

BOOK III

CHAPTER I--The Mental Condition of Adam Wayne

A little while after the King's accession a small book of poems appeared, called "Hymns on the Hill." They were not good poems, nor was the book successful, but it attracted a certain amount of attention from one particular school of critics. The King himself, who was a member of the school, reviewed it in his capacity of literary critic to "Straight from the Stables," a sporting journal. They were known as the Hammock School, because it had been calculated malignantly by an enemy that no less than thirteen of their delicate criticisms had begun with the words, "I read this book in a hammock: half asleep in the sleepy sunlight, I ..."; after that there were important differences. Under these conditions they liked everything, but especially everything silly. "Next to authentic goodness in a book," they said--"next to authentic goodness in a book (and that, alas! we never find) we desire a rich badness." Thus it happened that their praise (as indicating the presence of a rich badness) was not universally sought after, and authors became a little disquieted when they found the eye of the Hammock School fixed upon them with peculiar favour.

The peculiarity of "Hymns on the Hill" was the celebration of the poetry of London as distinct from the poetry of the country. This sentiment or affectation was, of course, not uncommon in the twentieth century, nor was it, although sometimes exaggerated, and sometimes artificial, by any means without a great truth at its root, for there is one respect in which a town must be more poetical than the country, since it is closer to the spirit of man; for London, if it be not one of the masterpieces of man, is at least one of his sins. A street is really more poetical than a meadow, because a street has a secret. A street is going somewhere, and a meadow nowhere. But, in the case of the book called "Hymns on the Hill," there was another peculiarity, which the King pointed out with great acumen in his review. He was naturally interested in the matter, for he had himself published a volume of lyrics about London under his pseudonym of "Daisy Daydream."

This difference, as the King pointed out, consisted in the fact that, while mere artificers like "Daisy Daydream" (on whose elaborate style the King, over his signature of "Thunderbolt," was perhaps somewhat too severe) thought to praise London by comparing it to the country--using nature, that is, as a background from which all poetical images had to be drawn--the more robust author of "Hymns on the Hill" praised the country, or nature, by comparing it to the town,

and used the town itself as a background. "Take," said the critic, "the typically feminine lines, 'To the Inventor of The Hansom Cab'--

'Poet, whose cunning carved this amorous shell, Where twain may dwell.'

"Surely," wrote the King, "no one but a woman could have written those lines. A woman has always a weakness for nature; with her art is only beautiful as an echo or shadow of it. She is praising the hansom cab by theme and theory, but her soul is still a child by the sea, picking up shells. She can never be utterly of the town, as a man can; indeed, do we not speak (with sacred propriety) of 'a man about town'? Who ever spoke of a woman about town? However much, physically, 'about town' a woman may be, she still models herself on nature; she tries to carry nature with her; she bids grasses to grow on her head, and furry beasts to bite her about the throat. In the heart of a dim city, she models her hat on a flaring cottage garden of flowers. We, with our nobler civic sentiment, model ours on a chimney pot; the ensign of civilisation. And rather than be without birds, she will commit massacre, that she may turn her head into a tree, with dead birds to sing on it."

This kind of thing went on for several pages, and then the critic remembered his subject, and returned to it.

"Poet, whose cunning carved this amorous shell, Where twain may dwell."

"The peculiarity of these fine though feminine lines," continued "Thunderbolt," "is, as we have said, that they praise the hansom cab by comparing it to the shell, to a natural thing. Now, hear the author of 'Hymns on the Hill,' and how he deals with the same subject. In his fine nocturne, entitled 'The Last Omnibus' he relieves the rich and poignant melancholy of the theme by a sudden sense of rushing at the end--

'The wind round the old street corner Swung sudden and quick as a cab.'

"Here the distinction is obvious. 'Daisy Daydream' thinks it a great compliment to a hansom cab to be compared to one of the spiral chambers of the sea. And the author of 'Hymns on the Hill' thinks it a great compliment to the immortal whirlwind to be compared to a hackney coach. He surely is the real admirer of London. We have no space to speak of all his perfect applications of the idea; of the poem in which, for instance, a lady's eyes are compared, not to stars, but to two perfect street-lamps guiding the wanderer. We have no space to speak of the fine lyric, recalling the Elizabethan spirit, in which the poet, instead of saying that the rose and the lily contend in her complexion, says, with a purer modernism, that the red omnibus of Hammersmith and the white omnibus of

Fulham fight there for the mastery. How perfect the image of two contending omnibuses!"

Here, somewhat abruptly, the review concluded, probably because the King had to send off his copy at that moment, as he was in some want of money. But the King was a very good critic, whatever he may have been as King, and he had, to a considerable extent, hit the right nail on the head. "Hymns on the Hill" was not at all like the poems originally published in praise of the poetry of London. And the reason was that it was really written by a man who had seen nothing else but London, and who regarded it, therefore, as the universe. It was written by a raw, red-headed lad of seventeen, named Adam Wayne, who had been born in Notting Hill. An accident in his seventh year prevented his being taken away to the seaside, and thus his whole life had been passed in his own Pump Street, and in its neighbourhood. And the consequence was, that he saw the street-lamps as things quite as eternal as the stars; the two fires were mingled. He saw the houses as things enduring, like the mountains, and so he wrote about them as one would write about mountains. Nature puts on a disguise when she speaks to every man; to this man she put on the disguise of Notting Hill. Nature would mean to a poet born in the Cumberland hills, a stormy sky-line and sudden rocks. Nature would mean to a poet born in the Essex flats, a waste of splendid waters and splendid sunsets. So nature meant to this man Wayne a line of violet roofs and lemon lamps, the chiaroscuro of the town. He did not think it clever or funny to praise the shadows and colours of the town; he had seen no other shadows or colours, and so he praised them--because they were shadows and colours. He saw all this because he was a poet, though in practice a bad poet. It is too often forgotten that just as a bad man is nevertheless a man, so a bad poet is nevertheless a poet.

Mr. Wayne's little volume of verse was a complete failure; and he submitted to the decision of fate with a quite rational humility, went back to his work, which was that of a draper's assistant, and wrote no more. He still retained his feeling about the town of Notting Hill, because he could not possibly have any other feeling, because it was the back and base of his brain. But he does not seem to have made any particular attempt to express it or insist upon it.

He was a genuine natural mystic, one of those who live on the border of fairyland. But he was perhaps the first to realise how often the boundary of fairyland runs through a crowded city. Twenty feet from him (for he was very short-sighted) the red and white and yellow suns of the gas-lights thronged and melted into each other like an orchard of fiery trees, the beginning of the woods of elf-land.

But, oddly enough, it was because he was a small poet that he came to his strange and isolated triumph. It was because he was a failure in literature that he

became a portent in English history. He was one of those to whom nature has given the desire without the power of artistic expression. He had been a dumb poet from his cradle. He might have been so to his grave, and carried unuttered into the darkness a treasure of new and sensational song. But he was born under the lucky star of a single coincidence. He happened to be at the head of his dingy municipality at the time of the King's jest, at the time when all municipalities were suddenly commanded to break out into banners and flowers. Out of the long procession of the silent poets, who have been passing since the beginning of the world, this one man found himself in the midst of an heraldic vision, in which he could act and speak and live lyrically. While the author and the victims alike treated the whole matter as a silly public charade, this one man, by taking it seriously, sprang suddenly into a throne of artistic omnipotence. Armour, music, standards, watch-fires, the noise of drums, all the theatrical properties were thrown before him. This one poor rhymster, having burnt his own rhymes, began to live that life of open air and acted poetry of which all the poets of the earth have dreamed in vain; the life for which the Iliad is only a cheap substitute.

Upwards from his abstracted childhood, Adam Wayne had grown strongly and silently in a certain quality or capacity which is in modern cities almost entirely artificial, but which can be natural, and was primarily almost brutally natural in him, the quality or capacity of patriotism. It exists, like other virtues and vices, in a certain undiluted reality. It is not confused with all kinds of other things. A child speaking of his country or his village may make every mistake in Mandeville or tell every lie in Munchausen, but in his statement there will be no psychological lies any more than there can be in a good song. Adam Wayne, as a boy, had for his dull streets in Notting Hill the ultimate and ancient sentiment that went out to Athens or Jerusalem. He knew the secret of the passion, those secrets which make real old national songs sound so strange to our civilisation. He knew that real patriotism tends to sing about sorrows and forlorn hopes much more than about victory. He knew that in proper names themselves is half the poetry of all national poems. Above all, he knew the supreme psychological fact about patriotism, as certain in connection with it as that a fine shame comes to all lovers, the fact that the patriot never under any circumstances boasts of the largeness of his country, but always, and of necessity, boasts of the smallness of it.

All this he knew, not because he was a philosopher or a genius, but because he was a child. Any one who cares to walk up a side slum like Pump Street, can see a little Adam claiming to be king of a paving-stone. And he will always be proudest if the stone is almost too narrow for him to keep his feet inside it.

It was while he was in such a dream of defensive battle, marking out some strip of street or fortress of steps as the limit of his haughty claim, that the King had

met him, and, with a few words flung in mockery, ratified for ever the strange boundaries of his soul. Thenceforward the fanciful idea of the defence of Notting Hill in war became to him a thing as solid as eating or drinking or lighting a pipe. He disposed his meals for it, altered his plans for it, lay awake in the night and went over it again. Two or three shops were to him an arsenal; an area was to him a moat; corners of balconies and turns of stone steps were points for the location of a culverin or an archer. It is almost impossible to convey to any ordinary imagination the degree to which he had transmitted the leaden London landscape to a romantic gold. The process began almost in babyhood, and became habitual like a literal madness. It was felt most keenly at night, when London is really herself, when her lights shine in the dark like the eyes of innumerable cats, and the outline of the dark houses has the bold simplicity of blue hills. But for him the night revealed instead of concealing, and he read all the blank hours of morning and afternoon, by a contradictory phrase, in the light of that darkness. To this man, at any rate, the inconceivable had happened. The artificial city had become to him nature, and he felt the curbstones and gas-lamps as things as ancient as the sky.

One instance may suffice. Walking along Pump Street with a friend, he said, as he gazed dreamily at the iron fence of a little front garden, "How those railings stir one's blood!"

His friend, who was also a great intellectual admirer, looked at them painfully, but without any particular emotion. He was so troubled about it that he went back quite a large number of times on quiet evenings and stared at the railings, waiting for something to happen to his blood, but without success. At last he took refuge in asking Wayne himself. He discovered that the ecstasy lay in the one point he had never noticed about the railings even after his six visits--the fact that they were, like the great majority of others--in London, shaped at the top after the manner of a spear. As a child, Wayne had half unconsciously compared them with the spears in pictures of Lancelot and St. George, and had grown up under the shadow of the graphic association. Now, whenever he looked at them, they were simply the serried weapons that made a hedge of steel round the sacred homes of Notting Hill. He could not have cleansed his mind of that meaning even if he tried. It was not a fanciful comparison, or anything like it. It would not have been true to say that the familiar railings reminded him of spears; it would have been far truer to say that the familiar spears occasionally reminded him of railings.

A couple of days after his interview with the King, Adam Wayne was pacing like a caged lion in front of five shops that occupied the upper end of the disputed street. They were a grocer's, a chemist's, a barber's, an old curiosity shop and a toy-shop that sold also newspapers. It was these five shops which his childish

fastidiousness had first selected as the essentials of the Notting Hill campaign, the citadel of the city. If Notting Hill was the heart of the universe, and Pump Street was the heart of Notting Hill, this was the heart of Pump Street. The fact that they were all small and side by side realised that feeling for a formidable comfort and compactness which, as we have said, was the heart of his patriotism, and of all patriotism. The grocer (who had a wine and spirit licence) was included because he could provision the garrison; the old curiosity shop because it contained enough swords, pistols, partisans, cross-bows, and blunderbusses to arm a whole irregular regiment; the toy and paper shop because Wayne thought a free press an essential centre for the soul of Pump Street; the chemist's to cope with outbreaks of disease among the besieged; and the barber's because it was in the middle of all the rest, and the barber's son was an intimate friend and spiritual affinity.

It was a cloudless October evening settling down through purple into pure silver around the roofs and chimneys of the steep little street, which looked black and sharp and dramatic. In the deep shadows the gas-lit shop fronts gleamed like five fires in a row, and before them, darkly outlined like a ghost against some purgatorial furnaces, passed to and fro the tall bird-like figure and eagle nose of Adam Wayne.

He swung his stick restlessly, and seemed fitfully talking to himself.

"There are, after all, enigmas," he said "even to the man who has faith. There are doubts that remain even after the true philosophy is completed in every rung and rivet. And here is one of them. Is the normal human need, the normal human condition, higher or lower than those special states of the soul which call out a doubtful and dangerous glory? those special powers of knowledge or sacrifice which are made possible only by the existence of evil? Which should come first to our affections, the enduring sanities of peace or the half-maniacal virtues of battle? Which should come first, the man great in the daily round or the man great in emergency? Which should come first, to return to the enigma before me, the grocer or the chemist? Which is more certainly the stay of the city, the swift chivalrous chemist or the benignant all-providing grocer? In such ultimate spiritual doubts it is only possible to choose a side by the higher instincts, and to abide the issue. In any case, I have made my choice. May I be pardoned if I choose wrongly, but I choose the grocer."

"Good morning, sir," said the grocer, who was a middle-aged man, partially bald, with harsh red whiskers and beard, and forehead lined with all the cares of the small tradesman. "What can I do for you, sir?"

Wayne removed his hat on entering the shop, with a ceremonious gesture, which,

slight as it was, made the tradesman eye him with the beginnings of wonder.

"I come, sir," he said soberly, "to appeal to your patriotism."

"Why, sir," said the grocer, "that sounds like the times when I was a boy and we used to have elections."

"You will have them again," said Wayne, firmly, "and far greater things. Listen, Mr. Mead. I know the temptations which a grocer has to a too cosmopolitan philosophy. I can imagine what it must be to sit all day as you do surrounded with wares from all the ends of the earth, from strange seas that we have never sailed and strange forests that we could not even picture. No Eastern king ever had such argosies or such cargoes coming from the sunrise and the sunset, and Solomon in all his glory was not enriched like one of you. India is at your elbow," he cried, lifting his voice and pointing his stick at a drawer of rice, the grocer making a movement of some alarm, "China is before you, Demerara is behind you, America is above your head, and at this very moment, like some old Spanish admiral, you hold Tunis in your hands."

Mr. Mead dropped the box of dates which he was just lifting, and then picked it up again vaguely.

Wayne went on with a heightened colour, but a lowered voice,

"I know, I say, the temptations of so international, so universal a vision of wealth. I know that it must be your danger not to fall like many tradesmen into too dusty and mechanical a narrowness, but rather to be too broad, to be too general, too liberal. If a narrow nationalism be the danger of the pastry-cook, who makes his own wares under his own heavens, no less is cosmopolitanism the danger of the grocer. But I come to you in the name of that patriotism which no wanderings or enlightenments should ever wholly extinguish, and I ask you to remember Notting Hill. For, after all, in this cosmopolitan magnificence, she has played no small part. Your dates may come from the tall palms of Barbary, your sugar from the strange islands of the tropics, your tea from the secret villages of the Empire of the Dragon. That this room might be furnished, forests may have been spoiled under the Southern Cross, and leviathans speared under the Polar Star. But you yourself--surely no inconsiderable treasure--you yourself, the brain that wields these vast interests--you yourself, at least, have grown to strength and wisdom between these grey houses and under this rainy sky. This city which made you, and thus made your fortunes, is threatened with war. Come forth and tell to the ends of the earth this lesson. Oil is from the North and fruits from the South; rices are from India and spices from Ceylon; sheep are from New Zealand and men from Notting Hill."

The grocer sat for some little while, with dim eyes and his mouth open, looking rather like a fish. Then he scratched the back of his head, and said nothing. Then he said--

"Anything out of the shop, sir?"

Wayne looked round in a dazed way. Seeing a pile of tins of pine-apple chunks, he waved his stick generally towards them.

"Yes," he said; "I'll take those."

"All those, sir?" said the grocer, with greatly increased interest.

"Yes, yes; all those," replied Wayne, still a little bewildered, like a man splashed with cold water.

"Very good, sir; thank you, sir," said the grocer with animation. "You may count upon my patriotism, sir."

"I count upon it already," said Wayne, and passed out into the gathering night.

The grocer put the box of dates back in its place.

"What a nice fellow he is!" he said. "It's odd how often they are nice. Much nicer than those as are all right."

Meanwhile Adam Wayne stood outside the glowing chemist's shop, unmistakably wavering.

"What a weakness it is!" he muttered. "I have never got rid of it from childhood--the fear of this magic shop. The grocer is rich, he is romantic, he is poetical in the truest sense, but he is not--no, he is not supernatural. But the chemist! All the other shops stand in Notting Hill, but this stands in Elf-land. Look at those great burning bowls of colour. It must be from them that God paints the sunsets. It is superhuman, and the superhuman is all the more uncanny when it is beneficent. That is the root of the fear of God. I am afraid. But I must be a man and enter."

He was a man, and entered. A short, dark young man was behind the counter with spectacles, and greeted him with a bright but entirely business-like smile.

"A fine evening, sir," he said.

"Fine indeed, strange Father," said Adam, stretching his hands somewhat forward. "It is on such clear and mellow nights that your shop is most itself. Then they appear most perfect, those moons of green and gold and crimson, which from afar oft guide the pilgrim of pain and sickness to this house of merciful witchcraft."

"Can I get you anything?" asked the chemist.

"Let me see," said Wayne, in a friendly but vague manner. "Let me have some sal volatile."

"Eightpence, tenpence, or one and sixpence a bottle?" said the young man, genially.

"One and six--one and six," replied Wayne, with a wild submissiveness. "I come to ask you, Mr. Bowles, a terrible question."

He paused and collected himself.

"It is necessary," he muttered--"it is necessary to be tactful, and to suit the appeal to each profession in turn."

"I come," he resumed aloud, "to ask you a question which goes to the roots of your miraculous toils. Mr. Bowles, shall all this witchery cease?" And he waved his stick around the shop.

Meeting with no answer, he continued with animation--

"In Notting Hill we have felt to its core the elfish mystery of your profession. And now Notting Hill itself is threatened."

"Anything more, sir?" asked the chemist.

"Oh," said Wayne, somewhat disturbed--"oh, what is it chemists sell? Quinine, I think. Thank you. Shall it be destroyed? I have met these men of Bayswater and North Kensington--Mr. Bowles, they are materialists. They see no witchery in your work, even when it is wrought within their own borders. They think the chemist is commonplace. They think him human."

The chemist appeared to pause, only a moment, to take in the insult, and immediately said--

"And the next article, please?"

"Alum," said the Provost, wildly. "I resume. It is in this sacred town alone that your priesthood is revered. Therefore, when you fight for us you fight not only for yourself, but for everything you typify. You fight not only for Notting Hill, but for Fairyland, for as surely as Buck and Barker and such men hold sway, the sense of Fairyland in some strange manner diminishes."

"Anything more, sir?" asked Mr. Bowles, with unbroken cheerfulness.

"Oh yes, jujubes--Gregory powder--magnesia. The danger is imminent. In all this matter I have felt that I fought not merely for my own city (though to that I owe all my blood), but for all places in which these great ideas could prevail. I am fighting not merely for Notting Hill, but for Bayswater itself; for North Kensington itself. For if the gold-hunters prevail, these also will lose all their ancient sentiments and all the mystery of their national soul. I know I can count upon you."

"Oh yes, sir," said the chemist, with great animation; "we are always glad to oblige a good customer."

Adam Wayne went out of the shop with a deep sense of fulfilment of soul.

"It is so fortunate," he said, "to have tact, to be able to play upon the peculiar talents and specialities, the cosmopolitanism of the grocer and the world-old necromancy of the chemist. Where should I be without tact?"

CHAPTER II--The Remarkable Mr. Turnbull

After two more interviews with shopmen, however, the patriot's confidence in his own psychological diplomacy began vaguely to wane. Despite the care with which he considered the peculiar rationale and the peculiar glory of each separate shop, there seemed to be something unresponsive about the shopmen. Whether it was a dark resentment against the uninitiate for peeping into their masonic magnificence, he could not quite conjecture.

His conversation with the man who kept the shop of curiosities had begun encouragingly. The man who kept the shop of curiosities had, indeed, enchanted him with a phrase. He was standing drearily at the door of his shop, a wrinkled man with a grey pointed beard, evidently a gentleman who had come down in the world.

"And how does your commerce go, you strange guardian of the past?" said Wayne, affably.

"Well, sir, not very well," replied the man, with that patient voice of his class which is one of the most heart-breaking things in the world. "Things are terribly quiet."

Wayne's eyes shone suddenly.

"A great saying," he said, "worthy of a man whose merchandise is human history. Terribly quiet; that is in two words the spirit of this age, as I have felt it from my cradle. I sometimes wondered how many other people felt the oppression of this union between quietude and terror. I see blank well-ordered streets and men in black moving about inoffensively, sullenly. It goes on day after day, day after day, and nothing happens; but to me it is like a dream from which I might wake screaming. To me the straightness of our life is the straightness of a thin cord stretched tight. Its stillness is terrible. It might snap with a noise like thunder. And you who sit, amid the débris of the great wars, you who sit, as it were, upon a battlefield, you know that war was less terrible than this evil peace; you know that the idle lads who carried those swords under Francis or Elizabeth, the rude Squire or Baron who swung that mace about in Picardy or Northumberland battles, may have been terribly noisy, but were not like us, terribly quiet."

Whether it was a faint embarrassment of conscience as to the original source and date of the weapons referred to, or merely an engrained depression, the guardian of the past looked, if anything, a little more worried.

"But I do not think," continued Wayne, "that this horrible silence of modernity will last, though I think for the present it will increase. What a farce is this modern liberality! Freedom of speech means practically, in our modern civilisation, that we must only talk about unimportant things. We must not talk about religion, for that is illiberal; we must not talk about bread and cheese, for that is talking shop; we must not talk about death, for that is depressing; we must not talk about birth, for that is indelicate. It cannot last. Something must break this strange indifference, this strange dreamy egoism, this strange loneliness of millions in a crowd. Something must break it. Why should it not be you and I? Can you do nothing else but guard relics?"

The shopman wore a gradually clearing expression, which would have led those unsympathetic with the cause of the Red Lion to think that the last sentence was the only one to which he had attached any meaning.

"I am rather old to go into a new business," he said, "and I don't quite know what to be, either."

"Why not," said Wayne, gently having reached the crisis of his delicate persuasion--"why not be a colonel?"

It was at this point, in all probability, that the interview began to yield more disappointing results. The man appeared inclined at first to regard the suggestion of becoming a colonel as outside the sphere of immediate and relevant discussion. A long exposition of the inevitable war of independence, coupled with the purchase of a doubtful sixteenth-century sword for an exaggerated price, seemed to resettle matters. Wayne left the shop, however, somewhat infected with the melancholy of its owner.

That melancholy was completed at the barber's.

"Shaving, sir?" inquired that artist from inside his shop.

"War!" replied Wayne, standing on the threshold.

"I beg your pardon," said the other, sharply.

"War!" said Wayne, warmly. "But not for anything inconsistent with the beautiful and the civilised arts. War for beauty. War for society. War for peace. A great chance is offered you of repelling that slander which, in defiance of the lives of so many artists, attributes poltroonery to those who beautify and polish the surface of our lives. Why should not hairdressers be heroes? Why should not--"

"Now, you get out," said the barber, irascibly. "We don't want any of your sort here. You get out."

And he came forward with the desperate annoyance of a mild person when enraged.

Adam Wayne laid his hand for a moment on the sword, then dropped it.

"Notting Hill," he said, "will need her bolder sons;" and he turned gloomily to the toy-shop.

It was one of those queer little shops so constantly seen in the side streets of London, which must be called toy-shops only because toys upon the whole predominate; for the remainder of goods seem to consist of almost everything else in the world--tobacco, exercise-books, sweet-stuff, novelettes, halfpenny paper clips, halfpenny pencil sharpeners, bootlaces, and cheap fireworks. It also sold newspapers, and a row of dirty-looking posters hung along the front of it.

"I am afraid," said Wayne, as he entered, "that I am not getting on with these tradesmen as I should. Is it that I have neglected to rise to the full meaning of their work? Is there some secret buried in each of these shops which no mere poet can discover?"

He stepped to the counter with a depression which he rapidly conquered as he addressed the man on the other side of it,--a man of short stature, and hair prematurely white, and the look of a large baby.

"Sir," said Wayne, "I am going from house to house in this street of ours, seeking to stir up some sense of the danger which now threatens our city. Nowhere have I felt my duty so difficult as here. For the toy-shop keeper has to do with all that remains to us of Eden before the first wars began. You sit here meditating continually upon the wants of that wonderful time when every staircase leads to the stars, and every garden-path to the other end of nowhere. Is it thoughtlessly, do you think, that I strike the dark old drum of peril in the paradise of children? But consider a moment; do not condemn me hastily. Even that paradise itself contains the rumour or beginning of that danger, just as the Eden that was made for perfection contained the terrible tree. For judge childhood, even by your own arsenal of its pleasures. You keep bricks; you make yourself thus, doubtless, the witness of the constructive instinct older than the destructive. You keep dolls; you make yourself the priest of that divine idolatry. You keep Noah's Arks; you perpetuate the memory of the salvation of all life as a precious, an irreplaceable thing. But do you keep only, sir, the symbols of this prehistoric sanity, this

childish rationality of the earth? Do you not keep more terrible things? What are those boxes, seemingly of lead soldiers, that I see in that glass case? Are they not witnesses to that terror and beauty, that desire for a lovely death, which could not be excluded even from the immortality of Eden? Do not despise the lead soldiers, Mr. Turnbull."

"I don't," said Mr. Turnbull, of the toy-shop, shortly, but with great emphasis.

"I am glad to hear it," replied Wayne. "I confess that I feared for my military schemes the awful innocence of your profession. How, I thought to myself, will this man, used only to the wooden swords that give pleasure, think of the steel swords that give pain? But I am at least partly reassured. Your tone suggests to me that I have at least the entry of a gate of your fairyland--the gate through which the soldiers enter, for it cannot be denied--I ought, sir, no longer to deny, that it is of soldiers that I come to speak. Let your gentle employment make you merciful towards the troubles of the world. Let your own silvery experience tone down our sanguine sorrows. For there is war in Notting Hill."

The little toy-shop keeper sprang up suddenly, slapping his fat hands like two fans on the counter.

"War?" he cried. "Not really, sir? Is it true? Oh, what a joke! Oh, what a sight for sore eyes!"

Wayne was almost taken aback by this outburst.

"I am delighted," he stammered. "I had no notion--"

He sprang out of the way just in time to avoid Mr. Turnbull, who took a flying leap over the counter and dashed to the front of the shop.

"You look here, sir," he said; "you just look here."

He came back with two of the torn posters in his hand which were flapping outside his shop.

"Look at those, sir," he said, and flung them down on the counter.

Wayne bent over them, and read on one--

"LAST FIGHTING. REDUCTION OF THE CENTRAL DERVISH CITY.
REMARKABLE, ETC."

On the other he read--

"LAST SMALL REPUBLIC ANNEXED. NICARAGUAN CAPITAL SURRENDERS AFTER A MONTH'S FIGHTING. GREAT SLAUGHTER."

Wayne bent over them again, evidently puzzled; then he looked at the dates. They were both dated in August fifteen years before.

"Why do you keep these old things?" he said, startled entirely out of his absurd tact of mysticism. "Why do you hang them outside your shop?"

"Because," said the other, simply, "they are the records of the last war. You mentioned war just now. It happens to be my hobby."

Wayne lifted his large blue eyes with an infantile wonder.

"Come with me," said Turnbull, shortly, and led him into a parlour at the back of the shop.

In the centre of the parlour stood a large deal table. On it were set rows and rows of the tin and lead soldiers which were part of the shopkeeper's stock. The visitor would have thought nothing of it if it had not been for a certain odd grouping of them, which did not seem either entirely commercial or entirely haphazard.

"You are acquainted, no doubt," said Turnbull, turning his big eyes upon Wayne-- "you are acquainted, no doubt, with the arrangement of the American and Nicaraguan troops in the last battle;" and he waved his hand towards the table.

"I am afraid not," said Wayne. "I--"

"Ah! you were at that time occupied too much, perhaps, with the Dervish affair. You will find it in this corner." And he pointed to a part of the floor where there was another arrangement of children's soldiers grouped here and there.

"You seem," said Wayne, "to be interested in military matters."

"I am interested in nothing else," answered the toy-shop keeper, simply.

Wayne appeared convulsed with a singular, suppressed excitement.

"In that case," he said, "I may approach you with an unusual degree of confidence. Touching the matter of the defence of Notting Hill, I--"

"Defence of Notting Hill? Yes, sir. This way, sir," said Turnbull, with great perturbation. "Just step into this side room;" and he led Wayne into another apartment, in which the table was entirely covered with an arrangement of children's bricks. A second glance at it told Wayne that the bricks were arranged in the form of a precise and perfect plan of Notting Hill. "Sir," said Turnbull, impressively, "you have, by a kind of accident, hit upon the whole secret of my life. As a boy, I grew up among the last wars of the world, when Nicaragua was taken and the dervishes wiped out. And I adopted it as a hobby, sir, as you might adopt astronomy or bird-stuffing. I had no ill-will to any one, but I was interested in war as a science, as a game. And suddenly I was bowled out. The big Powers of the world, having swallowed up all the small ones, came to that confounded agreement, and there was no more war. There was nothing more for me to do but to do what I do now--to read the old campaigns in dirty old newspapers, and to work them out with tin soldiers. One other thing had occurred to me. I thought it an amusing fancy to make a plan of how this district or ours ought to be defended if it were ever attacked. It seems to interest you too."

"If it were ever attacked," repeated Wayne, awed into an almost mechanical enunciation. "Mr. Turnbull, it is attacked. Thank Heaven, I am bringing to at least one human being the news that is at bottom the only good news to any son of Adam. Your life has not been useless. Your work has not been play. Now, when the hair is already grey on your head, Turnbull, you shall have your youth. God has not destroyed, He has only deferred it. Let us sit down here, and you shall explain to me this military map of Notting Hill. For you and I have to defend Notting Hill together."

Mr. Turnbull looked at the other for a moment, then hesitated, and then sat down beside the bricks and the stranger. He did not rise again for seven hours, when the dawn broke.

* * * * *

The headquarters of Provost Adam Wayne and his Commander-in-Chief consisted of a small and somewhat unsuccessful milk-shop at the corner of Pump Street. The blank white morning had only just begun to break over the blank London buildings when Wayne and Turnbull were to be found seated in the cheerless and unswept shop. Wayne had something feminine in his character; he belonged to that class of persons who forget their meals when anything interesting is in hand. He had had nothing for sixteen hours but hurried glasses of milk, and, with a glass standing empty beside him, he was writing and sketching and dotting and crossing out with inconceivable rapidity with a pencil and a piece of paper. Turnbull was of that more masculine type in which a sense of responsibility increases the appetite, and with his sketch-map beside him he was dealing

strenuously with a pile of sandwiches in a paper packet, and a tankard of ale from the tavern opposite, whose shutters had just been taken down. Neither of them spoke, and there was no sound in the living stillness except the scratching of Wayne's pencil and the squealing of an aimless-looking cat. At length Wayne broke the silence by saying--

"Seventeen pounds eight shillings and ninepence."

Turnbull nodded and put his head in the tankard.

"That," said Wayne, "is not counting the five pounds you took yesterday. What did you do with it?"

"Ah, that is rather interesting!" replied Turnbull, with his mouth full. "I used that five pounds in a kindly and philanthropic act."

Wayne was gazing with mystification in his queer and innocent eyes.

"I used that five pounds," continued the other, "in giving no less than forty little London boys rides in hansom cabs."

"Are you insane?" asked the Provost.

"It is only my light touch," returned Turnbull. "These hansom-cab rides will raise the tone--raise the tone, my dear fellow--of our London youths, widen their horizon, brace their nervous system, make them acquainted with the various public monuments of our great city. Education, Wayne, education. How many excellent thinkers have pointed out that political reform is useless until we produce a cultured populace. So that twenty years hence, when these boys are grown up--"

"Mad!" said Wayne, laying down his pencil; "and five pounds gone!"

"You are in error," explained Turnbull. "You grave creatures can never be brought to understand how much quicker work really goes with the assistance of nonsense and good meals. Stripped of its decorative beauties, my statement was strictly accurate. Last night I gave forty half-crowns to forty little boys, and sent them all over London to take hansom cabs. I told them in every case to tell the cabman to bring them to this spot. In half an hour from now the declaration of war will be posted up. At the same time the cabs will have begun to come in, you will have ordered out the guard, the little boys will drive up in state, we shall commandeer the horses for cavalry, use the cabs for barricade, and give the men the choice between serving in our ranks and detention in our basements and

cellars. The little boys we can use as scouts. The main thing is that we start the war with an advantage unknown in all the other armies--horses. And now," he said, finishing his beer, "I will go and drill the troops."

And he walked out of the milk-shop, leaving the Provost staring.

A minute or two afterwards, the Provost laughed. He only laughed once or twice in his life, and then he did it in a queer way as if it were an art he had not mastered. Even he saw something funny in the preposterous coup of the half-crowns and the little boys. He did not see the monstrous absurdity of the whole policy and the whole war. He enjoyed it seriously as a crusade, that is, he enjoyed it far more than any joke can be enjoyed. Turnbull enjoyed it partly as a joke, even more perhaps as a reversion from the things he hated--modernity and monotony and civilisation. To break up the vast machinery of modern life and use the fragments as engines of war, to make the barricade of omnibuses and points of vantage of chimney-pots, was to him a game worth infinite risk and trouble. He had that rational and deliberate preference which will always to the end trouble the peace of the world, the rational and deliberate preference for a short life and a merry one.

CHAPTER III--The Experiment of Mr. Buck

An earnest and eloquent petition was sent up to the King signed with the names of Wilson, Barker, Buck, Swindon, and others. It urged that at the forthcoming conference to be held in his Majesty's presence touching the final disposition of the property in Pump Street, it might be held not inconsistent with political decorum and with the unutterable respect they entertained for his Majesty if they appeared in ordinary morning dress, without the costume decreed for them as Provosts. So it happened that the company appeared at that council in frock-coats and that the King himself limited his love of ceremony to appearing (after his not unusual manner), in evening dress with one order--in this case not the Garter, but the button of the Club of Old Clipper's Best Pals, a decoration obtained (with difficulty) from a halfpenny boy's paper. Thus also it happened that the only spot of colour in the room was Adam Wayne, who entered in great dignity with the great red robes and the great sword.

"We have met," said Auberon, "to decide the most arduous of modern problems. May we be successful." And he sat down gravely.

Buck turned his chair a little, and flung one leg over the other.

"Your Majesty," he said, quite good-humouredly, "there is only one thing I can't understand, and that is why this affair is not settled in five minutes. Here's a small property which is worth a thousand to us and is not worth a hundred to any one else. We offer the thousand. It's not business-like, I know, for we ought to get it for less, and it's not reasonable and it's not fair on us, but I'm damned if I can see why it's difficult."

"The difficulty may be very simply stated," said Wayne. "You may offer a million and it will be very difficult for you to get Pump Street."

"But look here, Mr. Wayne," cried Barker, striking in with a kind of cold excitement. "Just look here. You've no right to take up a position like that. You've a right to stand out for a bigger price, but you aren't doing that. You're refusing what you and every sane man knows to be a splendid offer simply from malice or spite--it must be malice or spite. And that kind of thing is really criminal; it's against the public good. The King's Government would be justified in forcing you."

With his lean fingers spread on the table, he stared anxiously at Wayne's face, which did not move.

"In forcing you ... it would," he repeated.

"It shall," said Buck, shortly, turning to the table with a jerk. "We have done our best to be decent."

Wayne lifted his large eyes slowly.

"Was it my Lord Buck," he inquired, "who said that the King of England 'shall' do something?"

Buck flushed and said testily--

"I mean it must--it ought to. As I say, we've done our best to be generous; I defy any one to deny it. As it is, Mr. Wayne, I don't want to say a word that's uncivil. I hope it's not uncivil to say that you can be, and ought to be, in gaol. It is criminal to stop public works for a whim. A man might as well burn ten thousand onions in his front garden or bring up his children to run naked in the street, as do what you say you have a right to do. People have been compelled to sell before now. The King could compel you, and I hope he will."

"Until he does," said Wayne, calmly, "the power and government of this great nation is on my side and not yours, and I defy you to defy it."

"In what sense," cried Barker, with his feverish eyes and hands, "is the Government on your side?"

With one ringing movement Wayne unrolled a great parchment on the table. It was decorated down the sides with wild water-colour sketches of vestrymen in crowns and wreaths.

"The Charter of the Cities," he began.

Buck exploded in a brutal oath and laughed.

"That tomfool's joke. Haven't we had enough--"

"And there you sit," cried Wayne, springing erect and with a voice like a trumpet, "with no argument but to insult the King before his face."

Buck rose also with blazing eyes.

"I am hard to bully," he began--and the slow tones of the King struck in with incomparable gravity--

"My Lord Buck, I must ask you to remember that your King is present. It is not often that he needs to protect himself among his subjects."

Barker turned to him with frantic gestures.

"For God's sake don't back up the madman now," he implored. "Have your joke another time. Oh, for Heaven's sake--"

"My Lord Provost of South Kensington," said King Auberon, steadily, "I do not follow your remarks, which are uttered with a rapidity unusual at Court. Nor do your well-meant efforts to convey the rest with your fingers materially assist me. I say that my Lord Provost of North Kensington, to whom I spoke, ought not in the presence of his Sovereign to speak disrespectfully of his Sovereign's ordinances. Do you disagree?"

Barker turned restlessly in his chair, and Buck cursed without speaking. The King went on in a comfortable voice--

"My Lord Provost of Notting Hill, proceed."

Wayne turned his blue eyes on the King, and to every one's surprise there was a look in them not of triumph, but of a certain childish distress.

"I am sorry, your Majesty," he said; "I fear I was more than equally to blame with the Lord Provost of North Kensington. We were debating somewhat eagerly, and we both rose to our feet. I did so first, I am ashamed to say. The Provost of North Kensington is, therefore, comparatively innocent. I beseech your Majesty to address your rebuke chiefly, at least, to me. Mr. Buck is not innocent, for he did no doubt, in the heat of the moment, speak disrespectfully. But the rest of the discussion he seems to me to have conducted with great good temper."

Buck looked genuinely pleased, for business men are all simple-minded, and have therefore that degree of communion with fanatics. The King, for some reason, looked, for the first time in his life, ashamed.

"This very kind speech of the Provost of Notting Hill," began Buck, pleasantly, "seems to me to show that we have at least got on to a friendly footing. Now come, Mr. Wayne. Five hundred pounds have been offered to you for a property you admit not to be worth a hundred. Well, I am a rich man and I won't be outdone in generosity. Let us say fifteen hundred pounds, and have done with it. And let us shake hands;" and he rose, glowing and laughing.

"Fifteen hundred pounds," whispered Mr. Wilson of Bayswater; "can we do fifteen hundred pounds?"

"I'll stand the racket," said Buck, heartily. "Mr. Wayne is a gentleman and has spoken up for me. So I suppose the negotiations are at an end."

Wayne bowed.

"They are indeed at an end. I am sorry I cannot sell you the property."

"What?" cried Mr. Barker, starting to his feet.

"Mr. Buck has spoken correctly," said the King.

"I have, I have," cried Buck, springing up also; "I said--"

"Mr. Buck has spoken correctly," said the King; "the negotiations are at an end."

All the men at the table rose to their feet; Wayne alone rose without excitement.

"Have I, then," he said, "your Majesty's permission to depart? I have given my last answer."

"You have it," said Auberon, smiling, but not lifting his eyes from the table. And amid a dead silence the Provost of Notting Hill passed out of the room.

"Well?" said Wilson, turning round to Barker--"well?"

Barker shook his head desperately.

"The man ought to be in an asylum," he said. "But one thing is clear--we need not bother further about him. The man can be treated as mad."

"Of course," said Buck, turning to him with sombre decisiveness. "You're perfectly right, Barker. He is a good enough fellow, but he can be treated as mad. Let's put it in simple form. Go and tell any twelve men in any town, go and tell any doctor in any town, that there is a man offered fifteen hundred pounds for a thing he could sell commonly for four hundred, and that when asked for a reason for not accepting it he pleads the inviolate sanctity of Notting Hill and calls it the Holy Mountain. What would they say? What more can we have on our side than the common sense of everybody? On what else do all laws rest? I'll tell you, Barker, what's better than any further discussion. Let's send in workmen on the spot to pull down Pump Street. And if old Wayne says a word, arrest him as a lunatic.

That's all."

Barker's eyes kindled.

"I always regarded you, Buck, if you don't mind my saying so, as a very strong man. I'll follow you."

"So, of course, will I," said Wilson.

Buck rose again impulsively.

"Your Majesty," he said, glowing with popularity, "I beseech your Majesty to consider favourably the proposal to which we have committed ourselves. Your Majesty's leniency, our own offers, have fallen in vain on that extraordinary man. He may be right. He may be God. He may be the devil. But we think it, for practical purposes, more probable that he is off his head. Unless that assumption were acted on, all human affairs would go to pieces. We act on it, and we propose to start operations in Notting Hill at once."

The King leaned back in his chair.

"The Charter of the Cities ...," he said with a rich intonation.

But Buck, being finally serious, was also cautious, and did not again make the mistake of disrespect.

"Your Majesty," he said, bowing, "I am not here to say a word against anything your Majesty has said or done. You are a far better educated man than I, and no doubt there were reasons, upon intellectual grounds, for those proceedings. But may I ask you and appeal to your common good-nature for a sincere answer? When you drew up the Charter of the Cities, did you contemplate the rise of a man like Adam Wayne? Did you expect that the Charter--whether it was an experiment, or a scheme of decoration, or a joke--could ever really come to this--to stopping a vast scheme of ordinary business, to shutting up a road, to spoiling the chances of cabs, omnibuses, railway stations, to disorganising half a city, to risking a kind of civil war? Whatever were your objects, were they that?"

Barker and Wilson looked at him admiringly; the King more admiringly still.

"Provost Buck," said Auberon, "you speak in public uncommonly well. I give you your point with the magnanimity of an artist. My scheme did not include the appearance of Mr. Wayne. Alas! would that my poetic power had been great enough."

"I thank your Majesty," said Buck, courteously, but quickly. "Your Majesty's statements are always clear and studied; therefore I may draw a deduction. As the scheme, whatever it was, on which you set your heart did not include the appearance of Mr. Wayne, it will survive his removal. Why not let us clear away this particular Pump Street, which does interfere with our plans, and which does not, by your Majesty's own statement, interfere with yours."

"Caught out!" said the King, enthusiastically and quite impersonally, as if he were watching a cricket match.

"This man Wayne," continued Buck, "would be shut up by any doctors in England. But we only ask to have it put before them. Meanwhile no one's interests, not even in all probability his own, can be really damaged by going on with the improvements in Notting Hill. Not our interests, of course, for it has been the hard and quiet work of ten years. Not the interests of Notting Hill, for nearly all its educated inhabitants desire the change. Not the interests of your Majesty, for you say, with characteristic sense, that you never contemplated the rise of the lunatic at all. Not, as I say, his own interests, for the man has a kind heart and many talents, and a couple of good doctors would probably put him righter than all the free cities and sacred mountains in creation. I therefore assume, if I may use so bold a word, that your Majesty will not offer any obstacle to our proceeding with the improvements."

And Mr. Buck sat down amid subdued but excited applause among the allies.

"Mr. Buck," said the King, "I beg your pardon, for a number of beautiful and sacred thoughts, in which you were generally classified as a fool. But there is another thing to be considered. Suppose you send in your workmen, and Mr. Wayne does a thing regrettable indeed, but of which, I am sorry to say, I think him quite capable--knocks their teeth out?"

"I have thought of that, your Majesty," said Mr. Buck, easily, "and I think it can simply be guarded against. Let us send in a strong guard of, say, a hundred men--a hundred of the North Kensington Halberdiers" (he smiled grimly), "of whom your Majesty is so fond. Or say a hundred and fifty. The whole population of Pump Street, I fancy, is only about a hundred."

"Still they might stand together and lick you," said the King, dubiously.

"Then say two hundred," said Buck, gaily.

"It might happen," said the King, restlessly, "that one Notting Hiller fought better

than two North Kensingtons."

"It might," said Buck, coolly; "then say two hundred and fifty."

The King bit his lip.

"And if they are beaten too?" he said viciously.

"Your Majesty," said Buck, and leaned back easily in his chair, "suppose they are. If anything be clear, it is clear that all fighting matters are mere matters of arithmetic. Here we have a hundred and fifty, say, of Notting Hill soldiers. Or say two hundred. If one of them can fight two of us--we can send in, not four hundred, but six hundred, and smash him. That is all. It is out of all immediate probability that one of them could fight four of us. So what I say is this. Run no risks. Finish it at once. Send in eight hundred men and smash him--smash him almost without seeing him. And go on with the improvements."

And Mr. Buck pulled out a bandanna and blew his nose.

"Do you know, Mr. Buck," said the King, staring gloomily at the table, "the admirable clearness of your reason produces in my mind a sentiment which I trust I shall not offend you by describing as an aspiration to punch your head. You irritate me sublimely. What can it be in me? Is it the relic of a moral sense?"

"But your Majesty," said Barker, eagerly and suavely, "does not refuse our proposals?"

"My dear Barker, your proposals are as damnable as your manners. I want to have nothing to do with them. Suppose I stopped them altogether. What would happen?"

Barker answered in a very low voice--

"Revolution."

The King glanced quickly at the men round the table. They were all looking down silently: their brows were red.

He rose with a startling suddenness, and an unusual pallor.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you have overruled me. Therefore I can speak plainly. I think Adam Wayne, who is as mad as a hatter, worth more than a million of you. But you have the force, and, I admit, the common sense, and he is lost. Take

your eight hundred halberdiers and smash him. It would be more sportsmanlike to take two hundred."

"More sportsmanlike," said Buck, grimly, "but a great deal less humane. We are not artists, and streets purple with gore do not catch our eye in the right way."

"It is pitiful," said Auberon. "With five or six times their number, there will be no fight at all."

"I hope not," said Buck, rising and adjusting his gloves. "We desire no fight, your Majesty. We are peaceable business men."

"Well," said the King, wearily, "the conference is at an end at last."

And he went out of the room before any one else could stir.

* * * * *

Forty workmen, a hundred Bayswater Halberdiers, two hundred from South, and three from North Kensington, assembled at the foot of Holland Walk and marched up it, under the general direction of Barker, who looked flushed and happy in full dress. At the end of the procession a small and sulky figure lingered like an urchin. It was the King.

"Barker," he said at length, appealingly, "you are an old friend of mine--you understand my hobbies as I understand yours. Why can't you let it alone? I hoped that such fun might come out of this Wayne business. Why can't you let it alone? It doesn't really so much matter to you--what's a road or so? For me it's the one joke that may save me from pessimism. Take fewer men and give me an hour's fun. Really and truly, James, if you collected coins or humming-birds, and I could buy one with the price of your road, I would buy it. I collect incidents--those rare, those precious things. Let me have one. Pay a few pounds for it. Give these Notting Hillers a chance. Let them alone."

"Auberon," said Barker, kindly, forgetting all royal titles in a rare moment of sincerity, "I do feel what you mean. I have had moments when these hobbies have hit me. I have had moments when I have sympathised with your humours. I have had moments, though you may not easily believe it, when I have sympathised with the madness of Adam Wayne. But the world, Auberon, the real world, is not run on these hobbies. It goes on great brutal wheels of facts--wheels on which you are the butterfly; and Wayne is the fly on the wheel."

Auberon's eyes looked frankly at the other's.

"Thank you, James; what you say is true. It is only a parenthetical consolation to me to compare the intelligence of flies somewhat favourably with the intelligence of wheels. But it is the nature of flies to die soon, and the nature of wheels to go on for ever. Go on with the wheel. Good-bye, old man."

And James Barker went on, laughing, with a high colour, slapping his bamboo on his leg.

The King watched the tail of the retreating regiment with a look of genuine depression, which made him seem more like a baby than ever. Then he swung round and struck his hands together.

"In a world without humour," he said, "the only thing to do is to eat. And how perfect an exception! How can these people strike dignified attitudes, and pretend that things matter, when the total ludicrousness of life is proved by the very method by which it is supported? A man strikes the lyre, and says, 'Life is real, life is earnest,' and then goes into a room and stuffs alien substances into a hole in his head. I think Nature was indeed a little broad in her humour in these matters. But we all fall back on the pantomime, as I have in this municipal affair. Nature has her farces, like the act of eating or the shape of the kangaroo, for the more brutal appetite. She keeps her stars and mountains for those who can appreciate something more subtly ridiculous." He turned to his equerry. "But, as I said 'eating,' let us have a picnic like two nice little children. Just run and bring me a table and a dozen courses or so, and plenty of champagne, and under these swinging boughs, Bowler, we will return to Nature."

It took about an hour to erect in Holland Lane the monarch's simple repast, during which time he walked up and down and whistled, but still with an unaffected air of gloom. He had really been done out of a pleasure he had promised himself, and had that empty and sickened feeling which a child has when disappointed of a pantomime. When he and the equerry had sat down, however, and consumed a fair amount of dry champagne, his spirits began mildly to revive.

"Things take too long in this world," he said. "I detest all this Barkerian business about evolution and the gradual modification of things. I wish the world had been made in six days, and knocked to pieces again in six more. And I wish I had done it. The joke's good enough in a broad way, sun and moon and the image of God, and all that, but they keep it up so damnably long. Did you ever long for a miracle, Bowler?"

"No, sir," said Bowler, who was an evolutionist, and had been carefully brought

up.

"Then I have," answered the King. "I have walked along a street with the best cigar in the cosmos in my mouth, and more Burgundy inside me than you ever saw in your life, and longed that the lamp-post would turn into an elephant to save me from the hell of blank existence. Take my word for it, my evolutionary Bowler, don't you believe people when they tell you that people sought for a sign, and believed in miracles because they were ignorant. They did it because they were wise, filthily, vilely wise--too wise to eat or sleep or put on their boots with patience. This seems delightfully like a new theory of the origin of Christianity, which would itself be a thing of no mean absurdity. Take some more wine."

The wind blew round them as they sat at their little table, with its white cloth and bright wine-cups, and flung the tree-tops of Holland Park against each other, but the sun was in that strong temper which turns green into gold. The King pushed away his plate, lit a cigar slowly, and went on--

"Yesterday I thought that something next door to a really entertaining miracle might happen to me before I went to amuse the worms. To see that red-haired maniac waving a great sword, and making speeches to his incomparable followers, would have been a glimpse of that Land of Youth from which the Fates shut us out. I had planned some quite delightful things. A Congress of Knightsbridge with a treaty, and myself in the chair, and perhaps a Roman triumph, with jolly old Barker led in chains. And now these wretched prigs have gone and stamped out the exquisite Mr. Wayne altogether, and I suppose they will put him in a private asylum somewhere in their damned humane way. Think of the treasures daily poured out to his unappreciative keeper! I wonder whether they would let me be his keeper. But life is a vale. Never forget at any moment of your existence to regard it in the light of a vale. This graceful habit, if not acquired in youth--"

The King stopped, with his cigar lifted, for there had slid into his eyes the startled look of a man listening. He did not move for a few moments; then he turned his head sharply towards the high, thin, and lath-like paling which fenced certain long gardens and similar spaces from the lane. From behind it there was coming a curious scrambling and scraping noise, as of a desperate thing imprisoned in this box of thin wood. The King threw away his cigar, and jumped on to the table. From this position he saw a pair of hands hanging with a hungry clutch on the top of the fence. Then the hands quivered with a convulsive effort, and a head shot up between them--the head of one of the Bayswater Town Council, his eyes and whiskers wild with fear. He swung himself over, and fell on the other side on his face, and groaned openly and without ceasing. The next moment the thin, taut wood of the fence was struck as by a bullet, so that it reverberated like a

drum, and over it came tearing and cursing, with torn clothes and broken nails and bleeding faces, twenty men at one rush. The King sprang five feet clear off the table on to the ground. The moment after the table was flung over, sending bottles and glasses flying, and the débris was literally swept along the ground by that stream of men pouring past, and Bowler was borne along with them, as the King said in his famous newspaper article, "like a captured bride." The great fence swung and split under the load of climbers that still scaled and cleared it. Tremendous gaps were torn in it by this living artillery; and through them the King could see more and more frantic faces, as in a dream, and more and more men running. They were as miscellaneous as if some one had taken the lid off a human dustbin. Some were untouched, some were slashed and battered and bloody, some were splendidly dressed, some tattered and half naked, some were in the fantastic garb of the burlesque cities, some in the dullest modern dress. The King stared at all of them, but none of them looked at the King. Suddenly he stepped forward.

"Barker," he said, "what is all this?"

"Beaten," said the politician--"beaten all to hell!" And he plunged past with nostrils shaking like a horse's, and more and more men plunged after him.

Almost as he spoke, the last standing strip of fence bowed and snapped, flinging, as from a catapult, a new figure upon the road. He wore the flaming red of the halberdiers of Notting Hill, and on his weapon there was blood, and in his face victory. In another moment masses of red glowed through the gaps of the fence, and the pursuers, with their halberds, came pouring down the lane. Pursued and pursuers alike swept by the little figure with the owlish eyes, who had not taken his hands out of his pockets.

The King had still little beyond the confused sense of a man caught in a torrent--the feeling of men eddying by. Then something happened which he was never able afterwards to describe, and which we cannot describe for him. Suddenly in the dark entrance, between the broken gates of a garden, there appeared framed a flaming figure.

Adam Wayne, the conqueror, with his face flung back, and his mane like a lion's, stood with his great sword point upwards, the red raiment of his office flapping round him like the red wings of an archangel. And the King saw, he knew not how, something new and overwhelming. The great green trees and the great red robes swung together in the wind. The sword seemed made for the sunlight. The preposterous masquerade, born of his own mockery, towered over him and embraced the world. This was the normal, this was sanity, this was nature; and he himself, with his rationality and his detachment and his black frock-coat, he

was the exception and the accident--a blot of black upon a world of crimson and gold.