks down upon the tops of wayfaring trees and spruces, and westward on a steep slope of beechwood,

through which the road comes. One turns back to the still old house, and sees a grey and lichenous façade with a very finely arched entrance. It was warmed by the afternoon light and touched with the colour of a few neglected roses and a pyracanthus. It seemed to me that the most modern owner conceivable in this serene fine place was some bearded scholarly man in a black cassock, gentle-voiced and white-handed, or some very soft-robed, grey gentlewoman. And there was my uncle holding his goggles in a sealskin glove, wiping the glass with a pocket-handkerchief, and asking my aunt if Lady Grove wasn't a " Bit of all Right."

My aunt made him no answer.

" The man who built this," I speculated, " wore armour and carried a sword."

" There's some of it inside still," said my uncle.

We went inside. An old woman with very white hair was in charge of the place, and cringed rather obviously to the new master. She evidently found him a very strange and frightful apparition indeed, and was dreadfully afraid of him. But if the surviving present bowed down to us, the past did not. We stood up to the dark long portraits of the extinguished race—one was a Holbein—and looked them in their sidelong eyes. They looked back at us. We all, I know, felt the enigmatical quality in them. Even my uncle was momentarily embarrassed I think, by that invincibly self-complacent expression. It was just as though, after all, he had *not* bought them up and replaced them altogether, as though that, secretly, they knew better and could smile at him. . . .

The spirit of the place was akin to Bladesover but touched with something older and remoter. That armour that stood about had once served in tilt-yards, if indeed it had not served in battle, and this family had sent its blood and treasure, time after time, upon the most romantic quest in history, to Palestine. Dreams, loyalties, place and honour, how utterly had it all evaporated, leaving at last, the final expression of its spirit, these quaint painted smiles, these smiles of triumphant completion. It had evaporated, indeed, long before the ultimate Durgan had died, and in his old age he had cumbered the place with Early Victorian cushions and carpets and tapestry table-cloths and invalid

appliances of a type even more extinct it seemed to us than the crusades. . . . Yes, it was different from Bladesover.

"Bit stuffy, George," said my uncle. "They hadn't much idee of ventilation when this was built."

One of the panelled rooms was half-filled with presses and a four-poster bed. "Might be the ghost room," said my uncle; but it did not seem to me that so retiring a family as the Durgans, so old and completed and exhausted a family as the Durgans, was likely to haunt anybody. What living thing now had any concern with their honour and judgments and good and evil deeds? Ghosts and witchcraft were a later innovation, that fashion came from Scotland with the Stuarts. . . .

Afterwards, prying for epitaphs, we found a marble crusader with a broken nose, under a battered canopy of fretted stone, outside the restricted limits of the present Duffield church, and half-buried in nettles. "Ichabod," said my uncle. "Eh? We shall be like that, Susan, some day. . . . I'm going to clean him up a bit and put a railing to keep off the children."

"Old saved at the eleventh hour," said my aunt, quoting one of the less successful advertisements of Tono-Bungay.

But I don't think my uncle heard her.

It was by our captured crusader that the vicar found us. He came round the corner at us briskly, a little out of breath. He had an air of having been running after us since the first toot of our horn had warned the village of our presence. He was an Oxford man, clean-shaven, with a cadaverous complexion and a guardedly respectful manner, a cultivated intonation, and a general air of accommodation to the new order of things. These Oxford men are the Greeks of our plutocratic empire. He was a Tory in spirit, and what one may call an adapted Tory by stress of circumstances, that is to say he was no longer a legitimist, he was prepared for the substitution of new lords for old. We were pill vendors, he knew, and no doubt horribly vulgar in soul; but then it might have been some polygamous Indian rajah, a great strain on a good man's tact, or some Jew with an inherited expression of contempt. Anyhow, we were English and neither Dissenters nor Socialists, and he was cheerfully prepared to do what he could to make gentlemen of both of

us. He might have preferred Americans for some reasons; they are not so obviously taken from one part of the social system and dumped down in another, and they are more teachable; but in this world we cannot always be choosers. So he was very bright and pleasant with us, showed us the church, gossiped informingly about our neighbours on the countryside, Tux the banker, Lord Boom the magazine and newspaper proprietor, Lord Carnaby, that great sportsman, and old Lady Osprey. And finally he took us by way of a village lane—three children bobbed convulsively with eyes of terror for my uncle—through a meticulous garden to a big, slovenly Vicarage with faded Victorian furniture and a faded Victorian wife, who gave us tea and introduced us to a confusing family dispersed among a lot of disintegrating basket chairs upon the edge of a well-used tennis lawn.

These people interested me. They were a common type, no doubt, but they were new to me. There were two lank sons who had been playing singles at tennis, red-eared youths growing black moustaches, and dressed in conscientiously untidy tweeds and unbottoned and ungirt Norfolk jackets. There were a number of ill-nourished looking daughters, sensible and economical in their costume, the younger still with long, brown-stockinged legs, and the eldest present—there were we discovered one or two hidden away—displaying a large gold cross and other aggressive ecclesiastical symbols; there were two or three fox-terriers, a retrieverish mongrel, and an old, bloody-eyed and very evil-smelling St. Bernard. There was a jackdaw. There was, moreover, an ambiguous silent lady that my aunt subsequently decided must be a very deaf paying guest. Two or three other people had concealed themselves at our coming and left unfinished teas behind them. Rugs and cushions lay among the chairs, and two of the latter were, I noted, covered with Union Jacks.

The vicar introduced us sketchily, and the faded Victorian wife regarded my aunt with a mixture of conventional scorn and abject respect, and talked to her in a languid persistent voice about people in the neighbourhood whom my aunt could not possibly know. My aunt received these personalia cheerfully, with her blue eyes flitting from point

to point, and coming back again and again to the pinched faces of the daughters and the cross upon the eldest's breast. Encouraged by my aunt's manner the vicar's wife grew patronizing and kindly, and made it evident that she could do much to bridge the social gulf between ourselves and the people of family about us.

I had just snatches of that conversation. "Mrs. Merridew brought him quite a lot of money. Her father, I believe, had been in the Spanish wine trade—quite a lady, though. And after that he fell off his horse and cracked his brain pan and took to fishing and farming. I'm sure you'll like to know them. He's *most* amusing. . . . The daughter had a disappointment and went to China as a missionary and got mixed up in a massacre." . . .

"The most beautiful silks and things she brought back, you'd hardly believe!" . . .

"Yes, they gave them to propitiate her. You see they didn't understand the difference, and they thought as they'd been massacring people, *they'd* be massacred. They didn't understand the difference Christianity makes." . . .

"Seven bishops they've had in the family!" . . .

"Married a Papist and was quite lost to them." . . .

"He failed some dreadful examination and had to go into the militia." . . .

"So she bit his leg as hard as ever she could and he let go." . . .

"Had four of his ribs amputated." . . .

"Caught meningitis and was carried off in a week."

"Had to have a large piece of silver tube let into his throat, and if he wants to talk he puts his finger on it. It makes him so interesting, I think. You feel he's sincere somehow. A most charming man in every way."

"Preserved them both in spirits very luckily, and there they are in his study, though of course he doesn't show them to everybody."

The silent lady, unperturbed by these apparently exciting topics, scrutinized my aunt's costume with a singular intensity, and was visibly moved when she unbuttoned her dust cloak and flung it wide. Meanwhile, we men conversed, one of the more spirited daughters listened brightly, and the youths lay on the grass at our feet. My uncle

offered them cigars, but they both declined,—out of bashfulness it seemed to me, whereas the vicar, I think, accepted out of tact. When we were not looking at them directly, these young men would kick each other furtively.

Under the influence of my uncle's cigar, the vicar's mind had soared beyond the limits of the district. "This Socialism," he said, "seems making great headway."

My uncle shook his head. "We're too individualistic in this country for that sort of nonsense," he said. "Everybody's business is nobody's business. That's where they go wrong."

"They have some intelligent people in their ranks, I am told," said the vicar, "writers and so forth. Quite a distinguished playwright, my eldest daughter was telling me—I forget his name. Milly dear! Oh! she's not here. Painters too, they have. This Socialism it seems to me is part of the Unrest of the Age. . . . But, as you say, the spirit of the people is against it. In the country at any rate. The people down here are too sturdily independent in their small way,—and too sensible altogether." . . .

"It's a great thing for Duffield to have Lady Grove occupied again," he was saying when my wandering attention came back from some attractive casualty in his wife's discourse. "People have always looked up to the house—and considering all things, old Mr. Durgan really was extraordinarily good—extraordinarily good. You intend to give us a good deal of your time here I hope."

"I mean to do my duty by the Parish," said my uncle.

"I'm sincerely glad to hear it—sincerely. We've missed—the house influence. An English village isn't complete ——. People get out of hand. Life grows dull. The young people drift away to London."

He enjoyed his cigar gingerly for a moment.

"We shall look to you to liven things up," he said,—poor man!

My uncle cocked his cigar and removed it from his mouth.

"Whad you think the place wants?" he asked.

He did not wait for an answer. "I been thinking while you been talking—things one might do. Cricket—a good English game—sports. Build the chaps a pavilion perhaps. Then every village ought to have a miniature rifle range."

"Ye-ees," said the vicar. "Provided, of course, there isn't a constant popping." . . .

"Manage *that* all right," said my uncle. "Thing'd be a sort of long shed. Paint it red. British colour. Then there's a Union Jack for the church and the village school. Paint the school red too, p'raps. Not enough colour about now. Too grey. Then a maypole."

"How far our people would take up that sort of thing ——" began the vicar.

"I'm all for getting that good old English spirit back again," said my uncle. "Merrymakings. Lads and lasses dancing on the village green. Harvest home. Fairings. Yule Log—all the rest of it."

"How would old Sally Glue do for a May Queen?" asked one of the sons in the slight pause that followed.

"Or Annie Glassbound?" said the other, with the huge virile guffaw of a young man whose voice has only recently broken.

"Sally Glue is eighty-five," explained the vicar, "and Anni Glass'ound is, well—a young lady of extremely generous proportions. And not quite right, you know. Not quite right—here." He tapped his brow.

"Generous proportions!" said the eldest son, and the guffaws were renewed.

"You see," said the vicar, "all the brisker girls go into service in or near London. The life of excitement attracts them. And no doubt the higher wages have something to do with it. And the liberty to wear finery. And generally—freedom from restraint. So that there might be a little difficulty perhaps to find a May Queen here just at present who was really young and, er—pretty. . . . Of course I couldn't think of any of my girls—or anything of that sort."

"We got to attract 'em back," said my uncle. "That's what I feel about it. We got to Buck-Up the country. The English country is a going concern still; just as the Established Church—if you'll excuse me saying it, is a going concern. Just as Oxford is—or Cambridge. Or any of those old, fine old things. Only it wants fresh capital, fresh idees, and fresh methods. Light railways, f'rinstance—scientific use of drainage. Wire fencing—machinery—all that."

The vicar's face for one moment betrayed dismay.

Perhaps he was thinking of his country walks amidst the hawthorns and honeysuckle.

"There's great things," said my uncle, "to be done on Mod'un lines with Village Jam and Pickles—boiled in the country."

It was the reverberation of this last sentence in my mind, I think, that sharpened my sentimental sympathy as we went through the straggling village street and across the trim green on our way back to London. It seemed that afternoon the most tranquil and idyllic collection of creeper sheltered homes you can imagine; thatch still lingered on a whitewashed cottage or two, pyracanthus, wallflowers, and daffodils abounded, and an unsystematic orchard or so was white with blossom above and gay with bulbs below. I noted a row of straw beehives, beehive shaped, beehives of the type long since condemned as inefficient by all progressive minds, and in the doctor's acre of grass a flock of two whole sheep was grazing,—no doubt he'd taken them on account. Two men and one old woman made gestures of abject vassalage, and my uncle replied with a lordly gesture of his great motoring glove. . . .

"England's full of Bits like this," said my uncle, leaning over the front seat and looking back with great satisfaction. The black glare of his goggles rested for a time on the receding turrets of Lady Grove just peeping over the trees.

"I shall have a flagstaff, I think," he considered. "Then one could show when one is in residence. The villagers will like to know." . . .

I reflected. "They will," I said. "They're used to liking to know." . . .

My aunt had been unusually silent. Suddenly she spoke. "He says Snap," she remarked; "he buys that place. And a nice old job of Housekeeping he gives me! He sails through the village swelling like an old Turkey. And who'll have to scoot the butler? Me! Who's got to forget all she ever knew and start again? Me! Who's got to trek from Chislehurst and be a great lady? Me! . . . You old Bother! Just when I was settling down and beginning to feel at home."

My uncle turned his goggles to her. "Ah! *this* time it is home, Susan. . . . We got there."

§ 7

It seems to me now but a step from the buying of Lady Grove to the beginning of Crest Hill, from the days when the former was a stupendous achievement to the days when it was too small and dark and inconvenient altogether for a great financier's use. For me that was a period of increasing detachment from our business and the great world of London, I saw it more and more in broken glimpses, and sometimes I was working in my little pavilion above Lady Grove for a fortnight together; even when I came up it was often solely for a meeting of the aeronautical society or for one of the learned societies or to consult literature or employ searchers or some such special business. For my uncle it was a period of stupendous inflation. Each time I met him I found him more confident, more comprehensive, more consciously a factor in great affairs. Soon he was no longer an associate of merely business men, he was big enough for the attentions of greater powers.

I grew used to discovering some item of personal news about him in my evening paper or to the sight of a full-page portrait of him in a sixpenny magazine. Usually the news was of some munificent act, some romantic piece of buying or giving, or some fresh rumour of reconstruction. He saved, you will remember, the Parbury Reynolds for the country. Or at times it would be an interview or my uncle's contribution to some symposium on the "Secret of Success," or such-like topic. Or wonderful tales of his power of work, of his wonderful organization to get things done, of his instant decisions and remarkable power of judging his fellow-men. They repeated his great *mot*: "Eight-hour working-day—I want eighty hours!"

He became modestly but resolutely "public." They cartooned him in *Vanity Fair*. One year my aunt, looking indeed a very gracious, slender lady, faced the portrait of the King in the great room at Burlington House, and the next year saw a medallion of my uncle by Ewart, looking out upon the world, proud and imperial, but on the whole a trifle too prominently convex, from the walls of the New Gallery.

I shared only intermittently in his social experiences.

People knew of me, it is true, and many of them sought to make through me a sort of flank attack upon him, and there was a legend, owing, very unreasonably, partly to my growing scientific reputation and partly to an element of reserve in my manner, that I played a much larger share in planning his operations than was actually the case. This led to one or two very intimate private dinners, to my inclusion in one or two house parties and various odd offers of introductions and services that I didn't for the most part accept. Among other people who sought me in this way was Archie Garvell, now a smart, impecunious soldier of no particular distinction, who would, I think, have been quite prepared to develop any sporting instincts I possessed, and who was beautifully unaware of our former contact. He was always offering me winners; no doubt in a spirit of anticipatory exchange for some really good thing in our more scientific and certain method of getting something for nothing. . . .

In spite of my preoccupation with my experimental work, I did, I find now that I come to ransack my impressions, see a great deal of the great world during those eventful years; I had a near view of the machinery by which our astounding Empire is run, rubbed shoulders and exchanged experiences with bishops and statesmen, political women and women who were not political, physicians and soldiers, artists and authors, the directors of great journals, philanthropists and all sort of eminent, significant people. I saw the statesmen without their orders and the bishops with but a little purple silk left over from their canonicals, inhaling, not incense but cigar smoke. I could look at them all the better because for the most part they were not looking at me but at my uncle, and calculating consciously or unconsciously how they might use him and assimilate him to their system, the most unpremeditated, subtle, successful and aimless plutocracy that ever encumbered the destinies of mankind. Not one of them, so far as I could see, until disaster overtook him, resented his lies, his almost naked dishonesty of method, the disorderly disturbance of this trade and that, caused by his spasmodic operations. I can see them now about him, see them polite, watchful, various; his stiff compact little figure always a centre of attention, his wiry hair, his brief

nose, his under-lip, electric with self-confidence. Wandering marginally through distinguished gatherings, I would catch the whispers : " That's Mr. Ponderevo ! "

" The little man ? "

" Yes, the little bounder with the glasses."

" They say he's made——" . . .

Or I would see him on some parterre of a platform beside my aunt's hurraying hat, amidst titles and costumes, " holding his end up," as he would say, subscribing heavily to obvious charities, even at times making brief convulsive speeches in some good cause before the most exalted audiences. " Mr. Chairman, your Royal Highness, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen," he would begin amidst subsiding applause and adjust those obstinate glasses and thrust back the wings of his frock-coat and rest his hands upon his hips and speak his fragment with ever and again an incidental Zzzz. His hands would fret about him as he spoke, fiddle his glasses, feel in his waistcoat pockets; ever and again he would rise slowly to his toes as a sentence unwound jerkily like a clockwork snake, and drop back on his heels at the end. They were the very gestures of our first encounter when he had stood before the empty fireplace in his minute draped parlour and talked of my future to my mother.

In those measurelessly long hot afternoons in the little shop at Wimblehurst he had talked and dreamt of the Romance of Modern Commerce. Here surely was his romance come true.

§ 8

People say that my uncle lost his head at the crest of his fortunes, but if one may tell so much truth of a man one has in a manner loved, he never had very much head to lose. He was always imaginative, erratic, inconsistent, recklessly inexact, and his inundation of wealth merely gave him scope for these qualities. It is true indeed that towards the climax he became intensely irritable at times and impatient of contradiction, but that I think was rather the gnawing uneasiness of sanity than any mental disturbance. But I find it hard either to judge him or convey the full development of him to the reader. I saw too much of him; my

memory is choked with disarranged moods and aspects. Now he is distended with megalomania, now he is deflated, now he is quarrelsome, now impenetrably self-satisfied, but always he is sudden, jerky, fragmentary, energetic, and —in some subtle fundamental way that I find difficult to define—absurd.

There stands out—because of the tranquil beauty of its setting perhaps—a talk we had in the verandah of the little pavilion near my work-sheds behind Crest Hill in which my aeroplanes and navigable balloons were housed. It was one of many similar conversations, and I do not know why it in particular should survive its fellows. It happens so. He had come up to me after his coffee to consult me about a certain chalice which in a moment of splendour and under the importunity of a countess he had determined to give to a deserving church in the East-end. I in a moment of even rasher generosity had suggested Ewart as a possible artist. Ewart had produced at once an admirable sketch for the sacred vessel surrounded by a sort of wreath of Millies with open arms and wings, and had drawn fifty pounds on the strength of it. After that came a series of vexatious delays. The chalice became less and less of a commercial-man's chalice, acquired more and more the elusive quality of the Hotel Grail, and at last even the drawing receded.

My uncle grew restive. . . . "You see, George, they'll begin to want the blasted thing!"

"What blasted thing?"

"That chalice, damn it! They're beginning to ask questions. It isn't Business, George."

"It's art," I protested, "and religion."

"That's all very well. But it's not a good ad' for us, George, to make a promise and not deliver the goods. . . . I'll have to write off your friend Ewart as a bad debt, that's what it comes to, and go to a decent firm." . . .

We sat outside on deck chairs in the verandah of the pavilion, smoked, drank whiskey, and the chalice disposed of, meditated. His temporary annoyance passed. It was an altogether splendid summer night, following a blazing, indolent day. Full moonlight brought out dimly the lines of the receding hills, one wave beyond another; far beyond were the pin-point lights of Leatherhead, and in the fore-

ground the little stage from which I used to start upon my gliders gleamed like wet steel. The season must have been high June, for down in the woods that hid the lights of the Lady Grove windows, I remember the nightingales thrilled and gurgled. . . .

"We got here, George," said my uncle ending a long pause. "Didn't I say?"

"Say!—when?" I asked.

"In that hole in the To'nem Court Road, eh? It's been a Straight Square fight, and here we are!"

I nodded.

"'Member me telling you—Tono-Bungay? . . . Well. . . . I'd just that afternoon thought of it!"

"I've fancied at times——" I admitted.

"It's a great world, George, nowadays, with a fair chance for every one who lays hold of things. The career *ouvert* to the Talons—eh? Tono-Bungay. Think of it! It's a great world and a growing world, and I'm glad we're in it—and getting a pull. We're getting big people, George. Things come to us. Eh? This Palestine thing." . . .

He meditated for a time and Zzzzed softly. Then he became still.

His theme was taken up by a cricket in the grass until he himself was ready to resume it. The cricket too seemed to fancy that in some scheme of its own it had got there. "Chirrrrrrup," it said; "chirrrrrrup." . . .

"Lord what a place that was at Wimblehurst!" he broke out. "If ever I get a day off we'll motor there, George, and run over that dog that sleeps in the High Street. Always was a dog asleep there—always. Always. . . . I'd like to see the old shop again. I daresay old Ruck still stands between the sheep at his door, grinning with all his teeth, and Marbel, silly beggar! comes out with his white apron on and a pencil stuck behind his ear, trying to look awake. . . . Wonder if they know it's me? I'd like 'em somehow to know it's me."

"They'll have had the International Tea Company and all sorts of people cutting them up," I said. "And that dog's been on the pavement this six years—can't sleep even there, poor dear, because of the motor-horns and its shattered nerves."

"Movin' everywhere," said my uncle. "I expect you're right. . . . It's a big time we're in, George. It's a big Progressive On-coming Imperial Time. This Palestine business—the daring of it. . . . It's—it's a Process, George. And we got our hands on it. Here we sit—with our hands on it, George. Entrusted.

"It seems quiet to-night. But if we could see and hear." He waved his cigar towards Leatherhead and London.

"There they are, millions, George. Jes' think of what they've been up to to-day—those ten millions—each one doing his own particular job. You can't grasp it. It's like old Whitman says—what is it he says? Well, anyway it's like old Whitman. Fine chap, Whitman! Fine old chap! Queer, you can't quote him! . . . And these millions aren't anything. There's the millions over seas, hundreds of millions, Chinee, M'rocco, Africa generally, 'Merica. . . . Well, here we are, with power, with leisure, picked out—because we've been energetic, because we've seized opportunities, because we've made things hum when other people have waited for them to hum. See? Here we are—with our hands on it. Big people. Big growing people. In a sort of way,—Forces."

He paused. "It's wonderful, George," he said.

"Anglo-Saxon energy," I said softly to the night.

"That's it, George—energy. It's put things in our grip—threads, wires, stretching out and out, George, from that little office of ours, out to West Africa, out to Egypt, out to Inja, out east, west, north and south. Running the world practically. Running it faster and faster. Creative. There's that Palestine canal affair. Marvellous idee! Suppose we take that up, suppose we let ourselves in for it, us and the others, and run that water sluice from the Mediterranean into the Dead Sea Valley—think of the difference it will make! All the desert blooming like a rose, Jericho lost for ever, all the Holy Places under water . . . Very likely destroy Christianity." . . .

He mused for a space. "Cuttin' canals," murmured my uncle. "Making tunnels. . . . New countries. . . . New centres. . . . Zzzz. . . . Finance. . . . Not only Palestine."

"I wonder where we shall get before we done, George? We got a lot of big things going. We got the investing

public sound and sure. I don't see why in the end we shouldn't be very big. There's difficulties—but I'm equal to them. We're still a bit soft in our bones, but they'll harden all right. . . . I suppose, after all, I'm worth something like a million, George—cleared up and settled. If I got out of things now. It's a great time, George, a wonderful time!" . . .

I glanced through the twilight at his convexity—and I must confess it struck me that on the whole he wasn't particularly good value.

"We got our hands on things, George—us big people. We got to hang together, George—run the show. Join up with the old order like that mill-wheel of Kipling's. (Finest thing he ever wrote, George;—I jes' been reading it again. Made me buy Lady Grove.) Well, we got to run the country, George. It's ours. Make it a Scientific—Organized—Business—Enterprise. Put idees into it. 'Lectrify it. Run the Press. Run all sorts of developments. I been talking to Lord Boom. I been talking to all sorts of people. Great things. Progress. The world on business lines. Only jes' beginning." . . .

He fell into a deep meditation.

He Zzzzed for a time and ceased.

"*Yes*," he said at last in the tone of a man who has at last emerged with ultimate solutions to the profoundest problems.

"What?" I said after a seemly pause.

My uncle hung fire for a moment, and it seemed to me the fate of nations trembled in the balance. Then he spoke as one who speaks from the very bottom of his heart—and I think it was the very bottom of his heart.

"I'd jes' like to drop into the Eastry Arms, jes' when all those beggars in the parlour are sittin' down to whist, Ruck and Marbel and all, and give 'em ten minutes of my mind, George. Straight from the shoulder. Jes' exactly what I think of them. It's a little thing, but I'd like to do it—jes' once before I die." . . .

He rested on that for some time—Zzzz-ing.

Then he broke out at a new place in a tone of detached criticism.

"There's Boom," he reflected.

"It's a wonderful system—this old British system, George. It's staid and stable, and yet it has a place for new men. We come up and take our places. It's almost expected. We take a hand. That's where our Democracy differs from America. Over there a man succeeds; all he gets is money. Here there's a system—open to every one—practically. . . . Chaps like Boom—come from nowhere."

His voice ceased. I reflected upon the spirit of his words. Suddenly I kicked my feet in the air, rolled on my side and sat up suddenly on my deck chair with my legs down.

"You don't mean it!" I said.

"Mean what, George?"

"Subscription to the party funds. Reciprocal advantage. Have we got to that?"

"Whad you driving at, George?"

"You know. They'd never do it, man!"

"Do what?" he said feebly; and, "Why shouldn't they?"

"They'd not even go to a baronetcy. *No!* . . . And yet, of course, there's Boom! And Collingshead—and Gorver. They've done beer, they've done snippets! After all Tono-Bungay—it's not like a turf commission agent or anything like that! . . . There have of course been some very gentlemanly commission agents. It isn't like a fool of a scientific man who can't make money!"

My uncle grunted; we'd differed on that issue before.

A malignant humour took possession of me. "What would they call you?" I speculated. "The vicar would like Duffield. Too much like Duffer! Difficult thing, a title." I ran my mind over various possibilities. "Why not take a leaf from a socialist tract I came upon yesterday? Chap says we're all getting delocalized. Beautiful word—delocalized! Why not be the first delocalized peer? That gives you—Tono-Bungay! There is a Bungay, you know. Lord Tono of Bungay—in bottles everywhere. Eh?"

My uncle astonished me by losing his temper.

"Damn it, George, you don't seem to see I'm serious! You're always sneering at Tono-Bungay! As though it was some sort of swindle. It was perfec'ly legitimate trade, perfec'ly legitimate. Good value and a good article.

. . . When I come up here and tell you plans and exchange idees—you sneer at me. You *do*. You don't see—it's a big thing. It's a big thing. You got to get used to new circumstances. You got to face what lies before us. You got to drop that tone." . . .

§ 9

My uncle was not altogether swallowed up in business and ambition. He kept in touch with modern thought. For example, he was, I know, greatly swayed by what he called "This Overman idee, Nietzsche—all that stuff."

He mingled those comforting suggestions of a potent and exceptional human being emancipated from the pettier limitations of integrity with the Napoleonic legend. It gave his imagination a considerable outlet. That Napoleonic legend! The real mischief of Napoleon's immensely disastrous and accidental career began only when he was dead and the romantic type of mind was free to elaborate his character. I do believe that my uncle would have made a far less egregious smash if there had been no Napoleonic legend to misguide him. He was in many ways better and infinitely kinder than his career. But when in doubt between decent conduct and a base advantage, that cult came in more and more influentially; "think of Napoleon; think what the inflexibly-wilful Napoleon would have done with such scruples as yours"; that was the rule, and the end was invariably a new step in dishonour.

My uncle was in an unsystematic way a collector of Napoleonic relics; the bigger the book about his hero, the more readily he bought it; he purchased letters and tinsel and weapons that bore however remotely upon the Man of Destiny, and he even secured in Geneva, though he never brought home, an old coach in which Buonaparte might have ridden; he crowded the quiet walls of Lady Grove with engravings and figures of him, preferring, my aunt remarked, the more convex portraits with the white vest and those statuettes with the hands behind the back which throw forward the figure. The Durgans watched him through it all, sardonically.

And he would stand after breakfast at times in the light of the window at Lady Grove, a little apart, with two

fingers of one hand stuck between his waistcoat-buttons and his chin sunken, thinking,—the most preposterous little fat man in the world. It made my aunt feel, she said, "like an old Field Marshal—knocks me into a cocked hat, George!"

Perhaps this Napoleonic bias made him a little less frequent with his cigars than he would otherwise have been, but of that I cannot be sure, and it certainly caused my aunt a considerable amount of vexation after he had read *Napoleon and the Fair Sex*, because for a time that roused him to a sense of a side of life he had in his commercial preoccupations very largely forgotten. Suggestion plays so great a part in this field. My uncle took the next opportunity and had an "affair!"

It was not a very impassioned affair, and the exact particulars never of course reached me. It is quite by chance I know anything of it at all. One evening I was surprised to come upon my uncle in a mixture of Bohemia and smart people at an At Home in the flat of Robbert, the R.A. who painted my aunt, and he was standing a little apart in a recess, talking or rather being talked to in undertones by a plump, blond little woman in pale blue, a Helen Scrymgeour who wrote novels and was organizing a weekly magazine. I elbowed a large lady who was saying something about them, but I didn't need to hear the thing she said to perceive the relationship of the two. It hit me like a placard on a hoarding. I was amazed the whole gathering did not see it. Perhaps they did. She was wearing a remarkably fine diamond necklace, much too fine for journalism, and regarding him with that quality of questionable proprietorship, of leashed but straining intimacy, that seems inseparable from this sort of affair. It is so much more palpable than matrimony. If anything was wanted to complete my conviction it was my uncle's eyes when presently he became aware of mine, a certain embarrassment and a certain pride and defiance. And the next day he made an opportunity to praise the lady's intelligence to me concisely, lest I should miss the point of it all.

After that I heard some gossip—from a friend of the lady's. I was much too curious to do anything but listen. I had never in all my life imagined my uncle in an amorous attitude. It would appear that she called him her "God

in the Car "—after the hero in a novel of Anthony Hope's. It was essential to the convention of their relations that he should go relentlessly whenever business called, and it was generally arranged that it did call. To him women were an incident, it was understood between them; Ambition was the master-passion. A great world called him and the noble hunger for Power. I have never been able to discover just how honest Mrs. Scrymgeour was in all this, but it is quite possible the immense glamour of his financial largeness prevailed with her and that she did bring a really romantic feeling to their encounters. There must have been some extraordinary moments. . . .

I was a good deal exercised and distressed about my aunt when I realized what was afoot. I thought it would prove a terrible humiliation to her. I suspected her of keeping up a brave front with the loss of my uncle's affections fretting at her heart, but there I simply underestimated her. She didn't hear for some time, and when she did hear she was extremely angry and energetic. The sentimental situation didn't trouble her for a moment. She decided that my uncle "wanted smacking." She accentuated herself with an unexpected new hat, went and gave him an inconceivable talking-to at the Hardingham, and then came round to "blow-up" me for not telling her what was going on before. . . .

I tried to bring her to a proper sense of the accepted values in this affair, but my aunt's originality of outlook was never so invincible. "Men don't tell on one another in affairs of passion," I protested, and suchlike worldly excuses.

"Women!" she said in high indignation, "and men! It isn't women and men—it's him and me, George! Why don't you talk sense?

"Old passion's all very well, George, in its way, and I'm the last person to be jealous. But this is old nonsense. . . . I'm not going to let him show off what a silly old lobster he is to other women. . . . I'll mark every scrap of his underclothes with red letters, 'Ponderevo—Private'—every scrap. . . .

"Going about making love indeed!—in abdominal belts!—at his time of life!" . . .

I cannot imagine what passed between her and my uncle. But I have no doubt that for once her customary badinage

was laid aside. How they talked then I do not know, for I who knew them so well had never heard that much of intimacy between them. At any rate it was a concerned and preoccupied " God in the Car " I had to deal with in the next few days, unusually Zzzz-y and given to slight impatient gestures that had nothing to do with the current conversation. And it was evident that in all directions he was finding things unusually difficult to explain.

All the intimate moments in this affair were hidden from me, but in the end my aunt triumphed. He did not so much throw as jerk over Mrs. Scrymgeour, and she did not so much make a novel of it as upset a huge pailful of attenuated and adulterated female soul upon this occasion. My aunt did not appear in that, even remotely. So that it is doubtful if the lady knew the real causes of her abandonment. The Napoleonic hero was practically unmarried, and he threw over his lady as Napoleon threw over Josephine, for a great alliance. . . .

It was a triumph for my aunt, but it had its price. For some time it was evident things were strained between them. He gave up the lady, but he resented having to do so, deeply. She had meant more to his imagination than one could have supposed. He wouldn't for a long time " come round." He became touchy and impatient and secretive towards my aunt, and she, I noted, after an amazing check or so, stopped that stream of kindly abuse that had flowed for so long and had been so great a refreshment in their lives. They were both the poorer for its cessation, both less happy. She devoted herself more and more to Lady Grove and the humours and complications of its management. The servants took to her—as they say—she god-mothered three Susans during her rule, the coachman's, the gardener's, and the Up Hill game-keeper's. She got together a library of old household books that were in the vein of the place. She revived the still-room, and became a great artist in jellies and elder and cowslip wine.

§ 10

And while I neglected the development of my uncle's finances—and my own, in my scientific work and my absorbing conflict with the difficulties of flying,—his

schemes grew more and more expansive and hazardous, and his spending wilder and laxer. I believe that a haunting sense of the intensifying unsoundness of his position accounts largely for his increasing irritability and his increasing secretiveness with my aunt and myself during these crowning years. He dreaded, I think, having to explain, he feared our jests might pierce unwittingly to the truth. Even in the privacy of his mind he would not face the truth. He was accumulating unrealizable securities in his safes until they hung a potential avalanche over the economic world. But his buying became a fever, and his restless desire to keep it up with himself that he was making a triumphant progress to limitless wealth gnawed deeper and deeper. A curious feature of this time with him was his buying over and over again of similar things. His ideas seemed to run in series. Within a twelvemonth he bought five new motor-cars, each more swift and powerful than its predecessor, and only the repeated prompt resignation of his chief chauffeur at each moment of danger, prevented his driving them himself. He used them more and more. He developed a passion for locomotion for its own sake.

Then he began to chafe at Lady Grove, fretted by a chance jest he had overheard at a dinner. "This house, George," he said. "It's a misfit. There's no elbow-room in it; it's choked with old memories. . . . And I can't stand all these damned Durgans!

"That chap in the corner, George. No! the other corner! The man in a cherry-colour coat. He watches you! He'd look silly if I stuck a poker through his Gizzard!"

"He'd look," I reflected, "much as he does now. As though he was amused."

He replaced his glasses which had fallen at his emotion, and glared at his antagonists. "What are they? What are they all, the lot of 'em? Dead as Mutton! They just stuck in the mud. They didn't even rise to the Reformation. The old out-of-date Reformation! Move with the times!—they moved against the times. Just a Family of Failure;—they never even tried! . . .

"They're jes', George, exactly what I'm not. Exactly. It isn't suitable. . . . All this living in the Past.

"And I want a bigger place too, George. I want air and

sunlight and room to move about and more service. A house where you can get a Move on things! Zzzz. Why! it's like a discord—it jars—even to have the telephone. . . . There's nothing, nothing except the terrace, that's worth a Rap. It's all dark and old and dried up and full of old-fashioned things—musty old idees—fitter for a silver-fish than a modern man. . . . I don't know how I got here."

He broke out into a new grievance. "That damned vicar," he complained, "thinks I ought to think myself lucky to get this place! Every time I meet him I can see him think it. . . . One of these days, George, I'll show him what a Mod'un house is like!"

And he did.

I remember the day when he declared, as Americans say, for Crest Hill. He had come up to see my new gas plant, for I was then only just beginning to experiment with auxiliary collapsible balloons, and all the time the shine of his glasses was wandering away to the open down beyond. "Let's go back to Lady Grove over the hill," he said. "Something I want to show you. Something fine!"

It was an empty sunlit place that summer evening, sky and earth warm with sundown, and a pewit or so just accentuating the pleasant stillness that ends a long clear day. A beautiful peace, it was, to wreck for ever. And there was my uncle, the modern man of power, in his grey top-hat and his grey suit and his black-ribboned glasses, short, thin-legged, large-stomached, pointing and gesticulating, threatening this calm.

He began with a wave of his arm. "That's the place, George," he said. "See?"

"Eh!" I cried—for I had been thinking of remote things.

"I got it."

"Got what?"

"For a house!—a Twentieth Century house! That's the place for it!"

One of his characteristic phrases was begotten in him. "Four-square to the winds of heaven, George!" he said. "Eh? Four-square to the winds of heaven!"

"You'll get the winds up here," I said.

"A mammoth house it ought to be, George—to suit these hills."

"Quite," I said.

"Great galleries and things—running out there and there—See? I been thinking of it, George! Looking out all this way—across the Weald. With its back to Lady Grove."

"And the morning sun in its eye."

"Like an eagle, George,—like an eagle!"

So he broached to me what speedily became the leading occupation of his culminating years, Crest Hill. But all the world has heard of that extravagant place which grew and changed its plans as it grew, and bubbled like a salted snail, and burgeoned and bulged and evermore grew. I know not what delirium of pinnacles and terraces and arcades and corridors glittered at last upon the uplands of his mind; the place, for all that its expansion was t rminated abruptly by our collapse, is wonderful enough as it stands,—that empty instinctive building of a childless man. His chief architect was a young man named Westminster, whose work he had picked out in the architecture room of the Royal Academy on account of a certain grandiose courage in it, but with him he associated from time to time a number of fellow professionals, stonemasons, sanitary engineers, painters, sculptors, scribes, metal workers, wood carvers, furniture designers, ceramic specialists, landscape gardeners, and the man who designs the arrangement and ventilation of the various new houses in the London Zoological Gardens. In addition he had his own ideas. The thing occupied his mind at all times, but it held it completely from Friday night to Monday morning. He would come down to Lady Grove on Friday night in a crowded motor-car that almost dripped architects. He didn't, however, confine himself to architects, every one was liable to an invitation to week-end and view Crest Hill, and many an eager promoter, unaware of how Napoleonically and completely my uncle had departmentalized his mind, tried to creep up to him by way of tiles and ventilators and new electric fittings. Always on Sunday mornings, unless the weather was vile, he would, so soon as breakfast and his secretaries were disposed of, visit the site with a considerable retinue, and alter and develop plans, making modifications, Zzzz-ing, giving immense new orders verbally—an unsatisfactory way, as Westminster and the contractors ultimately found.

There he stands in my memory, the symbol of this age for me, the man of luck and advertisement, the current master of the world. There he stands upon the great outward sweep of the terrace before the huge main entrance, a little figure, ridiculously disproportionate to that forty-foot arch, with the granite ball behind him—the astronomical ball, brass coopered, that represented the world, with a little adjustable tube of lenses on a gun-metal arm that focussed the sun upon just that point of the earth on which it chanced to be shining vertically. There he stands, Napoleonically grouped with his retinue, men in tweeds and golfing suits, a little solicitor, whose name I forget, in grey trousers and a black jacket, and Westminster in Jaeger underclothing, a floriferous tie, and a peculiar brown cloth of his own. The downland breeze flutters my uncle's coat-tails, disarranges his stiff hair, and insists on the evidence of undisciplined appetites in face and form, as he points out this or that feature in the prospect to his attentive collaborator.

Below are hundreds of feet of wheeling-planks, ditches, excavations, heaps of earth, piles of garden stone from the Wealden ridges. On either hand the walls of his irrelevant unmeaning palace rise. At one time he had working in that place—disturbing the economic balance of the whole countryside by their presence—upwards of three thousand men. . . .

So he poses for my picture amidst the raw beginnings that were never to be completed. He did the strangest things about that place, things more and more detached from any conception of financial scale, things more and more apart from sober humanity. He seemed to think himself at last, released from any such limitations. He moved a quite considerable hill, and nearly sixty mature trees were moved with it to open his prospect eastward, moved it about two hundred feet to the south. At another time he caught a suggestion from some city restaurant and made a billiard-room roofed with plate glass beneath the waters of his ornamental lake. He furnished one wing while its roof still awaited completion. He had a swimming bath thirty feet square next to his bedroom upstairs, and to crown it all he commenced a great wall to hold all his dominions together, free from the invasion of common men.

It was a ten-foot wall, glass surmounted, and had it been completed as he intended it, it would have had a total length of nearly eleven miles. Some of it towards the last was so dishonestly built that it collapsed within a year upon its foundations, but some miles of it still stand. I never think of it now but what I think of the hundreds of eager little investors who followed his "star," whose hopes and lives, whose wives' security and children's prospects are all mixed up beyond redemption with that flaking mortar. . . .

It is curious how many of these modern financiers of chance and bluff have ended their careers by building. It was not merely my uncle. Sooner or later they all seem to bring their luck to the test of realization, try to make their fluid opulence coagulate out as bricks and mortar, bring moonshine into relations with a weekly wages-sheet. Then the whole fabric of confidence and imagination totters—and down they come. . . .

When I think of that despoiled hillside, that colossal litter of bricks and mortar, and crude roads and paths, the scaffolding and sheds, the general quality of unforeseeing outrage upon the peace of nature, I am reminded of a chat I had with the vicar one bleak day after he had witnessed a glide. He talked to me of aeronautics as I stood in jersey and shorts beside my machine, fresh from alighting, and his cadaverous face failed to conceal a peculiar desolation that possessed him.

"Almost you convince me," he said, coming up to me, "against my will. . . . A marvellous invention! But it will take you a long time, sir, before you can emulate that perfect mechanism—the wing of a bird."

He looked at my sheds.

"You've changed the look of this valley, too," he said.

"Temporary defilements," I remarked, guessing what was in his mind.

"Of course. Things come and go. Things come and go. But—— H'm. I've just been up over the hill to look at Mr. Edward Ponderevo's new house. That—that is something more permanent. A magnificent place!—in many ways. Imposing. I've never somehow brought myself to go that way before. . . . Things are greatly advanced. . . . We find—the great number of strangers introduced into the villages about here by these operations, working-men

chiefly, a little embarrassing——. It puts us out. They bring a new spirit into the place; betting—ideas—all sorts of queer notions. Our publicans like it, of course. And they come and sleep in one's outhouses—and make the place a little unsafe at nights. The other morning I couldn't sleep—a slight dyspepsia—and I looked out of the window. I was amazed to see people going by on bicycles. A silent procession. I counted ninety-seven—in the dawn. All going up to the new road for Crest Hill. Remarkable I thought it. And so I've been up to see what they were doing."

"They would have been more than remarkable thirty years ago," I said.

"Yes, indeed. Things change. We think nothing of it now at all—comparatively. And that big house——"

He raised his eyebrows. "Really stupendous! . . . Stupendous.

"All the hillside—the old turf—cut to ribbons!"

His eye searched my face. "We've grown so accustomed to look up to Lady Grove," he said, and smiled in search of sympathy. "It shifts our centre of gravity."

"Things will readjust themselves," I lied.

He snatched at the phrase. "Of course," he said. "They'll readjust themselves—settle down again. Must. In the old way. It's bound to come right again—a comforting thought. Yes. After all, Lady Grove itself had to be built once upon a time—was—to begin with—artificial."

His eye returned to my aeroplane. He sought to dismiss his graver preoccupations. "I should think twice," he remarked, "before I trusted myself to that concern. . . . But I suppose one grows accustomed to the motion."

He bade me good morning and went his way, bowed and thoughtful. . . .

He had kept the truth from his mind a long time, but that morning it had forced its way to him with an aspect that brooked no denial that this time it was not just changes that were coming in his world, but that all his world lay open and defenceless, conquered and surrendered, doomed, so far as he could see, root and branch, scale and form alike, to change.

CHAPTER III

Soaring

§ 1

For nearly all the time that my uncle was incubating and hatching Crest Hill I was busy in a little transverse valley between that great beginning and Lady Grove with more and more costly and ambitious experiments in aerial navigation. This work was indeed the main substance of my life through all the great time of the Tono-Bungay symphony.

I have told already how I came to devote myself to this system of inquiries, how in a sort of disgust with the common adventure of life I took up the dropped ends of my college studies, taking them up again with a man's resolution instead of a boy's ambition. From the first I did well at this work. It was I think largely a case of special aptitude, of a peculiar irrelevant vein of faculty running through my mind. It is one of those things men seem to have by chance, that has little or nothing to do with their general merit, and which it is ridiculous to be either conceited or modest about. I did get through a very big mass of work in those years, working for a time with a concentrated fierceness that left little of such energy or capacity as I possess unused. I worked out a series of problems connected with the stability of bodies pitching in the air and the internal movements of the wind, and I also revolutionized one leading part at least of the theory of explosive engines. These things are to be found in the *Philosophical Transactions*, the *Mathematical Journal*, and less frequently in one or two other such publications, and they needn't detain us here. Indeed, I doubt if I could write about them here. One acquires a sort of shorthand

for one's notes and mind in relation to such special work. I have never taught nor lectured, that is to say I have never had to express my thoughts about mechanical things in ordinary everyday language, and I doubt very much if I could do so now without extreme tedium. . . .

My work was to begin with very largely theoretical. I was able to attack such early necessities of verification as arose with quite little models, using a turn-table to get the motion through the air, and cane, whalebone and silk as building material. But a time came when incalculable factors crept in, factors of human capacity and factors of insufficient experimental knowledge, when one must needs guess and try. Then I had to enlarge the scale of my operations, and soon I had enlarged them very greatly. I set to work almost concurrently on the balance and stability of gliders and upon the steering of inflated bags, the latter a particularly expensive branch of work. I was no doubt moved by something of the same spirit of lavish expenditure that was running away with my uncle in these developments. Presently my establishment above Lady Grove had grown to a painted wood châlet big enough to accommodate six men, and in which I would sometimes live for three weeks together; to a gasometer, to a motor-house, to three big corrugated-roofed sheds and lock-up houses, to a stage from which to start gliders, to a workshop, and so forth. A rough road was made. We brought up gas from Cheaping and electricity from Woking, which place I found also afforded a friendly workshop for larger operations than I could manage. I had the luck also to find a man who seemed my heaven-sent second-in-command—Cothope his name was. He was a self-educated man; he had formerly been a sapper and he was one of the best and handiest working engineers alive. Without him I do not think I could have achieved half what I have done. At times he has been not so much my assistant as my collaborator, and has followed my fortunes to this day. Other men came and went as I needed them.

I do not know how far it is possible to convey to any one who has not experienced it, the peculiar interest, the peculiar satisfaction that lies in a sustained research when one is not hampered by want of money. It is a different thing from

any other sort of human effort. You are free from the exasperating conflict with your fellow-creatures altogether —at least so far as the essential work goes—that for me is its peculiar merit. Scientific truth is the remotest of mistresses, she hides in strange places, she is attained by tortuous and laborious roads, but *she is always there!* Win to her and she will not fail you; she is yours and mankind's for ever. She is reality, the one reality I have found in this strange disorder of existence. She will not sulk with you nor misunderstand you nor cheat you of your reward upon some petty doubt. You cannot change her by advertisement or clamour, nor stifle her in vulgarities. Things grow under your hands when you serve her, things that are permanent as nothing else is permanent in the whole life of man. That I think is the peculiar satisfaction of science and its enduring reward. . . .

The taking up of experimental work produced a great change in my personal habits. I have told how already once in my life at Wimblehurst I had a period of discipline and continuous effort, and how when I came to South Kensington I became demoralized by the immense effect of London, by its innumerable imperative demands upon my attention and curiosity. And I parted with much of my personal pride when I gave up science for the development of Tono-Bungay. But my poverty kept me abstinent and my youthful romanticism kept me chaste until my married life was well under way. Then in all directions I relaxed. I did a large amount of work, but I never troubled to think whether it was my maximum nor whether the moods and indolences that came to me at times were avoidable things. With the coming of plenty I ate abundantly and foolishly, drank freely and followed my impulses more and more carelessly. I felt no reason why I should do anything else. Never at any point did I use myself to the edge of my capacity. The emotional crisis of my divorce did not produce any immediate change in these matters of personal discipline. I found some difficulty at first in concentrating my mind upon scientific work, it was so much more exacting than business, but I got over that difficulty by smoking. I became an inordinate cigar smoker; it gave me moods of profound depression, but I treated these usually by the

homœopathic method—by lighting another cigar. I didn't realize at all how loose my moral and nervous fibre had become until I reached the practical side of my investigations and was face to face with the necessity of finding out just how it felt to use a glider and just what a man could do with one.

I got into this relaxed habit of living in spite of very real tendencies in my nature towards discipline. I've never been in love with self-indulgence. That philosophy of the loose lip and the lax paunch is one for which I've always had an instinctive distrust. I like bare things, stripped things, plain, austere and continent things, fine lines and cold colours. But in these plethoric times when there is too much coarse stuff for everybody and the struggle for life takes the form of competitive advertisement and the effort to fill your neighbour's eye, when there is no urgent demand either for personal courage, sound nerves or stark beauty, we find ourselves by accident. Always before these times the bulk of the people did not over-eat themselves because they couldn't whether they wanted to do so or not, and all but a very few were kept "fit" by unavoidable exercise and personal danger. Now, if only he pitch his standard low enough and keep free from pride, almost any one can achieve a sort of excess. You can go through contemporary life fudging and evading, indulging and slacking, never really hungry nor frightened nor passionately stirred, your highest moment a mere sentimental orgasm, and your first real contact with primary and elemental necessities, the sweat of your death-bed. So I think it was with my uncle; so, very nearly, it was with me.

But the glider brought me up smartly. I had to find out how these things went down the air, and the only way to find out is to go down with one. And for a time I wouldn't face it.

There is something impersonal about a book I suppose. At any rate I find myself able to write down here just the confession I've never been able to make to any one face to face, the frightful trouble it was to me to bring myself to do what I suppose every other coloured boy in the West Indies could do without turning a hair, and that is to fling myself off for my first soar down the wind. The first trial

was bound to be the worst, it was an experiment I made with life, and the chance of death or injury was, I supposed, about equal to the chance of success. I believed that with a dawn-like lucidity. I had begun with a glider that I imagined was on the lines of the Wright Brothers' aeroplane, but I could not be sure. It might turn over. I might upset it. It might burrow its nose at the end and smash itself and me. The conditions of the flight necessitated alert attention; it wasn't a thing to be done by jumping off and shutting one's eyes or getting angry or drunk to do it. One had to use one's weight to balance. And when at last I did it it was horrible—for ten seconds. For ten seconds or so, as I swept down the air flattened on my infernal framework and with the wind in my eyes, the rush of the ground beneath me filled me with sick and helpless terror; I felt as though some violent oscillatory current was throbbing in brain and backbone, and I groaned aloud. I set my teeth and groaned. It was a groan wrung out of me in spite of myself. My sensations of terror swooped to a climax.

And then, you know, they ended!

Suddenly my terror was over and done with. I was soaring through the air right way up, steadily, and no mischance had happened. I felt intensely alive and my nerves were strung like a bow. I shifted a limb, swerved and shouted between fear and triumph as I recovered from the swerve and heeled the other way and steadied myself.

I thought I was going to hit a rook that was flying athwart me,—it was queer with what projectile silence that jumped upon me out of nothingness, and I yelled helplessly, "Get out of the way!" The bird doubled itself up like a partly inverted V, flapped, went up to the right abruptly and vanished from my circle of interest. Then I saw the shadow of my aeroplane keeping a fixed distance before me and very steady, and the turf as it seemed streaming out behind it. The turf!—it wasn't after all streaming so impossibly fast. . . .

When I came gliding down to the safe spread of level green I had chosen, I was as cool and ready as a city clerk who drops off an omnibus in motion, and I had learnt much

more than soaring. I tilted up her nose at the right moment, levelled again and grounded like a snowflake on a windless day. I lay flat for an instant and then knelt up and got on my feet atremble but very satisfied with myself. Cothope was running down the hill to me. . . .

But from that day I went into training, and I kept myself in training for many months. I had delayed my experiments for very nearly six weeks on various excuses because of my dread of this first flight, because of the slackness of body and spirit that had come to me with the business life The shame of that cowardice spurred me none the less because it was probably altogether my own secret. I felt that Cothope at any rate might suspect. Well,—he shouldn't suspect again.

It is curious that I remember that shame and self-accusation and its consequences far more distinctly than I recall the weeks of vacillation before I soared. For a time I went altogether without alcohol, I stopped smoking altogether and ate very sparingly, and every day I did something that called a little upon my nerves and muscles. I soared as frequently as I could. I substituted a motor-bicycle for the London train and took my chances in the southward traffic, and I even tried what thrills were to be got upon a horse. But they put me on made horses, and I conceived a perhaps unworthy contempt for the certitudes of equestrian exercise in comparison with the adventures of mechanism. Also I walked along the high wall at the back of Lady Grove garden, and at last brought myself to stride the gap where the gate comes. If I didn't altogether get rid of a certain giddy instinct by such exercises, at least I trained my will until it didn't matter. And soon I no longer dreaded flight but was eager to go higher into the air, and I came to esteem soaring upon a glider that even over the deepest dip in the ground had barely forty feet of fall beneath it, a mere mockery of what flight might be. I began to dream of the keener freshness in the air high above the beechwoods, and it was rather to satisfy that desire than as any legitimate development of my proper work that presently I turned a part of my energies and the bulk of my private income to the problem of the navigable balloon.

§ 2

I had gone far beyond that initial stage; I had had two smashes and a broken rib which my aunt nursed with great energy, and was getting some reputation in the aeronautic world when suddenly, as though she had never really left it, the Honourable Beatrice Normandy, dark-eyed, and with the old disorderly wave of the hair from her brow, came back into my life. She came riding down a grass path in the thickets below Lady Grove, perched up on a huge black horse, and the old Earl of Carnaby and Archie Garvell, her half-brother, were with her. My uncle had been bothering me about the Crest Hill hot-water pipes, and we were returning by a path transverse to theirs and came out upon them suddenly. Old Carnaby was trespassing on our ground and so he hailed us in a friendly fashion and pulled up to talk to us.

I didn't note Beatrice at all at first. I was interested in Lord Carnaby, that remarkable vestige of his own brilliant youth. I had heard of him but never seen him. For a man of sixty-five who had sinned all the sins, so they said, and laid waste the most magnificent political debut of any man of his generation, he seemed to me to be looking remarkably fit and fresh. He was a lean little man with grey-blue eyes in his brown face, and his cracked voice was the worst thing in his effect.

"Hope you don't mind us coming this way, Ponderevo," he cried; and my uncle, who was sometimes a little too general and generous with titles, answered, "Not at all my lord, not at all! Glad you make use of it!"

"You're building a great place over the hill,' 'said Carnaby.

"Thought I'd make a show for once," said my uncle. "It looks big because it's spread out for the sun."

"Air and sunlight," said the earl. "You can't have too much of them. But before our time they used to build for shelter and water and the highroad." . . .

Then I discovered that the silent figure behind the earl was Beatrice.

I'd forgotten her sufficiently to think for a moment that she hadn't changed at all since she had watched me from behind the skirts of Lady Drew. She was looking at me,

and her dainty brow under her broad-brimmed hat—she was wearing a grey hat and loose unbuttoned coat—was knit with perplexity, trying, I suppose, to remember where she had seen me before. Her shaded eyes met mine with that mute question. . . .

It seemed incredible to me she didn't remember.

"Well," said the earl, and touched his horse.

Garvell was patting the neck of his horse which was inclined to fidget, and disregarding me. He nodded over his shoulder and followed. His movement seemed to release a train of memories in her. She glanced suddenly at him and then back at me with a flash of recognition that warmed instantly to a faint smile. She hesitated as if to speak to me, smiled broadly and understandingly and turned to follow the others. All three broke into a canter and she did not look back. I stood for a second or so at the crossing of the lanes, watching her recede, and then became aware that my uncle was already some paces off and talking over his shoulder in the belief that I was close behind.

I turned about and strode to overtake him.

My mind was full of Beatrice and this surprise. I remembered her simply as a Normandy. I'd clean forgotten that Garvell was the son and she the step-daughter of our neighbour, Lady Osprey. Indeed, I'd probably forgotten at that time that we had Lady Osprey as a neighbour. There was no reason at all for remembering it. It was amazing to find her in this Surrey countryside, when I'd never thought of her as living anywhere in the world but at Bladesover Park, near forty miles and twenty years away. She was so alive—so unchanged! The same quick warm blood was in her cheeks. It seemed only yesterday that we had kissed among the bracken stems. . .

"Eh?" I said.

"I say he's good stuff," said my uncle. "You can say what you like against the aristocracy, George; Lord Carnaby's rattling good stuff. There's a sort of *Savoir Faire*, something—it's an old-fashioned phrase, George, but a good one—there's a Bong-Tong. . . . It's like the Oxford turf, George, you can't grow it in a year. I wonder how they do it? It's living always on a Scale, George. It's being there from the beginning." . . .

"She might," I said to myself, "be a picture by Romney come alive!"

"They tell all these stories about him," said my uncle, "but what do they all amount to?"

"Gods!" I said to myself; "but why have I forgotten for so long? Those queer little brows of hers—the touch of mischief in her eyes—the way she breaks into a smile!"

"I don't blame him," said my uncle. "Mostly it's imagination. That and leisure, George. When I was a young man I was kept pretty busy. So were you. Even then——!"

What puzzled me more particularly was the queer trick of my memory that had never recalled anything vital of Beatrice whatever when I met Garvell again, that had, indeed, recalled nothing except a boyish antagonism and our fight. Now when my senses were full of her, it seemed incredible that I could ever have forgotten. . . .

§ 3

"Oh Crikey!" said my aunt, reading a letter behind her coffee-machine. "*Here's* a young woman, George!"

We were breakfasting together in the big window bay at Lady Grove that looks upon the iris beds; my uncle was in London.

I sounded an interrogative note and decapitated an egg.

"Who's Beatrice Normandy?" asked my aunt. "I've not heard of her before."

"She the young woman?"

"Yes. Says she knows you. I'm no hand at old etiquette, George, but her line is a bit unusual. Practically she says she's going to make her mother——"

"Eh? Step-mother, isn't it?"

"You seem to know a lot about her. She says 'mother,'—Lady Osprey. They're to call on me, anyhow, next Wednesday week at four, and there's got to be you for tea."

"Eh?"

"You—for tea."

" H'm. She had rather—force of character when I knew her before."

I became aware of my aunt's head sticking out obliquely from behind the coffee-machine and regarding me with wide blue curiosity. I met her gaze for a moment, flinched, coloured and laughed.

" I've known her longer than I've known you," I said, and explained at length.

My aunt kept her eye on me over and round the coffee-machine as I did so. She was greatly interested, and asked several elucidatory questions.

" Why didn't you tell me the day you saw her ? You've had her on your mind for a week," she said.

" It *is* odd I didn't tell you," I admitted.

" You thought I'd get a Down on her," said my aunt conclusively. " That's what you thought," and opened the rest of her letters.

The two ladies came in a pony-carriage with conspicuous punctuality, and I had the unusual experience of seeing my aunt entertaining callers. We had tea upon the terrace under the cedar, but old Lady Osprey being an embittered Protestant had never before seen the inside of the house and we made a sort of tour of inspection that reminded me of my first visit to the place. In spite of my preoccupation with Beatrice, I stored a queer little memory of the contrast between the two other women; my aunt, tall, slender and awkward, in a simple blue home-keeping dress, an omnivorous reader and a very authentic wit, and the lady of pedigree, short and plump, dressed with Victorian fussiness, living at the intellectual level of palmistry and genteel fiction, pink in the face and generally flustered by a sense of my aunt's social strangeness and disposed under the circumstances to behave rather like an imitation of the more queenly moments of her own cook. The one seemed made of whalebone, the other of dough. My aunt was nervous, partly through the intrinsic difficulty of handling the lady and partly because of her passionate desire to watch Beatrice and me, and her nervousness took a common form with her, a wider clumsiness of gesture and an exacerbation of her habitual oddity of phrase which did much to deepen the pink perplexity of the lady of title. For instance

I heard my aunt admit that one of the Stuart Durgan ladies did look a bit "balmy on the crumpet"; she described the knights of the age of chivalry as "korvorting about on the off-chance of a dragon"; she explained she was "always old mucking about the garden," and instead of offering me a Garibaldi biscuit, she asked me with that faint lisp of hers, to "have some squashed flies, George." I felt convinced Lady Osprey would describe her as "a most eccentric person" on the very first opportunity;—"a *most* eccentric person." One could see her, as people say, "shaping" for that.

Beatrice was dressed very quietly in brown with a simple but courageous broad-brimmed hat, and an unexpected quality of being grown-up and responsible. She guided her step-mother through the first encounter, scrutinized my aunt and got us all well in movement through the house, and then she turned her attention to me with a quick and half-confident smile.

"We haven't met," she said, "since——"

"It was in the Warren."

"Of course," she said, "the Warren! I remembered it all except just the name. . . . I was eight."

Her smiling eyes insisted on my memories being thorough. I looked up and met them squarely, a little at a loss for what I should say.

"I gave you away pretty completely," she said, meditating upon my face. "And afterwards I gave away Archie."

She turned her face away from the others, and her voice fell ever so little.

"They gave him a licking for telling lies!" she said, as though that was a pleasant memory. "And when it was all over I went to our wigwam. You remember the wigwam?"

"Out in the West Wood?"

"Yes—and cried—for all the evil I had done you, I suppose. . . . I've often thought of it since." . . .

Lady Osprey stopped for us to overtake her. "My dear!" she said to Beatrice. "Such a beautiful gallery!" Then she stared very hard at me, puzzled in the most naked fashion to understand who I might be.

"People say the oak staircase is rather good," said my aunt, and led the way.

Lady Osprey, with her skirts gathered for the ascent to the gallery and her hand on the newel, turned and addressed a look full of meaning—overflowing indeed with meanings—at her charge. The chief meaning no doubt was caution about myself, but much of it was just meaning at large. I chanced to catch the response in a mirror and detected Beatrice with her nose wrinkled into a swift and entirely diabolical grimace. Lady Osprey became a deeper shade of pink and speechless with indignation,—it was evident she disavowed all further responsibility, as she followed my aunt upstairs.

"It's dark, but there's a sort of dignity," said Beatrice very distinctly, regarding the hall with serene tranquillity, and allowing the unwilling feet on the stairs to widen their distance from us. She stood a step up, so that she looked down a little upon me and over me at the old hall.

She turned upon me abruptly when she thought her step-mother was beyond ear-shot.

"But how did you get here?" she asked.

"Here?"

"All this." She indicated space and leisure by a wave of the hand at hall and tall windows and sunlit terrace. "Weren't you the housekeeper's son?"

"I've adventured. My uncle has become—a great financier. He used to be a little chemist about twenty miles from Bladesover. We're promoters now, amalgamators, big people on the new model."

"I understand." She regarded me with interested eyes, visibly thinking me out.

"And you recognized me?" I asked.

"After a second or so. I saw you recognized me. I couldn't place you, but I knew I knew you. Then Archie being there helped me to remember."

"I'm glad to meet again," I ventured. "I'd never forgotten you."

"One doesn't forget those childish things."

We regarded one another for a moment with a curiously easy and confident satisfaction in coming together again. I can't explain our ready zest in one another. The thing

was so. We pleased each other, we had no doubt in our minds that we pleased each other. From the first we were at our ease with one another. "So picturesque, so very picturesque," came a voice from above, and then; "Bee-atrice!"

"I've a hundred things I want to know about you," she said with an easy intimacy, as we went up the winding steps. . . .

As the four of us sat at tea together under the cedar on the terrace, she asked questions about my aeronautics. My aunt helped with a word or so about my broken ribs. Lady Osprey evidently regarded flying as a most undesirable and improper topic—a blasphemous intrusion upon the angels. "It isn't flying," I explained. "We don't fly yet."

"You never will," she said compactly. "You never will."

"Well," I said, "we do what we can."

The little lady lifted a small gloved hand and indicated a height of about four feet from the ground. "Thus far," she said, "thus far—*and no farther!* No!"

She became emphatically pink. "*No*," she said again quite conclusively, and coughed shortly. "Thank you," she said to her ninth or tenth cake. Beatrice burst into cheerful laughter with her eye on me. I was lying on the turf, and this perhaps caused a slight confusion about the primordial curse in Lady Osprey's mind.

"Upon his belly shall he go," she said with quiet distinctness, "all the days of his life."

After which we talked no more of aeronautics.

Beatrice sat bunched together in a chair and regarded me with exactly the same scrutiny, I thought, the same adventurous aggression, that I had faced long ago at the tea-table in my mother's room. She was amazingly like that little Princess of my Bladesover memories, the wilful misbehaviours of her hair seemed the same—her voice; things one would have expected to be changed altogether. She formed her plans in the same quick way, and acted with the same irresponsible decision.

She stood up abruptly.

"What is there beyond the terrace?" she said, and found me promptly beside her.

I invented a view for her.

At the further corner from the cedar she perched herself up upon the parapet and achieved an air of comfort among the lichenous stones. "Now tell me," she said, "all about yourself. Tell me about yourself; I know such duffers of men! They all do the same things. How did you get—here? All my men *were* here. They couldn't have got here if they hadn't been here always. They wouldn't have thought it right. You've climbed."

"If it's climbing," I said.

She went off at a tangent. "It's—I don't know if you'll understand—interesting to meet you again. I've remembered you. I don't know why, but I have. I've used you as a sort of lay figure—when I've told myself stories. But you've always been rather stiff and difficult in my stories—in ready-made clothes—a Labour Member or a Bradlaugh, or something like that. You're not like that a bit. And yet you *are!*"

She looked at me. "Was it much of a fight? They make out it is. I don't know why?"

"I was shot up here by an accident," I said. "There was no fight at all. Except to keep honest perhaps—and I made no great figure in that. I and my uncle mixed a medicine and it blew us up. No merit in that! But you've been here all the time. Tell me what you have done first."

"One thing we didn't do." She meditated for a moment.

"What?" said I.

"Produce a little half-brother for Bladesover. So it went to the Phillbrick gang. And they let it! And I and my step-mother—we let too. And live in a little house."

She nodded her head vaguely over her shoulder, and turned to me again. "Well, suppose it was an accident. Here you are! Now you're here, what are you going to do? You're young. Is it to be Parliament? I heard some men the other day talking about you. Before I knew you were you. They said that was what you ought to do." . . .

She put me through my intentions with a close and vital curiosity. It was just as she had tried to imagine me a soldier and place me years ago. She made me feel more

planless and incidental than ever. "You want to make a flying-machine," she pursued. "And when you fly? What then? Would it be for fighting?" . . .

I told her something of my experimental work. She had never heard of the soaring aeroplane, and was excited by the thought, and keen to hear about it. She had thought all the work so far had been a mere projecting of impossible machines. For her Pilcher and Lilienthal had died in vain. She did not know such men had lived in the world.

"But that's dangerous!" she said, with a note of discovery.

"Oh!—it's dangerous." . . .

"Bee-atrice!" Lady Osprey called.

Beatrice dropped from the wall to her feet.

"Where do you do this soaring?"

"Beyond the high Barrows. East of Crest Hill and the wood."

"Do you mind people coming to see?"

"Whenever you please. Only let me know——"

"I'll take my chance some day. Some day soon." She looked at me thoughtfully, smiled, and our talk was at an end.

§ 4

All my later work in aeronautics is associated in my memory with the quality of Beatrice, with her incidental presence, with things she said and did and things I thought of that had reference to her.

In the spring of that year I had got to a flying machine that lacked nothing but longitudinal stability. My model flew like a bird for fifty or a hundred yards or so, and then either dived and broke its nose or what was commoner reared up, slid back and smashed its propeller. The rhythm of the pitching puzzled me. I felt it must obey some laws not yet quite clearly stated. I became therefore a student of theory and literature for a time. I hit upon the string of considerations that led me to what is called Ponderevo's Principle and my F.R.S., and I worked this out in three long papers. Meanwhile I made a lot of turn-table and glider models and started in upon an idea of combining gas-bags and gliders. Balloon work was new

to me. I had made one or two ascents in the balloons of the Aero Club before I started my gasometer and the balloon shed and gave Cothope a couple of months with Sir Peter Rumchase. My uncle found part of the money for these developments; he was growing interested and competitive in this business because of Lord Boom's prize and the amount of *réclame* involved, and it was at his request that I named my first navigable balloon Lord Roberts Alpha.

Lord Roberts α very nearly terminated all my investigations. My idea both in this and its more successful and famous younger brother Lord Roberts β was to utilize the idea of a contractile balloon with a rigid flat base, a balloon shaped rather like an inverted boat that should almost support the apparatus but not quite. The gas-bag was of the chambered sort used for these long forms, and not with an internal balloonette. The trouble was to make the thing contractile. This I sought to do by fixing a long fine-meshed silk net over it that was fastened to be rolled up on two longitudinal rods. Practically I contracted my sausage gas-bag by netting it down. The ends were too complex for me to describe here, but I thought them out elaborately and they were very carefully planned. Lord Roberts α was furnished with a single big screw forward and there was a rudder aft. The engine was the first one to be, so to speak, right in the plane of the gas-bag. I lay immediately under the balloon on a sort of glider framework far away from either engine or rudder, controlling them by wire-pulls constructed on the principle of the well-known Bowden brake of the cyclist.

But Lord Roberts α has been pretty exhaustively figured and described in various aeronautical publications. The unforeseen defect was the badness of the work in the silk netting. It tore aft as soon as I began to contract the balloon and the last two segments immediately bulged through the hole, exactly as an inner tube will bulge through the ruptured outer cover of a pneumatic tyre, and then the sharp edge of the torn net cut the oiled-silk of the distended last segment along a weak seam and burst it with a loud report.

Up to that point the whole thing had been going on extremely well. As a navigable balloon and before I

contracted it, the Lord Roberts *a* was an unqualified success. It had run out of the shed admirably at nine or ten miles an hour or more, and although there was a gentle south-wester blowing, it had gone up and turned and faced it as well as any craft of the sort I have ever seen.

I lay in my customary glider position, horizontal and face downward, and the invisibility of all the machinery gave an extraordinary effect of independent levitation. Only by looking up as it were and turning my head back could I see the flat aeroplane bottom of the balloon and the rapid successive passages, swish, swish, swish of the vans of the propeller. I made a wide circle over Lady Grove and Duffield and out towards Effingham and came back quite successfully to the starting-point.

Down below in the October sunlight were my sheds and the little group that had been summoned to witness the start, their faces craned upward and most of them scrutinizing my expression through field-glasses. I could see Carnaby and Beatrice on horseback, and two girls I did not know with them, Cothope and three or four workmen I employed, my aunt and Mrs. Levinstein, who was staying with her, on foot, and Dimmock the veterinary surgeon and one or two others. My shadow moved a little to the north of them like the shadow of a fish. At Lady Grove the servants were out on the lawn, and the Duffield school playground swarmed with children too indifferent to aeronautics to cease their playing. But in the Crest Hill direction—the place looked extraordinarily squat and ugly from above—there were knots and strings of staring workmen everywhere—not one of them working but all agape. (But now I write of it, it occurs to me that perhaps it was their dinner-hour; it was certainly near twelve.) I hung for a moment or so enjoying the soar, then turned about to face a clear stretch of open down, let the engine out to full speed and set my rollers at work rolling in the net and so tightening the gas-bags. Instantly the pace quickened with the diminished resistance. . . .

In that moment before the bang I think I must have been really flying. Before the net ripped, just in the instant when my balloon was at its systole, the whole apparatus was, I am convinced, heavier than air. That

however is a claim that has been disputed, and in any case this sort of priority is a very trivial thing.

Then came a sudden retardation, instantly followed by an inexpressibly disconcerting tilt downward of the machine. That I still recall with horror. I couldn't see what was happening at all and I couldn't imagine. It was a mysterious, inexplicable dive. The thing it seemed without rhyme or reason was kicking up its heels in the air. The bang followed immediately and I perceived I was falling rapidly.

I was too much taken by surprise to think of the proper cause of the report. I don't even know what I made of it. I was obsessed I suppose by that perpetual dread of the modern aeronaut, a flash between engine and balloon. Yet obviously I wasn't wrapped in flames. I ought to have realized instantly it wasn't that. I did at any rate, whatever other impressions there were, release the winding of the outer net and let the balloon expand again, and that no doubt did something to break my fall. I don't remember that. Indeed all I do remember is the giddy effect upon the landscape of falling swiftly upon it down a flat spiral, the hurried rush of fields and trees and cottages on my left shoulder and the overhung feeling as if the whole apparatus was pressing down on the top of my head. I didn't stop or attempt to stop the screw. That was going on swish, swish, swish all the time.

Cothope really knows more about the fall than I do. He describes the easterly start, the tilt, and the appearance and bursting of a sort of bladder aft. Then down I swooped very swiftly but not nearly so steeply as I imagined I was doing. "Fifteen or twenty degrees," said Cothope, "to be exact." From him it was that I learnt that I let the nets loose again and so arrested my fall. He thinks I was more in control of myself than I remember. But I do not see why I should have forgotten so excellent a resolution. His impression is that I was really steering and trying to drop into the Farthing Down beeches. "You hit the trees," he said, "and the whole affair stood on its nose among them and then very slowly crumpled up. I saw you'd been jerked out as I thought and I didn't stay for more. I rushed for my bicycle."

As a matter of fact it was purely accidental that I came down in the woods. I am reasonably certain that I had no more control then than a thing in a parcel. I remember I felt a sort of wincing, "Now it comes!" as the trees rushed up to me. If I remember that I should remember steering. Then the propeller smashed, everything stopped with a jerk and I was falling into a mass of yellowing leaves, and Lord Roberts *a*, so it seemed to me, was going back into the sky.

I felt twigs and things hit me in the face, but I didn't feel injured at the time; I clutched at things that broke, tumbled through a froth of green and yellow into a shadowy world of great bark-covered arms, and there snatching wildly, got a grip on a fair round branch and hung.

I became intensely alert and clearheaded. I held by that branch for a moment and looked about me and caught at another and then found myself holding to a practicable fork. I swung forward to that and got a leg round it below its junction and so was able presently to clamber down, climbing very coolly and deliberately. I dropped ten feet or so from the lowest branch and fell on my feet. "That's all right," I said, and stared up through the tree to see what I could of the deflated and crumpled remains that had once been Lord Roberts *a* festooned on the branches it had broken. "Gods!" I said, "what a tumble!"

I wiped something that trickled from my face and was shocked to see my hand covered with blood. I looked at myself and saw what seemed to me an astonishing quantity of blood running down my arm and shoulder. I perceived my mouth was full of blood. It's a queer moment when one realizes one is hurt and perhaps badly hurt and has still to discover just how far one is hurt. I explored my face carefully and found unfamiliar contours on the left side. The broken end of a branch had driven right through my cheek, damaging my cheek and teeth and gums, and left a splinter of itself stuck like an explorer's farthest-point flag in the upper maxillary. That and a sprained wrist were all my damages. But I bled as though I had been chopped to pieces, and it seemed to me that my face had been driven in. I can't describe just the horrible disgust I felt at that.

"This blood must be stopped, anyhow," I said, thick-headedly. "I wonder where there's a spider's web,"—an odd twist for my mind to take. But it was the only treatment that occurred to me.

I must have conceived some idea of going home unaided, because I was thirty yards from the tree before I dropped.

Then a kind of black disk appeared in the middle of the world and rushed out to the edge of things and blotted them out. I don't remember falling down. I fainted from excitement, disgust at my injury and loss of blood, and lay there until Cothope found me.

He was the first to find me, scorching as he did over the downland turf, and making a wide course to get the Carnaby plantations at their narrowest. Then presently, while he was trying to apply the methodical teachings of the St. John's Ambulance classes to a rather abnormal case, Beatrice came galloping through the trees full-tilt with Lord Carnaby hard behind her, and she was hatless, muddy from a fall and white as death. "And cool as a cucumber too," said Cothope, turning it over in his mind as he told me.

("They never seem quite to have their heads, and never seem quite to lose 'em," said Cothope, generalizing about the sex.)

Also he witnessed she acted with remarkable decision. The question was whether I should be taken to the house her step-mother occupied at Bedley Corner, the Carnaby dower house, or down to Carnaby's place at Easting. Beatrice had no doubt in the matter, for she meant to nurse me. Carnaby didn't seem to want that to happen. "She *would* have it it wasn't half so far," said Cothope. "She faced us out. . . .

"I hate to be faced out of my opinions, so I've taken a pedometer over it since. It's exactly forty-three yards further.

"Lord Carnaby looked at her pretty straight," said Cothope, finishing the picture; "and then he gave in."

§ 5

But my story has made a jump from June to October, and during that time my relations with Beatrice and the

countryside that was her setting had developed in many directions. She came and went, moving in an orbit for which I had no data, going to London and Paris, into Wales and Northampton, while her step-mother on some independent system of her own also vanished and recurred intermittently. At home they obeyed the rule of an inflexible old maid, Charlotte, and Beatrice exercised all the rights of proprietorship in Carnaby's extensive stables. Her interest in me was from the first undisguised. She found her way to my work sheds and developed rapidly, in spite of the sincere discouragement of Cothope, into a keen amateur of aeronautics. She would come sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon, sometimes afoot with an Irish terrier, sometimes riding. She would come for three or four days every day, vanish for a fortnight or three weeks, return.

It was not long before I came to look for her. From the first I found her immensely interesting. To me she was a new feminine type altogether,—I have made it plain, I think, how limited was my knowledge of women. But she made me not simply interested in her, but in myself. She became for me something that greatly changes a man's world. How shall I put it? She became an audience. Since I've emerged from the emotional developments of the affair I have thought it out in a hundred aspects, and it does seem to me that this way in which men and women make audiences for one another is a curiously influential force in their lives. For some it seems an audience is a vital necessity, they seek audiences as creatures seek food; others again, my uncle among them, can play to an imaginary audience. I, I think, have lived and can live, without one. In my adolescence I was my own audience and my own court of honour. And to have an audience in one's mind is to play a part, to become self-conscious and dramatic. For many years I had been self-forgetful and scientific. I had lived for work and impersonal interests until I found scrutiny, applause and expectation in Beatrice's eyes. Then I began to live for the effect I imagined I made upon her, to make that very soon the principal value in my life. I played to her. I did things for the look of them. I began to dream more

and more of beautiful situations and fine poses and groupings with her and for her.

I put these things down because they puzzle me. I think I was in love with Beatrice, as being in love is usually understood, but it was quite a different state altogether from my passionate hunger for Marion, or my keen sensuous desire for and pleasure in Effie. These were selfish sincere things, fundamental and instinctive, as sincere as the leap of a tiger. But until matters drew to a crisis with Beatrice, there was an immense imaginative insurgence of a quite different quality. I am setting down here very gravely, and perhaps absurdly, what are no doubt elementary commonplaces for innumerable people. This love that grew up between Beatrice and myself was, I think—I put it quite tentatively and rather curiously—romantic love. That unfortunate and truncated affair of my uncle and the Scrymgeour lady was really of the same stuff, if a little different in quality. I have to admit that. The factor of audience was of primary importance in either case.

Its effect upon me was to make me in many respects adolescent again. It made me keener upon the point of honour, and anxious and eager to do high and splendid things, and, in particular, brave things. So far it ennobled and upheld me. But it did also push me towards vulgar and showy things. At bottom it was disingenuous; it gave my life the quality of stage scenery, with one side to the audience, another side that wasn't meant to show, and an economy of substance. It certainly robbed my work of high patience and quality. I cut down the toil of research in my eagerness and her eagerness for fine flourishes in the air, flights that would tell. I shirked the longer road.

And it robbed me, too, of any fine perception of absurdity. . . .

Yet that was not everything in our relationship. The elemental thing was there also. It came in very suddenly.

It was one day in the summer, though I do not now recall without reference to my experimental memoranda whether it was in July or August. I was working with a new and more bird-like aeroplane with wing curvatures studied from Lilienthal, Pilcher and Phillips, that I thought

would give a different rhythm for the pitching oscillations than anything I'd had before. I was soaring my long course from the framework on the old barrow by my sheds down to Tinker's Corner. It is a clear stretch of downland, except for two or three thickets of box and thorn to the right of my course; one transverse trough, in which there is bush and a small rabbit warren, comes in from the east. I had started, and was very intent on the peculiar long swoop with which my new arrangement flew. Then, without any sort of notice, right ahead of me appeared Beatrice riding towards Tinker's Corner to waylay and talk to me. She looked round over her shoulder, saw me coming, touched her horse to a gallop, and then the brute bolted right into the path of my machine.

There was a queer moment of doubt whether we shouldn't all smash together. I had to make up my mind very quickly whether I would pitch-up and drop backward at once and take my chance of falling undamaged, a poor chance it would have been, in order to avoid any risk to her, or whether I would lift against the wind and soar right over her. This latter I did. She had already got her horse in hand when I came up to her. Her woman's body lay along his neck, and she glanced up as I, with wings aspread, and every nerve in a state of tension, swept over her.

Then I had landed, and was going back to where her horse stood still and trembling.

We exchanged no greetings. She slid from her saddle into my arms, and for one instant I held her. "Those great wings," she said, and that was all.

She lay in my arms, and I thought for a moment she had fainted.

"Very near a nasty accident," said Cothope, coming up and regarding our grouping with disfavour. He took her horse by the bridle. "Very dangerous thing coming across us like that."

Beatrice disengaged herself from me, stood for a moment trembling, and then sat down on the turf. "I'll just sit down for a moment," she said.

"Oh!" she said.

She covered her face with her hands while Cothope

looked at her with an expression between suspicion and impatience.

For some moments nobody moved. Then Cothope remarked that perhaps he'd better get her water.

As for me I was filled with a new outrageous idea begotten I scarcely know how from this incident with its instant contacts and swift emotions, and that was that I must make love to and possess Beatrice. I see no particular reason why that thought should have come to me in that moment, but it did. I do not believe that before then I had thought of our relations in such terms at all. Suddenly, as I remember it, the factor of passion came. She crouched there, and I stood over her and neither of us said a word. But it was just as though something had been shouted from the sky.

Cothope had gone twenty paces perhaps when she uncovered her face. "I shan't want any water," she said. "Call him back."

§ 6

After that the spirit of our relations changed. The old ease had gone. She came to me less frequently, and when she came she would have some one with her, usually old Carnaby, and he would do the bulk of the talking. All through September she was away. When we were alone together there was a curious constraint. We became clouds of inexpressible feeling towards one another; we could think of nothing that was not too momentous for words.

Then came the smash of Lord Roberts a, and I found myself with a bandaged face in a bedroom in the Bedley Corner dower-house with Beatrice presiding over an inefficient nurse, Lady Osprey very pink and shocked in the background, and my aunt jealously intervening.

My injuries were much more showy than serious, and I could have been taken to Lady Grove next day, but Beatrice would not permit that, and kept me at Bedley Corner three clear days. In the afternoon of the second day she became extremely solicitous for the proper aeration of the nurse, packed her off for an hour in a brisk rain, and sat by me alone.

I asked her to marry me.

On the whole I must admit it was not a situation that lent itself to eloquence. I lay on my back and talked through bandages and with some little difficulty, for my tongue and mouth had swollen. But I was feverish and in pain, and the emotional suspense I had been in so long with regard to her, became now an unendurable impatience.

"Comfortable?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Shall I read to you?"

"No. I want to talk."

"You can't. I'd better talk to you."

"No," I said, "I want to talk to you."

She came and stood by my bedside and looked me in the eyes. "I don't—I don't want you to talk to me," she said. "I thought you couldn't talk."

"I get few chances—of you."

"You'd better not talk. Don't talk now. Let me chatter instead. You ought not to talk."

"It isn't much," I said.

"I'd rather you didn't."

"I'm not going to be disfigured," I said. "Only a scar."

"Oh!" she said, as if she had expected something quite different. "Did you think you'd become a sort of gargoyle?"

"L'Homme qui Rit!—I didn't know. But that's all right. Jolly flowers those are!"

"Michaelmas daisies," she said. "I'm glad you're not disfigured. And those are perennial sunflowers. Do you know no flowers at all? When I saw you on the ground I certainly thought you were dead. You ought to have been, by all the rules of the game."

She said some other things, but I was thinking of my next move.

"Are we social equals?" I said abruptly.

She stared at me. "Queer question," she said.

"But are we?"

"H'm. Difficult to say. But why do you ask? Is the daughter of a courtesy Baron who died—of general disreputableness, I believe—before his father——? I give it up. Does it matter?"

"No. My mind is confused. I want to know if you will marry me."

She whitened and said nothing. I suddenly felt I must plead with her. "Damn these bandages!" I said, breaking into ineffectual febrile rage.

She roused herself to her duties as nurse. "What are you doing? Why are you trying to sit up? Lie down! Don't touch your bandages. I told you not to talk."

She stood helpless for a moment, then took me firmly by the shoulders and pushed me back upon the pillow. She gripped the wrist of the hand I had raised to my face. "I told you not to talk," she whispered close to my face. "I asked you not to talk. Why couldn't you do as I asked you?"

"You've been avoiding me for a month," I said.

"I know. You might have known. Put your hand back—down by your side."

I obeyed. She sat on the edge of the bed. A flush had come to her cheeks, and her eyes were very bright. "I asked you," she repeated, "not to talk."

My eyes questioned her mutely.

She put her hand on my chest. Her eyes were tormented. "How can I answer you now?" she said. "How *can* I say anything now?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

She made no answer.

"Do you mean it must be No?"

She nodded.

"But——," I said, and my whole soul was full of accusations.

"I know," she said. "I can't explain. I can't. But it has to be No! It can't be. It's utterly, finally, for ever impossible. . . . Keep your hands still!"

"But," I said, "when we met again——"

"I can't marry. I can't and won't."

She stood up. "Why did you talk?" she cried. "Couldn't you *see?*"

She seemed to have something it was impossible to say.

She came to the table beside my bed and pulled the Michaelmas daisies awry. "Why did you talk like that?"

she said in a tone of infinite bitterness. "To begin like that——!"

"But what is it?" I said. "Is it some circumstance —my social position?"

"Oh *damn* your social position!" she cried.

She went and stood at the further window staring out at the rain. For a long time we were absolutely still. The wind and rain came in little gusts upon the pane. She turned to me abruptly.

"You didn't ask me if I loved you," she said.

"Oh, if it's *that!*" said I.

"It's not that," she said. "But if you want to know ——" She paused.

"I do," she said.

We stared at one another.

"I do—with all my heart, if you want to know."

"Then why the devil——?" I asked.

She made no answer. She walked across the room to the piano and began to play, rather noisily and rapidly, with odd gusts of emphasis, the shepherd's pipe music from the last act in Tristan and Isolde. Presently she missed a note, failed again, ran her finger heavily up the scale, struck the piano passionately with her fist making a feeble jar in the treble, jumped up, and went out of the room. . . .

The nurse found me still wearing my helmet of bandages, partially dressed and pottering round the room to find the rest of my clothes. I was in a state of exasperated hunger for Beatrice, and I was too inflamed and weakened to conceal the state of my mind. I was feebly angry because of the irritation of dressing and particularly of the struggle to put on my trousers without being able to see my legs. I was staggering about, and once I had fallen over a chair, and I had upset the jar of Michaelmas daisies.

I must have been a detestable spectacle. "I'll go back to bed," said I, "if I may have a word with Miss Beatrice. I've got something to say to her. That's why I'm dressing."

My point was conceded, but there were long delays. Whether the household had my ultimatum or whether she told Beatrice directly I do not know, and what Lady

Osprey can have made of it in the former case I can't imagine. . . .

At last Beatrice came and stood by my bedside. "Well?" she said.

"All I want to say," I said with the querulous note of a misunderstood child, "is that I can't take this as final. I want to see you and talk when I'm better—and write. I can't do anything now. I can't argue."

I was overtaken with self-pity and began to snivel.

"I can't rest. You see? I can't do anything."

She sat down beside me again and spoke softly. "I promise I will talk it all over with you again. When you are well. I promise I will meet you somewhere so that we can talk. You can't talk now. I asked you not to talk now. All you want to know you shall know. . . . Will that do?"

"I'd like to know——"

She looked round to see the door was closed, stood up and went to it.

Then she crouched beside me and began whispering very softly and rapidly with her face close to me.

"Dear," she said, "I love you. If it will make you happy to marry me, I will marry you. I was in a mood just now—a stupid inconsiderate mood. Of course I will marry you. You are my prince, my king. Women are such things of mood—or I would have—behaved differently. We say 'No' when we mean 'Yes'—and fly into crises. So now, Yes—yes—yes. I will. . . . I can't even kiss you. Give me your hand to kiss that. Understand I am yours. Do you understand? I am yours just as if we had been married fifty years. Your wife—Beatrice. Is that enough? Now—now will you rest?"

"Yes," I said; "but why——?"

"There are complications. There are difficulties. When you are better you will be able to—understand them. But now they don't matter. Only know this must be secret—for a time. Absolutely secret between us. Will you promise that?"

"Yes," I said, "I understand. I wish I could kiss you."

She laid her head down beside mine for a moment, and then she kissed my hand.

"I don't care what difficulties there are," I said, and shut my eyes.

§ 7

But I was only beginning to gauge the unaccountable elements in Beatrice. For a week after my return to Lady Grove I had no sign of her, and then she called with Lady Osprey and brought a huge bunch of perennial sunflowers and Michaelmas daisies, "just the old flowers there were in your room," said my aunt with a relentless eye on me. I didn't get any talk alone with Beatrice then and she took occasion to tell us she was going to London for some indefinite number of weeks. I couldn't even pledge her to write to me, and when she did it was a brief enigmatical friendly letter with not a word of the reality between us.

I wrote back a love letter—my first love letter—and she made no reply for eight days. Then came a scrawl: "I can't write letters. Wait till we can talk. Are you better?" . . .

I think the reader would be amused, if he could see the papers on my desk as I write all this, the mangled and disfigured pages, the experimental arrangements of notes, the sheets of suggestions balanced in constellations, the blottesque intellectual battlegrounds over which I have been fighting. I find this account of my relations to Beatrice quite the most difficult part of my story to write. I happen to be a very objective-minded person, I forget my moods and this was so much an affair of moods. And even such moods and emotions as I recall are very difficult to convey. To me it is about as difficult as describing a taste or a scent.

Then the objective story is made up of little things that are difficult to set in proper order. And love is an hysterical passion, now high, now low, now exalted, and now intensely physical. No one has ever dared to tell a love story completely, its alternations, its comings and goings, its debased moments, its hate. The love stories we tell, tell only the net consequence, the ruling effect. . . .

How can I rescue from the past now the mystical quality of Beatrice; my intense longing for her; the overwhelming, irrational, formless desire? How can I explain how

intimately that worship mingled with a high impatient resolve to make her mine, to take her by strength and courage, to do my loving in a violent heroic manner? And then the doubts, the puzzled arrest at the fact of her fluctuations, at her refusal to marry me, at the fact that even when at last she returned to Bedley Corner she seemed to evade me?

That exasperated me and perplexed me beyond measure. I felt that it was treachery. I thought of every conceivable explanation, and the most exalted and romantic confidence in her did not simply alternate but mingled with the basest misgivings.

And into the tangle of memories comes the figure of Carnaby, coming out slowly from the background to a position of significance, as an influence, as a predominant strand in the nets that kept us apart, as a rival. What were the forces that pulled her away from me when it was so clearly manifest she loved me? Did she think of marrying him? Had I invaded some long-planned scheme? It was evident he did not like me, that in some way I spoilt the world for him. She returned to Bedley Corner, and for some weeks she was flitting about me, and never once could I have talk with her alone. When she came to my sheds Carnaby was always with her, jealously observant. (Why the devil couldn't she send him about his business?) The days slipped by and my anger gathered.

All this mingles with the making of Lord Roberts β. I had resolved upon that one night as I lay awake at Bedley Corner, I got it planned out before the bandages were off my face. I conceived this second navigable balloon in a grandiose manner. It was to be a second Lord Roberts α only more so—it was to be three times as big, large enough to carry three men, and it was to be an altogether triumphant vindication of my claims upon the air. The framework was to be hollow like a bird's bones, airtight, and the air pumped in or out as the weight of fuel I carried changed. I talked much and boasted to Cothope—whom I suspected of scepticisms about this new type—of what it would do, and it progressed—slowly. It progressed slowly because I was restless and uncertain. At times I would go away to London to snatch some chance of seeing Beatrice there,

at times nothing but a day of gliding and hard and dangerous exercise would satisfy me. And now in the newspapers, in conversation, in everything about me, arose a new invader of my mental states. Something was happening to the great schemes of my uncle's affairs; people were beginning to doubt, to question. It was the first quiver of his tremendous insecurity, the first wobble of that gigantic credit top he had kept spinning so long.

There were comings and goings, November and December slipped by. I had two unsatisfactory meetings with Beatrice, meetings that had no privacy—in which we said things of the sort that need atmosphere, baldly and furtively. I wrote to her several times and she wrote back notes that I would sometimes respond to altogether, sometimes condemn as insincere evasions. "You don't understand. I can't just now explain. Be patient with me. Leave things a little while to me." So she wrote.

I would talk aloud to these notes and wrangle over them in my work-room—while the plans of Lord Roberts β waited.

"You don't give me a chance!" I would say. "Why don't you let me know the secret? That's what I'm for—to settle difficulties!—to tell difficulties to!"

And at last I could hold out no longer against these accumulating pressures.

I took an arrogant, outrageous line that left her no loop-holes; I behaved as though we were living in a melodrama.

"You must come and talk to me," I wrote, "or I will come and take you. I want you—and the time runs away."

We met in a ride in the upper plantations. It must have been early in January, for there was snow on the ground and on the branches of the trees. We walked to and fro for an hour or more, and from the first I pitched the key high in romance and made understandings impossible. It was our worst time together. I boasted like an actor, and she, I know not why, was tired and spiritless.

Now I think over that talk in the light of all that has happened since, I can imagine how she came to me full of human appeal I was too foolish to let her make. I don't

know. I confess I have never completely understood Beatrice. I confess I am still perplexed at many things she said and did. That afternoon anyhow I was impossible. I posed and scolded. I was—I said it—for "taking the Universe by the throat!"

"If it was only that," she said, but though I heard I did not heed her.

At last she gave way to me and talked no more. Instead she looked at me—as a thing beyond her controlling but none the less interesting—much as she had looked at me from behind the skirts of Lady Drew in the Warren when we were children together. Once even I thought she smiled faintly.

"What are the difficulties?" I cried. "There's no difficulty I will not overcome for you! Do your people think I'm no equal for you? Who says it? My dear, tell me to win a title! I'll do it in five years! . . .

"Here am I just grown a man at the sight of you. I have wanted something to fight for. Let me fight for you! . . .

"I'm rich without intending it. Let me mean it, give me an honourable excuse for it, and I'll put all this rotten old warren of England at your feet!"

I said such things as that. I write them down here in all their resounding base pride. I said these empty and foolish things and they are part of me. Why should I still cling to pride and be ashamed? I shouted her down.

I passed from such megalomania to petty accusations.

"You think Carnaby is a better man than I?" I said.

"No!" she cried, stung to speech; "No!"

"You think we're unsubstantial. You've listened to all these rumours Boom has started because we talked of a newspaper of our own. When you are with me you know I'm a man; when you get away from me you think I'm a cheat and a cad. . . . There's not a word of truth in the things they say about us. I've been slack. I've left things. But we have only to exert ourselves. You do not know how wide and far we have spread our nets. Even now we have a coup—an expedition—in hand. It will put us on a footing." . . .

Her eyes asked mutely and asked in vain that I would cease to boast of the very qualities she admired in me.

In the night I could not sleep for thinking of that talk and the vulgar things I had said in it. I could not understand the drift my mind had taken. I was acutely disgusted. And my unwonted doubts about myself spread from a merely personal discontent to our financial position. It was all very well to talk as I had done of wealth and power and peerages, but what did I know nowadays of my uncle's position? Suppose in the midst of such boasting and confidence there came some turn I did not suspect, some rottenness he had concealed from me! I resolved I had been playing with aeronautics long enough, that next morning I would go to him and have things clear between us.

I caught an early train and went up to the Hardingham.

I went up to the Hardingham through a dense London fog to see how things really stood. Before I had talked to my uncle for ten minutes I felt like a man who has just awakened in a bleak inhospitable room out of a grandiose dream.

CHAPTER IV

How I stole the Heaps of Quap from Mordet Island

§ 1

"We got to make a fight for it," said my uncle. "We got to face the music!"

I remember that even at the sight of him I had a sense of impending calamity. He sat under the electric light with the shadow of his hair making bars down his face. He looked shrunken and as though his skin had suddenly got loose and yellow. The decorations of the room seemed to have lost freshness, and outside—the blinds were up—there was not so much fog as a sun darkness. One saw the dingy outlines of the chimneys opposite quite distinctly, and then a sky of such a brown as only London can display.

"I saw a placard," I said; "'More Ponderevity.'"

"That's Boom," he said. "Boom and his damned newspapers. He's trying to fight me down. Ever since I offered to buy the *Daily Decorator* he's been at me. And he thinks consolidating Do Ut cut down the ads. He wants everything, damn him! He's got no sense of dealing. I'd like to bash his face!"

"Well," I said; "what's to be done?"

"Keep going," said my uncle.

"I'll smash Boom yet," he said with sudden savagery.

"Nothing else?" I asked.

"We got to keep going. There's a scare on. Did you notice the rooms? Half the people out there this morning are reporters. And if I talk they touch it up! . . . They didn't use to touch things up! Now they put in character touches—insulting you. Don't know what journalism's coming to. It's all Boom's doing."

He cursed Lord Boom with considerable imaginative vigour.

"Well," said I, "what can he do?"

"Shove us up against time, George; make money tight for us. We been handling a lot of money—and he tightens us up."

"We're sound?"

"Oh, we're sound, George. Trust me for that! But all the same—— There's such a lot of imagination in these things. . . . We're sound enough. That's not it."

He blew. "Damn Boom!" he said, and his eyes over his glasses met mine defiantly.

"We can't, I suppose, run close hauled for a bit—stop expenditure?"

"Where?"

"Well,—Crest Hill."

"What!" he shouted. "Me stop Crest Hill for Boom!" He waved a fist as if to hit his inkpot and controlled himself with difficulty. He spoke at last in a reasonable voice. "If I did," he said, "he'd kick up a fuss. It's no good even if I wanted to. Everybody's watching the place. If I was to stop building we'd be down in a week."

He had an idea. "I wish I could do something to start a strike or something. No such luck. Treat those workmen a sight too well. No, sink or swim, Crest Hill goes on until we're under water."

I began to ask questions and irritated him instantly.

"Oh, dash these explanations, George!" he cried; "you only make things look rottener than they are. It's your way. It isn't a case of figures. We're all right—there's only one thing we got to do."

"Yes?"

"Show value, George. That's where this quap comes in; that's why I fell in so readily with what you brought to me week before last. Here we are, we got our option on the perfect filament, and all we want's canadium. Nobody knows there's more canadium in the world than will go on the edge of a sixpence except me and you. Nobody has an idee the perfect filament's more than just a bit of theorising. Fifty tons of quap and we'd turn that bit of theorising into somethin'——. We'd make the lamp trade sit

on it's tail and howl. We'd put Ediswan and all of 'em into a parcel with our last year's trousers and a hat, and swap 'em off for a pot of geraniums. See? We'd do it through Business Organizations, and there you are! See? Capern's Patent Filament! The Ideal and the Real! George, we'll do it! We'll bring it off! And then we'll give such a facer to Boom: he'll think for fifty years. He's laying up for our London and African meeting. Let him. He can turn the whole paper on to us. He says the Business Organizations shares aren't worth fifty-two—and we quote 'em at eighty-four. Well, here we are. Gettin' ready for him—loading our gun."

His pose was triumphant.

"Yes," I said, "that's all right. But I can't help thinking where should we be if we hadn't just by accident got Capern's Perfect Filament? Because, you know it was an accident—my buying up that."

He crumpled up his nose into an expression of impatient distaste at my unreasonableness.

"And after all, the meeting's in June, and you haven't begun to get the quap! After all, we've still got to load our gun——"

"They start on Toosday."

"Have they got the brig?"

"They've got a brig."

"Gordon-Nasmyth!" I doubted.

"Safe as a bank," he said. "More I see of that man the more I like him. All I wish is we'd got a steamer instead of a sailing-ship——"

"And," I went on, "you seem to overlook what used to weigh with us a bit. This canadium side of the business and the Capern chance has rushed you off your legs. After all—it's stealing, and in its way an international outrage. They've got two gunboats on the coast."

I jumped up and went and stared out at the fog.

"And, by Jove, it's about our only chance! . . . I didn't dream."

I turned on him. "I've been up in the air," I said. "Heaven knows where I haven't been. And here's our only chance—and you give it to that adventurous lunatic to play in his own way—in a brig!"

"Well, you had a voice——"

"I wish I'd been in this before. We ought to have run out a steamer to Lagos or one of those West Coast places and done it from there. Fancy a brig in the Channel at this time of the year, if it blows south-west!"

"I dessay you'd have shoved it, George. Still—— You know, George. . . . I believe in him."

"Yes," I said. "Yes, I believe in him too. In a way. Still——"

He took up a telegram that was lying on his desk and opened it. His face became a livid yellow. He put the flimsy pink paper down with a slow reluctant movement and took off his glasses.

"George," he said, "the luck's against us."

"What?"

He grimaced with his mouth in the queerest way at the telegram.

"That."

I took it up and read:—

"motor smash compound fracture of the leg gordon naismith what price mordet now"

For a moment neither of us spoke.

"That's all right," I said at last.

"Eh?" said my uncle.

"*I'm* going. I'll get that quap or bust."

§ 2

I had a ridiculous persuasion that I was "saving the situation."

"I'm going," I said quite consciously and dramatically. I saw the whole affair—how shall I put it?—in American colours.

I sat down beside him. "Give me all the data you've got," I said, "and I'll pull this thing off."

"But nobody knows exactly where——"

"Nasmyth does, and he'll tell me."

"He's been very close," said my uncle, and regarded me.

"He'll tell me all right now he's smashed."

He thought. "I believe he will."

"George," he said, "if you pull this thing off——! Once or twice before you've stepped in—with that sort of Woosh of yours——"

He left the sentence unfinished.

"Give me that note-book," I said, "and tell me all you know. Where's the ship? Where's Pollack? And where's that telegram from? If that quap's to be got, I'll get it or bust. If you'll hold on here until I get back with it." . . .

And so it was I jumped into the wildest adventure of my life.

I requisitioned my uncle's best car forthwith. I went down that night to the place of dispatch named on Nasmyth's telegram, Bampton S.O. Oxon, routed him out with a little trouble from that centre, made things right with him and got his explicit directions; and I was inspecting the *Maud Mary* with young Pollack, his cousin and aide, the following afternoon. She was rather a shock to me and not at all in my style, a beast of a brig inured to the potato trade, and she reeked from end to end with the faint subtle smell of raw potatoes so that it prevailed even over the temporary smell of new paint. She was a beast of a brig, all hold and dirty framework, and they had ballasted her with old iron and old rails and iron sleepers, and got a miscellaneous lot of spades and iron wheelbarrows against the loading of the quap. I thought her over with Pollack, one of those tall blond young men who smoke pipes and don't help much, and then by myself, and as a result I did my best to sweep Gravesend clean of wheeling planks, and got in as much cord and small rope as I could for lashing. I had an idea we might need to run up a jetty. In addition to much ballast she held remotely hidden in a sort of inadvertent way a certain number of ambiguous cases which I didn't examine, but which I gathered were a provision against the need of a trade.

The captain was a most extraordinary creature, under the impression we were after copper ore; he was a Roumanian Jew, with twitching excitable features, who had made his way to a certificate after some preliminary naval experiences in the Black Sea. The mate was an Essex man of impenetrable reserve. The crew were astoundingly ill-clad and destitute and dirty; most of them youths,

unwashed, out of colliers. One, the cook, was a mulatto; and one, the best-built fellow of them all, was a Breton. There was some subterfuge about our position on board—I forget the particulars now—I was called the supercargo and Pollack was the steward. This added to the piratical flavour that insufficient funds and Gordon-Nasmyth's original genius had already given the enterprise.

Those two days of bustle at Gravesend, under dingy skies, in narrow, dirty streets, was a new experience for me. It is like nothing else in my life. I realized that I was a modern and a civilized man. I found the food filthy and the coffee horrible; the whole town stank in my nostrils; the landlord of the Good Intent on the quay had a stand-up quarrel with us before I could get even a hot bath, and the bedroom I slept in was infested by a quantity of exotic but voracious flat parasites called locally "bugs," in the walls, in the woodwork, everywhere. I fought them with insect powder, and found them comatose in the morning. I was dipping down into the dingy underworld of the contemporary state, and I liked it no better than I did my first dip into it when I stayed with my Uncle Nicodemus Frapp at the bakery at Chatham—where, by the by, we had to deal with cockroaches of a smaller, darker variety, and also with bugs of sorts.

Let me confess that through all this time before we started I was immensely self-conscious, and that Beatrice played the part of audience in my imagination throughout. I was, as I say, "saving the situation," and I was acutely aware of that. The evening before we sailed, instead of revising our medicine-chest as I intended, I took the car and ran across country to Lady Grove to tell my aunt of the journey I was making, dress, and astonish Lady Osprey by an after-dinner call.

The two ladies were at home and alone beside a big fire that seemed wonderfully cheerful after the winter night. I remember the effect of the little parlour in which they sat as very bright and domestic. Lady Osprey in a costume of mauve and lace sat on a chintz sofa and played an elaborately spread-out patience by the light of a tall shaded lamp; Beatrice in a white dress that showed her throat, smoked a cigarette in an arm-chair and read with a

lamp at her elbow. The room was white-panelled and chintz-curtained. About those two bright centres of light were warm dark shadows in which a circular mirror shone like a pool of brown water. I carried off my raid by behaving like a slave of etiquette. There were moments when I think I really made Lady Osprey believe that my call was an unavoidable necessity, that it would have been negligent of me not to call just how and when I did. But at the best those were transitory moments.

They received me with disciplined amazement. Lady Osprey was interested in my face and scrutinized the scar. Beatrice stood behind her solicitude. Our eyes met, and in hers I could see startled interrogations.

"I'm going," I said, "to the west coast of Africa."

They asked questions, but it suited my mood to be vague.

"We've interests there. It is urgent I should go. I don't know when I may return."

After that I perceived Beatrice surveyed me steadily.

The conversation was rather difficult. I embarked upon lengthy thanks for their kindness to me after my accident. I tried to understand Lady Osprey's game of patience, but it didn't appear that Lady Osprey was anxious for me to understand her patience. I came to the verge of taking my leave.

"You needn't go yet," said Beatrice, abruptly.

She walked across to the piano, took a pile of music from the cabinet near, surveyed Lady Osprey's back, and with a gesture to me dropped it all deliberately on to the floor.

"Must talk," she said, kneeling close to me as I helped her to pick it up. "Turn my pages. At the piano."

"I can't read music."

"Turn my pages."

Presently we were at the piano, and Beatrice was playing with noisy inaccuracy. She glanced over her shoulder and Lady Osprey had resumed her patience. The old lady was very pink, and appeared to be absorbed in some attempt to cheat herself without our observing it.

"Isn't West Africa a vile climate?" "Are you going to live there?" "Why are you going?"

Beatrice asked these questions in a low voice and gave

me no chance to answer. Then taking a rhythm from the music before her, she said—

"At the back of the house is a garden—a door in the wall—on the lane. Understand?"

I turned over two pages without any effect on her playing.

"When?" I asked.

She dealt in chords. "I wish I *could* play this!" she said. "Midnight."

She gave her attention to the music for a time.

"You may have to wait."

"I'll wait."

She brought her playing to an end by—as schoolboys say—"stashing it up."

"I can't play to-night," she said, standing up and meeting my eyes. "I wanted to give you a parting voluntary."

"Was that Wagner, Beatrice?" asked Lady Osprey, looking up from her cards. "It sounded very confused."

I took my leave. I had a curious twinge of conscience as I parted from Lady Osprey. Either a first intimation of middle-age or my inexperience in romantic affairs was to blame, but I felt a very distinct objection to the prospect of invading this good lady's premises from the garden door. I motored up to the pavilion, found Cothope reading in bed, told him for the first time of West Africa, spent an hour with him in settling all the outstanding details of Lord Roberts β, and left that in his hands to finish against my return. I sent the motor back to Lady Grove, and still wearing my fur coat—for the January night was damp and bitterly cold—walked back to Bedley Corner. I found the lane to the back of the dower-house without any difficulty, and was at the door in the wall with ten minutes to spare. I lit a cigar and fell to walking up and down. This queer flavour of intrigue, this nocturnal garden-door business, had taken me by surprise and changed my mental altitudes. I was startled out of my egotistical pose, and thinking intently of Beatrice, of that elfin quality in her that always pleased me, that always took me by surprise, that had made her, for example, so instantly conceive this meeting.

She came within a minute of mignight; the door opened softly and she appeared, a short, grey figure in a motor-

coat of sheepskin, bare-headed to the cold drizzle. She flitted up to me, and her eyes were shadows in her dusky face.

"Why are you going to West Africa?" she asked at once.

"Business crisis. I have to go."

"You're not going——? You're coming back?"

"Three or four months," I said, "at most."

"Then, it's nothing to do with me?"

"Nothing," I said. "Why should it have?"

"Oh, that's all right. One never knows what people think or what people fancy." She took me by the arm. "Let's go for a walk," she said.

I looked about me at darkness and rain.

"That's all right," she laughed. "We can go along the lane and into the Old Woking Road. Do you mind? Of course you don't. My head. It doesn't matter. One never meets anybody."

"How do you know?"

"I've wandered like this before. . . . Of course! Did you think"—she nodded her head back at her home—"that's all?"

"No, by Jove!" I cried; "it's manifest it isn't."

She took my arm and turned me down the lane. "Night's my time," she said by my side. "There's a touch of the werewolf in my blood. One never knows in these old families. . . . I've wondered often. . . . Here we are, anyhow, alone in the world. Just darkness and cold and a sky of clouds and wet. And we—together. I like the wet on my face and hair, don't you? When do you sail?"

I told her to-morrow.

"Oh, well, there's no to-morrow now. You and I!" She stopped and confronted me.

"You don't say a word except to answer!"

"No," I said.

"Last time you did all the talking."

"Like a fool. Now——"

We looked at each other's two dim faces. "You're glad to be here?"

"I'm glad—I'm beginning to be—it's more than glad."

She put her hands on my shoulders and drew me down to kiss her.

"Ah!" she said, and for a moment or so we just clung to one another.

"That's all," she said, releasing herself. "What bundles of clothes we are to-night. I felt we should kiss some day again. Always. The last time was ages ago."

"Among the fern stalks."

"Among the bracken. You remember. And your lips were cold. Were mine? The same lips—after so long—after so much! . . . And now let's trudge through this blotted-out world together for a time. Yes, let me take your arm. Just trudge, see? Hold tight to me because I know the way—and don't talk—don't talk. Unless you want to talk. . . . Let me tell you things! You see, dear, the whole world *is* blotted out—it's dead and gone, and we're in this place. This dark wild place. . . . We're dead. Or all the world is dead. No! We're dead. No one can see us. We're shadows. We've got out of our positions, out of our bodies—and together. That's the good thing of it—together. But that's why the world can't see us and why we hardly see the world. Sssh! Is it all right?"

"It's all right," I said.

We stumbled along for a time in a close silence. We passed a dim-lit, rain-veiled window.

"The silly world," she said, "the silly world! It eats and sleeps. If the wet didn't patter so from the trees we'd hear it snoring. It's dreaming such stupid things—stupid judgments. It doesn't know we are passing, we two—free of it—clear of it. You and I!"

We pressed against each other reassuringly.

"I'm glad we're dead," she whispered. "I'm glad we're dead. I was tired of it, dear. I was so tired of it, dear, and so entangled."

She stopped abruptly.

We splashed through a string of puddles. I began to remember things I had meant to say.

"Look here!" I cried. "I want to help you beyond measure. You are entangled. What is the trouble? I asked you to marry me. You said you would. But there's something."

My thoughts sounded clumsy as I said them.

"Is it something about my position? . . . Or is it something—perhaps—about some other man?"

There was an immense assenting silence.

"You've puzzled me so. At first—I mean quite early—I thought you meant to make me marry you."

"I did."

"And then——?"

"To-night," she said after a long pause, "I can't explain. No! I can't explain. I love you! But—explanations! To-night—— My dear, here we are in the world alone—and the world doesn't matter. Nothing matters. Here am I in the cold with you—and my bed away there deserted. I'd tell you—— I *will* tell you when things enable me to tell you, and soon enough they will. But to-night—— I won't. I won't."

She left my side and went in front of me.

She turned upon me. "Look here," she said, "I insist upon your being dead. Do you understand? I'm not joking. To-night you and I are out of life. It's our time together. There may be other times, but this we won't spoil. We're—in Hades if you like. Where there's nothing to hide and nothing to tell. No bodies even. No bothers. We loved each other—down there—and were kept apart, but now it doesn't matter. It's over. . . . If you won't agree to that—I will go home."

"I wanted——" I began.

"I know. Oh! my dear, if you'd only understand I understand. If you'd only not care—and love me to-night."

"I do love you," I said.

"Then *love* me," she answered, "and leave all these things that bother you. Love me! Here I am!"

"But——"

"No!" she said.

"Well, have your way."

So she carried her point, and we wandered into the night together and Beatrice talked to me of love. . . .

I'd never heard a woman before in all my life who could talk of love, who could lay bare and develop and touch with imagination all that mass of fine emotion every woman, it may be, hides. She had read of love, she had thought of love, a thousand sweet lyrics had sounded through her

brain and left fine fragments in her memory; she poured it out, all of it, shamelessly, skilfully, for me. I cannot give any sense of that talk, I cannot even tell how much of the delight of it was the magic of her voice, the glow of her near presence. And always we walked swathed warmly through a chilly air, along dim, interminable greasy roads—with never a soul abroad it seemed but us, never a beast in the fields.

"Why do people love each other?" I said.

"Why not?"

"But why do I love you? Why is your voice better than any voice, your face sweeter than any face?"

"And why do I love you?" she asked; "not only what is fine in you, but what isn't? Why do I love your dulness, your arrogance? For I do. To-night I love the very rain-drops on the fur of your coat!" . . .

So we talked; and at last very wet, still glowing but a little tired, we parted at the garden door. We had been wandering for two hours in our strange irrational community of happiness, and all the world about us, and particularly Lady Osprey and her household, had been asleep—and dreaming of anything rather than Beatrice in the night and rain.

She stood in the doorway a muffled figure with eyes that glowed.

"Come back," she whispered. "I shall wait for you."

She hesitated.

She touched the lapel of my coat. "I love you *now*," she said, and lifted her face to mine.

I held her to me and was atremble from top to toe. "O God!" I cried. "And I must go!"

She slipped from my arms and paused regarding me. For an instant the world seemed full of fantastic possibilities.

"Yes, *Go!*" she said, and vanished and slammed the door upon me, leaving me alone like a man new fallen from fairyland in the black darkness of the night.

§ 3

That expedition to Mordet Island stands apart from all the rest of my life, detached, a piece by itself with an

atmosphere of its own. It would, I suppose, make a book by itself—it has made a fairly voluminous official report—but so far as this novel of mine goes it is merely an episode, a contributory experience, and I mean to keep it at that.

Vile weather, an impatient fretting against unbearable slowness and delay, sea-sickness, general discomfort and humiliating self-revelation are the master values of these memories.

I was sick all through the journey out. I don't know why. It was the only time I was ever seasick, and I have seen some pretty bad weather since I became a boat-builder. But that phantom smell of potatoes was peculiarly vile to me. Coming back on the brig we were all ill, every one of us, so soon as we got to sea, poisoned I firmly believe by quap. On the way out most of the others recovered in a few days, but the stuffiness below, the coarse food, the cramped dirty accommodation kept me, if not actually seasick, in a state of acute physical wretchedness the whole time. The ship abounded in cockroaches and more intimate vermin. I was cold all the time until after we passed Cape Verde, then I became steamily hot; I had been too preoccupied with Beatrice and my keen desire to get the *Maud Mary* under way at once, to consider a proper wardrobe for myself, and in particular I lacked a coat. Heavens! how I lacked that coat! And, moreover, I was cooped up with two of the worst bores in Christendom, Pollack and the captain. Pollack, after conducting his illness in a style better adapted to the capacity of an opera house than a small compartment, suddenly got insupportably well and breezy, and produced a manly pipe in which he smoked a tobacco as blond as himself, and divided his time almost equally between smoking it and trying to clean it. "There's only three things you *can* clean a pipe with," he used to remark with a twist of paper in hand. "The best's a feather, the second's a straw, and the third's a girl's hairpin. I never see such a ship. You can't find any of 'em. Last time I came this way I did find hairpins anyway, and found 'em on the floor of the captain's cabin. Regular deposit. Eh? . . . Feelin' better?"

At which I usually swore.

"Oh, you'll be all right soon. Don't mind my puffin' a bit? Eh?"

He never tired of asking me to "have a hand at Nap. Good game. Makes you forget it, and that's half the battle."

He would sit swaying with the rolling of the ship and suck at his pipe of blond tobacco and look with an inexpressibly sage but somnolent blue eye at the captain by the hour together. "Captain's a Card," he would say over and over again as the outcome of these meditations. "He'd like to know what we're up to. He'd like to know —no end."

That did seem to be the captain's ruling idea. But he also wanted to impress me with the notion that he was a gentleman of good family and to air a number of views adverse to the English, to English literature, to the English constitution, and the like. He had learnt the sea in the Roumanian navy, and English out of a book; he would still at times pronounce the e's at the end of "there" and "here"; he was a naturalized Englishman, and he drove me into a reluctant and uncongenial patriotism by his everlasting carping at things English. Pollack would set himself to "draw him out." Heaven alone can tell how near I came to murder.

Fifty-three days I had outward, cooped up with these two and a shy and profoundly depressed mate who read the Bible on Sundays and spent the rest of his leisure in lethargy, three and fifty days of life cooped up in a perpetual smell, in a persistent sick hunger that turned from the sight of food, in darkness, cold and wet, in a lightly ballasted ship that rolled and pitched and swayed. And all the time the sands in the hour-glass of my uncle's fortunes were streaming out. Misery! Amidst it all I remember only one thing brightly, one morning of sunshine in the Bay of Biscay and a vision of frothing waves, sapphire green, a bird following our wake and our masts rolling about the sky. Then wind and rain close in on us again.

You must not imagine they were ordinary days, days I mean of an average length; they were not so much days as long damp slabs of time that stretched each one to the horizon, and much of that length was night. One paraded

the staggering deck in a borrowed sou'-wester hour after hour in the chilly, windy, splashing and spitting darkness, or sat in the cabin, bored and ill, and looked at the faces of those inseparable companions by the help of a lamp that gave smell rather than light. Then one would see going up, up, up, and then sinking down, down, down, Pollack, extinct pipe in mouth, humorously observant, bringing his mind slowly to the seventy-seventh decision that the captain was a Card, while the words flowed from the latter in a nimble incessant flood. "Dis England eet is not a country aristocratic, no! Eet is a glorified bourgeoisie! Eet is plutocratic. In England dere is no aristocracy since de Wars of Roses. In the rest of Europe east of the Latins, yes; in England, no.

"Eet is all middle-class, youra England. Everything you look at, middle-class. Respectable! Everything good—eet is, you say, shocking. Madame Grundy! Eet is all limited and computing and self-seeking. Dat is why your art is so limited, youra fiction, your philosophia, why you are all so inartistic. You want nothing but profit! What will pay! What would you?" . . .

He had all those violent adjuncts to speech we Western Europeans have abandoned, shruggings of the shoulders, waving of the arms, thrusting out of the face, wonderful grimaces and twiddlings of the hands under your nose until you wanted to hit them away. Day after day it went on, and I had to keep my anger to myself, to reserve myself for the time ahead when it would be necessary to see the quap was got aboard and stowed—knee deep in this man's astonishment. I knew he would make a thousand objections to all we had before us. He talked like a drugged man. It ran glibly over his tongue. And all the time one could see his seamanship fretting him, he was gnawed by responsibility, perpetually uneasy about the ship's position, perpetually imagining dangers. If a sea hit us exceptionally hard he'd be out of the cabin in an instant making an outcry of inquiries, and he was pursued by a dread of the hold, of ballast shifting, of insidious wicked leaks. As we drew near the African coast his fear of rocks and shoals became infectious.

"I do not know dis coast," he used to say. "I cama

hera because Gordon-Nasmyth was coming too. Den he does not come ! "

" Fortunes of war," I said, and tried to think in vain if any motive but sheer haphazard could have guided Gordon-Nasmyth in the choice of these two men. I think perhaps Gordon-Nasmyth had the artistic temperament and wanted contrasts, and also that the captain helped him to express his own malignant Anti-Britishism. He was indeed an exceptionally inefficient captain. On the whole I was glad I had come even at the eleventh hour to see to things.

(The captain, by the by, did at last, out of sheer nervousness, get aground at the end of Mordet's Island, but we got off in an hour or so with a swell and a little hard work in the boat.)

I suspected the mate of his opinion of the captain long before he expressed it. He was, I say, a taciturn man, but one day speech broke through him. He had been sitting at the table with his arms folded on it, musing drearily, pipe in mouth, and the voice of the captain drifted down from above.

The mate lifted his heavy eyes to me and regarded me for a moment. Then he began to heave with the beginnings of speech. He disembarrassed himself of his pipe. I cowered with expectation. Speech was coming at last. Before he spoke he nodded reassuringly one or twice.

" E——"

He moved his head strangely and mysteriously, but a child might have known he spoke of the captain.

" E's a foreigner."

He regarded me doubtfully for a time, and at last decided for the sake of lucidity to clench the matter.

" That's what E is—a *Dago !* "

He nodded like a man who gives a last tap to a nail, and I could see he considered his remark well and truly laid. His face, though still resolute, became as tranquil and uneventful as a huge hall after a public meeting has dispersed out of it, and finally he closed and locked it with his pipe.

" Roumanian Jew, isn't he ? " I said.

He nodded darkly and almost forbiddingly.

More would have been too much. The thing was said. But from that time forth I knew I could depend upon him and that he and I were friends. It happens I never did have to depend upon him, but that does not affect our relationship.

Forward the crew lived lives very much after the fashion of ours, more crowded, more cramped and dirty, wetter, steamier, more verminous. The coarse food they had was still not so coarse but that they did not think they were living "like fighting cocks." So far as I could make out they were all nearly destitute men, hardly any of them had a proper sea outfit, and what small possessions they had were a source of mutual distrust. And as we pitched and floundered southward they gambled and fought, were brutal to one another, argued and wrangled loudly, until we protested at the uproar. . . .

There's no romance about the sea in a small sailing ship as I saw it. The romance is in the mind of the landsman dreamer. These brigs and schooners and brigantines that still stand out from every little port are relics from an age of petty trade, as rotten and obsolescent as a Georgian house that has sunken into a slum. They are indeed just floating fragments of slum, much as icebergs are floating fragments of glacier. The civilized man who has learnt to wash, who has developed a sense of physical honour, of cleanly temperate feeding, of time, can endure them no more. They pass, and the clanking coal-wasting steamers will follow them, giving place to cleaner, finer things. . . .

But so it was I made my voyage to Africa, and came at last into a world of steamy fogs and a hot smell of vegetable decay, and into sound and sight of surf and distant intermittent glimpses of the coast. I lived a strange concentrated life through all that time, such a life as a creature must do that has fallen in a well. All my former ways ceased, all my old vistas became memories.

The situation I was saving was very small and distant now; I felt its urgency no more. Beatrice and Lady Grove, my uncle and the Hardingham, my soaring in the air and my habitual wide vision of swift effectual things, became as remote as if they were in some world I had left for ever. . .

§ 4

All these African memories stand by themselves. It was for me an expedition into the realms of undisciplined nature out of the world that is ruled by men, my first bout with that hot side of our mother that gives you the jungle—that cold side that gives you the air-eddy I was beginning to know passing well. They are memories woven upon a fabric of sunshine and heat and a constant warm smell of decay. They end in rain—such rain as I had never seen before, a vehement, a frantic downpouring of water, but our first slow passage through the channels behind Mordet's Island was an incandescent sunshine.

There we go in my memory still, a blistered dirty ship with patched sails and a battered mermaid to present *Maud Mary*, sounding and taking thought between high banks of forest whose trees come out knee-deep at last in the water. There we go with a little breeze on our quarter, Mordet Island rounded and the quap it might be within a day of us.

Here and there strange blossoms woke the dank intensities of green with a trumpet call of colour. Things crept among the jungle and peeped and dashed back rustling into stillness. Always in the sluggishly drifting, opaque water were eddyings and stirrings; little rushes of bubbles came chuckling up light-heartedly from this or that submerged conflict and tragedy; now and again were crocodiles like a stranded fleet of logs basking in the sun. Still it was by day, a dreary stillness broken only by insect sounds and the creaking and flapping of our progress, by the calling of the soundings and the captain's confused shouts; but in the night as we lay moored to a clump of trees the darkness brought a thousand swampy things to life and out of the forest came screamings and howlings, screamings and yells that made us glad to be afloat. And once we saw between the tree stems long blazing fires. We passed two or three villages landward and brown-black women and children came and stared at us and gesticulated, and once a man came out in a boat from a creek and hailed us in an unknown tongue; and so at last we came to a great open place, a broad lake rimmed with a desolation of mud and bleached

refuse and dead trees, free from crocodiles or water birds or sight or sound of any living thing, and saw far off, even as Nasmyth had described, the ruins of the deserted station and hard by two little heaps of buff-hued rubbish under a great rib of rock, the quap! The forest receded. The land to the right of us fell away and became barren, and far off across a notch in its backbone was surf and the sea.

We took the ship in towards those heaps and the ruined jetty slowly and carefully. The captain came and talked.

"This is eet?" he said.

"Yes," said I.

"Is eet for trade we have come?"

This was ironical.

"No," said I. . . .

"Gordon-Nasmyth would haf told me long ago what it ees for we haf come."

"I'll tell you now," I said. "We are going to lay in as close as we can to those two heaps of stuff—you see them?—under the rock. Then we are going to chuck all our ballast overboard and take those in. Then we're going home."

"May I presume to ask—is eet gold?"

"No," I said incivilly, "it isn't."

"Then what is it?"

"It's stuff—of some commercial value."

"We can't do eet," he said.

"We can," I answered reassuringly.

"We can't," he said as confidently. "I don't mean what you mean. You know so liddle—But—Dis is forbidden country."

I turned on him suddenly angry and met bright excited eyes. For a minute we scrutinized one another. Then I said, "That's our risk. Trade is forbidden. But this isn't trade. . . . This thing's got to be done."

His eyes glittered and he shook his head. . . .

The brig stood in slowly through the twilight towards this strange scorched and blistered stretch of beach, and the man at the wheel strained his ears to listen to the low-voiced angry argument that began between myself and the captain, that was presently joined by Pollack. We moored at last within a hundred yards of our goal and all through our

dinner and far into the night we argued intermittently and fiercely with the captain about our right to load just what we pleased. "I will haf nothing to do with it," he persisted. "I wash my hands." It seemed that night as though we argued in vain. "If it is not trade," he said, "it is prospecting and mining. That is worse. Any one who knows anything—outside England—knows that is worse."

We argued and I lost my temper and swore at him. Pollack kept cooler and chewed his pipe watchfully with that blue eye of his upon the captain's gestures. Finally I went on deck to cool. The sky was overcast. I discovered all the men were in a knot forward, staring at the faint quivering luminosity that had spread over the heaps of quap, a phosphorescence such as one sees at times on rotting wood. And about the beach east and west there were patches and streaks of something like diluted moonshine. . .

In the small hours I was still awake and turning over scheme after scheme in my mind whereby I might circumvent the captain's opposition. I meant to get that quap aboard if I had to kill some one to do it. Never in my life had I been so thwarted! After this intolerable voyage! There came a rap at my cabin door, and then it opened and I made out a bearded face. "Come in," I said, and a black voluble figure I could just see obscurely came in to talk in my private ear and fill my cabin with its whisperings and gestures. It was the captain. He too had been awake and thinking things over. He had come to explain —enormously. I lay there hating him and wondering if I and Pollack could lock him in his cabin and run the ship without him. "I do not want to spoil dis expedition," emerged from a cloud of protestations, and then I was able to disentangle "a commission—shush a small commission —for special risks!" "Special risks" became frequent. I let him explain himself out. It appeared he was also demanding an apology for something I had said. No doubt I had insulted him generously. At last came definite offers. I broke my silence and bargained.

"Pollack!" I cried, and hammered the partition.

"What's up?" asked Pollack.

I stated the case concisely.

There came a silence.

"He's a Card," said Pollack. "Let's give him his commission. I don't mind."

"Eh?" I cried.

"I said he was a Card, that's all," said Pollack. "I'm coming."

He appeared in my doorway a faint white figure and joined our vehement whisperings. . . .

We had to buy the captain off; we had to promise him ten per cent. of our problematical profits. We were to give him ten per cent. on what we sold the cargo for over and above his legitimate pay, and I found in my out-bargained and disordered state small consolation in the thought that I, as the Gordon-Nasmyth expedition, was to sell the stuff to myself as Business Organizations. And he further exasperated me by insisting on having our bargain in writing. "In the form of a letter," he insisted.

"All right," I acquiesced, "in the form of a letter. Here goes. Get a light!"

"And the apology," he said, folding up the letter.

"All right," I said; "apology."

My hand shook with anger as I wrote and afterwards I could not sleep for hate of him. At last I got up. I suffered, I found, from an unusual clumsiness. I struck my toe against my cabin door, and cut myself as I shaved. I found myself at last pacing the deck under the dawn in a mood of extreme exasperation. The sun rose abruptly and splashed light blindingly into my eyes and I swore at the sun. I found myself imagining fresh obstacles with the men and talking aloud in anticipatory rehearsal of the consequent row.

The malaria of the quap was already in my blood.

§ 5

Sooner or later the ridiculous embargo that now lies upon all the coast eastward of Mordet Island will be lifted and the reality of the deposits of quap ascertained. I am sure myself that we were merely taking the outcrop of a stratum of nodulated deposits that dip steeply seaward. Those heaps were merely the crumbled out contents of two irregu-

lar cavities in the rock, they are as natural as any talus or heap of that kind, and the mud along the edge of the water for miles is mixed with quap, and is radio-active and lifeless and faintly phosphorescent at night. But the reader will find the full particulars of my impression of all this in the *Geological Magazine* for October 1905, and to that I must refer him. There too he will find my unconfirmed theories of its nature. If I am right it is something far more significant from the scientific point of view than those incidental constituents of various rare metals, pitchblende, rutile, and the like, upon which the revolutionary discoveries of the last decade are based. Those are just little molecular centres of disintegration, of that mysterious decay and rotting of those elements, elements once regarded as the most stable things in nature. But there is something—the only word that comes near it is *cancerous*—and that is not very near, about the whole of quap, something that creeps and lives as a disease lives by destroying; an elemental stirring and disarrangement, incalculably maleficent and strange.

This is no imaginative comparison of mine. To my mind radio-activity is a real disease of matter. Moreover it is a contagious disease. It spreads. You bring those debased and crumbling atoms near others and those too presently catch the trick of swinging themselves out of coherent existence. It is in matter exactly what the decay of our old culture is in society, a loss of traditions and distinctions and assured reactions. When I think of these inexplicable dissolvent centres that have come into being in our globe—these quap heaps are surely by far the largest that have yet been found in the world; the rest as yet mere specks in grains and crystals—I am haunted by a grotesque fancy of the ultimate eating away and dry-rotting and dispersal of all our world. So that while man still struggles and dreams his very substance will change and crumble from beneath him. I mention this here as a queer persistent fancy. Suppose indeed that is to be the end of our planet; no splendid climax and finale, no towering accumulation of achievements but just—atomic decay! I add that to the ideas of the suffocating comet, the dark body out of space, the burning out of the sun, the distorted orbit,

as a new and far more possible end—as Science can see ends—to this strange by-play of matter that we call human life. I do not believe this can be the end; no human soul can believe in such an end and go on living, but to it science points as a possible thing, science and reason alike. If single human beings—if one single rickety infant—can be born as it were by accident and die futile, why not the whole race? These are questions I have never answered, that now I never attempt to answer, but the thought of quap and its mysteries brings them back to me.

I can witness that the beach and mud for two miles or more either way was a lifeless beach—lifeless as I could have imagined no tropical mud could ever be, and all the dead branches and leaves and rotting dead fish and so forth that drifted ashore became presently shrivelled and white. Sometimes crocodiles would come up out of the water and bask, and now and then water birds would explore the mud and rocky ribs that rose out of it, in a mood of transitory speculation. That was its utmost animation. And the air felt at once hot and austere, dry and blistering, and altogether different to the warm moist embrace that had met us at our first African landfall and to which we had grown accustomed.

I believe that the primary influence of the quap upon us was to increase the conductivity of our nerves, but that is a mere unjustifiable speculation on my part. At any rate it gave a sort of east wind effect to life. We all became irritable, clumsy, languid and disposed to be impatient with our languor. We moored the brig to the rocks with difficulty, and got aground on mud, and decided to stick there and tow off when we had done—the bottom was as greasy as butter. Our efforts to fix up planks and sleepers in order to wheel the quap aboard were as ill conceived as that sort of work can be—and that sort of work can at times be very ill conceived. The captain had a superstitious fear of his hold; he became wildly gesticulatory and expository and incompetent at the bare thought of it. His shouts still echo in my memory, becoming as each crisis approached less and less like any known tongue.

But I cannot now write the history of those days of blundering and toil, of how Milton, one of the boys, fell

from a plank to the beach, thirty feet perhaps, with his barrow and broke his arm and I believe a rib, of how I and Pollack set the limb and nursed him through the fever that followed, of how one man after another succumbed to a feverish malaria, and how I—by virtue of my scientific reputation—was obliged to play the part of doctor and dose them with quinine, and then finding that worse than nothing, with rum and small doses of Easton's Syrup, of which there chanced to be a case of bottles aboard—Heaven and Gordon-Nasmyth know why. For three long days we lay in misery and never shipped a barrow-load. Then, when they resumed, the men's hands broke out into sores. There were no gloves available; and I tried to get them, while they shovelled and wheeled, to cover their hands with stockings or greased rags. They would not do this on account of the heat and discomfort. This attempt of mine did however direct their attention to the quap as the source of their illness and precipitated what in the end finished our lading, an informal strike. "We've had enough of this," they said, and they meant it. They came aft to say as much. They cowed the captain.

Through all these days the weather was variously vile, first a furnace heat under a sky of a scowling intensity of blue, then a hot fog that stuck in one's throat like wool and turned the men on the planks into colourless figures of giants, then a wild burst of thunderstorms, mad elemental uproar and rain. Through it all against illness, heat, confusion of mind, one master impetus prevailed with me, to keep the shipping going, to maintain one motif at least, whatever else arose or ceased, the chuff of the spades, the squeaking and shriek of the barrows, the pluppa, pluppa, pluppa, as the men came trotting along the swinging high planks, and then at last, the dollop, dollop as the stuff shot into the hold. "Another barrow-load, thank God! Another fifteen hundred, or it may be two thousand pounds, for the saving of Ponderevo! . . . !"

I found out many things about myself and humanity in those weeks of effort behind Mordet Island. I understand now the heart of the sweater, of the harsh employer, of the nigger-driver. I had brought these men into a danger they didn't understand, I was fiercely resolved to overcome their

oppositions and bend and use them for my purpose, and I hated the men. But I hated all humanity during the time that the quap was near me. . . .

And my mind was pervaded too by a sense of urgency and by the fear that we should be discovered and our proceedings stopped. I wanted to get out to sea again—to be beating up northward with our plunder. I was afraid our masts showed to seaward and might betray us to some curious passer on the high sea. And one evening near the end I saw a canoe with three natives far off down the lake; I got field-glasses from the captain and scrutinized them, and I could see them staring at us. One man might have been a half-breed and was dressed in white. They watched us for some time very quietly and then paddled off into some channel in the forest shadows.

And for three nights running, so that it took a painful grip upon my inflamed imagination, I dreamt of my uncle's face, only that it was ghastly white like a clown's, and the throat was cut from ear to ear—a long ochreous cut. "Too late," he said; "too late! . . ."

6

A day or so after we had got to work upon the quap I found myself so sleepless and miserable that the ship became unendurable. Just before the rush of sunrise I borrowed Pollack's gun, walked down the planks, clambered over the quap heaps and prowled along the beach. I went perhaps a mile and a half that day and some distance beyond the ruins of the old station, I became interested in the desolation about me, and found when I returned that I was able to sleep for nearly an hour. It was delightful to have been alone for so long,—no captain, no Pollack, no one. Accordingly I repeated this expedition the next morning and the next until it became a custom with me. There was little for me to do once the digging and wheeling was organized, and so these prowlings of mine grew longer and longer, and presently I began to take food with me.

I pushed these walks far beyond the area desolated by the quap. On the edges of that was first a zone of stunted

vegetation, then a sort of swampy jungle that was difficult to penetrate, and then the beginnings of the forest, a scene of huge tree stems and tangled creeper ropes and roots mingled with oozy mud. Here I used to loaf in a state between botanizing and reverie—always very anxious to know what was up above in the sunlight—and here it was I murdered a man.

It was the most unmeaning and purposeless murder imaginable. Even as I write down its well-remembered particulars there comes again the sense of its strangeness, its pointlessness, its incompatibility with any of the neat and definite theories people hold about life and the meaning of the world. I did this thing and I want to tell of my doing it, but why I did it and particularly why I should be held responsible for it I cannot explain.

That morning I had come upon a track in the forest and it had occurred to me as a disagreeable idea that this was a human pathway. I didn't want to come upon any human beings. The less our expedition saw of the African population the better for its prospects. Thus far we had been singularly free from native pestering. So I turned back and was making my way over mud and roots and dead fronds and petals scattered from the green world above when abruptly I saw my victim.

I became aware of him perhaps forty feet off standing quite still and regarding me.

He wasn't by any means a pretty figure. He was very black and naked except for a dirty loin-cloth, his legs were ill-shaped and his toes spread wide, and the upper edge of his cloth and a girdle of string cut his clumsy abdomen into folds. His forehead was low, his nose very flat, and his lower lip swollen and purplish red. His hair was short and fuzzy, and about his neck was a string and a little purse of skin. He carried a musket, and a powder flask was stuck in his girdle. It was a curious confrontation. There opposed to him stood I, a little soiled perhaps, but still a rather elaborately civilized human being born, bred and trained in a vague tradition. In my hand was an unaccustomed gun. And each of us was essentially a teeming vivid brain, tensely excited by the encounter, quite unaware of the other's mental content or what to do with him.

He stepped back a pace or so. Stumbled and turned to run. "Stop," I cried; "stop, you fool!" and started to run after him shouting such things in English. But I was no match for him over the roots and mud.

I had a preposterous idea. "He mustn't get away and tell them!"

And with that instantly I brought both feet together, raised my gun, aimed quite coolly, drew the trigger carefully and shot him neatly in the back.

I saw, and saw with a leap of pure exaltation, the smash of my bullet between his shoulder blades. "Got him," said I, dropping my gun, and down he flopped and died without a groan. "By Jove," I cried with a note of surprise, "I've killed him." I looked about me and then went forward cautiously in a mood between curiosity and astonishment to look at this man whose soul I had flung so unceremoniously out of our common world. I went to him not as one goes to something one has made or done, but as one approaches something found.

He was frightfully smashed out in front; he must have died in the instant. I stooped and raised him by his shoulder and realized that. I dropped him, and stood about and peered about me through the trees. "My word!" I said. He was the second dead human being—apart I mean from surgical properties and mummies and common shows of that sort—that I had ever seen. I stood over him wondering, wondering beyond measure.

A practical idea came into that confusion. Had any one heard the gun?

I reloaded.

After a time I felt securer, and gave my mind again to the dead I had killed. What must I do?

It occurred to me that perhaps I ought to bury him. At any rate, I ought to hide him. I reflected coolly, and then put my gun within easy reach and dragged him by the arm towards a place where the mud seemed soft, and thrust him in. His powder-flask slipped from his loin-cloth, and I went back to get it. Then I pressed him down with the butt of my rifle.

Afterwards this all seemed to me most horrible, but at the time it was entirely a matter-of-fact transaction. I

looked round for any other visible evidence of his fate, looked round as one does when one packs one's portmanteau in an hotel bedroom.

Then I got my bearings, and carefully returned towards the ship. I had the mood of grave concentration of a boy who has lapsed into poaching. And the business only began to assume proper proportions for me as I got near the ship, to seem any other kind of thing than the killing of a bird or rabbit.

In the night, however, it took on enormous and portentous forms. "By God!" I cried suddenly, starting wide awake; "but it was murder!"

I lay after that wide awake, staring at my memories. In some odd way these visions mixed up with my dream of my uncle in his despair. The black body which I saw now damaged and partly buried, but which, nevertheless, I no longer felt was dead but acutely alive and perceiving, I mixed up with the ochreous slash under my uncle's face. I tried to dismiss this horrible obsession from my mind, but it prevailed over all my efforts.

The next day was utterly black with my sense of that ugly creature's body. I am the least superstitious of men, but it drew me. It drew me back into those thickets to the very place where I had hidden him.

Some evil and detestable beast had been at him, and he lay disinterred.

Methodically I buried his swollen and mangled carcass again, and returned to the ship for another night of dreams. Next day for all the morning I resisted the impulse to go to him, and played Nap with Pollack with my secret gnawing at me, and in the evening started to go and was near benighted. I never told a soul of them of this thing I had done.

Next day I went early and he had gone, and there were human footmarks and ugly stains round the muddy hole from which he had been dragged.

I returned to the ship, disconcerted and perplexed. That day it was the men came aft, with blistered hands and faces, and sullen eyes. When they proclaimed, through Edwards, their spokesman, "We've had enough of this, and we mean it," I answered very readily, "So have I. Let's go."

§ 7

We were none too soon. People had been reconnoitring us, the telegraph had been at work, and we were not four hours at sea before we ran against the gunboat that had been sent down the coast to look for us and that would have caught us behind the island like a beast in a trap. It was a night of driving cloud that gave intermittent gleams of moonlight, the wind and sea were strong and we were rolling along through a drift of rain and mist. Suddenly the world was white with moonshine. The gunboat came out as a long dark shape wallowing on the water to the east. She sighted the *Maud Mary* at once, and fired some sort of popgun to arrest us.

The mate turned to me.

"Shall I tell the captain?"

"The captain be damned!" said I, and we let him sleep through two hours of chase till a rainstorm swallowed us up. Then we changed our course and sailed right across them, and by morning only her smoke was showing.

We were clear of Africa—and with the booty aboard. I did not see what stood between us and home.

For the first time since I had fallen sick in the Thames my spirits rose. I was sea-sick and physically disgusted of course, but I felt kindly in spite of my qualms. So far as I could calculate then the situation was saved. I saw myself returning triumphantly into the Thames, and nothing on earth to prevent old Capern's Perfect Filament going on the market in a fortnight. I had the monopoly of electric lamps beneath my feet.

I was released from the spell of that blood-stained black body all mixed up with grey-black mud. I was going back to baths and decent food and aeronautics and Beatrice. I was going back to Beatrice and my real life again—out of this well into which I had fallen. It would have needed something more than sea-sickness and quap fever to prevent my spirits rising.

I told the captain that I agreed with him that the British were the scum of Europe, the westward drift of all the people, a disgusting rabble, and I lost three pounds by attenuated retail to Pollack at ha'penny nap and euchre.

And then you know, as we got out into the Atlantic this side of Cape Verde, the ship began to go to pieces. I don't pretend for one moment to understand what happened. But I think Greiffenhagen's recent work on the effects of radium upon ligneous tissue does rather carry out my idea that emanations from quap have a rapid rotting effect upon woody fibre.

From the first there had been a different feel about the ship, and as the big winds and waves began to strain her she commenced leaking. Soon she was leaking—not at any particular point, but everywhere. She did not spring a leak, I mean, but water came in first of all near the decaying edges of her planks, and then through them.

I firmly believe the water came through the wood. First it began to ooze, then to trickle. It was like trying to carry moist sugar in a thin paper bag. Soon we were taking in water as though we had opened a door in her bottom.

Once it began, the thing went ahead beyond all fighting. For a day or so we did our best, and I can still remember in my limbs and back the pumping—the fatigue in my arms and the memory of a clear little dribble of water that jerked as one pumped, and of knocking off and the being awakened to go on again, and of fatigue piling up upon fatigue. At last we ceased to think of anything but pumping; one became a thing of torment enchanted, doomed to pump for ever. I still remember it as pure relief when at last Pollack came to me pipe in mouth.

"The captain says the damned thing's going down right now," he remarked, chewing his mouthpiece. "Eh?"

"Good idea!" I said. "One can't go on pumping for ever."

And without hurry or alacrity, sullenly and wearily we got into the boats and pulled away from the *Maud Mary* until we were clear of her, and then we stayed resting on our oars, motionless upon a glassy sea, waiting for her to sink. We were all silent, even the captain was silent until she went down. And then he spoke quite mildly in an undertone.

"Dat is the first ship I haf ever lost. . . . And it was not a fair game! It wass not a cargo any man should take. No!"

I stared at the slow eddies that circled above the departed *Maud Mary*, and the last chance of Business Organizations. I felt weary beyond emotion. I thought of my heroics to Beatrice and my uncle, of my prompt "*I'll* go," and of all the ineffectual months I had spent after this headlong decision. I was moved to laughter at myself and fate.

But the captain and the men did not laugh. The men scowled at me and rubbed their sore and blistered hands, and set themselves to row. . . .

As all the world knows, we were picked up by the Union Castle liner *Portland Castle*.

The hairdresser aboard was a wonderful man, and he even improvised me a dress suit, and produced a clean shirt and warm underclothing. I had a hot bath, and dressed and dined and drank a bottle of Burgundy.

"Now," I said, "are there any newspapers? I want to know what's been happening in the world."

My steward gave me what he had, but I landed at Plymouth still largely ignorant of the course of events. I shook off Pollack and left the captain and mate in an hotel, and the men in a Sailors' Home until I could send to pay them off, and I made my way to the station.

The newspapers I bought, the placards I saw, all England indeed resounded to my uncle's bankruptcy.

BOOK THE FOURTH

THE AFTERMATH OF TONO-BUNGAY

CHAPTER I

The Stick of the Rocket

§ 1

That evening I talked with my uncle in the Hardingham for the last time. The atmosphere of the place had altered quite shockingly. Instead of the crowd of importunate courtiers there were just half a dozen uninviting men, journalists waiting for an interview. Ropper, the big commissionaire, was still there, but now indeed he was defending my uncle from something more than time-wasting intrusions. I found the little man alone in the inner office pretending to work but really brooding. He was looking yellow and deflated.

"Lord!" he said at the sight of me. "You're lean, George. It makes that scar of yours show up."

We regarded each other gravely for a time.

"Quap," I said, "is at the bottom of the Atlantic. There's some bills——. We've got to pay the men." . . .

"Seen the papers?"

"Read 'em all in the train."

"At bay," he said. "I been at bay for a week. . . . Yelping round me. . . . And me facing the music. I'm feelin' a bit tired."

He blew and wiped his glasses.

"My stomach isn't what it was," he explained. "One finds it—these times. How did it all happen, George? Your Marconigram—it took me in the wind a bit."

I told him concisely. He nodded to the paragraphs of my narrative, and at the end he poured something from a medicine bottle into a sticky little wineglass and drank it. I became aware of the presence of drugs, of three or four

small bottles before him among his disorder of papers, of a faint elusively familiar odour in the room.

"Yes," he said, wiping his lips and recorking the bottle. "You've done your best, George. The luck's been against us."

He reflected, bottle in hand. "Sometimes the luck goes with you and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it doesn't. And then where are you? Grass in the oven! Fight or no fight."

He asked a few questions and then his thoughts came back to his own urgent affairs. I tried to get some comprehensive account of the situation from him, but he would not give it.

"Oh, I wish I'd had you. I wish I'd had you, George. I've had a lot on my hands. You're clear-headed at times."

"What has happened?"

"Oh! Boom!—infernal things."

"Yes, but—how? I'm just off the sea, remember."

"It'd worry me too much to tell you now. It's tied up in a skein."

He muttered something to himself and mused darkly, and roused himself to say—

"Besides—you'd better keep out of it. It's getting tight. Get 'em talking. Go down to Crest Hill and fly. That's *your* affair."

For a time his manner set free queer anxieties in my brain again. I will confess that the Mordet Island nightmare of mine returned, and as I looked at him his hand went out for the drug again. "Stomach, George," he said.

"I been fightin' on that. Every man fights on something—gives way somewhere,—head, heart, liver—something. Zzzz. Gives way somewhere. Napoleon did at last. All through the Waterloo campaign, his stomach—it wasn't a stomach! Worse than mine, no end."

The mood of depression passed as the drug worked within him. His eyes brightened. He began to talk big. He began to dress up the situation for my eyes, to recover what he had admitted to me. He put it as a retreat from Russia. There were still the chances of Leipzig.

"It's a battle, George—a big fight. We're fighting for

millions. I've still chances. There's still a card or so. I can't tell all my plans—like speaking on the stroke."

"You might," I began.

"I can't, George. It's like asking to look at some embryo. You got to wait. I know. In a sort of way, I know. But to tell it—— No! You been away so long. And everything's got complicated."

My perception of disastrous entanglements deepened with the rise of his spirits. It was evident that I could only help to tie him up in whatever net was weaving round his mind by forcing questions and explanations upon him. My thoughts flew off at another angle. "How's Aunt Susan?" said I.

I had to repeat the question. His busy whispering lips stopped for a moment, and he answered in the note of one who repeats a formula.

"She'd like to be in the battle with me. She'd like to be here in London. But there's corners I got to turn alone." His eyes rested for a moment on the little bottle beside him. "And things have happened.

"You might go down now and talk to her," he said, in a director voice. "I shall be down to-morrow night, I think."

He looked up as though he hoped that would end our talk.

"For the week-end?" I asked.

"For the week-end. Thang God for week-ends, George!"

§ 2

My return home to Lady Grove was a very different thing from what I had anticipated when I got out to sea with my load of quap and fancied the Perfect Filament was safe within my grasp. As I walked through the evening light along the downs, the summer stillness seemed like the stillness of something newly dead. There were no lurking workmen any more, no cyclists on the high-road.

Cessation was manifest everywhere. There had been, I learnt from my aunt, a touching and quite voluntary demonstration when the Crest Hill work had come to an

end and the men had drawn their last pay; they had cheered my uncle and hooted the contractors and Lord Boom.

I cannot now recall the manner in which my aunt and I greeted one another. I must have been very tired then; but whatever impression was made has gone out of my memory. But I recall very clearly how we sat at the little round table near the big window that gave on the terrace, and dined and talked. I remember her talking of my uncle.

She asked after him, and whether he seemed well. "I wish I could help," she said. "But I've never helped him much, never. His way of doing things was never mine. And since—since—— Since he began to get so rich, he's kept things from me. In the old days—it was different. . . .

"There he is—I don't know what he's doing. He won't have me near him. . . .

"More's kept from me than any one. The very servants won't let me know. They try and stop the worst of the papers—Boom's things—from coming upstairs. . . . I suppose they've got him in a corner, George.

"Poor old Teddy! Poor old Adam and Eve we are! 'Ficial Receivers with flaming swords to drive us out of our garden! I'd hoped we'd never have another Trek. Well—anyway, it won't be Crest Hill. . . . But it's hard on Teddy. He must be in such a mess up there. Poor old chap. I suppose we can't help him. I suppose we'd only worry him. Have some more soup, George—while there is some? . . ."

The next day was one of those days of strong perception that stand out clear in one's memory when the common course of days is blurred. I can recall now the awakening in the large familiar room that was always kept for me, and how I lay staring at its chintz-covered chairs, its spaced fine furniture, its glimpse of the cedars without, and thought that all this had to end.

I have never been greedy for money, I have never wanted to be rich, but I felt now an immense sense of impending deprivation. I read the newspapers after breakfast—I and my aunt together—and then I walked up to see what Cothope had done in the matter of Lord Roberts β. Never before had I appreciated so acutely the ample brightness of the Lady Grove gardens, the dignity and wide

peace of all about me. It was one of those warm mornings in late May that have won all the glory of summer without losing the gay delicacy of spring. The shrubbery was bright with laburnum and lilac, the beds swarmed with daffodils and narcissi and with lilies of the valley in the shade.

I went along the well-kept paths among the rhododendra and through the private gate into the woods where the bluebells and common orchid were in profusion. Never before had I tasted so completely the fine sense of privilege and ownership. And all this has to end, I told myself, all this has to end.

Neither my uncle nor I had made any provision for disaster, all we had was in the game, and I had little doubt now of the completeness of our ruin. For the first time in my life since he had sent me that wonderful telegram of his I had to consider that common anxiety of mankind,—Employment. I had to come off my magic carpet and walk once more in the world.

And suddenly I found myself at the cross drives where I had seen Beatrice for the first time after so many years. It is strange, but so far as I can recollect I had not thought of her once since I had landed at Plymouth. No doubt she had filled the background of my mind, but I do not remember one definite clear thought. I had been intent on my uncle and the financial collapse.

It came like a blow in the face now, all that too has to end!

Suddenly I was filled with the thought of her and a great longing for her. What would she do when she realized our immense disaster? What would she do? How would she take it? It filled me with astonishment to realize how little I could tell. . . .

Should I perhaps presently happen upon her?

I went on through the plantations and out upon the downs and thence I saw Cothope with a new glider of his own design soaring down wind to my old familiar "grounding" place. To judge by its long rhythm it was a very good glider. "Like Cothope's cheek," thought I, "to go on with the research. I wonder if he's keeping notes. . . . But all this will have to stop."

He was sincerely glad to see me. "It's been a rum go," he said.

He had been there without wages for a month, a man forgotten in the rush of events.

"I just stuck on and did what I could with the stuff. I got a bit of money of my own—and I said to myself, 'Well, here you are with the gear and no one to look after you. You won't get such a chance again, my boy, not in all your born days. Why not make what you can with it?'"

"How's Lord Roberts β?"

Cothope lifted his eyebrows. "I've had to refrain," he said. "But he's looking very handsome."

"Gods!" I said, "I'd like to get him up just once before we smash. You read the papers? You know we're going to smash?"

"Oh! I read the papers. It's scandalous, Sir, such work as ours should depend on things like that. You and I ought to be under the State, Sir, if you'll excuse me——"

"Nothing to excuse," I said. "I've always been a Socialist—of a sort—in theory. Let's go and have a look at him. How is he? Deflated?"

"Just about quarter full. That last oil glaze of yours holds the gas something beautiful. He's not lost a cubic metre a week. . . ."

Cothope returned to Socialism as we went towards the sheds.

"Glad to think you're a Socialist, Sir," he said, "it's the only civilized state. I been a Socialist some years—off the *Clarion*. It's a rotten scramble, this world. It takes the things we make and invent and it plays the silly fool with 'em. We scientific people, we'll have to take things over and stop all this financing and advertisement and that. It's too silly. It's a noosance. Look at us!"

Lord Roberts β even in his partially deflated condition in his shed was a fine thing to stare up at. I stood side by side with Cothope regarding him, and it was borne in upon me more acutely than ever that all this had to end. I had a feeling just like the feeling of a boy who wants to do wrong, that I would use up the stuff while I had it before the creditors descended. I had a queer fancy too, I remember, that

if I could get into the air it would advertise my return to Beatrice.

"We'll fill her," I said concisely.

"It's all ready," said Cothope, and added as an afterthought, "unless they cut off the gas. . . ."

I worked and interested myself with Cothope all the morning and for a time forgot my other troubles. But the thought of Beatrice flooded me slowly and steadily. It became an unintelligent sick longing to see her. I felt that I could not wait for the filling of Lord Roberts β, that I must hunt her up and see her soon. I got everything forward and lunched with Cothope, and then with the feeblest excuses left him in order to prowl down through the woods towards Bedley Corner. I became a prey to wretched hesitations and diffidence. Ought I to go near her now? I asked myself, reviewing all the social abasements of my early years. At last about five I called at the Dower House. I was greeted by their Charlotte—with a forbidding eye and a cold astonishment.

Both Beatrice and Lady Osprey were out.

There came into my head some prowling dream of meeting her. I went along the lane towards Woking, the lane down which we had walked five months ago in the wind and rain.

I mooned for a time in our former footsteps, then swore and turned back across the fields, and then conceived a distaste for Cothope and went Downward. At last I found myself looking down on the huge abandoned masses of the Crest Hill house.

That gave my mind a twist into a new channel. My uncle came uppermost again. What a strange melancholy emptiness of intention that stricken enterprise seemed in the even evening sunlight, what vulgar magnificence and crudity and utter absurdity! It was as idiotic as the pyramids. I sat down on the stile, staring at it as though I had never seen that forest of scaffold poles, that waste of walls and bricks and plaster and shaped stones, that wilderness of broken soil and wheeling tracks and dumps before. It struck me suddenly as the compactest image and sample of all that passes for Progress, for all the advertisement-inflated spending, the aimless building up and pulling down, the enterprise and promise of my age. This was our fruit,

this was what we had done, I and my uncle, in the fashion of our time. We were its leaders and exponents, we were the thing it most flourishingly produced. For this futility in its end, for an epoch of such futility, the solemn scroll of history had unfolded. . . .

"Great God!" I cried, "but is this Life?"

For this the armies drilled, for this the Law was administered and the prisons did their duty, for this the millions toiled and perished in suffering, in order that a few of us should build palaces we never finished, make billiard-rooms under ponds, run imbecile walls round irrational estates, scorch about the world in motor-cars, devise flying-machines, play golf and a dozen such foolish games of ball, crowd into chattering dinner parties, gamble and make our lives one vast dismal spectacle of witless waste! So it struck me then, and for a time I could think of no other interpretation. This was Life! It came to me like a revelation, a revelation at once incredible and indisputable of the abysmal folly of our being.

§ 3

I was roused from such thoughts by the sound of footsteps behind me.

I turned half hopeful—so foolish is a lover's imagination, and stopped amazed. It was my uncle. His face was white—white as I had seen it in my dream.

"Hullo!" I said, and stared. "Why aren't you in London?"

"It's all up," he said. . . .

"Adjudicated?" . . .

"No!" . . .

I stared at him for a moment and then got off the stile.

He stood swaying and then came forward with a weak motion of his arms like a man who cannot see distinctly, and caught at and leant upon the stile. For a moment we were absolutely still. He made a clumsy gesture towards the great futility below and choked. I discovered that his face was wet with tears, that his wet glasses blinded him. He put up his little fat hand and clawed them off clumsily, felt inefficiently for his pocket-handkerchief and

then to my horror, as he clung to me, he began to weep aloud, this little old world-worn swindler. It wasn't just sobbing or shedding tears, it was crying as a child cries. It was—oh! terrible!

"It's cruel," he blubbered at last. "They asked me questions. They *kep'* asking me questions, George. . . ."

He sought for utterance, and spluttered.

"The Bloody bullies!" he shouted. "The Blöö-öödy Bullies."

He ceased to weep. He became suddenly rapid and explanatory.

"It's not a fair game, George. They tire you out. And I'm not well. My stomach's all wrong. And I been and got a cold. I always been li'ble to cold and this one's on my chest. And then they tell you to speak up. They bait you—and bait you, and bait you. It's torture. The strain of it. You can't remember what you said. You're bound to contradict yourself. It's like Russia, George. . . . It isn't fair play. . . . Prominent man. I've been next at dinners with that chap, Neal, I've told him stories—and he's bitter! Sets out to ruin me. Don't ask a civil question—bellows."

He broke down again. "I been bellowed at, I been bullied, I been treated like a dog. Dirty cads they are! Dirty cads! I'd rather be a Three Card Sharper than a barrister; I'd rather sell cat's-meat in the streets.

"They sprung things on me this morning, things I didn't expect. They rushed me! I'd got it all in my hands and then I was jumped. By Neal! Neal I've given city tips to! Neal! I've helped Neal. . . .

"I couldn't swallow a mouthful—not in the lunch hour. I couldn't face it. It's true, George—I couldn't face it. I said I'd get a bit of air and slipped out and down to the Embankment, and there I took a boat to Richmond. Some idee. I took a rowing boat when I got there and rowed about on the river for a bit. A lot of chaps and girls there was on the bank laughed at my shirt-sleeves and top hat. Dessay they thought it was a pleasure trip. Fat lot of pleasure! I rowed round for a bit and came in. Then I came on here. Windsor way. And there they are in London doing what they like with me. . . . I don't care!"

"But——" I said, looking down at him perplexed.

"It's abscondin'. They'll have a warrant."

"I don't understand," I said.

"It's all up, George—all up and over.

"And I thought I'd live in that place, George—and die a lord! It's a great place, reely, an imperial place—if any one has the sense to buy it and finish it. That terrace——"

I stood thinking him over.

"Look here!" I said. "What's that about a warrant? Are you sure they'll get a warrant? I'm sorry, uncle; but what have you done?"

"Haven't I tole you?"

"Yes, but they won't do very much to you for that. They'll only bring you up for the rest of your examination."

He remained silent for a time. At last he spoke—speaking with difficulty.

"It's worse than that. I done something. . . . They're bound to get it out. Practically they *have* got it out."

"What?"

"Writin' things down—— I done something."

For the first time in his life, I believe, he felt and looked ashamed. It filled me with remorse to see him suffer so.

"We've all done things," I said. "It's part of the game the world makes us play. If they want to arrest you—and you've got no cards in your hand——! They mustn't arrest you."

"No. That's partly why I went to Richmond. But I never thought——"

His little bloodshot eyes stared at Crest Hill.

"That chap Wittaker Wright," he said, "he had his stuff ready. I haven't. Now you got it, George. That's the sort of hole I'm in."

§ 4

That memory of my uncle at the gate is very clear and full. I am able to recall even the undertow of my thoughts while he was speaking. I remember my pity and affection for him in his misery growing and stirring within me, my realization that at any risk I must help him. But then comes indistinctness again. I was beginning to act. I know I persuaded him to put himself in my hands, and

began at once to plan and do. I think that when we act most we remember least, that just in the measure that the impulse of our impressions translates itself into schemes and movements, it ceases to record itself in memories. I know I resolved to get him away at once, and to use the Lord Roberts β in effecting that. It was clear he was soon to be a hunted man, and it seemed to me already unsafe for him to try the ordinary Continental routes in his flight. I had to evolve some scheme, and evolve it rapidly, how we might drop most inconspicuously into the world across the water. My resolve to have one flight at least in my airship fitted with this like hand to glove. It seemed to me we might be able to cross over the water in the night, set our airship adrift, and turn up as pedestrian tourists in Normandy or Brittany, and so get away. That, at any rate, was my ruling idea. I sent off Cothope with a dummy note to Woking because I did not want to implicate him, and took my uncle to the pavilion. I went down to my aunt, and made a clean breast of the situation. She became admirably competent. We went into his dressing-room, and ruthlessly broke his locks. I got a pair of brown boots, a tweed suit and cap of his, and indeed a plausible walking outfit, and a little game bag for his pedestrian gear; and, in addition, a big motoring overcoat and a supply of rugs to add to those I had at the pavilion. I also got a flask of brandy, and she made sandwiches. I don't remember any servants appearing, and I forget where she got those sandwiches. Meanwhile we talked. Afterwards I thought with what a sure confidence we talked to each other.

"What's he done?" she said.

"D' you mind knowing?"

"No conscience left, thank God!"

"I think—forgery!"

There was just a little pause. "Can you carry this bundle?" she asked.

I lifted it.

"No woman ever has respected the law—ever," she said. "It's too silly. . . . The things it lets you do! And then pulls you up. Like a mad nurse minding a child."

She carried some rugs for me through the shrubbery in the darkling.

"They'll think we're going mooning," she said, jerking her head at the household. "I wonder what they make of us—criminals. . . ." An immense droning note came as if in answer to that. It startled us both for a moment. "The dears!" she said. "It's the gong for dinner! . . . But I wish I could help little Teddy, George. It's awful to think of him there with hot eyes, red and dry. And I know—the sight of me makes him feel sore. Things I said, George. If I could have seen, I'd have let him have an omnibusful of Scrymgeours. I cut him up. He'd never thought I meant it before. . . . I'll help all I can, anyhow."

I turned at something in her voice, and got a moonlight gleam of tears upon her face.

"Could *she* have helped?" she asked abruptly.

"*She?*"

"That woman."

"My God!" I cried, "*helped!* Those—things don't help! . . ."

"Tell me again what I ought to do," she said after a silence.

I went over the plans I had made for communicating, and the things I thought she might do. I had given her the address of a solicitor she might put some trust in.

"But you must act for yourself," I insisted. "Roughly," I said, "it's a scramble. You must get what you can for us, and follow us as you can."

She nodded.

She came right up to the pavilion and hovered for a time shyly, and then went away.

I found my uncle in my sitting-room in an arm-chair, with his feet upon the fender of the gas stove, which he had lit, and now he was feebly drunken with my whisky, and very weary in body and spirit, and inclined to be cowardly.

"I lef' my drops," he said.

He changed his clothes slowly and unwillingly. I had to bully him, I had almost to shove him to the airship and tuck him up upon its wicker flat. Single-handed I made but a clumsy start; we scraped along the roof of the shed and bent a van of the propeller, and for a time I hung underneath without his offering a hand to help me to clamber up. If it hadn't been for a sort of anchoring trolley device of

Cothope's, a sort of slip anchor running on a rail, we should never have got clear at all.

§ 5

The incidents of our flight in Lord Roberts β do not arrange themselves in any consecutive order. To think of that adventure is like dipping haphazard into an album of views. One is reminded first of this and then of that. We were both lying down on a horizontal plate of basketwork; for Lord Roberts β had none of the elegant accommodation of a balloon. I lay forward, and my uncle behind me in such a position that he could see hardly anything of our flight. We were protected from rolling over simply by netting between the steel stays. It was impossible for us to stand up at all; we had either to lie or crawl on all fours over the basketwork. Amidships were lockers made of Watson's Aulite material, and between these it was that I had put my uncle wrapped in rugs. I wore sealskin motoring boots and gloves, and a motoring fur coat over my tweeds, and I controlled the engine by Bowden wires and levers forward.

The early part of that night's experience was made up of warmth, of moonlit Surrey and Sussex landscape, and of a rapid and successful flight, ascending and swooping, and then ascending again southward. I could not watch the clouds because the airship overhung me; I could not see the stars nor gauge the meteorological happening, but it was fairly clear to me that a wind, shifting between north and north-east, was gathering strength, and after I had satisfied myself by a series of entirely successful expansions and contractions of the real air-worthiness of Lord Roberts β, I stopped the engine to save my petrol, and let the monster drift, checking its progress by the dim landscape below. My uncle lay quite still behind me, saying little and staring in front of him, and I was left to my own thoughts and sensations.

My thoughts, whatever they were, have long since faded out of memory, and my sensations have merged into one continuous memory of a countryside lying, as it seemed, under snow, with square patches of dimness, white phan-

toms of roads, rents and pools of velvety blackness, and lamp-jewelled houses. I remember a train boring its way like a hastening caterpillar of fire across the landscape, and how distinctly I heard its clatter. Every town and street was buttoned with street lamps. I came quite close to the South Downs near Lewes, and all the lights were out in the houses, and the people gone to bed. We left the land a little to the east of Brighton, and by that time Brighton was well abed, and the brightly-lit sea-front deserted. Then I let out the gas chamber to its fullest extent and rose. I like to be high above water.

I do not clearly know what happened in the night. I think I must have dozed, and probably my uncle slept. I remember that once or twice I heard him talking in an eager, muffled voice to himself, or to an imaginary court. But there can be no doubt the wind changed right round into the east, and that we were carried far down the Channel without any suspicion of the immense leeway we were making. I remember the kind of stupid perplexity with which I saw the dawn breaking over a grey waste of waters below, and realized that something was wrong. I was so stupid that it was only after the sunrise I really noticed the trend of the foam caps below, and perceived we were in a severe easterly gale. Even then, instead of heading south-easterly, I set the engine going, headed south, and so continued a course that must needs have either just hit Ushant, or carry us over the Bay of Biscay. I thought I was east of Cherbourg, when I was far to the west, and stopped my engine in that belief, and then set it going again. I did actually sight the coast of Brittany to the south-east in the late afternoon, and that it was woke me up to the gravity of our position. I discovered it by accident in the south-east, when I was looking for it in the south-west. I turned about east and faced the wind for some time, and finding I had no chance in its teeth, went high, where it seemed less violent, and tried to make a course south-east. It was only then that I realized what a gale I was in. I had been going westward, and perhaps even in gusts north of west, at a pace of fifty or sixty miles an hour.

Then I began what I suppose would be called a Fight against the east wind. One calls it a Fight, but it was

really almost as unlike a fight as plain sewing. The wind tried to drive me westwardly, and I tried to get as much as I could eastwardly, with the wind beating and rocking us irregularly, but by no means unbearably, for about twelve hours. My hope lay in the wind abating, and our keeping in the air and eastward of Finisterre until it did, and the chief danger was the exhaustion of our petrol. It was a long and anxious and almost meditative time; we were fairly warm, and only slowly getting hungry, and except that my uncle grumbled a little and produced some philosophical reflections, and began to fuss about having a temperature, we talked very little. I was tired and sulky, and chiefly worried about the engine. I had to resist a tendency to crawl back and look at it. I did not care to risk contracting our gas chamber for fear of losing gas. Nothing was less like a fight. I know that in popular magazines, and so forth, all such occasions as this are depicted in terms of hysteria. Captains save their ships, engineers complete their bridges, generals conduct their battles, in a state of dancing excitement, foaming recondite technicalities at the lips. I suppose that sort of thing works up the reader, but so far as it professes to represent reality, I am convinced it is all childish nonsense. Schoolboys of fifteen, girls of eighteen, and literary men all their lives, may have these squealing fits, but my own experience is that most exciting scenes are not exciting, and most of the urgent moments in life are met by steady-headed men.

Neither I nor my uncle spent the night in ejaculations, nor in humorous allusions, nor any of these things. We remained lumpish. My uncle stuck in his place and grumbled about his stomach, and occasionally rambled off into expositions of his financial position and denunciations of Neal—he certainly struck out one or two good phrases for Neal—and I crawled about at rare intervals in a vague sort of way and grunted, and our basketwork creaked continually, and the wind on our quarter made a sort of ruffled flapping in the wall of the gas chamber. For all our wraps we got frightfully cold as the night wore on.

I must have dozed, and it was still dark when I realized

with a start that we were nearly due south of, and a long way from, a regularly-flashing lighthouse, standing out before the glow of some great town, and then that the thing that had awakened me was the cessation of our engine, and that we were driving back to the west.

Then, indeed, for a time I felt the grim thrill of life. I crawled forward to the cords of the release valves, made my uncle crawl forward too, and let out the gas until we were falling down through the air like a clumsy glider towards the vague greyness that was land.

Something must have intervened here that I have forgotten. I saw the lights of Bordeaux when it was quite dark, a nebulous haze against black; of that I am reasonably sure. But certainly our fall took place in the cold, uncertain light of early dawn. I am, at least, equally sure of that. And Mimizan, near where we dropped, is fifty miles from Bordeaux, whose harbour lights I must have seen.

I remember coming down at last with a curious indifference, and actually rousing myself to steer. But the actual coming to earth was exciting enough. I remember our prolonged dragging landfall, and the difficulty I had to get clear, and how a gust of wind caught Lord Roberts β as my uncle stumbled away from the ropes and litter, and dropped me heavily, and threw me on to my knees. Then came the realization that the monster was almost consciously disentangling itself for escape, and then the light leap of its rebound. The rope slipped out of reach of my hand. I remember running knee-deep in a salt pool in hopeless pursuit of the airship as it dragged and rose seaward, and how only after it had escaped my uttermost effort to recapture it, did I realize that this was quite the best thing that could have happened. It drove swiftly over the sandy dunes, lifting and falling, and was hidden by a clump of wind-bitten trees. Then it reappeared much further off, and still receding. It soared for a time, and sank slowly, and after that I saw it no more. I suppose it fell into the sea and got wetted with salt water and heavy, and so became deflated and sank.

It was never found, and there was never a report of any one seeing it after it escaped from me.

§ 6

But if I find it hard to tell the story of our long flight through the air overseas, at least that dawn in France stands cold and clear and full. I see again almost as if I saw once more with my bodily eyes the ridges of sand rising behind ridges of sand, grey and cold and black-browed with an insufficient grass. I feel again the clear, cold chill of dawn, and hear the distant barking of a dog. I find myself asking again, "What shall we do now?" and trying to scheme with a brain tired beyond measure.

At first my uncle occupied my attention. He was shivering a good deal, and it was all I could do to resist my desire to get him into a comfortable bed at once. But I wanted to appear plausibly in this part of the world. I felt it would not do to turn up anywhere at dawn and rest, it would be altogether too conspicuous; we must rest until the day was well advanced, and then appear as road-stained pedestrians seeking a meal. I gave him most of what was left of the biscuits, emptied our flasks, and advised him to sleep, but at first it was too cold, albeit I wrapped the big fur rug around him.

I was struck now by the flushed weariness of his face, and the look of age the grey stubble on his unshaved chin gave him. He sat crumpled up, shivering and coughing, munching reluctantly, but drinking eagerly, and whimpering a little, a dreadfully pitiful figure to me. But we had to go through with it, there was no way out for us.

Presently the sun rose over the pines, and the sand grew rapidly warm. My uncle had done eating, and sat with his wrists resting on his knees, the most hopeless-looking of lost souls.

"I'm ill," he said, "I'm damnably ill! I can feel it in my skin!"

Then—it was horrible to me—he cried, "I ought to be in bed; I ought to be in bed . . . instead of flying about," and suddenly he burst into tears.

I stood up. "Go to sleep, man!" I said, and took the rug from him, and spread it out and rolled him up in it.

"It's all very well," he protested; "I'm not young enough——"

"Lift up your head," I interrupted, and put his knapsack under it.

"They'll catch us here, just as much as in an inn," he grumbled, and then lay still.

Presently, after a long time, I perceived he was asleep. His breath came with peculiar wheezings, and every now and again he would cough. I was very stiff and tired myself, and perhaps I dozed. I don't remember. I remember only sitting, as it seemed nigh interminably, beside him, too weary even to think in that sandy desolation.

No one came near us, no creature, not even a dog. I roused myself at last, feeling that it was vain to seek to seem other than abnormal, and with an effort that was like lifting a sky of lead, we made our way through the wearisome sand to a farmhouse. There I feigned even a more insufficient French than I possess naturally, and let it appear that we were pedestrians from Biarritz who had lost our way along the shore and got benighted. This explained us pretty well, I thought, and we got most heartening coffee and a cart to a little roadside station. My uncle grew more and more manifestly ill with every stage of our journey. I got him to Bayonne, where he refused at first to eat, and was afterwards very sick, and then took him shivering and collapsed up a little branch line to a frontier place called Luzon Gare.

We found one homely inn with two small bedrooms, kept by a kindly Basque woman. I got him to bed, and that night shared his room, and after an hour or so of sleep he woke up in a raging fever and with a wandering mind, cursing Neal and repeating long inaccurate lists of figures. He was manifestly a case for a doctor, and in the morning we got one in. He was a young man from Montpelier, just beginning to practise, and very mysterious and technical and modern and unhelpful. He spoke of cold and exposure, and *la grippe* and pneumonia. He gave many explicit and difficult directions. . . . I perceived it devolved upon me to organize nursing and a sick-room. I installed a *religieuse* in the second bedroom of the inn, and took a room for myself in the inn of Port de Luzon, a quarter of a mile away.

§ 7

And now my story converges on what, in that queer corner of refuge out of the world, was destined to be my uncle's deathbed. There is a background of the Pyrenees, of blue hills and sunlit houses, of the old castle of Luzon and a noisy cascading river, and for a foreground the dim stuffy room whose windows both the *religieuse* and hostess conspired to shut, with its waxed floor, its four-poster bed, its characteristically French chairs and fireplace, its champagne bottles and dirty basins and used towels and packets of *Somatosé* on the table. And in the sickly air of the confined space behind the curtains of the bed lay my little uncle, with an effect of being enthroned and secluded, or sat up, or writhed and tossed in his last dealings with life. One went and drew back the edge of the curtains if one wanted to speak to him or look at him.

Usually he was propped up against pillows, because so he breathed more easily. He slept hardly at all.

I have a confused memory of vigils and mornings and afternoons spent by that bedside, and how the *religieuse* hovered about me, and how meek and good and inefficient she was, and how horribly black were her nails. Other figures come and go, and particularly the doctor, a young man plumply rococo, in bicycling dress, with fine waxen features, a little pointed beard, and the long black frizzy hair and huge tie of a minor poet. Bright and clear-cut and irrelevant are memories of the Basque hostess of my uncle's inn and of the family of Spanish people who entertained me and prepared the most amazingly elaborate meals for me, with soup and salad and chicken and remarkable sweets. They were all very kind and sympathetic people, systematically so. And constantly, without attracting attention, I was trying to get newspapers from home.

My uncle is central to all these impressions.

I have tried to make you picture him, time after time, as the young man of the Wimblehurst chemist's shop, as the shabby assistant in Tottenham Court Road, as the adventurer of the early days of Tono-Bungay, as the confident preposterous plutocrat. And now I have to tell of him strangely changed under the shadow of oncoming

death, with his skin lax and yellow and glistening with sweat, his eyes large and glassy, his countenance unfamiliar through the growth of a beard, his nose pinched and thin. Never had he looked so small as now. And he talked to me in a whispering, strained voice of great issues, of why his life had been, and whither he was going. Poor little man! that last phase is, as it were, disconnected from all the other phases. It was as if he crawled out from the ruins of his career, and looked about him before he died. For he had quite clear-minded states in the intervals of his delirium.

He knew he was almost certainly dying. In a way that took the burthen of his cares off his mind. There was no more Neal to face, no more flights or evasions, no punishments.

"It has been a great career, George," he said, "but I shall be glad to rest. Glad to rest! . . . Glad to rest."

His mind ran rather upon his career, and usually, I am glad to recall, with a note of satisfaction and approval. In his delirious phases he would most often exaggerate this self-satisfaction, and talk of his splendours. He would pluck at the sheet and stare before him, and whisper half-audible fragments of sentences.

"What is this great place, these cloud-capped towers, these airy pinnacles? . . . Ilion. Sky-y-pointing. . . . Ilion House, the residence of one of our great merchant princes. . . . Terrace above terrace. Reaching to the heavens. . . . Kingdoms Cæsar never knew. . . . A great poet, George. Zzzz. Kingdoms Cæsar never knew. . . . Under entirely new management.

"Greatness. . . . Millions. . . . Universities. . . . He stands on the terrace—on the upper terrace—directing—directing—by the globe—directing—the trade. . . ."

It was hard at times to tell when his sane talk ceased and his delirium began. The secret springs of his life, the vain imaginations, were revealed. I sometimes think that all the life of man sprawls abed, careless and unkempt, until it must needs clothe and wash itself and come forth seemly in act and speech for the encounter with one's fellow-men. I suspect that all things unspoken in our souls partake somewhat of the laxity of delirium and dementia. Certainly from those slimy tormented lips above the bristling

grey beard came nothing but dreams and disconnected fancies. . . .

Sometimes he raved about Neal, threatened Neal. "What has he got invested?" he said. "Does he think he can escape me? . . . If I followed him up. . . . Ruin. Ruin. . . . One would think *I* had taken his money."

And sometimes he reverted to our airship flight. "It's too long, George, too long and too cold. I'm too old a man too—old—for this sort of thing. . . . You know you're not saving—you're killing me."

Towards the end it became evident our identity was discovered. I found the press, and especially Boom's section of it, had made a sort of hue and cry for us, sent special commissioners to hunt for us, and though none of these emissaries reached us until my uncle was dead, one felt the forewash of that storm of energy. The thing got into the popular French press. People became curious in their manner towards us, and a number of fresh faces appeared about the weak little struggle that went on in the closeness behind the curtains of the bed. The young doctor insisted on consultations, and a motor-car came up from Biarritz, and suddenly odd people with questioning eyes began to poke in with inquiries and help. Though nothing was said, I could feel that we were no longer regarded as simple middle-class tourists; about me, as I went, I perceived, almost as though it trailed visibly, the prestige of Finance and a criminal notoriety. Local personages of a plump and prosperous quality appeared in the inn making inquiries, the Luzon priest became helpful, people watched our window, and stared at me as I went to and fro; and then we had a raid from a little English clergyman and his amiable, capable wife in severely Anglican blacks, who swooped down upon us like virtuous but resolute vultures from the adjacent village of Saint Jean de Pollack.

The clergyman was one of those odd types that oscillate between remote country towns in England and the conduct of English Church services on mutual terms in enterprising hotels abroad, a tremulous, obstinate little being with sporadic hairs upon his face, spectacles, a red button nose, and aged black raiment. He was evidently enormously impressed by my uncle's monetary greatness, and by his

own inkling of our identity, and he shone and brimmed over with tact and fussy helpfulness. He was eager to share the watching of the bedside with me, he proffered services with both hands, and as I was now getting into touch with affairs in London again, and trying to disentangle the gigantic details of the smash from the papers I had succeeded in getting from Biarritz, I accepted his offers pretty generously, and began the studies in modern finance that lay before me. I had got so out of touch with the old traditions of religion, that I overlooked the manifest possibility of his attacking my poor sinking vestiges of an uncle with theological solicitudes. My attention was called to that, however, very speedily by a polite but urgent quarrel between himself and the Basque landlady as to the necessity of her hanging a cheap crucifix in the shadow over the bed, where it might catch my uncle's eye, where, indeed, I found it had caught his eye.

"Good Lord!" I cried; "is *that* still going on!"

That night the little clergyman watched, and in the small hours he raised a false alarm that my uncle was dying, and made an extraordinary fuss. He raised the house. I shall never forget that scene, I think, which began with a tapping at my bedroom door just after I had fallen asleep, and his voice—

"If you want to see your uncle before he goes, you must come now."

The stuffy little room was crowded when I reached it, and lit by three flickering candles. I felt I was back in the eighteenth century. There lay my poor uncle amidst indescribably tumbled bedclothes, weary of life beyond measure, weary and rambling, and the little clergyman trying to hold his hand and his attention, and repeating over and over again—

"Mr. Ponderevo, Mr. Ponderevo, it is all right. It is all right. Only Believe! 'Believe on Me, and ye shall be saved'!"

Close at hand was the doctor with one of those cruel and idiotic injection needles modern science puts in the hands of these half-educated young men, keeping my uncle flickeringly alive for no reason whatever. The *religieuse* hovered sleepily in the background with an overdue and

neglected dose. In addition, the landlady had not only got up herself, but roused an aged crone of a mother and a partially imbecile husband, and there was also a fattish, stolid man in grey alpaca, with an air of importance—who he was and how he got there, I don't know. I rather fancy the doctor explained him to me in French I did not understand. And they were all there, wearily nocturnal, hastily and carelessly dressed, intent upon the life that flickered and sank, making a public and curious show of its going, queer shapes of human beings lit by three uncertain candles, and every soul of them keenly and avidly resolved to be in at the death. The doctor stood, the others were all sitting on chairs the landlady had brought in and arranged for them.

And my uncle spoilt the climax, and did not die.

I replaced the little clergyman on the chair by the bedside, and he hovered about the room.

"I think," he whispered to me mysteriously, as he gave place to me, "I believe—it is well with him."

I heard him trying to render the stock phrases of Low Church piety into French for the benefit of the stolid man in grey alpaca. Then he knocked a glass off the table, and scrabbled for the fragments. From the first I doubted the theory of an immediate death. I consulted the doctor in urgent whispers. I turned round to get champagne, and nearly fell over the clergyman's legs. He was on his knees at the additional chair the Basque landlady had got on my arrival, and he was praying aloud, "Oh, Heavenly Father, have mercy on this Thy Child. . . ." I hustled him up and out of the way, and in another minute he was down at another chair praying again, and barring the path of the *religieuse* who had found me the corkscrew. Something put into my head that tremendous blasphemy of Carlyle's about "the last mew of a drowning kitten." He found a chair vacant presently; it was as if he was playing a game.

"Good heavens," said I, "we must clear these people out," and with a certain urgency I did.

I had a temporary lapse of memory, and forgot all my French. I drove them out mainly by gesture, and opened the window to the universal horror. I intimated the death

scene was postponed, and, as a matter of fact, my uncle did not die until the next night.

I did not let the little clergyman come near him again, and I was watchful for any sign that his mind had been troubled. But he made none. He talked once about "that parson chap."

"Didn't bother you?" I asked.

"Wanted something," he said.

I kept silence, listening keenly to his mutterings. I understood him to say, "they wanted too much." His face puckered like a child's going to cry. "You can't *get* a safe six per cent.," he said. I had for a moment a wild suspicion that those urgent talks had not been altogether spiritual, but that, I think, was a quite unworthy and unjust suspicion. The little clergyman was as simple and honest as the day. My uncle was simply generalizing about his class.

But it may have been these talks that set loose some long dormant string of ideas in my uncle's brain, ideas the things of this world had long suppressed and hidden altogether. Near the end he suddenly became clear-minded and lucid, albeit very weak, and his voice was little, but clear.

"George," he said.

"I'm here," I said, "close beside you."

"George. You have always been responsible for the science. George. You know better than I do. Is——. Is it proved?"

"What proved?"

"Either way?"

"I don't understand."

"Death ends all. After so much——. Such splendid beginnings. Somewhere. Something."

I stared at him amazed. His sunken eyes were very grave.

"What do you expect?" I said in wonder.

He would not answer. "Aspirations," he whispered.

He fell into a broken monologue, regardless of me. "Trailing clouds of glory," he said, and "first-rate poet, first-rate. . . . George was always hard. Always."

For a long time there was silence.

Then he made a gesture that he wished to speak.

"Seems to me, George——"

I bent my head down, and he tried to lift his hand to my shoulder. I raised him a little on his pillows, and listened.

"It seems to me, George, always—there must be something in me—that won't die."

He looked at me as though the decision rested with me.

"I think," he said; "——something."

Then, for a moment, his mind wandered. "Just a little link," he whispered almost pleadingly, and lay quite still, but presently he was uneasy again.

"Some other world——"

"Perhaps," I said. "Who knows?"

"Some other world."

"Not the same scope for enterprise," I said. "No."

He became silent. I sat leaning down to him, and following out my own thoughts, and presently the *religieuse* resumed her periodic conflict with the window fastening. For a time he struggled for breath. . . . It seemed such nonsense that he should have to suffer so—poor silly little man!

"George," he whispered, and his weak little hand came out. "*Perhaps*——"

He said no more, but I perceived from the expression of his eyes that he thought the question had been put.

"Yes, I think so," I said stoutly.

"Aren't you sure?"

"Oh—practically sure," said I, and I think he tried to squeeze my hand. And there I sat, holding his hand tight, and trying to think what seeds of immortality could be found in all his being, what sort of ghost there was in *him* to wander out into the bleak immensities. Queer fancies came to me. . . . He lay still for a long time, save for a brief struggle or so for breath, and ever and again I wiped his mouth and lips.

I fell into a pit of thought. I did not remark at first the change that was creeping over his face. He lay back on his pillow, made a faint zzzing sound that ceased, and presently and quite quietly he died—greatly comforted by

my assurance. I do not know when he died. His hand relaxed insensibly. Suddenly, with a start, with a shock, I found that his mouth had fallen open, and that he was dead. . . .

§ 8

It was dark night when I left his deathbed and went back to my own inn down the straggling street of Luzon.

That return to my inn sticks in my memory also as a thing apart, as an experience apart. Within was a subdued bustle of women, a flitting of lights, and the doing of petty offices to that queer exhausted thing that had once been my active and urgent little uncle. For me those offices were irksome and impertinent. I slammed the door, and went out into the warm, foggy drizzle of the village street lit by blurred specks of light in great voids of darkness, and never a soul abroad. That warm veil of fog produced an effect of vast seclusion. The very houses by the roadside peered through it as if from another world. The stillness of the night was marked by an occasional remote baying of dogs; all these people kept dogs because of the near neighbourhood of the frontier.

Death!

It was one of those rare seasons of relief, when for a little time one walks a little outside of and beside life. I felt as I sometimes feel after the end of a play. I saw the whole business of my uncle's life as something familiar and completed. It was done, like a play one leaves, like a book one closes. I thought of the push and the promotions, the noise of London, the crowded, various company of people through which our lives had gone, the public meetings, the excitements, the dinners and disputations, and suddenly it appeared to me that none of these things existed. It came to me like a discovery that none of these things existed. Before and after I have thought and called life a phantasmagoria, but never have I felt its truth as I did that night. . . . We had parted; we two who had kept company so long had parted. But there was, I knew, no end to him or me. He had died a dream death, and ended a dream, his pain dream was over. It seemed to me almost

as though I had died too. What did it matter, since it was unreality, all of it, the pain and desire, the beginning and the end? There was no reality except this solitary road, this quite solitary road, along which one went rather puzzled, rather tired. . . .

Part of the fog became a big mastiff that came towards me and stopped and slunk round me growling, barked gruffly and shortly and presently became fog again.

My mind swayed back to the ancient beliefs and fears of our race. My doubts and disbeliefs slipped from me like a loosely-fitting garment. I wondered quite simply what dogs bayed about the path of that other walker in the darkness, what shapes, what lights, it might be, loomed about him as he went his way from our last encounter on earth—along the paths that are real, and the way that endures for ever?

§ 9

Last belated figure in that grouping round my uncle's death-bed is my aunt. When it was beyond all hope that my uncle could live I threw aside whatever concealment remained to us and telegraphed directly to her. But she came too late to see him living. She saw him calm and still, strangely unlike his habitual garrulous animation, an unfamiliar inflexibility.

"It isn't like him," she whispered, awed by this alien dignity.

I remember her chiefly as she talked and wept upon the bridge below the old castle. We had got rid of some amateurish reporters from Biarritz, and had walked together in the hot morning sunshine down through Port Luzon. There, for a time, we stood leaning on the parapet of the bridge and surveying the distant peaks, the rich blue masses of the Pyrenees. For a long time we said nothing, and then she began talking.

"Life's a rum Go, George!" she began. "Who would have thought, when I used to darn your stockings at old Wimblehurst, that this would be the end of the story? It seems far away now—that little shop, his and my first

home. The glow of the bottles, the big coloured bottles! Do you remember how the light shone on the mahogany drawers? The little gilt letters! *Ol Amjig*, and *S'nap!* I can remember it all—bright and shining—like a Dutch picture. Real! And yesterday. And here we are in a dream. You a man—and me an old woman, George. And poor little Teddy, who used to rush about and talk—making that noise he did—Oh!"

She choked, and the tears flowed unrestrained. She wept, and I was glad to see her weeping. . . .

She stood leaning over the bridge; her tear-wet handkerchief gripped in her clenched hand.

"Just an hour in the old shop again—and him talking. Before things got done. Before they got hold of him. And fooled him.

"Men oughtn't to be so tempted with business and things. . . .

"They didn't hurt him, George?" she asked suddenly.

For a moment I was puzzled.

"Here, I mean," she said.

"No," I lied stoutly, suppressing the memory of that foolish injection needle I had caught the young doctor using.

"I wonder, George, if they'll let him talk in heaven?" . . .

She faced me. "Oh! George, dear, my heart aches, and I don't know what I say and do. Give me your arm to lean on—it's good to have you, dear, and lean upon you. . . . Yes, I know you care for me. That's why I'm talking. We've always loved one another, and never said anything about it, and you understand, and I understand. But my heart's torn to pieces by this, torn to rags, and things drop out I've kept in it. It's true he wasn't a husband much for me at the last. But he was my child, George, he was my child and all my children, my silly child, and life has knocked him about for me, and I've never had a say in the matter; never a say; it's puffed him up and smashed him—like an old bag—under my eyes. I was clever enough to see it, and not clever enough to prevent it, and all I could do was to jeer. I've had to make what I could of it. Like most people. Like most of us. . . . But it wasn't fair, George.

It wasn't fair. Life and Death—great serious things—why couldn't they leave him alone, and his lies and ways? If *we* could see the lightness of it——

"Why couldn't they leave him alone?" she repeated in a whisper as we went towards the inn.

CHAPTER II

Love among the Wreckage

§ 1

When I came back I found that my share in the escape and death of my uncle had made me for a time a notorious and even popular character. For two weeks I was kept in London "facing the music," as he would have said, and making things easy for my aunt, and I still marvel at the consideration with which the world treated me. For now it was open and manifest that I and my uncle were no more than specimens of a modern species of brigand, wasting the savings of the public out of the sheer wantonness of enterprise. I think that, in a way, his death produced a reaction in my favour, and my flight, of which some particulars now appeared, stuck in the popular imagination. It seemed a more daring and difficult feat than it was, and I couldn't very well write to the papers to sustain my private estimate. There can be little doubt that men infinitely prefer the appearance of dash and enterprise to simple honesty. No one believed I was not an arch plotter in his financing. Yet they favoured me. I even got permission from the trustee to occupy my châlet for a fortnight while I cleared up the mass of papers, calculations, notes of work, drawings and the like, that I left in disorder when I started on that impulsive raid upon the Mordet quap heaps. I was there alone. I got work for Cothope with the Ilchesters, for whom I now build these destroyers. They wanted him at once, and he was short of money, so I let him go and managed very philosophically by myself.

But I found it hard to fix my attention on aeronautics. I had been away from the work for a full half-year and more,

a half-year crowded with intense disconcerting things. For a time my brain refused these fine problems of balance and adjustment altogether; it wanted to think about my uncle's dropping jaw, my aunt's reluctant tears, about dead negroes and pestilential swamps, about the evident realities of cruelty and pain, about life and death. Moreover, it was weary with the frightful pile of figures and documents at the Hardingham, a task to which this raid to Lady Grove was simply an interlude. And there was Beatrice.

On the second morning, as I sat out upon the verandah recalling memories and striving in vain to attend to some too succinct pencil notes of Cothope's, Beatrice rode up suddenly from behind the pavilion, and pulled rein and became still; Beatrice a little flushed from riding and sitting on a big black horse.

I did not instantly rise. I stared at her. "*You!*" I said.

She looked at me steadily. "Me," she said.

I did not trouble about any civilities. I stood up and asked point blank a question that came into my head.

"Whose horse is that?" I said.

She looked me in the eyes. "Carnaby's," she answered.

"How did you get here—this way?"

"The wall's down."

"Down? Already?"

"A great bit of it between the plantations."

"And you rode through, and got here by chance?"

"I saw you yesterday. And I rode over to see you."

I had now come close to her, and stood looking up into her face.

"I'm a mere vestige," I said.

She made no answer, but remained regarding me steadfastly with a curious air of proprietorship.

"You know I'm the living survivor now of the great smash. I'm rolling and dropping down through all the scaffolding of the social system . . . It's all a chance whether I roll out free at the bottom, or go down a crack into the darkness out of sight for a year or two."

"The sun," she remarked irrelevantly, "has burnt you. . . . I'm getting down."

She swung herself down into my arms, and stood beside me face to face.

"Where's Cothope?" she asked.

"Gone."

Her eyes flitted to the pavilion and back to me. We stood close together, extraordinarily intimate, and extraordinarily apart.

"I've never seen this cottage of yours," she said, "and I want to."

She flung the bridle of her horse round the verandah post, and I helped her tie it.

"Did you get what you went for to Africa?" she asked

"No," I said, "I lost my ship."

"And that lost everything?"

"Everything."

She walked before me into the living-room of the châlet; and I saw that she gripped her riding-whip very tightly in her hand. She looked about her for a moment, and then at me.

"It's comfortable," she remarked.

Our eyes met in a conversation very different from the one upon our lips. A sombre glow surrounded us, drew us together; an unwonted shyness kept us apart. She roused herself, after an instant's pause, to examine my furniture.

"You have chintz curtains. I thought men were too feckless to have curtains without a woman——. But, of course, your aunt did that! And a couch and a brass fender, and—is that a pianola? That is your desk. I thought men's desks were always untidy, and covered with dust and tobacco ash."

She flitted to my colour prints and my little case of books. Then she went to the pianola. I watched her intently.

"Does this thing play?" she said.

"What?" I asked.

"Does this thing play?"

I roused myself from my preoccupation.

"Like a musical gorilla with fingers all of one length. And a sort of soul. . . . It's all the world of music to me."

"What do you play?"

"Beethoven, when I want to clear up my head while I'm working. He is—how one would always like to work. Sometimes Chopin and those others, but Beethoven. Beethoven mainly. Yes."

Silence again between us. She spoke with an effort.

"Play me something." She turned from me and explored the rack of music rolls, became interested and took a piece, the first part of the Kreutzer Sonata, hesitated. "No," she said, "that!"

She gave me Brahms' Second Concerto, Op. 58, and curled up on the sofa watching me as I set myself slowly to play. . . .

"I say," she said when I had done, "that's fine. I didn't know those things could play like that. I'm all astir. . . ."

She came and stood over me, looking at me. "I'm going to have a concert," she said abruptly, and laughed uneasily and hovered at the pigeon-holes. "Now—now what shall I have?" She chose more of Brahms. Then we came to the Kreutzer Sonata. It is queer how Tolstoy has loaded that with suggestions, debauched it, made it a scandalous and intimate symbol. When I had played the first part of that, she came up to the pianola and hesitated over me. I sat stiffly—waiting.

Suddenly she seized my downcast head and kissed my hair. She caught at my face between her hands and kissed my lips. I put my arms about her and we kissed together. I sprang to my feet and clasped her.

"Beatrice," I said. "Beatrice!"

"My dear," she whispered, nearly breathless, with her arms about me. "Oh! my dear!"

§ 2

Love, like everything else in this immense process of social disorganization in which we live, is a thing adrift, a fruitless thing broken away from its connections. I tell of this love affair here because of its irrelevance, because it is so remarkable that it should mean nothing, and be nothing

except itself. It glows in my memory like some bright casual flower starting up amidst the *débris* of a catastrophe. For nearly a fortnight we two met and made love together. Once more this mighty passion, that our aimless civilization has fettered and maimed and sterilized and debased, gripped me and filled me with passionate delights and solemn joys—that were all, you know, futile and purposeless. Once more I had the persuasion "This matters. Nothing else matters so much as this." We were both infinitely grave in such happiness as we had. I do not remember any laughter at all between us.

Twelve days it lasted from that encounter in my châlet until our parting.

Except at the end, they were days of supreme summer, and there was a waxing moon. We met recklessly day by day. We were so intent upon each other at first, so intent upon expressing ourselves to each other, and getting at each other, that we troubled very little about the appearance of our relationship. We met almost openly. . . . We talked of ten thousand things, and of ourselves. We loved. We made love. There is no prose of mine that can tell of hours transfigured. The facts are nothing. Everything we touched, the meanest things, became glorious. How can I render bare tenderness and delight and mutual possession?

I sit here at my desk thinking of untellable things.

I have come to know so much of love that I know now what love might be. We loved, scarred and stained; we parted—basely and inevitably, but at least I met love.

I remember as we sat in a Canadian canoe, in a reedy, bush-masked shallow we had discovered opening out of that pine-shaded Woking canal, how she fell talking of the things that happened to her before she met me again. . . .

She told me things, and they so joined and welded together other things that lay disconnected in my memory, that it seemed to me I had always known what she told me. And yet indeed I had not known nor suspected it, save perhaps for a luminous, transitory suspicion ever and again.

She made me see how life had shaped her. She told me of her girlhood after I had known her. "We were poor

and pretending and managing. We hacked about on visits and things. I ought to have married. The chances I had weren't particularly good chances. I didn't like 'em."

She paused. "Then Carnaby came along."

I remained quite still. She spoke now with downcast eyes, and one finger just touching the water.

"One gets bored, bored beyond redemption. One goes about to these huge expensive houses. I suppose—the scale's immense. One makes one's self useful to the other women, and agreeable to the men. One has to dress. . . . One has food and exercise and leisure. It's the leisure, and the space, and the blank opportunity it seems a sin not to fill. Carnaby isn't like the other men. He's bigger. . . . They go about making love. Everybody's making love. I did. . . . And I don't do things by halves."

She stopped.

"You knew?" she asked, looking up, quite steadily.

I nodded.

"Since when?"

"Those last days. . . . It hasn't seemed to matter really. I was a little surprised——"

She looked at me quietly. "Cothope knew," she said. "By instinct. I could feel it."

"I suppose," I began, "once, this would have mattered immensely. Now——"

"Nothing matters," she said, completing me. "I felt I had to tell you. I wanted you to understand why I didn't marry you—with both hands. I have loved you"—she paused—"have loved you ever since the day I kissed you in the bracken. Only—I forgot."

And suddenly she dropped her face upon her hands, and sobbed passionately—

"I forgot—I forgot," she cried, and became still. . . .

I dabbed my paddle in the water. "Look here!" I said; "forget again! Here am I—a ruined man. Marry me."

She shook her head without looking up.

We were still for a long time. "Marry me," I whispered.

She looked up, twined back a wisp of hair, and answered dispassionately—

"I wish I could. Anyhow, we have had this time. It

has been a fine time—has it been—for you also? I haven't grudged you all I had to give. It's a poor gift—except for what it means and might have been. But we are near the end of it now."

"Why?" I asked. "Marry me! Why should we two——"

"You think," she said, "I could take courage and come to you and be your everyday wife—while you work and are poor?"

"Why not?" said I.

She looked at me gravely, with extended finger. "Do you really think that?—of me? Haven't you seen me—all?"

I hesitated.

"Never once have I really meant marrying you," she insisted. "Never once. I fell in love with you from the first. But when you seemed a successful man, I told myself I wouldn't. I was love-sick for you, and you were so stupid, I came near it then. But I knew I wasn't good enough. What could I have been to you? A woman with bad habits and bad associations, a woman smirched. And what could I do for you or be to you? If I wasn't good enough to be a rich man's wife, I'm certainly not good enough to be a poor one's. Forgive me for talking sense to you now, but I wanted to tell you this somewhen——"

She stopped at my gesture. I sat up, and the canoe rocked with my movement.

"I don't care," I said. "I want to marry you and make you my wife!"

"No," she said, "don't spoil things. That is impossible!"

"Impossible!"

"Think! I can't do my own hair! Do you mean you will get me a maid?"

"Good God!" I cried, disconcerted beyond measure, "won't you learn to do your own hair for me? Do you mean to say you can love a man——"

She flung out her hands at me. "Don't spoil it," she cried. "I have given you all I have, I have given you all I can. If I could do it, if I was good enough to do it, I would. But I am a woman spoilt and ruined, dear, and

you are a ruined man. When we are making love we are lovers—but think of the gulf between us in habits and ways of thought, in will and training, when we are not making love. Think of it—and don't think of it! Don't think of it yet. We have snatched some hours. We still may have some hours!"

She suddenly knelt forward toward me, with a glowing darkness in her eyes. "Who cares if it upsets?" she cried. "If you say another word I will kiss you. And go to the bottom clutching you. I'm not afraid of that. I'm not a bit afraid of that. I'll die with you. Choose a death, and I'll die with you—readily. Do listen to me! I love you. I shall always love you. It's because I love you that I won't go down to become a dirty familiar thing with you amidst the grime. I've given all I can. I've had all I can. . . . Tell me," and she crept nearer, "have I been like the dusk to you, like the warm dusk? Is there magic still? Listen to the ripple of water from your paddle. Look at the warm evening light in the sky. Who cares if the canoe upsets? Come nearer to me. Oh, my love! come near! So."

She drew me to her and our lips met.

§ 3

I asked her to marry me once again.

It was our last morning together, and we had met very early, about sunrise, knowing that we were to part. No sun shone that day. The sky was overcast, the morning chilly and lit by a clear, cold, spiritless light. A heavy dampness in the air verged close on rain. When I think of that morning, it has always the quality of greying ashes wet with rain.

Beatrice too had changed. The spring had gone out of her movement; it came to me, for the first time, that some day she might grow old. She had become one flesh with the rest of common humanity; the softness had gone from her voice and manner, the dusky magic of her presence had gone. I saw these things with perfect clearness, and they made me sorry for them and for her. But they altered my

love not a whit, abated it nothing. And when we had talked awkwardly for half a dozen sentences, I came dully to my point.

"And now," I cried, "will you marry me?"

"No," she said, "I shall keep to my life here."

I asked her to marry me in a year's time. She shook her head.

"This world is a soft world," I said, "in spite of my present disasters. I know now how to do things. If I had you to work for—in a year I could be a prosperous man——"

"No," she said, "I will put it brutally, I shall go back to Carnaby."

"But——!" I did not feel angry. I had no sort of jealousy, no wounded pride, no sense of injury. I had only a sense of grey desolation, of hopeless cross-purposes.

"Look here," she said. "I have been awake all night and every night. I have been thinking of this—every moment when we have not been together. I'm not answering you on an impulse. I love you. I love you. I'll say that over ten thousand times. But here we are——"

"The rest of life together," I said.

"It wouldn't be together. Now we are together. Now we have been together. We are full of memories. I do not feel I can ever forget a single one."

"Nor I."

"And I want to close it and leave it at that. You see, dear, what else is there to do?"

She turned her white face to me. "All I know of love, all I have ever dreamt or learnt of love I have packed into these days for you. You think we might live together and go on loving. No! For you I will have no vain repetitions. You have had the best and all of me. Would you have us, after this, meet again in London or Paris or somewhere, scuffle to some wretched dressmaker's, meet in a *cabinet particulier*?"

"No," I said. "I want you to marry me. I want you to play the game of life with me as an honest woman should. Come and live with me. Be my wife and squaw. Bear me children."

I looked at her white, drawn face, and it seemed to me I might carry her yet. I spluttered for words.

"My God! Beatrice!" I cried; "but this is cowardice and folly! Are *you* afraid of life? You of all people! What does it matter what has been or what we were? Here we are with the world before us! Start clean and new with me. We'll fight it through! I'm not such a simple lover that I'll not tell you plainly when you go wrong, and fight our difference out with you. It's the one thing I want, the one thing I need—to have you, and more of you and more! This love-making—it's love-making. It's just a part of us, an incident——"

She shook her head and stopped me abruptly. "It's all," she said.

"All!" I protested.

"I'm wiser than you. Wiser beyond words." She turned her eyes to me and they shone with tears.

"I wouldn't have you say anything—but what you're saying," she said. "But it's nonsense, dear. You know it's nonsense as you say it."

I tried to keep up the heroic note, but she would not listen to it.

"It's no good," she cried almost petulantly. "This little world has made—made us what we are. Don't you see—don't you see what I am? I can make love. I can make love and be loved, prettily. Dear, don't blame me! I have given you all I have. If I had anything more——. I have gone through it all over and over again—thought it out. This morning my head aches, my eyes ache. The light has gone out of me and I am a sick and tired woman. But I'm talking wisdom—bitter wisdom. I couldn't be any sort of helper to you, any sort of wife, any sort of mother. I'm spoilt. I'm spoilt by this rich idle way of living, until every habit is wrong, every taste wrong. The world is wrong. People can be ruined by wealth just as much as by poverty. Do you think I wouldn't face life with you if I could, if I wasn't absolutely certain I should be down and dragging in the first half-mile of the journey? Here I am—damned! Damned! But I won't damn you. You know what I am! You know. You are too clear and simple not to know the truth. You try to romance and hector, but you know the truth. I am a little cad—sold and done. I'm——. My dear, you think I've been misbe-

having, but all these days I've been on my best behaviour. . . . You don't understand, because you're a man. A woman, when she's spoilt, is *spoilt*. She's dirty in grain. She's done."

She walked on weeping.

"You're a fool to want me," she said. "You're a fool to want me—for my sake just as much as yours. We've done all we can. It's just romancing——"

She dashed the tears from her eyes and turned upon me.

"Don't you understand?" she challenged. "Don't you know?"

We faced one another in silence for a moment.

"Yes," I said, "I know."

For a long time we spoke never a word, but walked on together, slowly and sorrowfully, reluctant to turn about towards our parting. When at last we did, she broke silence again.

"I've had you," she said.

"Heaven and hell," I said, "can't alter that."

"I've wanted——" she went on. "I've talked to you in the nights and made up speeches. Now when I want to make them I'm tongue-tied. But to me it's just as if the moments we have had lasted for ever. Moods and states come and go. To-day my light is out. . . ."

To this day I cannot determine whether she said or whether I imagined she said "chloral." Perhaps a half-conscious diagnosis flashed it on my brain. Perhaps I am the victim of some perverse imaginative freak of memory, some hinted possibility that scratched and seared. There the word stands in my memory, as if it were written in fire.

We came to the door of Lady Osprey's garden at last, and it was beginning to drizzle.

She held out her hands and I took them.

"Yours," she said, in a weary unimpassioned voice; "all that I had—such as it was. Will you forget?"

"Never," I answered.

"Never a touch or a word of it?"

"No."

"You will," she said.

We looked at one another in silence, and her face was full of fatigue and misery.

What could I do? What was there to do?

"I wish——" I said, and stopped.

"Good-bye."

§ 4

That should have been the last I saw of her, but, indeed, I was destined to see her once again. Two days after I was at Lady Grove, I forget altogether upon what errand, and as I walked back to the station believing her to be gone away she came upon me, and she was riding with Carnaby, just as I had seen them first. The encounter jumped upon us unprepared. She rode by, her eyes dark in her white face, and scarcely noticed me. She winced and grew stiff at the sight of me and bowed her head. But Carnaby, because he thought I was a broken and discomfited man, saluted me with an easy friendliness, and shouted some genial commonplace to me.

They passed out of sight and left me by the roadside. . . .

And then indeed I tasted the ultimate bitterness of life. For the first time I felt utter futility, and was wrung by emotion that begot no action, by shame and pity beyond words. I had parted from her dully and I had seen my uncle break and die with dry eyes and a steady mind, but this chance sight of my lost Beatrice brought me to tears. My face was wrung, and tears came pouring down my cheeks. All the magic she had for me had changed to wild sorrow. "Oh God!" I cried, "this is too much," and turned my face after her and made appealing gestures to the beech trees and cursed at fate. I wanted to do preposterous things, to pursue her, to save her, to turn life back so that she might begin again. I wonder what would have happened had I overtaken them in pursuit, breathless with running, uttering incoherent words, weeping, expostulatory? I came near to doing that.

There was nothing in earth or heaven to respect my curses or weeping. In the midst of it a man who had been trimming the opposite hedge appeared and stared at me.

Abruptly, ridiculously, I dissembled before him and went on and caught my train. . . .

But the pain I felt then I have felt a hundred times; it is with me as I write. It haunts this book, I see, that is what haunts this book, from end to end. . . .

CHAPTER III

Night and the Open Sea

§ 1

I HAVE tried throughout all this story to tell things as they happened to me. In the beginning—the sheets are still here on the table, grimy and dog's-eared and old-looking—I said I wanted to tell *myself* and the world in which I found myself, and I have done my best. But whether I have succeeded I cannot imagine. All this writing is grey now and dead and trite and unmeaning to me; some of it I know by heart. I am the last person to judge it.

As I turn over the big pile of manuscript before me, certain things become clearer to me, and particularly the immense inconsequence of my experiences. It is, I see now that I have it all before me, a story of activity and urgency and sterility. I have called it *Tono-Bungay*, but I had far better have called it *Waste*. I have told of childless Marion, of my childless aunt, of Beatrice wasted and wasteful and futile. What hope is there for a people whose women become fruitless? I think of all the energy I have given to vain things. I think of my industrious scheming with my uncle, of Crest Hill's vast cessation, of his resonant strenuous career. Ten thousand men have envied him and wished to live as he lived. It is all one spectacle of forces running to waste, of people who use and do not replace, the story of a country hectic with a wasting aimless fever of trade and money-making and pleasure-seeking. And now I build destroyers!

Other people may see this country in other terms; this is how I have seen it. In some early chapter in this heap I compared all our present colour and abundance to

October foliage before the frosts nip down the leaves. That I still feel was a good image. Perhaps I see wrongly. It may be I see decay all about me because I am, in a sense, decay. To others it may be a scene of achievement and construction radiant with hope. I too have a sort of hope, but it is a remote hope, a hope that finds no promise in this Empire or in any of the great things of our time. How they will look in history I do not know, how time and chance will prove them I cannot guess; that is how they have mirrored themselves on one contemporary mind.

§ 2

Concurrently with writing the last chapter of this book I have been much engaged by the affairs of a new destroyer we have completed. It has been an oddly complementary alternation of occupations. Three weeks or so ago this novel had to be put aside in order that I might give all my time day and night to the fitting and finishing of the engines. Last Thursday X 2, for so we call her, was done, and I took her down the Thames and went out nearly to Texel for a trial of speed.

It is curious how at times one's impressions will all fuse and run together into a sort of unity and become continuous with things that have hitherto been utterly alien and remote. That rush down the river became mysteriously connected with this book. As I passed down the Thames I seemed in a new and parallel manner to be passing all England in review. I saw it then as I had wanted my readers to see it. The thought came to me slowly as I picked my way through the Pool; it stood out clear as I went dreaming into the night out upon the wide North Sea. . . .

It wasn't so much thinking at the time as a sort of photographic thought that came and grew clear. X 2 went ripping through the dirty oily water as scissors rip through canvas, and the front of my mind was all intent with getting her through under the bridges and in and out among the steamboats and barges and rowing-boats and piers. I lived with my hands and eyes hard ahead. I thought nothing then of any appearances but obstacles,

but for all that the back of my mind took the photographic memory of it complete and vivid. . . .

"This," it came to me, "is England. This is what I wanted to give in my book. This!"

We started in the late afternoon. We throbbed out of our yard above Hammersmith Bridge, fussed about for a moment, and headed down stream. We came at an easy rush down Craven Reach, past Fulham and Hurlingham, past the long stretches of muddy meadow and muddy suburb to Battersea and Chelsea, round the cape of tidy frontage that is Grosvenor Road and under Vauxhall Bridge, and Westminster opened before us. We cleared a string of coal barges, and there on the left in the October sunshine stood the Parliament houses and the flag was flying and Parliament was sitting. . . .

I saw it at the time unseeingly; afterwards it came into my mind as the centre of the whole broad panoramic effect of that afternoon. The stiff square lace of Victorian Gothic with its Dutch clock of a tower came upon me suddenly and stared and whirled past in a slow half pirouette and became still, I know, behind me as if watching me recede. "Aren't you going to respect me, then?" it seemed to say.

"Not I! There in that great pile of Victorian architecture the landlords and the lawyers, the bishops, the railway men and the magnates of commerce go to and fro—in their incurable tradition of commercialized Bladesovery, of meretricious gentry and nobility sold for riches. I have been near enough to know. The Irish and the Labour-men run about among their feet, making a fuss, effecting little; they've got no better plans that I can see. Respect it indeed! There's a certain paraphernalia of dignity, but whom does it deceive? The King comes down in a gilt coach to open the show and wears long robes and a crown; and there's a display of stout and slender legs in white stockings and stout and slender legs in black stockings and artful old gentlemen in ermine. I was reminded of one congested afternoon I had spent with my aunt amidst a cluster of agitated women's hats in the Royal Gallery of the House of Lords and how I saw the King going to open Parliament, and the Duke of Devonshire looking like a gorgeous pedlar and terribly bored with the cap of main-

tenance on a tray before him hung by slings from his shoulders. A wonderful spectacle ! . . .

It is quaint, no doubt, this England—it is even dignified in places—and full of mellow associations. That does not alter the quality of the realities these robes conceal. The realities are greedy trade, base profit-seeking, bold advertisement—and kingship and chivalry, spite of this wearing of treasured robes, are as dead among it all as that crusader my uncle championed against the nettles outside the Duffield church. . . .

I have thought much of that bright afternoon's panorama. To run down the Thames so is to run one's hand over the pages in the book of England from end to end. One begins in Craven Reach and it is as if one were in the heart of old England. Behind us are Kew and Hampton Court with their memories of Kings and Cardinals, and one runs at first between Fulham's episcopal garden parties and Hurlingham's playground for the sporting instinct of our race. The whole effect is English. There is space, there are old trees and all the best qualities of the home-land in that upper reach. Putney, too, looks Anglican on a dwindling scale. And then for a stretch the newer developments slop over, one misses Bladesover and there come first squalid stretches of mean homes right and left and then the dingy industrialism of the south side, and on the north bank the polite long front of nice houses, artistic, literary, administrative people's residences, that stretches from Cheyne Walk nearly to Westminster and hides a wilderness of slums. What a long slow crescendo that is, mile after mile, with the houses crowding closelier, the multiplying succession of church towers, the architectural moments, the successive bridges, until you come out into the second movement of the piece with Lambeth's old palace under your quarter and the Houses of Parliament on your bow ! Westminster Bridge is ahead of you then and through it you flash, and in a moment the round-faced clock tower cranes up to peer at you again and New Scotland Yard squares at you, a fat-beef-eater of a policeman disguised miraculously as a Bastille.

For a stretch you have the essential London; you have Charing Cross railway station, heart of the world, and the

Embankment on the north side with its new hotels overshadowing its Georgian and Victorian architecture, and mud and great warehouses and factories, chimneys, shot towers, advertisements on the south. The northward skyline grows more intricate and pleasing, and more and more does one thank God for Wren. Somerset House is as picturesque as the civil war, one is reminded again of the original England, one feels in the fretted sky the quality of Restoration lace.

And then comes Astor's strong box and the lawyers' Inns. . . .

(I had a passing memory of myself there, how once I had trudged along the Embankment westward, weighing my uncle's offer of three hundred pounds a year. . . .)

Through that central essential London reach I drove, and X 2 bored her nose under the foam regardless of it all like a black hound going through reeds—on what trail even I who made her cannot tell.

And in this reach, too, one first meets the seagulls and is reminded of the sea. Blackfriars one takes—just under these two bridges and just between them is the finest bridge moment in the world—and behold, soaring up, hanging in the sky over a rude tumult of warehouses, over a jostling competition of traders, irrelevantly beautiful and altogether remote, Saint Paul's! "Of course!" one says, "Saint Paul's!" It is the very figure of whatever fineness the old Anglican culture achieved, detached, a more dignified and chastened Saint Peter's, colder, greyer but still ornate; it has never been overthrown, never disavowed, only the tall warehouses and all the roar of traffic have forgotten it, every one has forgotten it; the steamships, the barges, go heedlessly by regardless of it, intricacies of telephone wires and poles cut blackly into its thin mysteries and presently, when in a moment the traffic permits you and you look round for it, it has dissolved like a cloud into the grey blues of the London sky.

And then the traditional and ostensible England falls from you altogether. The third movement begins, the last great movement in the London symphony, in which the trim scheme of the old order is altogether dwarfed and swallowed up. Comes London Bridge, and the great

warehouses tower up about you waving stupendous cranes; the gulls circle and scream in your ears, large ships lie among their lighters, and one is in the port of the world. Again and again in this book I have written of England as a feudal scheme overtaken by fatty degeneration and stupendous accidents of hypertrophy. For the last time I must strike that note as the memory of the dear neat little sunlit ancient Tower of London lying away in a gap among the warehouses comes back to me, that little accumulation of buildings so provincially pleasant and dignified, overshadowed by the vulgarest, most typical exploit of modern England, the sham Gothic casings to the iron-work of the Tower Bridge. That Tower Bridge is the very balance and confirmation of Westminster's dull pinnacles and tower. That sham Gothic bridge; in the very gates of our mother of change, the Sea!

But after that one is in a world of accident and nature. For the third part of the panorama of London is beyond all law, order, and precedence, it is the seaport and the sea. One goes down the widening reaches through a monstrous variety of shipping, great steamers, great sailing-ships, trailing the flags of all the world, a monstrous confusion of lighters, witches' conferences of brown-sailed barges, wallowing tugs, a tumultuous crowding and jostling of cranes and spars, and wharves and stores, and assertive inscriptions. Huge vistas of dock open right and left of one, and here and there beyond and amidst it all are church towers, little patches of indescribably old-fashioned and worn-out houses, riverside pubs and the like, vestiges of townships that were long since torn to fragments and submerged in these new growths. And amidst it all no plan appears, no intention, no comprehensive desire. That is the very key of it all. Each day one feels that the pressure of commerce and traffic grew, grew insensibly monstrous, and first this man made a wharf and that erected a crane, and then this company set to work and then that, and so they jostled together to make this unassimilable enormity of traffic. Through it we dodged and drove, eager for the high seas.

I remember how I laughed aloud at the glimpse of the name of a London County Council steamboat that ran

across me. *Caxton* it was called, and another was *Pepys*, and another was *Shakespeare*. They seemed so wildly out of place, splashing about in that confusion. One wanted to take them out and wipe them and put them back in some English gentleman's library. Everything was alive about them, flashing, splashing, and passing, ships moving, tugs panting, hawsers taut, barges going down with men toiling at the sweeps, the water all a-swirl with the wash of shipping scaling into millions of little wavelets, curling and frothing under the whip of the unceasing wind. Past it all we drove. And at Greenwich to the south, you know, there stands a fine stone frontage where all the victories are recorded in a Painted Hall, and beside it is the "Ship," where once upon a time those gentlemen of Westminster used to have an annual dinner—before the port of London got too much for them altogether. The old façade of the Hospital was just warming to the sunset as we went by, and after that, right and left, the river opened, the sense of the sea increased and prevailed reach after reach from Northfleet to the Nore.

And out you come at last with the sun behind you into the eastern sea. You speed up and tear the oily water louder and faster, siroo, siroo—swish—siroo, and the hills of Kent—over which I once fled from the Christian teachings of Nicodemus Frapp—fall away on the right hand and Essex on the left. They fall away and vanish into blue haze and the tall slow ships behind the tugs, scarce moving ships and wallowing sturdy tugs, are all wrought of wet gold as one goes frothing by. They stand out bound on strange missions of life and death, to the killing of men in unfamiliar lands. And now behind us is blue mystery and the phantom flash of unseen lights, and presently even these are gone, and I and my destroyer tear out to the unknown across a great grey space. We tear into the great spaces of the future and the turbines fall to talking in unfamiliar tongues. Out to the open we go, to windy freedom and trackless ways. Light after light goes down. England and the Kingdom, Britain and the Empire, the old prides and the old devotions, glide abeam, astern, sink down upon the horizon, pass—pass. The river passes—London passes, England passes. . . .

§ 3

This is the note I have tried to emphasize, the note that sounds clear in my mind when I think of anything beyond the purely personal aspects of my story.

It is a note of crumbling and confusion, of change and seemingly aimless swelling, of a bubbling up and medley of futile loves and sorrows. But through the confusion sounds another note. Through the confusion something drives, something that is at once human achievement and the most inhuman of all existing things. Something comes out of it. . . . How can I express the values of a thing at once so essential and so immaterial? It is something that calls upon such men as I with an irresistible appeal.

I have figured it in my last section by the symbol of my destroyer, stark and swift, irrelevant to most human interests. Sometimes I call this reality Science, sometimes I call it Truth. But it is something we draw by pain and effort out of the heart of life, that we disentangle and make clear. Other men serve it, I know, in art, in literature, in social invention, and see it in a thousand different figures, under a hundred names. I see it always as austerity, as beauty. This thing we make clear is the heart of life. It is the one enduring thing. Men and nations, epochs and civilizations pass, each making its contribution. I do not know what it is, this something, except that it is supreme. It is a something, a quality, an element, one may find now in colours, now in forms, now in sounds, now in thoughts. It emerges from life with each year one lives and feels, and generation by generation and age by age, but the how and why of it are all beyond the compass of my mind. . . .

Yet the full sense of it was with me all that night as I drove, lonely above the rush and murmur of my engines, out upon the weltering circle of the sea. . . .

Far out to the north-east there came the flicker of a squadron of warships waving white swords of light above the sky. I kept them hull-down, and presently they were mere summer lightning over the watery edge of the globe. . . . I fell into thought that was nearly formless, into doubts

and dreams that have no words, and it seemed good to me to drive ahead and on and on through the windy starlight, over the long black waves.

§ 4

It was morning and day before I returned with the four sick and starving journalists who had got permission to come with me, up the shining river, and past the old grey Tower. . . .

I recall the back views of those journalists very distinctly, going with a certain damp weariness of movement, along a side street away from the river. They were good men and bore me no malice, and they served me up to the public in turgid degenerate Kiplingese, as a modest button on the complacent stomach of the Empire. Though as a matter of fact, X 2 isn't intended for the Empire, or indeed for the hands of any European power. We offered it to our own people first, but they would have nothing to do with me, and I have long since ceased to trouble much about such questions. I have come to see myself from the outside, my country from the outside—without illusions. We make and pass.

We are all things that make and pass, striving upon a hidden mission, out to the open sea.

THE END

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