

## **Chapter II - The Two Curates; or, the Burglary Charge**

Arthur Inglewood handed the document he had just read to the leaders of the prosecution, who examined it with their heads together. Both the Jew and the American were of sensitive and excitable stocks, and they revealed by the jumpings and bumpings of the black head and the yellow that nothing could be done in the way of denial of the document. The letter from the Warden was as authentic as the letter from the Sub-Warden, however regrettably different in dignity and social tone.

"Very few words," said Inglewood, "are required to conclude our case in this matter. Surely it is now plain that our client carried his pistol about with the eccentric but innocent purpose of giving a wholesome scare to those whom he regarded as blasphemers. In each case the scare was so wholesome that the victim himself has dated from it as from a new birth. Smith, so far from being a madman, is rather a mad doctor-- he walks the world curing frenzies and not distributing them. That is the answer to the two unanswerable questions which I put to the prosecutors. That is why they dared not produce a line by any one who had actually confronted the pistol. All who had actually confronted the pistol confessed that they had profited by it. That was why Smith, though a good shot, never hit anybody. He never hit anybody because he was a good shot. His mind was as clear of murder as his hands are of blood. This, I say, is the only possible explanation of these facts and of all the other facts. No one can possibly explain the Warden's conduct except by believing the Warden's story. Even Dr. Pym, who is a very factory of ingenious theories, could find no other theory to cover the case."

"There are promising per-spectives in hypnotism and dual personality," said Dr. Cyrus Pym dreamily; "the science of criminology is in its infancy, and--"

"Infancy!" cried Moon, jerking his red pencil in the air with a gesture of enlightenment; "why, that explains it!"

"I repeat," proceeded Inglewood, "that neither Dr. Pym nor any one else can account on any other theory but ours for the Warden's signature, for the shots missed and the witnesses missing."

The little Yankee had slipped to his feet with some return of a cock-fighting coolness. "The defence," he said, "omits a coldly colossal fact. They say we produce none of the actual victims. Wal, here is one victim--England's celebrated and stricken Warner. I reckon he is pretty well produced. And they suggest that

all the outrages were followed by reconciliation. Wal, there's no flies on England's Warner; and he isn't reconciliated much."

"My learned friend," said Moon, getting elaborately to his feet, "must remember that the science of shooting Dr. Warner is in its infancy. Dr. Warner would strike the idlest eye as one specially difficult to startle into any recognition of the glory of God. We admit that our client, in this one instance, failed, and that the operation was not successful. But I am empowered to offer, on behalf of my client, a proposal for operating on Dr. Warner again, at his earliest convenience, and without further fees."

"Ang it all, Michael," cried Gould, quite serious for the first time in his life, "you might give us a bit of bally sense for a chinge."

"What was Dr. Warner talking about just before the first shot?" asked Moon sharply.

"The creature," said Dr. Warner superciliously, "asked me, with characteristic rationality, whether it was my birthday."

"And you answered, with characteristic swank," cried Moon, shooting out a long lean finger, as rigid and arresting as the pistol of Smith, "that you didn't keep your birthday."

"Something like that," assented the doctor.

"Then," continued Moon, "he asked you why not, and you said it was because you didn't see that birth was anything to rejoice over. Agreed? Now is there any one who doubts that our tale is true?"

There was a cold crash of stillness in the room; and Moon said, "Pax populi vox Dei; it is the silence of the people that is the voice of God. Or in Dr. Pym's more civilized language, it is up to him to open the next charge. On this we claim an acquittal."

It was about an hour later. Dr. Cyrus Pym had remained for an unprecedented time with his eyes closed and his thumb and finger in the air. It almost seemed as if he had been "struck so," as the nurses say; and in the deathly silence Michael Moon felt forced to relieve the strain with some remark. For the last half-hour or so the eminent criminologist had been explaining that science took the same view of offences against property as it did of offences against life. "Most murder," he had said, "is a variation of homicidal mania, and in the same way most theft is a version of kleptomania. I cannot entertain any doubt that my learned friends

opposite adequately conceive how this must involve a scheme of punishment more tolerant and humane than the cruel methods of ancient codes. They will doubtless exhibit consciousness of a chasm so eminently yawning, so thought-arresting, so--" It was here that he paused and indulged in the delicate gesture to which allusion has been made; and Michael could bear it no longer.

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently, "we admit the chasm. The old cruel codes accuse a man of theft and send him to prison for ten years. The tolerant and humane ticket accuses him of nothing and sends him to prison for ever. We pass the chasm."

It was characteristic of the eminent Pym, in one of his trances of verbal fastidiousness, that he went on, unconscious not only of his opponent's interruption, but even of his own pause.

"So stock-improving," continued Dr. Cyrus Pym, "so fraught with real high hopes of the future. Science therefore regards thieves, in the abstract, just as it regards murderers. It regards them not as sinners to be punished for an arbitrary period, but as patients to be detained and cared for," (his first two digits closed again as he hesitated)--"in short, for the required period. But there is something special in the case we investigate here. Kleptomania commonly con-joints itself--"

"I beg pardon," said Michael; "I did not ask just now because, to tell the truth, I really thought Dr. Pym, though seemingly vertical, was enjoying well-earned slumber, with a pinch in his fingers of scentless and delicate dust. But now that things are moving a little more, there is something I should really like to know. I have hung on Dr. Pym's lips, of course, with an interest that it were weak to call rapture, but I have so far been unable to form any conjecture about what the accused, in the present instance, is supposed to have been and gone and done."

"If Mr. Moon will have patience," said Pym with dignity, "he will find that this was the very point to which my exposition was directed. Kleptomania, I say, exhibits itself as a kind of physical attraction to certain defined materials; and it has been held (by no less a man than Harris) that this is the ultimate explanation of the strict specialism and very narrow professional outlook of most criminals. One will have an irresistible physical impulsion towards pearl sleeve-links, while he passes over the most elegant and celebrated diamond sleeve-links, placed about in the most conspicuous locations. Another will impede his flight with no less than forty-seven buttoned boots, while elastic-sided boots leave him cold, and even sarcastic. The specialism of the criminal, I repeat, is a mark rather of insanity than of any brightness of business habits; but there is one kind of depredator to whom this principle is at first sight hard to apply. I allude to our fellow-citizen the housebreaker.

"It has been maintained by some of our boldest young truth-seekers, that the eye of a burglar beyond the back-garden wall could hardly be caught and hypnotized by a fork that is insulated in a locked box under the butler's bed. They have thrown down the gauntlet to American science on this point. They declare that diamond links are not left about in conspicuous locations in the haunts of the lower classes, as they were in the great test experiment of Calypso College. We hope this experiment here will be an answer to that young ringing challenge, and will bring the burglar once more into line and union with his fellow criminals."

Moon, whose face had gone through every phase of black bewilderment for five minutes past, suddenly lifted his hand and struck the table in explosive enlightenment.

"Oh, I see!" he cried; "you mean that Smith is a burglar."

"I thought I made it quite ad'quately lucid," said Mr. Pym, folding up his eyelids. It was typical of this topsy-turvy private trial that all the eloquent extras, all the rhetoric or digression on either side, was exasperating and unintelligible to the other. Moon could not make head or tail of the solemnity of a new civilization. Pym could not make head or tail of the gaiety of an old one.

"All the cases in which Smith has figured as an expropriator," continued the American doctor, "are cases of burglary. Pursuing the same course as in the previous case, we select the indubitable instance from the rest, and we take the most correct cast-iron evidence. I will now call on my colleague, Mr. Gould, to read a letter we have received from the earnest, unspotted Canon of Durham, Canon Hawkins."

Mr. Moses Gould leapt up with his usual alacrity to read the letter from the earnest and unspotted Hawkins. Moses Gould could imitate a farmyard well, Sir Henry Irving not so well, Marie Lloyd to a point of excellence, and the new motor horns in a manner that put him upon the platform of great artists. But his imitation of a Canon of Durham was not convincing; indeed, the sense of the letter was so much obscured by the extraordinary leaps and gasps of his pronunciation that it is perhaps better to print it here as Moon read it when, a little later, it was handed across the table.

"Dear Sir,--I can scarcely feel surprise that the incident you mention, private as it was, should have filtered through our omnivorous journals to the mere populace; for the position I have since attained makes me, I conceive, a public character, and this was certainly the most extraordinary incident in a not uneventful and perhaps not an unimportant career. I am by no means without

experience in scenes of civil tumult. I have faced many a political crisis in the old Primrose League days at Herne Bay, and, before I broke with the wilder set, have spent many a night at the Christian Social Union. But this other experience was quite inconceivable. I can only describe it as the letting loose of a place which it is not for me, as a clergyman, to mention.

"It occurred in the days when I was, for a short period, a curate at Hoxton; and the other curate, then my colleague, induced me to attend a meeting which he described, I must say profanely described, as calculated to promote the kingdom of God. I found, on the contrary, that it consisted entirely of men in corduroys and greasy clothes whose manners were coarse and their opinions extreme.

"Of my colleague in question I wish to speak with the fullest respect and friendliness, and I will therefore say little. No one can be more convinced than I of the evil of politics in the pulpit; and I never offer my congregation any advice about voting except in cases in which I feel strongly that they are likely to make an erroneous selection. But, while I do not mean to touch at all upon political or social problems, I must say that for a clergyman to countenance, even in jest, such discredited nostrums of dissipated demagogues as Socialism or Radicalism partakes of the character of the betrayal of a sacred trust. Far be it from me to say a word against the Reverend Raymond Percy, the colleague in question. He was brilliant, I suppose, and to some apparently fascinating; but a clergyman who talks like a Socialist, wears his hair like a pianist, and behaves like an intoxicated person, will never rise in his profession, or even obtain the admiration of the good and wise. Nor is it for me to utter my personal judgements of the appearance of the people in the hall. Yet a glance round the room, revealing ranks of debased and envious faces--"

"Adopting," said Moon explosively, for he was getting restive--"adopting the reverend gentleman's favourite figure of logic, may I say that while tortures would not tear from me a whisper about his intellect, he is a blasted old jackass."

"Really!" said Dr. Pym; "I protest."

"You must keep quiet, Michael," said Inglewood; "they have a right to read their story."

"Chair! Chair! Chair!" cried Gould, rolling about exuberantly in his own; and Pym glanced for a moment towards the canopy which covered all the authority of the Court of Beacon.

"Oh, don't wake the old lady," said Moon, lowering his voice in a moody good-humour. "I apologize. I won't interrupt again."

Before the little eddy of interruption was ended the reading of the clergyman's letter was already continuing.

"The proceedings opened with a speech from my colleague, of which I will say nothing. It was deplorable. Many of the audience were Irish, and showed the weakness of that impetuous people. When gathered together into gangs and conspiracies they seem to lose altogether that lovable good-nature and readiness to accept anything one tells them which distinguishes them as individuals."

With a slight start, Michael rose to his feet, bowed solemnly, and sat down again.

"These persons, if not silent, were at least applaudive during the speech of Mr. Percy. He descended to their level with witticisms about rent and a reserve of labour. Confiscation, expropriation, arbitration, and such words with which I cannot soil my lips, recurred constantly. Some hours afterward the storm broke. I had been addressing the meeting for some time, pointing out the lack of thrift in the working classes, their insufficient attendance at evening service, their neglect of the Harvest Festival, and of many other things that might materially help them to improve their lot. It was, I think, about this time that an extraordinary interruption occurred. An enormous, powerful man, partly concealed with white plaster, arose in the middle of the hall, and offered (in a loud, roaring voice, like a bull's) some observations which seemed to be in a foreign language. Mr. Raymond Percy, my colleague, descended to his level by entering into a duel of repartee, in which he appeared to be the victor. The meeting began to behave more respectfully for a little; yet before I had said twelve sentences more the rush was made for the platform. The enormous plasterer, in particular, plunged towards us, shaking the earth like an elephant; and I really do not know what would have happened if a man equally large, but not quite so ill-dressed, had not jumped up also and held him away. This other big man shouted a sort of speech to the mob as he was shoving them back. I don't know what he said, but, what with shouting and shoving and such horseplay, he got us out at a back door, while the wretched people went roaring down another passage.

"Then follows the truly extraordinary part of my story. When he had got us outside, in a mean backyard of blistered grass leading into a lane with a very lonely-looking lamp-post, this giant addressed me as follows: 'You're well out of that, sir; now you'd better come along with me. I want you to help me in an act of social justice, such as we've all been talking about. Come along!' And turning his big back abruptly, he led us down the lean old lane with the one lean old lamp-post, we scarcely knowing what to do but to follow him. He had certainly helped us in a most difficult situation, and, as a gentleman, I could not treat such a benefactor with suspicion without grave grounds. Such also was the view

of my Socialistic colleague, who (with all his dreadful talk of arbitration) is a gentleman also. In fact, he comes of the Staffordshire Percys, a branch of the old house and has the black hair and pale, clear-cut face of the whole family. I cannot but refer it to vanity that he should heighten his personal advantages with black velvet or a red cross of considerable ostentation, and certainly--but I digress.

"A fog was coming up the street, and that last lost lamp-post faded behind us in a way that certainly depressed the mind. The large man in front of us looked larger and larger in the haze. He did not turn round, but he said with his huge back to us, 'All that talking's no good; we want a little practical Socialism.'

"I quite agree,' said Percy; 'but I always like to understand things in theory before I put them into practice.'

"'Oh, you just leave that to me,' said the practical Socialist, or whatever he was, with the most terrifying vagueness. 'I have a way with me. I'm a Permeator.'

"I could not imagine what he meant, but my companion laughed, so I was sufficiently reassured to continue the unaccountable journey for the present. It led us through most singular ways; out of the lane, where we were already rather cramped, into a paved passage, at the end of which we passed through a wooden gate left open. We then found ourselves, in the increasing darkness and vapour, crossing what appeared to be a beaten path across a kitchen garden. I called out to the enormous person going on in front, but he answered obscurely that it was a short cut.

"I was just repeating my very natural doubt to my clerical companion when I was brought up against a short ladder, apparently leading to a higher level of road. My thoughtless colleague ran up it so quickly that I could not do otherwise than follow as best I could. The path on which I then planted my feet was quite unprecedentedly narrow. I had never had to walk along a thoroughfare so exiguous. Along one side of it grew what, in the dark and density of air, I first took to be some short, strong thicket of shrubs. Then I saw that they were not short shrubs; they were the tops of tall trees. I, an English gentleman and clergyman of the Church of England--I was walking along the top of a garden wall like a tom cat.

"I am glad to say that I stopped within my first five steps, and let loose my just reprobation, balancing myself as best I could all the time.

"'It's a right-of-way,' declared my indefensible informant. 'It's closed to traffic once in a hundred years.'

"Mr. Percy, Mr. Percy!' I called out; 'you are not going on with this blackguard?'

"Why, I think so,' answered my unhappy colleague flippantly. 'I think you and I are bigger blackguards than he is, whatever he is.'

"I am a burglar,' explained the big creature quite calmly. 'I am a member of the Fabian Society. I take back the wealth stolen by the capitalist, not by sweeping civil war and revolution, but by reform fitted to the special occasion--here a little and there a little. Do you see that fifth house along the terrace with the flat roof? I'm permeating that one to-night.'

"Whether this is a crime or a joke,' I cried, 'I desire to be quit of it.'

"The ladder is just behind you,' answered the creature with horrible courtesy; 'and, before you go, do let me give you my card.'

"If I had had the presence of mind to show any proper spirit I should have flung it away, though any adequate gesture of the kind would have gravely affected my equilibrium upon the wall. As it was, in the wildness of the moment, I put it in my waistcoat pocket, and, picking my way back by wall and ladder, landed in the respectable streets once more. Not before, however, I had seen with my own eyes the two awful and lamentable facts-- that the burglar was climbing up a slanting roof towards the chimneys, and that Raymond Percy (a priest of God and, what was worse, a gentleman) was crawling up after him. I have never seen either of them since that day.

"In consequence of this soul-searching experience I severed my connection with the wild set. I am far from saying that every member of the Christian Social Union must necessarily be a burglar. I have no right to bring any such charge. But it gave me a hint of what such courses may lead to in many cases; and I saw them no more.

"I have only to add that the photograph you enclose, taken by a Mr. Inglewood, is undoubtedly that of the burglar in question. When I got home that night I looked at his card, and he was inscribed there under the name of Innocent Smith.--

Yours faithfully,

"John Clement Hawkins."

Moon merely went through the form of glancing at the paper. He knew that the prosecutors could not have invented so heavy a document; that Moses Gould (for one) could no more write like a canon than he could read like one. After handing it back he rose to open the defence on the burglary charge.



"We wish," said Michael, "to give all reasonable facilities to the prosecution; especially as it will save the time of the whole court. The latter object I shall once again pursue by passing over all those points of theory which are so dear to Dr. Pym. I know how they are made. Perjury is a variety of aphasia, leading a man to say one thing instead of another. Forgery is a kind of writer's cramp, forcing a man to write his uncle's name instead of his own. Piracy on the high seas is probably a form of sea-sickness. But it is unnecessary for us to inquire into the causes of a fact which we deny. Innocent Smith never did commit burglary at all.

"I should like to claim the power permitted by our previous arrangement, and ask the prosecution two or three questions."

Dr. Cyrus Pym closed his eyes to indicate a courteous assent.

"In the first place," continued Moon, "have you the date of Canon Hawkins's last glimpse of Smith and Percy climbing up the walls and roofs?"

"Ho, yus!" called out Gould smartly. "November thirteen, eighteen ninety-one."

"Have you," continued Moon, "identified the houses in Hoxton up which they climbed?"

"Must have been Ladysmith Terrace out of the highroad," answered Gould with the same clockwork readiness.

"Well," said Michael, cocking an eyebrow at him, "was there any burglary in that terrace that night? Surely you could find that out."

"There may well have been," said the doctor primly, after a pause, "an unsuccessful one that led to no legalities."

"Another question," proceeded Michael. "Canon Hawkins, in his blood-and-thunder boyish way, left off at the exciting moment. Why don't you produce the evidence of the other clergyman, who actually followed the burglar and presumably was present at the crime?"

Dr. Pym rose and planted the points of his fingers on the table, as he did when he was specially confident of the clearness of his reply.

"We have entirely failed," he said, "to track the other clergyman, who seems to have melted into the ether after Canon Hawkins had seen him ascending the gutters and the leads. I am fully aware that this may strike many as singular; yet, upon reflection, I think it will appear pretty natural to a bright thinker. This Mr.

Raymond Percy is admittedly, by the canon's evidence, a minister of eccentric ways. His connection with England's proudest and fairest does not seemingly prevent a taste for the society of the real low-down. On the other hand, the prisoner Smith is, by general agreement, a man of irresistible fascination. I entertain no doubt that Smith led the Reverend Percy into the crime and forced him to hide his head in the real criminal class. That would fully account for his non-appearance, and the failure of all attempts to trace him."

"It is impossible, then, to trace him?" asked Moon.

"Impossible," repeated the specialist, shutting his eyes.

"You are sure it's impossible?"

"Oh dry up, Michael," cried Gould, irritably. "We'd 'ave found 'im if we could, for you bet 'e saw the burglary. Don't YOU start looking for 'im. Look for your own 'ead in the dustbin. You'll find that--after a bit," and his voice died away in grumbling.

"Arthur," directed Michael Moon, sitting down, "kindly read Mr. Raymond Percy's letter to the court."

"Wishing, as Mr. Moon has said, to shorten the proceedings as much as possible," began Inglewood, "I will not read the first part of the letter sent to us. It is only fair to the prosecution to admit the account given by the second clergyman fully ratifies, as far as facts are concerned, that given by the first clergyman. We concede, then, the canon's story so far as it goes. This must necessarily be valuable to the prosecutor and also convenient to the court. I begin Mr. Percy's letter, then, at the point when all three men were standing on the garden wall:--

"As I watched Hawkins wavering on the wall, I made up my own mind not to waver. A cloud of wrath was on my brain, like the cloud of copper fog on the houses and gardens round. My decision was violent and simple; yet the thoughts that led up to it were so complicated and contradictory that I could not retrace them now. I knew Hawkins was a kind, innocent gentleman; and I would have given ten pounds for the pleasure of kicking him down the road. That God should allow good people to be as bestially stupid as that-- rose against me like a towering blasphemy.

"At Oxford, I fear, I had the artistic temperament rather badly; and artists love to be limited. I liked the church as a pretty pattern; discipline was mere decoration. I delighted in mere divisions of time; I liked eating fish on Friday. But then I like fish; and the fast was made for men who like meat. Then I came to Hoxton and

found men who had fasted for five hundred years; men who had to gnaw fish because they could not get meat--and fish-bones when they could not get fish. As too many British officers treat the army as a review, so I had treated the Church Militant as if it were the Church Pageant. Hoxton cures that. Then I realized that for eighteen hundred years the Church Militant had not been a pageant, but a riot--and a suppressed riot. There, still living patiently in Hoxton, were the people to whom the tremendous promises had been made. In the face of that I had to become a revolutionary if I was to continue to be religious. In Hoxton one cannot be a conservative without being also an atheist-- and a pessimist. Nobody but the devil could want to conserve Hoxton.

"On the top of all this comes Hawkins. If he had cursed all the Hoxton men, excommunicated them, and told them they were going to hell, I should have rather admired him. If he had ordered them all to be burned in the market-place, I should still have had that patience that all good Christians have with the wrongs inflicted on other people. But there is no priestcraft about Hawkins--nor any other kind of craft. He is as perfectly incapable of being a priest as he is of being a carpenter or a cabman or a gardener or a plasterer. He is a perfect gentleman; that is his complaint. He does not impose his creed, but simply his class. He never said a word of religion in the whole of his damnable address. He simply said all the things his brother, the major, would have said. A voice from heaven assures me that he has a brother, and that this brother is a major.

"When this helpless aristocrat had praised cleanliness in the body and convention in the soul to people who could hardly keep body and soul together, the stampede against our platform began. I took part in his undeserved rescue, I followed his obscure deliverer, until (as I have said) we stood together on the wall above the dim gardens, already clouding with fog. Then I looked at the curate and at the burglar, and decided, in a spasm of inspiration, that the burglar was the better man of the two. The burglar seemed quite as kind and human as the curate was--and he was also brave and self-reliant, which the curate was not. I knew there was no virtue in the upper class, for I belong to it myself; I knew there was not so very much in the lower class, for I had lived with it a long time. Many old texts about the despised and persecuted came back to my mind, and I thought that the saints might well be hidden in the criminal class. About the time Hawkins let himself down the ladder I was crawling up a low, sloping, blue-slate roof after the large man, who went leaping in front of me like a gorilla.

"This upward scramble was short, and we soon found ourselves tramping along a broad road of flat roofs, broader than many big thoroughfares, with chimney-pots here and there that seemed in the haze as bulky as small forts. The asphyxiation of the fog seemed to increase the somewhat swollen and morbid anger under which my brain and body laboured. The sky and all those things that are

commonly clear seemed overpowered by sinister spirits. Tall spectres with turbans of vapour seemed to stand higher than the sun or moon, eclipsing both. I thought dimly of illustrations to the 'Arabian Nights' on brown paper with rich but sombre tints, showing genii gathering round the Seal of Solomon. By the way, what was the Seal of Solomon? Nothing to do with sealing-wax really, I suppose; but my muddled fancy felt the thick clouds as being of that heavy and clinging substance, of strong opaque colour, poured out of boiling pots and stamped into monstrous emblems.

"The first effect of the tall turbaned vapours was that discoloured look of pea-soup or coffee brown of which Londoners commonly speak. But the scene grew subtler with familiarity. We stood above the average of the housetops and saw something of that thing called smoke, which in great cities creates the strange thing called fog. Beneath us rose a forest of chimney-pots. And there stood in every chimney-pot, as if it were a flower-pot, a brief shrub or a tall tree of coloured vapour. The colours of the smoke were various; for some chimneys were from firesides and some from factories, and some again from mere rubbish heaps. And yet, though the tints were all varied, they all seemed unnatural, like fumes from a witch's pot. It was as if the shameful and ugly shapes growing shapeless in the cauldron sent up each its separate spurt of steam, coloured according to the fish or flesh consumed. Here, aglow from underneath, were dark red clouds, such as might drift from dark jars of sacrificial blood; there the vapour was dark indigo gray, like the long hair of witches steeped in the hell-broth. In another place the smoke was of an awful opaque ivory yellow, such as might be the disembodiment of one of their old, leprous waxen images. But right across it ran a line of bright, sinister, sulphurous green, as clear and crooked as Arabic--"

Mr. Moses Gould once more attempted the arrest of the 'bus. He was understood to suggest that the reader should shorten the proceedings by leaving out all the adjectives. Mrs. Duke, who had woken up, observed that she was sure it was all very nice, and the decision was duly noted down by Moses with a blue, and by Michael with a red pencil. Inglewood then resumed the reading of the document.

"Then I read the writing of the smoke. Smoke was like the modern city that makes it; it is not always dull or ugly, but it is always wicked and vain.

"Modern England was like a cloud of smoke; it could carry all colours, but it could leave nothing but a stain. It was our weakness and not our strength that put a rich refuse in the sky. These were the rivers of our vanity pouring into the void. We had taken the sacred circle of the whirlwind, and looked down on it, and seen it as a whirlpool. And then we had used it as a sink. It was a good symbol of the mutiny in my own mind. Only our worst things were going to heaven. Only our criminals could still ascend like angels.

"As my brain was blinded with such emotions, my guide stopped by one of the big chimney-pots that stood at the regular intervals like lamp-posts along that uplifted and aerial highway. He put his heavy hand upon it, and for the moment I thought he was merely leaning on it, tired with his steep scramble along the terrace. So far as I could guess from the abysses, full of fog on either side, and the veiled lights of red brown and old gold glowing through them now and again, we were on the top of one of those long, consecutive, and genteel rows of houses which are still to be found lifting their heads above poorer districts, the remains of some rage of optimism in earlier speculative builders. Probably enough, they were entirely untenanted, or tenanted only by such small clans of the poor as gather also in the old emptied palaces of Italy. Indeed, some little time later, when the fog had lifted a little, I discovered that we were walking round a semi-circle of crescent which fell away below us into one flat square or wide street below another, like a giant stairway, in a manner not unknown in the eccentric building of London, and looking like the last ledges of the land. But a cloud sealed the giant stairway as yet.

"My speculations about the sullen skyscape, however, were interrupted by something as unexpected as the moon falling from the sky. Instead of my burglar lifting his hand from the chimney he leaned on, he leaned on it a little more heavily, and the whole chimney-pot turned over like the opening top of an inkstand. I remembered the short ladder leaning against the low wall and felt sure he had arranged his criminal approach long before.

"The collapse of the big chimney-pot ought to have been the culmination of my chaotic feelings; but, to tell the truth, it produced a sudden sense of comedy and even of comfort. I could not recall what connected this abrupt bit of housebreaking with some quaint but still kindly fancies. Then I remembered the delightful and uproarious scenes of roofs and chimneys in the harlequinades of my childhood, and was darkly and quite irrationally comforted by a sense of unsubstantiality in the scene, as if the houses were of lath and paint and pasteboard, and were only meant to be tumbled in and out of by policemen and pantaloons. The law-breaking of my companion seemed not only seriously excusable, but even comically excusable. Who were all these pompous preposterous people with their footmen and their foot-scrapers, their chimney-pots and their chimney-pot hats, that they should prevent a poor clown from getting sausages if he wanted them? One would suppose that property was a serious thing. I had reached, as it were, a higher level of that mountainous and vapourous visions, the heaven of a higher levity.

"My guide had jumped down into the dark cavity revealed by the displaced chimney-pot. He must have landed at a level considerably lower, for, tall as he

was, nothing but his weirdly tousled head remained visible. Something again far off, and yet familiar, pleased me about this way of invading the houses of men. I thought of little chimney-sweeps, and 'The Water Babies;' but I decided that it was not that. Then I remembered what it was that made me connect such topsyturvy trespass with ideas quite opposite to the idea of crime. Christmas Eve, of course, and Santa Claus coming down the chimney.

"Almost at the same instant the hairy head disappeared into the black hole; but I heard a voice calling to me from below. A second or two afterwards, the hairy head reappeared; it was dark against the more fiery part of the fog, and nothing could be spelt of its expression, but its voice called on me to follow with that enthusiastic impatience proper only among old friends. I jumped into the gulf, and as blindly as Curtius, for I was still thinking of Santa Claus and the traditional virtue of such vertical entrance.

"In every well-appointed gentleman's house, I reflected, there was the front door for the gentlemen, and the side door for the tradesmen; but there was also the top door for the gods. The chimney is, so to speak, the underground passage between earth and heaven. By this starry tunnel Santa Claus manages--like the skylark-- to be true to the kindred points of heaven and home. Nay, owing to certain conventions, and a widely distributed lack of courage for climbing, this door was, perhaps, little used. But Santa Claus's door was really the front door: it was the door fronting the universe.

"I thought this as I groped my way across the black garret, or loft below the roof, and scrambled down the squat ladder that let us down into a yet larger loft below. Yet it was not till I was half-way down the ladder that I suddenly stood still, and thought for an instant of retracing all my steps, as my companion had retraced them from the beginning of the garden wall. The name of Santa Claus had suddenly brought me back to my senses. I remembered why Santa Clause came, and why he was welcome.

"I was brought up in the propertied classes, and with all their horror of offences against property. I had heard all the regular denunciations of robbery, both right and wrong; I had read the Ten Commandments in church a thousand times. And then and there, at the age of thirty-four, half-way down a ladder in a dark room in the bodily act of burglar, I saw suddenly for the first time that theft, after all, is really wrong.

"It was too late to turn back, however, and I followed the strangely soft footsteps of my huge companion across the lower and larger loft, till he knelt down on a part of the bare flooring and, after a few fumbling efforts, lifted a sort of trapdoor. This released a light from below, and we found ourselves looking down into a

lamp-lit sitting room, of the sort that in large houses often leads out of a bedroom, and is an adjunct to it. Light thus breaking from beneath our feet like a soundless explosion, showed that the trapdoor just lifted was clogged with dust and rust, and had doubtless been long disused until the advent of my enterprising friend. But I did not look at this long, for the sight of the shining room underneath us had an almost unnatural attractiveness. To enter a modern interior at so strange an angle, by so forgotten a door, was an epoch in one's psychology. It was like having found a fourth dimension.

"My companion dropped from the aperture into the room so suddenly and soundlessly, that I could do nothing but follow him; though, for lack of practice in crime, I was by no means soundless. Before the echo of my boots had died away, the big burglar had gone quickly to the door, half opened it, and stood looking down the staircase and listening. Then, leaving the door still half open, he came back into the middle of the room, and ran his roving blue eye round its furniture and ornament. The room was comfortably lined with books in that rich and human way that makes the walls seem alive; it was a deep and full, but slovenly, bookcase, of the sort that is constantly ransacked for the purposes of reading in bed. One of those stunted German stoves that look like red goblins stood in a corner, and a sideboard of walnut wood with closed doors in its lower part. There were three windows, high but narrow. After another glance round, my housebreaker plucked the walnut doors open and rummaged inside. He found nothing there, apparently, except an extremely handsome cut-glass decanter, containing what looked like port. Somehow the sight of the thief returning with this ridiculous little luxury in his hand woke within me once more all the revelation and revulsion I had felt above.

"Don't do it! I cried quite incoherently, `Santa Claus--'

"Ah,' said the burglar, as he put the decanter on the table and stood looking at me, `you've thought about that, too.'

"I can't express a millionth part of what I've thought of,' I cried, `but it's something like this... oh, can't you see it? Why are children not afraid of Santa Claus, though he comes like a thief in the night? He is permitted secrecy, trespass, almost treachery--because there are more toys where he has been. What should we feel if there were less? Down what chimney from hell would come the goblin that should take away the children's balls and dolls while they slept? Could a Greek tragedy be more gray and cruel than that daybreak and awakening? Dog-stealer, horse-stealer, man-stealer--can you think of anything so base as a toy-stealer?'

"The burglar, as if absently, took a large revolver from his pocket and laid it on

the table beside the decanter, but still kept his blue reflective eyes fixed on my face.

"Man! I said, `all stealing is toy-stealing. That's why it's really wrong. The goods of the unhappy children of men should be really respected because of their worthlessness. I know Naboth's vineyard is as painted as Noah's Ark. I know Nathan's ewe-lamb is really a woolly baa-lamb on a wooden stand. That is why I could not take them away. I did not mind so much, as long as I thought of men's things as their valuables; but I dare not put a hand upon their vanities.'

"After a moment I added abruptly, `Only saints and sages ought to be robbed. They may be stripped and pillaged; but not the poor little worldly people of the things that are their poor little pride.'

"He set out two wineglasses from the cupboard, filled them both, and lifted one of them with a salutation towards his lips.

"Don't do it! I cried. `It might be the last bottle of some rotten vintage or other. The master of this house may be quite proud of it. Don't you see there's something sacred in the silliness of such things?'

"It's not the last bottle,' answered my criminal calmly; `there's plenty more in the cellar.'

"You know the house, then?' I said.

"Too well,' he answered, with a sadness so strange as to have something eerie about it. `I am always trying to forget what I know-- and to find what I don't know.' He drained his glass. `Besides,' he added, `it will do him good.'

"What will do him good?'

"The wine I'm drinking,' said the strange person.

"Does he drink too much, then?' I inquired.

"No,' he answered, `not unless I do.'

"Do you mean,' I demanded, `that the owner of this house approves of all you do?'

"God forbid,' he answered; `but he has to do the same.'



"The dead face of the fog looking in at all three windows unreasonable increased a sense of riddle, and even terror, about this tall, narrow house we had entered out of the sky. I had once more the notion about the gigantic genii-- I fancied that enormous Egyptian faces, of the dead reds and yellows of Egypt, were staring in at each window of our little lamp-lit room as at a lighted stage of marionettes. My companion went on playing with the pistol in front of him, and talking with the same rather creepy confidentiality.

"I am always trying to find him--to catch him unawares. I come in through skylights and trapdoors to find him; but whenever I find him--he is doing what I am doing.'

"I sprang to my feet with a thrill of fear. 'There is some one coming,' I cried, and my cry had something of a shriek in it. Not from the stairs below, but along the passage from the inner bedchamber (which seemed somehow to make it more alarming), footsteps were coming nearer. I am quite unable to say what mystery, or monster, or double, I expected to see when the door was pushed open from within. I am only quite certain that I did not expect to see what I did see.

"Framed in the open doorway stood, with an air of great serenity, a rather tall young woman, definitely though indefinably artistic-- her dress the colour of spring and her hair of autumn leaves, with a face which, though still comparatively young, conveyed experience as well as intelligence. All she said was, 'I didn't hear you come in.'

"I came in another way,' said the Permeator, somewhat vaguely. 'I'd left my latchkey at home.'

"I got to my feet in a mixture of politeness and mania. 'I'm really very sorry,' I cried. 'I know my position is irregular. Would you be so obliging as to tell me whose house this is?'

"'Mine,' said the burglar, 'May I present you to my wife?'

"I doubtfully, and somewhat slowly, resumed my seat; and I did not get out of it till nearly morning. Mrs. Smith (such was the prosaic name of this far from prosaic household) lingered a little, talking slightly and pleasantly. She left on my mind the impression of a certain odd mixture of shyness and sharpness; as if she knew the world well, but was still a little harmlessly afraid of it. Perhaps the possession of so jumpy and incalculable a husband had left her a little nervous. Anyhow, when she had retired to the inner chamber once more, that extraordinary man poured forth his apologia and autobiography over the dwindling wine.

"He had been sent to Cambridge with a view to a mathematical and scientific, rather than a classical or literary, career. A starless nihilism was then the philosophy of the schools; and it bred in him a war between the members and the spirit, but one in which the members were right. While his brain accepted the black creed, his very body rebelled against it. As he put it, his right hand taught him terrible things. As the authorities of Cambridge University put it, unfortunately, it had taken the form of his right hand flourishing a loaded firearm in the very face of a distinguished don, and driving him to climb out of the window and cling to a waterspout. He had done it solely because the poor don had professed in theory a preference for non-existence. For this very unacademic type of argument he had been sent down. Vomiting as he was with revulsion, from the pessimism that had quailed under his pistol, he made himself a kind of fanatic of the joy of life. He cut across all the associations of serious-minded men. He was gay, but by no means careless. His practical jokes were more in earnest than verbal ones. Though not an optimist in the absurd sense of maintaining that life is all beer and skittles, he did really seem to maintain that beer and skittles are the most serious part of it. 'What is more immortal,' he would cry, 'than love and war? Type of all desire and joy--beer. Type of all battle and conquest--skittles.'

"There was something in him of what the old world called the solemnity of revels--when they spoke of 'solemnizing' a mere masquerade or wedding banquet. Nevertheless he was not a mere pagan any more than he was a mere practical joker. His eccentricities sprang from a static fact of faith, in itself mystical, and even childlike and Christian.

"I don't deny,' he said, 'that there should be priests to remind men that they will one day die. I only say that at certain strange epochs it is necessary to have another kind of priests, called poets, actually to remind men that they are not dead yet. The intellectuals among whom I moved were not even alive enough to fear death. They hadn't enough blood in them to be cowards. Until a pistol barrel was poked under their very noses they never even knew they had been born. For ages looking up an eternal perspective it might be true that life is a learning to die. But for these little white rats it was just as true that death was their only chance of learning to live.'

"His creed of wonder was Christian by this absolute test; that he felt it continually slipping from himself as much as from others. He had the same pistol for himself, as Brutus said of the dagger. He continually ran preposterous risks of high precipice or headlong speed to keep alive the mere conviction that he was alive. He treasured up trivial and yet insane details that had once reminded him of the awful subconscious reality. When the don had hung on the stone gutter,

the sight of his long dangling legs, vibrating in the void like wings, somehow awoke the naked satire of the old definition of man as a two-legged animal without feathers. The wretched professor had been brought into peril by his head, which he had so elaborately cultivated, and only saved by his legs, which he had treated with coldness and neglect. Smith could think of no other way of announcing or recording this, except to send a telegram to an old friend (by this time a total stranger) to say that he had just seen a man with two legs; and that the man was alive.

"The uprush of his released optimism burst into stars like a rocket when he suddenly fell in love. He happened to be shooting a high and very headlong weir in a canoe, by way of proving to himself that he was alive; and he soon found himself involved in some doubt about the continuance of the fact. What was worse, he found he had equally jeopardized a harmless lady alone in a rowing-boat, and one who had provoked death by no professions of philosophic negation. He apologized in wild gasps through all his wild wet labours to bring her to the shore, and when he had done so at last, he seems to have proposed to her on the bank. Anyhow, with the same impetuosity with which he had nearly murdered her, he completely married her; and she was the lady in green to whom I had recently said `good-night.'

"They had settled down in these high narrow houses near Highbury. Perhaps, indeed, that is hardly the word. One could strictly say that Smith was married, that he was very happily married, that he not only did not care for any woman but his wife, but did not seem to care for any place but his home; but perhaps one could hardly say that he had settled down. `I am a very domestic fellow,' he explained with gravity, `and have often come in through a broken window rather than be late for tea.'

"He lashed his soul with laughter to prevent it falling asleep. He lost his wife a series of excellent servants by knocking at the door as a total stranger, and asking if Mr. Smith lived there and what kind of a man he was. The London general servant is not used to the master indulging in such transcendental ironies. And it was found impossible to explain to her that he did it in order to feel the same interest in his own affairs that he always felt in other people's.

"`I know there's a fellow called Smith,' he said in his rather weird way, `living in one of the tall houses in this terrace. I know he is really happy, and yet I can never catch him at it.'

"Sometimes he would, of a sudden, treat his wife with a kind of paralyzed politeness, like a young stranger struck with love at first sight. Sometimes he would extend this poetic fear to the very furniture; would seem to apologize to the

chair he sat on, and climb the staircase as cautiously as a cragsman, to renew in himself the sense of their skeleton of reality. Every stair is a ladder and every stool a leg, he said. And at other times he would play the stranger exactly in the opposite sense, and would enter by another way, so as to feel like a thief and a robber. He would break and violate his own home, as he had done with me that night. It was near morning before I could tear myself from this queer confidence of the Man Who Would Not Die, and as I shook hands with him on the doorstep the last load of fog was lifting, and rifts of daylight revealed the stairway of irregular street levels that looked like the end of the world.

"It will be enough for many to say that I had passed a night with a maniac. What other term, it will be said, could be applied to such a being? A man who reminds himself that he is married by pretending not to be married! A man who tries to covet his own goods instead of his neighbor's! On this I have but one word to say, and I feel it of my honour to say it, though no one understands. I believe the maniac was one of those who do not merely come, but are sent; sent like a great gale upon ships by Him who made His angels winds and His messengers a flaming fire. This, at least, I know for certain. Whether such men have laughed or wept, we have laughed at their laughter as much as at their weeping. Whether they cursed or blessed the world, they have never fitted it. It is true that men have shrunk from the sting of a great satirist as if from the sting of an adder. But it is equally true that men flee from the embrace of a great optimist as from the embrace of a bear. Nothing brings down more curses than a real benediction. For the goodness of good things, like the badness of bad things, is a prodigy past speech; it is to be pictured rather than spoken. We shall have gone deeper than the deeps of heaven and grown older than the oldest angels before we feel, even in its first faint vibrations, the everlasting violence of that double passion with which God hates and loves the world.--I am, yours faithfully,  
"Raymond Percy."

"Oh, 'oly, 'oly, 'oly!" said Mr. Moses Gould.

The instant he had spoken all the rest knew they had been in an almost religious state of submission and assent. Something had bound them together; something in the sacred tradition of the last two words of the letter; something also in the touching and boyish embarrassment with which Inglewood had read them-- for he had all the thin-skinned reverence of the agnostic. Moses Gould was as good a fellow in his way as ever lived; far kinder to his family than more refined men of pleasure, simple and steadfast in his admiration, a thoroughly wholesome animal and a thoroughly genuine character. But wherever there is conflict, crises come in which any soul, personal or racial, unconsciously turns on the world the most hateful of its hundred faces. English reverence, Irish mysticism, American idealism, looked up and saw on the face of Moses a certain smile. It was that

smile of the Cynic Triumphant, which has been the tocsin for many a cruel riot in Russian villages or mediaeval towns.

"Oh, 'oly, 'oly, 'oly!" said Moses Gould.

Finding that this was not well received, he explained further, exuberance deepening on his dark exuberant features.

"Always fun to see a bloke swallow a wasp when 'e's corfin' up a fly," he said pleasantly. "Don't you see you've bunged up old Smith anyhow. If this parson's tale's O.K.--why, Smith is 'ot. 'E's pretty 'ot. We find him elopin' with Miss Gray (best respects!) in a cab. Well, what abart this Mrs. Smith the curate talks of, with her blarsted shyness--transmigogrified into a blighted sharpness? Miss Gray ain't been very sharp, but I reckon she'll be pretty shy."

"Don't be a brute," growled Michael Moon.

None could lift their eyes to look at Mary; but Inglewood sent a glance along the table at Innocent Smith. He was still bowed above his paper toys, and a wrinkle was on his forehead that might have been worry or shame. He carefully plucked out one corner of a complicated paper and tucked it in elsewhere; then the wrinkle vanished and he looked relieved.