Part II - The Explanations of Innocent Smith

Chapter I - The Eye of Death; or, the Murder Charge

The dining-room of the Dukes had been set out for the Court of Beacon with a certain impromptu pomposity that seemed somehow to increase its cosiness. The big room was, as it were, cut up into small rooms, with walls only waist high--the sort of separation that children make when they are playing at shops. This had been done by Moses Gould and Michael Moon (the two most active members of this remarkable inquiry) with the ordinary furniture of the place. At one end of the long mahogany table was set the one enormous garden chair, which was surmounted by the old torn tent or umbrella which Smith himself had suggested as a coronation canopy. Inside this erection could be perceived the dumpy form of Mrs. Duke, with cushions and a form of countenance that already threatened slumber. At the other end sat the accused Smith, in a kind of dock; for he was carefully fenced in with a quadrilateral of light bedroom chairs, any of which he could have tossed out the window with his big toe. He had been provided with pens and paper, out of the latter of which he made paper boats, paper darts, and paper dolls contentedly throughout the whole proceedings. He never spoke or even looked up, but seemed as unconscious as a child on the floor of an empty nursery.

On a row of chairs raised high on the top of a long settee sat the three young ladies with their backs up against the window, and Mary Gray in the middle; it was something between a jury box and the stall of the Queen of Beauty at a tournament. Down the centre of the long table Moon had built a low barrier out of eight bound volumes of "Good Words" to express the moral wall that divided the conflicting parties. On the right side sat the two advocates of the prosecution, Dr. Pym and Mr. Gould; behind a barricade of books and documents, chiefly (in the case of Dr. Pym) solid volumes of criminology. On the other side, Moon and Inglewood, for the defence, were also fortified with books and papers; but as these included several old yellow volumes by Ouida and Wilkie Collins, the hand of Mr. Moon seemed to have been somewhat careless and comprehensive. As for the victim and prosecutor, Dr. Warner, Moon wanted at first to have him kept entirely behind a high screen in the corner, urging the indelicacy of his appearance in court, but privately assuring him of an unofficial permission to peep over the top now and then. Dr. Warner, however, failed to rise to the chivalry of such a course, and after some little disturbance and discussion he was accommodated

with a seat on the right side of the table in a line with his legal advisers.

It was before this solidly-established tribunal that Dr. Cyrus Pym, after passing a hand through the honey-coloured hair over each ear, rose to open the case. His statement was clear and even restrained, and such flights of imagery as occurred in it only attracted attention by a certain indescribable abruptness, not uncommon in the flowers of American speech.

He planted the points of his ten frail fingers on the mahogany, closed his eyes, and opened his mouth. "The time has gone by," he said, "when murder could be regarded as a moral and individual act, important perhaps to the murderer, perhaps to the murdered. Science has profoundly..." here he paused, poising his compressed finger and thumb in the air as if he were holding an elusive idea very tight by its tail, then he screwed up his eyes and said "modified," and let it go-- "has profoundly Modified our view of death. In superstitious ages it was regarded as the termination of life, catastrophic, and even tragic, and was often surrounded by solemnity. Brighter days, however, have dawned, and we now see death as universal and inevitable, as part of that great soul-stirring and heart-upholding average which we call for convenience the order of nature. In the same way we have come to consider murder SOCIALLY. Rising above the mere private feelings of a man while being forcibly deprived of life, we are privileged to behold murder as a mighty whole, to see the rich rotation of the cosmos, bringing, as it brings the golden harvests and the golden-bearded harvesters, the return for ever of the slayers and the slain."

He looked down, somewhat affected with his own eloquence, coughed slightly, putting up four of his pointed fingers with the excellent manners of Boston, and continued: "There is but one result of this happier and humaner outlook which concerns the wretched man before us. It is that thoroughly elucidated by a Milwaukee doctor, our great secret-guessing Sonnenschein, in his great work, `The Destructive Type.' We do not denounce Smith as a murderer, but rather as a murderous man. The type is such that its very life-- I might say its very health--is in killing. Some hold that it is not properly an aberration, but a newer and even a higher creature. My dear old friend Dr. Bulger, who kept ferrets--" (here Moon suddenly ejaculated a loud "hurrah!" but so instantaneously resumed his tragic expression that Mrs. Duke looked everywhere else for the sound); Dr. Pym continued somewhat sternly--"who, in the interests of knowledge, kept ferrets, felt that the creature's ferocity is not utilitarian, but absolutely an end in itself. However this may be with ferrets, it is certainly so with the prisoner. In his other iniquities you may find the cunning of the maniac; but his acts of blood have almost the simplicity of sanity. But it is the awful sanity of the sun and the elements--a cruel, an evil sanity. As soon stay the iris-leapt cataracts of our virgin West as stay the natural force that sends him forth to slay. No

environment, however scientific, could have softened him. Place that man in the silver-silent purity of the palest cloister, and there will be some deed of violence done with the crozier or the alb. Rear him in a happy nursery, amid our brave-browed Anglo-Saxon infancy, and he will find some way to strangle with the skipping-rope or brain with the brick. Circumstances may be favourable, training may be admirable, hopes may be high, but the huge elemental hunger of Innocent Smith for blood will in its appointed season burst like a well-timed bomb."

Arthur Inglewood glanced curiously for an instant at the huge creature at the foot of the table, who was fitting a paper figure with a cocked hat, and then looked back at Dr. Pym, who was concluding in a quieter tone.

"It only remains for us," he said, "to bring forward actual evidence of his previous attempts. By an agreement already made with the Court and the leaders of the defence, we are permitted to put in evidence authentic letters from witnesses to these scenes, which the defence is free to examine. Out of several cases of such outrages we have decided to select one-- the clearest and most scandalous. I will therefore, without further delay, call on my junior, Mr. Gould, to read two letters--one from the Sub-Warden and the other from the porter of Brakespeare College, in Cambridge University."

Gould jumped up with a jerk like a jack-in-the-box, an academic-looking paper in his hand and a fever of importance on his face. He began in a loud, high, cockney voice that was as abrupt as a cock-crow:--

"Sir,--Hi am the Sub-Warden of Brikespeare College, Cambridge--"

"Lord have mercy on us," muttered Moon, making a backward movement as men do when a gun goes off.

"Hi am the Sub-Warden of Brikespeare College, Cambridge," proclaimed the uncompromising Moses, "and I can endorse the description you gave of the un'appy Smith. It was not alone my unfortunate duty to rebuke many of the lesser violences of his undergraduate period, but I was actually a witness to the last iniquity which terminated that period. Hi happened to passing under the house of my friend the Warden of Brikespeare, which is semi-detached from the College and connected with it by two or three very ancient arches or props, like bridges, across a small strip of water connected with the river. To my grive astonishment I be'eld my eminent friend suspended in mid-air and clinging to one of these pieces of masonry, his appearance and attitude indicatin' that he suffered from the grivest apprehensions. After a short time I heard two very loud shots, and distinctly perceived the unfortunate undergraduate Smith leaning far

out of the Warden's window and aiming at the Warden repeatedly with a revolver. Upon seeing me, Smith burst into a loud laugh (in which impertinence was mingled with insanity), and appeared to desist. I sent the college porter for a ladder, and he succeeded in detaching the Warden from his painful position. Smith was sent down. The photograph I enclose is from the group of the University Rifle Club prizemen, and represents him as he was when at the College.-- Hi am, your obedient servant, Amos Boulter.

"The other letter," continued Gould in a glow of triumph, "is from the porter, and won't take long to read.

"Dear Sir,--It is quite true that I am the porter of Brikespeare College, and that I 'elped the Warden down when the young man was shooting at him, as Mr. Boulter has said in his letter. The young man who was shooting at him was Mr. Smith, the same that is in the photograph Mr. Boulter sends.-- Yours respectfully, Samuel Barker."

Gould handed the two letters across to Moon, who examined them. But for the vocal divergences in the matter of h's and a's, the Sub-Warden's letter was exactly as Gould had rendered it; and both that and the porter's letter were plainly genuine. Moon handed them to Inglewood, who handed them back in silence to Moses Gould.

"So far as this first charge of continual attempted murder is concerned," said Dr. Pym, standing up for the last time, "that is my case."

Michael Moon rose for the defence with an air of depression which gave little hope at the outset to the sympathizers with the prisoner. He did not, he said, propose to follow the doctor into the abstract questions. "I do not know enough to be an agnostic," he said, rather wearily, "and I can only master the known and admitted elements in such controversies. As for science and religion, the known and admitted facts are plain enough. All that the parsons say is unproved. All that the doctors say is disproved. That's the only difference between science and religion there's ever been, or will be. Yet these new discoveries touch me, somehow," he said, looking down sorrowfully at his boots. "They remind me of a dear old great-aunt of mine who used to enjoy them in her youth. It brings tears to my eyes. I can see the old bucket by the garden fence and the line of shimmering poplars behind--"

"Hi! here, stop the 'bus a bit," cried Mr. Moses Gould, rising in a sort of perspiration. "We want to give the defence a fair run--like gents, you know; but any gent would draw the line at shimmering poplars."

"Well, hang it all," said Moon, in an injured manner, "if Dr. Pym may have an old friend with ferrets, why mayn't I have an old aunt with poplars?"

"I am sure," said Mrs. Duke, bridling, with something almost like a shaky authority, "Mr. Moon may have what aunts he likes."

"Why, as to liking her," began Moon, "I--but perhaps, as you say, she is scarcely the core of the question. I repeat that I do not mean to follow the abstract speculations. For, indeed, my answer to Dr. Pym is simple and severely concrete. Dr. Pym has only treated one side of the psychology of murder. If it is true that there is a kind of man who has a natural tendency to murder, is it not equally true"--here he lowered his voice and spoke with a crushing quietude and earnestness--"is it not equally true that there is a kind of man who has a natural tendency to get murdered? Is it not at least a hypothesis holding the field that Dr. Warner is such a man? I do not speak without the book, any more than my learned friend. The whole matter is expounded in Dr. Moonenschein's monumental work, `The Destructible Doctor,' with diagrams, showing the various ways in which such a person as Dr. Warner may be resolved into his elements. In the light of these facts--"

"Hi, stop the 'bus! stop the 'bus!" cried Moses, jumping up and down and gesticulating in great excitement. "My principal's got something to say! My principal wants to do a bit of talkin'."

Dr. Pym was indeed on his feet, looking pallid and rather vicious. "I have strictly CON-fined myself," he said nasally, "to books to which immediate reference can be made. I have Sonnenschein's `Destructive Type' here on the table, if the defence wish to see it. Where is this wonderful work on Destructability Mr. Moon is talking about? Does it exist? Can he produce it?"

"Produce it!" cried the Irishman with a rich scorn. "I'll produce it in a week if you'll pay for the ink and paper."

"Would it have much authority?" asked Pym, sitting down.

"Oh, authority!" said Moon lightly; "that depends on a fellow's religion."

Dr. Pym jumped up again. "Our authority is based on masses of accurate detail," he said. "It deals with a region in which things can be handled and tested. My opponent will at least admit that death is a fact of experience."

"Not of mine," said Moon mournfully, shaking his head. "I've never experienced such a thing in all my life."

"Well, really," said Dr. Pym, and sat down sharply amid a crackle of papers.

"So we see," resumed Moon, in the same melancholy voice, "that a man like Dr. Warner is, in the mysterious workings of evolution, doomed to such attacks. My client's onslaught, even if it occurred, was not unique. I have in my hand letters from more than one acquaintance of Dr. Warner whom that remarkable man has affected in the same way. Following the example of my learned friends I will read only two of them. The first is from an honest and laborious matron living off the Harrow Road.

"Mr. Moon, Sir,--Yes, I did throw a sorsepan at him. Wot then? It was all I had to throw, all the soft things being porned, and if your Docter Warner doesn't like having sorsepans thrown at him, don't let him wear his hat in a respectable woman's parler, and tell him to leave orf smiling or tell us the joke.--Yours respectfully, Hannah Miles.

"The other letter is from a physician of some note in Dublin, with whom Dr. Warner was once engaged in consultation. He writes as follows:--

"Dear Sir,--The incident to which you refer is one which I regret, and which, moreover, I have never been able to explain. My own branch of medicine is not mental; and I should be glad to have the view of a mental specialist on my singular momentary and indeed almost automatic action. To say that I `pulled Dr. Warner's nose,' is, however, inaccurate in a respect that strikes me as important. That I punched his nose I must cheerfully admit (I need not say with what regret); but pulling seems to me to imply a precision of objective with which I cannot reproach myself. In comparison with this, the act of punching was an outward, instantaneous, and even natural gesture.-- Believe me, yours faithfully, Burton Lestrange.

"I have numberless other letters," continued Moon, "all bearing witness to this widespread feeling about my eminent friend; and I therefore think that Dr. Pym should have admitted this side of the question in his survey. We are in the presence, as Dr. Pym so truly says, of a natural force. As soon stay the cataract of the London water-works as stay the great tendency of Dr. Warner to be assassinated by somebody. Place that man in a Quakers' meeting, among the most peaceful of Christians, and he will immediately be beaten to death with sticks of chocolate. Place him among the angels of the New Jerusalem, and he will be stoned to death with precious stones. Circumstances may be beautiful and wonderful, the average may be heart-upholding, the harvester may be golden-bearded, the doctor may be secret-guessing, the cataract may be iris-leapt, the Anglo-Saxon infant may be brave-browed, but against and above all these

prodigies the grand simple tendency of Dr. Warner to get murdered will still pursue its way until it happily and triumphantly succeeds at last."

He pronounced this peroration with an appearance of strong emotion. But even stronger emotions were manifesting themselves on the other side of the table. Dr. Warner had leaned his large body quite across the little figure of Moses Gould and was talking in excited whispers to Dr. Pym. That expert nodded a great many times and finally started to his feet with a sincere expression of sternness.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried indignantly, "as my colleague has said, we should be delighted to give any latitude to the defence--if there were a defence. But Mr. Moon seems to think he is there to make jokes-- very good jokes I dare say, but not at all adapted to assist his client. He picks holes in science. He picks holes in my client's social popularity. He picks holes in my literary style, which doesn't seem to suit his high-toned European taste. But how does this picking of holes affect the issue? This Smith has picked two holes in my client's hat, and with an inch better aim would have picked two holes in his head. All the jokes in the world won't unpick those holes or be any use for the defence."

Inglewood looked down in some embarrassment, as if shaken by the evident fairness of this, but Moon still gazed at his opponent in a dreamy way. "The defence?" he said vaguely--"oh, I haven't begun that yet."

"You certainly have not," said Pym warmly, amid a murmur of applause from his side, which the other side found it impossible to answer. "Perhaps, if you have any defence, which has been doubtful from the very beginning--"

"While you're standing up," said Moon, in the same almost sleepy style, "perhaps I might ask you a question."

"A question? Certainly," said Pym stiffly. "It was distinctly arranged between us that as we could not cross-examine the witnesses, we might vicariously cross-examine each other. We are in a position to invite all such inquiry."

"I think you said," observed Moon absently, "that none of the prisoner's shots really hit the doctor."

"For the cause of science," cried the complacent Pym, "fortunately not."

"Yet they were fired from a few feet away."

"Yes; about four feet."

"And no shots hit the Warden, though they were fired quite close to him too?" asked Moon.

"That is so," said the witness gravely.

"I think," said Moon, suppressing a slight yawn, "that your Sub-Warden mentioned that Smith was one of the University's record men for shooting."

"Why, as to that--" began Pym, after an instant of stillness.

"A second question," continued Moon, comparatively curtly. "You said there were other cases of the accused trying to kill people. Why have you not got evidence of them?"

The American planted the points of his fingers on the table again. "In those cases," he said precisely, "there was no evidence from outsiders, as in the Cambridge case, but only the evidence of the actual victims."

"Why didn't you get their evidence?"

"In the case of the actual victims," said Pym, "there was some difficulty and reluctance, and--"

"Do you mean," asked Moon, "that none of the actual victims would appear against the prisoner?"

"That would be exaggerative," began the other.

"A third question," said Moon, so sharply that every one jumped. "You've got the evidence of the Sub-Warden who heard some shots; where's the evidence of the Warden himself who was shot at? The Warden of Brakespeare lives, a prosperous gentleman."

"We did ask for a statement from him," said Pym a little nervously; "but it was so eccentrically expressed that we suppressed it out of deference to an old gentleman whose past services to science have been great."

Moon leaned forward. "You mean, I suppose," he said, "that his statement was favourable to the prisoner."

"It might be understood so," replied the American doctor; "but, really, it was difficult to understand at all. In fact, we sent it back to him."

"You have no longer, then, any statement signed by the Warden of Brakespeare."

"No."

"I only ask," said Michael quietly, "because we have. To conclude my case I will ask my junior, Mr. Inglewood, to read a statement of the true story--a statement attested as true by the signature of the Warden himself."

Arthur Inglewood rose with several papers in his hand, and though he looked somewhat refined and self-effacing, as he always did, the spectators were surprised to feel that his presence was, upon the whole, more efficient and sufficing than his leader's. He was, in truth, one of those modest men who cannot speak until they are told to speak; and then can speak well. Moon was entirely the opposite. His own impudences amused him in private, but they slightly embarrassed him in public; he felt a fool while he was speaking, whereas Inglewood felt a fool only because he could not speak. The moment he had anything to say he could speak; and the moment he could speak, speaking seemed quite natural. Nothing in this universe seemed quite natural to Michael Moon.

"As my colleague has just explained," said Inglewood, "there are two enigmas or inconsistencies on which we base the defence. The first is a plain physical fact. By the admission of everybody, by the very evidence adduced by the prosecution, it is clear that the accused was celebrated as a specially good shot. Yet on both the occasions complained of he shot from a distance of four or five feet, and shot at him four or five times, and never hit him once. That is the first startling circumstance on which we base our argument. The second, as my colleague has urged, is the curious fact that we cannot find a single victim of these alleged outrages to speak for himself. Subordinates speak for him. Porters climb up ladders to him. But he himself is silent. Ladies and gentlemen, I propose to explain on the spot both the riddle of the shots and the riddle of the silence. I will first of all read the covering letter in which the true account of the Cambridge incident is contained, and then that document itself. When you have heard both, there will be no doubt about your decision. The covering letter runs as follows:--

"Dear Sir,--The following is a very exact and even vivid account of the incident as it really happened at Brakespeare College. We, the undersigned, do not see any particular reason why we should refer it to any isolated authorship. The truth is, it has been a composite production; and we have even had some difference of opinion about the adjectives. But every word of it is true.--We are, yours faithfully,

"Wilfred Emerson Eames, "Warden of

Brakespeare College, Cambridge.

"Innocent Smith.

"The enclosed statement," continued Inglewood, "runs as follows:--

"A celebrated English university backs so abruptly on the river, that it has, so to speak, to be propped up and patched with all sorts of bridges and semi-detached buildings. The river splits itself into several small streams and canals, so that in one or two corners the place has almost the look of Venice. It was so especially in the case with which we are concerned, in which a few flying buttresses or airy ribs of stone sprang across a strip of water to connect Brakespeare College with the house of the Warden of Brakespeare.

"The country around these colleges is flat; but it does not seem flat when one is thus in the midst of the colleges. For in these flat fens there are always wandering lakes and lingering rivers of water. And these always change what might have been a scheme of horizontal lines into a scheme of vertical lines. Wherever there is water the height of high buildings is doubled, and a British brick house becomes a Babylonian tower. In that shining unshaken surface the houses hang head downwards exactly to their highest or lowest chimney. The coral-coloured cloud seen in that abyss is as far below the world as its original appears above it. Every scrap of water is not only a window but a skylight. Earth splits under men's feet into precipitous aerial perspectives, into which a bird could as easily wing its way as--"

Dr. Cyrus Pym rose in protest. The documents he had put in evidence had been confined to cold affirmation of fact. The defence, in a general way, had an indubitable right to put their case in their own way, but all this landscape gardening seemed to him (Dr. Cyrus Pym) to be not up to the business. "Will the leader of the defence tell me," he asked, "how it can possibly affect this case, that a cloud was cor'l-coloured, or that a bird could have winged itself anywhere?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Michael, lifting himself lazily; "you see, you don't know yet what our defence is. Till you know that, don't you see, anything may be relevant. Why, suppose," he said suddenly, as if an idea had struck him, "suppose we wanted to prove the old Warden colour-blind. Suppose he was shot by a black man with white hair, when he thought he was being shot by a white man with yellow hair! To ascertain if that cloud was really and truly coral-coloured might be of the most massive importance."

He paused with a seriousness which was hardly generally shared, and continued with the same fluency: "Or suppose we wanted to maintain that the Warden

committed suicide--that he just got Smith to hold the pistol as Brutus's slave held the sword. Why, it would make all the difference whether the Warden could see himself plain in still water. Still water has made hundreds of suicides: one sees oneself so very--well, so very plain."

"Do you, perhaps," inquired Pym with austere irony, "maintain that your client was a bird of some sort--say, a flamingo?"

"In the matter of his being a flamingo," said Moon with sudden severity, "my client reserves his defence."

No one quite knowing what to make of this, Mr. Moon resumed his seat and Inglewood resumed the reading of his document:--

"There is something pleasing to a mystic in such a land of mirrors. For a mystic is one who holds that two worlds are better than one. In the highest sense, indeed, all thought is reflection.

"This is the real truth, in the saying that second thoughts are best. Animals have no second thoughts; man alone is able to see his own thought double, as a drunkard sees a lamp-post; man alone is able to see his own thought upside down as one sees a house in a puddle. This duplication of mentality, as in a mirror, is (we repeat) the inmost thing of human philosophy. There is a mystical, even a monstrous truth, in the statement that two heads are better than one. But they ought both to grow on the same body."

"I know it's a little transcendental at first," interposed Inglewood, beaming round with a broad apology, "but you see this document was written in collaboration by a don and a--"

"Drunkard, eh?" suggested Moses Gould, beginning to enjoy himself.

"I rather think," proceeded Inglewood with an unruffled and critical air, "that this part was written by the don. I merely warn the Court that the statement, though indubitably accurate, bears here and there the trace of coming from two authors."

"In that case," said Dr. Pym, leaning back and sniffing, "I cannot agree with them that two heads are better than one."

"The undersigned persons think it needless to touch on a kindred problem so often discussed at committees for University Reform: the question of whether dons see double because they are drunk, or get drunk because they see double. It is enough for them (the undersigned persons) if they are able to pursue their

own peculiar and profitable theme--which is puddles. What (the undersigned persons ask themselves) is a puddle? A puddle repeats infinity, and is full of light; nevertheless, if analyzed objectively, a puddle is a piece of dirty water spread very thin on mud. The two great historic universities of England have all this large and level and reflective brilliance. Nevertheless, or, rather, on the other hand, they are puddles--puddles, puddles, puddles, puddles. The undersigned persons ask you to excuse an emphasis inseparable from strong conviction."

Inglewood ignored a somewhat wild expression on the faces of some present, and continued with eminent cheerfulness:--

"Such were the thoughts that failed to cross the mind of the undergraduate Smith as he picked his way among the stripes of canal and the glittering rainy gutters into which the water broke up round the back of Brakespeare College. Had these thoughts crossed his mind he would have been much happier than he was. Unfortunately he did not know that his puzzles were puddles. He did not know that the academic mind reflects infinity and is full of light by the simple process of being shallow and standing still. In his case, therefore, there was something solemn, and even evil about the infinity implied. It was half-way through a starry night of bewildering brilliancy; stars were both above and below. To young Smith's sullen fancy the skies below seemed even hollower than the skies above; he had a horrible idea that if he counted the stars he would find one too many in the pool.

"In crossing the little paths and bridges he felt like one stepping on the black and slender ribs of some cosmic Eiffel Tower. For to him, and nearly all the educated youth of that epoch, the stars were cruel things. Though they glowed in the great dome every night, they were an enormous and ugly secret; they uncovered the nakedness of nature; they were a glimpse of the iron wheels and pulleys behind the scenes. For the young men of that sad time thought that the god always comes from the machine. They did not know that in reality the machine only comes from the god. In short, they were all pessimists, and starlight was atrocious to them-- atrocious because it was true. All their universe was black with white spots.

"Smith looked up with relief from the glittering pools below to the glittering skies and the great black bulk of the college. The only light other than stars glowed through one peacock-green curtain in the upper part of the building, marking where Dr. Emerson Eames always worked till morning and received his friends and favourite pupils at any hour of the night. Indeed, it was to his rooms that the melancholy Smith was bound. Smith had been at Dr. Eames's lecture for the first half of the morning, and at pistol practice and fencing in a saloon for the second half. He had been sculling madly for the first half of the afternoon and thinking

idly (and still more madly) for the second half. He had gone to a supper where he was uproarious, and on to a debating club where he was perfectly insufferable, and the melancholy Smith was melancholy still. Then, as he was going home to his diggings he remembered the eccentricity of his friend and master, the Warden of Brakespeare, and resolved desperately to turn in to that gentleman's private house.

"Emerson Eames was an eccentric in many ways, but his throne in philosophy and metaphysics was of international eminence; the university could hardly have afforded to lose him, and, moreover, a don has only to continue any of his bad habits long enough to make them a part of the British Constitution. The bad habits of Emerson Eames were to sit up all night and to be a student of Schopenhauer. Personally, he was a lean, lounging sort of man, with a blond pointed beard, not so very much older than his pupil Smith in the matter of mere years, but older by centuries in the two essential respects of having a European reputation and a bald head.

"`I came, against the rules, at this unearthly hour,' said Smith, who was nothing to the eye except a very big man trying to make himself small, `because I am coming to the conclusion that existence is really too rotten. I know all the arguments of the thinkers that think otherwise--bishops, and agnostics, and those sort of people. And knowing you were the greatest living authority on the pessimist thinkers--'

"`All thinkers,' said Eames, `are pessimist thinkers.'

"After a patch of pause, not the first--for this depressing conversation had gone on for some hours with alternations of cynicism and silence-- the Warden continued with his air of weary brilliancy: `It's all a question of wrong calculation. The moth flies into the candle because he doesn't happen to know that the game is not worth the candle. The wasp gets into the jam in hearty and hopeful efforts to get the jam into him. IN the same way the vulgar people want to enjoy life just as they want to enjoy gin--because they are too stupid to see that they are paying too big a price for it. That they never find happiness--that they don't even know how to look for it--is proved by the paralyzing clumsiness and ugliness of everything they do. Their discordant colours are cries of pain. Look at the brick villas beyond the college on this side of the river. There's one with spotted blinds; look at it! just go and look at it!'

"`Of course,' he went on dreamily, `one or two men see the sober fact a long way off--they go mad. Do you notice that maniacs mostly try either to destroy other things, or (if they are thoughtful) to destroy themselves? The madman is the man behind the scenes, like the man that wanders about the coulisse of a theater. He

has only opened the wrong door and come into the right place. He sees things at the right angle. But the common world--'

"`Oh, hang the common world!' said the sullen Smith, letting his fist fall on the table in an idle despair.

"`Let's give it a bad name first,' said the Professor calmly, `and then hang it. A puppy with hydrophobia would probably struggle for life while we killed it; but if we were kind we should kill it. So an omniscient god would put us out of our pain. He would strike us dead.'

"`Why doesn't he strike us dead?' asked the undergraduate abstractedly, plunging his hands into his pockets.

"`He is dead himself,' said the philosopher; `that is where he is really enviable.'

"`To any one who thinks,' proceeded Eames, `the pleasures of life, trivial and soon tasteless, are bribes to bring us into a torture chamber. We all see that for any thinking man mere extinction is the... What are you doing?... Are you mad?... Put that thing down.'

"Dr. Eames had turned his tired but still talkative head over his shoulder, and had found himself looking into a small round black hole, rimmed by a six-sided circlet of steel, with a sort of spike standing up on the top. It fixed him like an iron eye. Through those eternal instants during which the reason is stunned he did not even know what it was. Then he saw behind it the chambered barrel and cocked hammer of a revolver, and behind that the flushed and rather heavy face of Smith, apparently quite unchanged, or even more mild than before.

"`I'll help you out of your hole, old man,' said Smith, with rough tenderness. `I'll put the puppy out of his pain.'

"Emerson Eames retreated towards the window. `Do you mean to kill me?' he cried.

"`It's not a thing I'd do for every one,' said Smith with emotion; `but you and I seem to have got so intimate to-night, somehow. I know all your troubles now, and the only cure, old chap.'

"`Put that thing down,' shouted the Warden.

"`It'll soon be over, you know,' said Smith with the air of a sympathetic dentist. And as the Warden made a run for the window and balcony, his benefactor

followed him with a firm step and a compassionate expression.

"Both men were perhaps surprised to see that the gray and white of early daybreak had already come. One of them, however, had emotions calculated to swallow up surprise. Brakespeare College was one of the few that retained real traces of Gothic ornament, and just beneath Dr. Eames's balcony there ran out what had perhaps been a flying buttress, still shapelessly shaped into gray beasts and devils, but blinded with mosses and washed out with rains. With an ungainly and most courageous leap, Eames sprang out on this antique bridge, as the only possible mode of escape from the maniac. He sat astride of it, still in his academic gown, dangling his long thin legs, and considering further chances of flight. The whitening daylight opened under as well as over him that impression of vertical infinity already remarked about the little lakes round Brakespeare. Looking down and seeing the spires and chimneys pendent in the pools, they felt alone in space. They felt as if they were looking over the edge from the North Pole and seeing the South Pole below.

"`Hang the world, we said,' observed Smith, `and the world is hanged. "He has hanged the world upon nothing," says the Bible. Do you like being hanged upon nothing? I'm going to be hanged upon something myself. I'm going to swing for you... Dear, tender old phrase,' he murmured; `never true till this moment. I am going to swing for you. For you, dear friend. For your sake. At your express desire.'

"`Help!' cried the Warden of Brakespeare College; `help!'

"`The puppy struggles,' said the undergraduate, with an eye of pity, `the poor puppy struggles. How fortunate it is that I am wiser and kinder than he,' and he sighted his weapon so as exactly to cover the upper part of Eames's bald head.

"`Smith,' said the philosopher with a sudden change to a sort of ghastly lucidity, `I shall go mad.'

"`And so look at things from the right angle,' observed Smith, sighing gently. `Ah, but madness is only a palliative at best, a drug. The only cure is an operation--an operation that is always successful: death.'

"As he spoke the sun rose. It seemed to put colour into everything, with the rapidity of a lightning artist. A fleet of little clouds sailing across the sky changed from pigeon-gray to pink. All over the little academic town the tops of different buildings took on different tints: here the sun would pick out the green enameled on a pinnacle, there the scarlet tiles of a villa; here the copper ornament on some artistic shop, and there the sea-blue slates of some old and steep church roof. All

these coloured crests seemed to have something oddly individual and significant about them, like crests of famous knights pointed out in a pageant or a battlefield: they each arrested the eye, especially the rolling eye of Emerson Eames as he looked round on the morning and accepted it as his last. Through a narrow chink between a black timber tavern and a big gray college he could see a clock with gilt hands which the sunshine set on fire. He stared at it as though hypnotized; and suddenly the clock began to strike, as if in personal reply. As if at a signal, clock after clock took up the cry: all the churches awoke like chickens at cockcrow. The birds were already noisy in the trees behind the college. The sun rose, gathering glory that seemed too full for the deep skies to hold, and the shallow waters beneath them seemed golden and brimming and deep enough for the thirst of the gods. Just round the corner of the College, and visible from his crazy perch, were the brightest specks on that bright landscape, the villa with the spotted blinds which he had made his text that night. He wondered for the first time what people lived in them.

"Suddenly he called out with mere querulous authority, as he might have called to a student to shut a door.

"`Let me come off this place,' he cried; `I can't bear it.'

"`I rather doubt if it will bear you,' said Smith critically; `but before you break your neck, or I blow out your brains, or let you back into this room (on which complex points I am undecided) I want the metaphysical point cleared up. Do I understand that you want to get back to life?'

"`I'd give anything to get back,' replied the unhappy professor.

"`Give anything!' cried Smith; `then, blast your impudence, give us a song!'

"`What song do you mean?' demanded the exasperated Eames; `what song?'

"`A hymn, I think, would be most appropriate,' answered the other gravely. `I'll let you off if you'll repeat after me the words--

"`I thank the goodness and the grace That on my birth have smiled.
And perched me on this curious place, A happy English child.'

"Dr. Emerson Eames having briefly complied, his persecutor abruptly told him to hold his hands up in the air. Vaguely connecting this proceeding with the usual conduct of brigands and bushrangers, Mr. Eames held them up, very stiffly, but without marked surprise. A bird alighting on his stone seat took no more notice of him than of a comic statue.

"`You are now engaged in public worship,' remarked Smith severely, `and before I have done with you, you shall thank God for the very ducks on the pond.'

"The celebrated pessimist half articulately expressed his perfect readiness to thank God for the ducks on the pond.

"`Not forgetting the drakes,' said Smith sternly. (Eames weakly conceded the drakes.) `Not forgetting anything, please. You shall thank heaven for churches and chapels and villas and vulgar people and puddles and pots and pans and sticks and rags and bones and spotted blinds.'

"`All right, all right,' repeated the victim in despair; `sticks and rags and bones and blinds.'

"`Spotted blinds, I think we said,' remarked Smith with a rogueish ruthlessness, and wagging the pistol-barrel at him like a long metallic finger.

"`Spotted blinds,' said Emerson Eames faintly.

"`You can't say fairer than that,' admitted the younger man, `and now I'll just tell you this to wind up with. If you really were what you profess to be, I don't see that it would matter to snail or seraph if you broke your impious stiff neck and dashed out all your drivelling devil-worshipping brains. But in strict biographical fact you are a very nice fellow, addicted to talking putrid nonsense, and I love you like a brother. I shall therefore fire off all my cartridges round your head so as not to hit you (I am a good shot, you may be glad to hear), and then we will go in and have some breakfast.'

"He then let off two barrels in the air, which the Professor endured with singular firmness, and then said, `But don't fire them all off.'

"`Why not' asked the other buoyantly.

"`Keep them,' asked his companion, `for the next man you meet who talks as we were talking.'

"It was at this moment that Smith, looking down, perceived apoplectic terror upon the face of the Sub-Warden, and heard the refined shriek with which he summoned the porter and the ladder.

"It took Dr. Eames some little time to disentangle himself from the ladder, and some little time longer to disentangle himself from the Sub-Warden. But as soon

as he could do so unobtrusively, he rejoined his companion in the late extraordinary scene. He was astonished to find the gigantic Smith heavily shaken, and sitting with his shaggy head on his hands. When addressed, he lifted a very pale face.

"`Why, what is the matter?' asked Eames, whose own nerves had by this time twittered themselves quiet, like the morning birds.

"`I must ask your indulgence,' said Smith, rather brokenly. `I must ask you to realize that I have just had an escape from death.'

"`YOU have had an escape from death?' repeated the Professor in not unpardonable irritation. `Well, of all the cheek--'

"`Oh, don't you understand, don't you understand?' cried the pale young man impatiently. `I had to do it, Eames; I had to prove you wrong or die. When a man's young, he nearly always has some one whom he thinks the top-water mark of the mind of man-- some one who knows all about it, if anybody knows.

"`Well, you were that to me; you spoke with authority, and not as the scribes. Nobody could comfort me if YOU said there was no comfort. If you really thought there was nothing anywhere, it was because you had been there to see. Don't you see that I HAD to prove you didn't really mean it?-- or else drown myself in the canal.'

"`Well,' said Eames hesitatingly, `I think perhaps you confuse--'

"`Oh, don't tell me that!' cried Smith with the sudden clairvoyance of mental pain; `don't tell me I confuse enjoyment of existence with the Will to Live! That's German, and German is High Dutch, and High Dutch is Double Dutch. The thing I saw shining in your eyes when you dangled on that bridge was enjoyment of life and not "the Will to Live." What you knew when you sat on that damned gargoyle was that the world, when all is said and done, is a wonderful and beautiful place; I know it, because I knew it at the same minute. I saw the gray clouds turn pink, and the little gilt clock in the crack between the houses. It was THOSE things you hated leaving, not Life, whatever that is. Eames, we've been to the brink of death together; won't you admit I'm right?'

"`Yes,' said Eames very slowly, `I think you are right. You shall have a First!'

"`Right!' cried Smith, springing up reanimated. `I've passed with honours, and now let me go and see about being sent down.'

"`You needn't be sent down,' said Eames with the quiet confidence of twelve years of intrigue. `Everything with us comes from the man on top to the people just round him: I am the man on top, and I shall tell the people round me the truth.'

"The massive Mr. Smith rose and went firmly to the window, but he spoke with equal firmness. `I must be sent down,' he said, `and the people must not be told the truth.'

"`And why not' asked the other.

"`Because I mean to follow your advice,' answered the massive youth, `I mean to keep the remaining shots for people in the shameful state you and I were in last night--I wish we could even plead drunkenness. I mean to keep those bullets for pessimists--pills for pale people. And in this way I want to walk the world like a wonderful surprise-- to float as idly as the thistledown, and come as silently as the sunrise; not to be expected any more than the thunderbolt, not to be recalled any more than the dying breeze. I don't want people to anticipate me as a well-known practical joke. I want both my gifts to come virgin and violent, the death and the life after death. I am going to hold a pistol to the head of the Modern Man. But I shall not use it to kill him--only to bring him to life. I begin to see a new meaning in being the skeleton at the feast.'

"`You can scarcely be called a skeleton,' said Dr. Eames, smiling.

"`That comes of being so much at the feast,' answered the massive youth. `No skeleton can keep his figure if he is always dining out. But that is not quite what I meant: what I mean is that I caught a kind of glimpse of the meaning of death and all that--the skull and cross-bones, the ~memento mori~. It isn't only meant to remind us of a future life, but to remind us of a present life too. With our weak spirits we should grow old in eternity if we were not kept young by death. Providence has to cut immortality into lengths for us, as nurses cut the bread and butter into fingers.'

"Then he added suddenly in a voice of unnatural actuality, `But I know something now, Eames. I knew it when I saw the clouds turn pink.'

"`What do you mean?' asked Eames. `What did you know?'

"`I knew for the first time that murder is really wrong.'

"He gripped Dr. Eames's hand and groped his way somewhat unsteadily to the door. Before he had vanished through it he had added, `It's very dangerous, though, when a man thinks for a split second that he understands death.'

"Dr. Eames remained in repose and rumination some hours after his late assailant had left. Then he rose, took his hat and umbrella, and went for a brisk if rotatory walk. Several times, however, he stood outside the villa with the spotted blinds, studying them intently with his head slightly on one side. Some took him for a lunatic and some for an intending purchaser. He is not yet sure that the two characters would be widely different.

"The above narrative has been constructed on a principle which is, in the opinion of the undersigned persons, new in the art of letters. Each of the two actors is described as he appeared to the other. But the undersigned persons absolutely guarantee the exactitude of the story; and if their version of the thing be questioned, they, the undersigned persons, would deucedly well like to know who does know about it if they don't.

"The undersigned persons will now adjourn to `The Spotted Dog' for beer. Farewell.

"(Signed) James Emerson Eames, "Warden of Brakespeare College, Cambridge.

"Innocent Smith."