

BOOK V

CHAPTER I--The Empire of Notting Hill

On the evening of the third of October, twenty years after the great victory of Notting Hill, which gave it the dominion of London, King Auberon came, as of old, out of Kensington Palace.

He had changed little, save for a streak or two of grey in his hair, for his face had always been old, and his step slow, and, as it were, decrepit.

If he looked old, it was not because of anything physical or mental. It was because he still wore, with a quaint conservatism, the frock-coat and high hat of the days before the great war. "I have survived the Deluge," he said. "I am a pyramid, and must behave as such."

As he passed up the street the Kensingtonians, in their picturesque blue smocks, saluted him as a King, and then looked after him as a curiosity. It seemed odd to them that men had once worn so elvish an attire.

The King, cultivating the walk attributed to the oldest inhabitant ("Gaffer Auberon" his friends were now confidentially desired to call him), went toddling northward. He paused, with reminiscence in his eye, at the Southern Gate of Notting Hill, one of those nine great gates of bronze and steel, wrought with reliefs of the old battles, by the hand of Chiffy himself.

"Ah!" he said, shaking his head and assuming an unnecessary air of age, and a provincialism of accent--"Ah! I mind when there warn't none of this here."

He passed through the Ossington Gate, surmounted by a great lion, wrought in red copper on yellow brass, with the motto, "Nothing Ill." The guard in red and gold saluted him with his halberd.

It was about sunset, and the lamps were being lit. Auberon paused to look at them, for they were Chiffy's finest work, and his artistic eye never failed to feast on them. In memory of the Great Battle of the Lamps, each great iron lamp was surmounted by a veiled figure, sword in hand, holding over the flame an iron hood or extinguisher, as if ready to let it fall if the armies of the South and West

should again show their flags in the city. Thus no child in Notting Hill could play about the streets without the very lamp-posts reminding him of the salvation of his country in the dreadful year.

"Old Wayne was right in a way," commented the King. "The sword does make things beautiful. It has made the whole world romantic by now. And to think people once thought me a buffoon for suggesting a romantic Notting Hill. Deary me, deary me! (I think that is the expression)--it seems like a previous existence."

Turning a corner, he found himself in Pump Street, opposite the four shops which Adam Wayne had studied twenty years before. He entered idly the shop of Mr. Mead, the grocer. Mr. Mead was somewhat older, like the rest of the world, and his red beard, which he now wore with a moustache, and long and full, was partly blanched and discoloured. He was dressed in a long and richly embroidered robe of blue, brown, and crimson, interwoven with an Eastern complexity of pattern, and covered with obscure symbols and pictures, representing his wares passing from hand to hand and from nation to nation. Round his neck was the chain with the Blue Argosy cut in turquoise, which he wore as Grand Master of the Grocers. The whole shop had the sombre and sumptuous look of its owner. The wares were displayed as prominently as in the old days, but they were now blended and arranged with a sense of tint and grouping, too often neglected by the dim grocers of those forgotten days. The wares were shown plainly, but shown not so much as an old grocer would have shown his stock, but rather as an educated virtuoso would have shown his treasures. The tea was stored in great blue and green vases, inscribed with the nine indispensable sayings of the wise men of China. Other vases of a confused orange and purple, less rigid and dominant, more humble and dreamy, stored symbolically the tea of India. A row of caskets of a simple silvery metal contained tinned meats. Each was wrought with some rude but rhythmic form, as a shell, a horn, a fish, or an apple, to indicate what material had been canned in it.

"Your Majesty," said Mr. Mead, sweeping an Oriental reverence. "This is an honour to me, but yet more an honour to the city."

Auberon took off his hat.

"Mr. Mead," he said, "Notting Hill, whether in giving or taking, can deal in nothing but honour. Do you happen to sell liquorice?"

"Liquorice, sire," said Mr. Mead, "is not the least important of our benefits out of the dark heart of Arabia."

And going reverently towards a green and silver canister, made in the form of an

Arabian mosque, he proceeded to serve his customer.

"I was just thinking, Mr. Mead," said the King, reflectively, "I don't know why I should think about it just now, but I was just thinking of twenty years ago. Do you remember the times before the war?"

The grocer, having wrapped up the liquorice sticks in a piece of paper (inscribed with some appropriate sentiment), lifted his large grey eyes dreamily, and looked at the darkening sky outside.

"Oh yes, your Majesty," he said. "I remember these streets before the Lord Provost began to rule us. I can't remember how we felt very well. All the great songs and the fighting change one so; and I don't think we can really estimate all we owe to the Provost; but I can remember his coming into this very shop twenty-two years ago, and I remember the things he said. The singular thing is that, as far as I remember, I thought the things he said odd at that time. Now it's the things that I said, as far as I can recall them, that seem to me odd--as odd as a madman's antics."

"Ah!" said the King; and looked at him with an unfathomable quietness.

"I thought nothing of being a grocer then," he said. "Isn't that odd enough for anybody? I thought nothing of all the wonderful places that my goods come from, and wonderful ways that they are made. I did not know that I was for all practical purposes a king with slaves spearing fishes near the secret pool, and gathering fruits in the islands under the world. My mind was a blank on the thing. I was as mad as a hatter."

The King turned also, and stared out into the dark, where the great lamps that commemorated the battle were already flaming.

"And is this the end of poor old Wayne?" he said, half to himself. "To inflame every one so much that he is lost himself in the blaze. Is this his victory that he, my incomparable Wayne, is now only one in a world of Waynes? Has he conquered and become by conquest commonplace? Must Mr. Mead, the grocer, talk as high as he? Lord! what a strange world in which a man cannot remain unique even by taking the trouble to go mad!"

And he went dreamily out of the shop.

He paused outside the next one almost precisely as the Provost had done two decades before.

"How uncommonly creepy this shop looks!" he said. "But yet somehow encouragingly creepy, invitingly creepy. It looks like something in a jolly old nursery story in which you are frightened out of your skin, and yet know that things always end well. The way those low sharp gables are carved like great black bat's wings folded down, and the way those queer-coloured bowls underneath are made to shine like giants eye-balls. It looks like a benevolent warlock's hut. It is apparently a chemist's."

Almost as he spoke, Mr. Bowles, the chemist, came to his shop door in a long black velvet gown and hood, monastic as it were, but yet with a touch of the diabolic. His hair was still quite black, and his face even paler than of old. The only spot of colour he carried was a red star cut in some precious stone of strong tint, hung on his breast. He belonged to the Society of the Red Star of Charity, founded on the lamps displayed by doctors and chemists.

"A fine evening, sir," said the chemist. "Why, I can scarcely be mistaken in supposing it to be your Majesty. Pray step inside and share a bottle of sal-volatile, or anything that may take your fancy. As it happens, there is an old acquaintance of your Majesty's in my shop carousing (if I may be permitted the term) upon that beverage at this moment."

The King entered the shop, which was an Aladdin's garden of shades and hues, for as the chemist's scheme of colour was more brilliant than the grocer's scheme, so it was arranged with even more delicacy and fancy. Never, if the phrase may be employed, had such a nosegay of medicines been presented to the artistic eye.

But even the solemn rainbow of that evening interior was rivalled or even eclipsed by the figure standing in the centre of the shop. His form, which was a large and stately one, was clad in a brilliant blue velvet, cut in the richest Renaissance fashion, and slashed so as to show gleams and gaps of a wonderful lemon or pale yellow. He had several chains round his neck, and his plumes, which were of several tints of bronze and gold, hung down to the great gold hilt of his long sword. He was drinking a dose of sal-volatile, and admiring its opal tint. The King advanced with a slight mystification towards the tall figure, whose face was in shadow; then he said--

"By the Great Lord of Luck, Barker!"

The figure removed his plumed cap, showing the same dark head and long, almost equine face which the King had so often seen rising out of the high collar of Bond Street. Except for a grey patch on each temple, it was totally unchanged.

"Your Majesty," said Barker, "this is a meeting nobly retrospective, a meeting that

has about it a certain October gold. I drink to old days;" and he finished his sal-volatile with simple feeling.

"I am delighted to see you again, Barker," said the King. "It is indeed long since we met. What with my travels in Asia Minor, and my book having to be written (you have read my 'Life of Prince Albert for Children,' of course?), we have scarcely met twice since the Great War. That is twenty years ago."

"I wonder," said Barker, thoughtfully, "if I might speak freely to your Majesty?"

"Well," said Auberon, "it's rather late in the day to start speaking respectfully. Flap away, my bird of freedom."

"Well, your Majesty," replied Barker, lowering his voice, "I don't think it will be so long to the next war."

"What do you mean?" asked Auberon.

"We will stand this insolence no longer," burst out Barker, fiercely. "We are not slaves because Adam Wayne twenty years ago cheated us with a water-pipe. Notting Hill is Notting Hill; it is not the world. We in South Kensington, we also have memories--ay, and hopes. If they fought for these trumpery shops and a few lamp-posts, shall we not fight for the great High Street and the sacred Natural History Museum?"

"Great Heavens!" said the astounded Auberon. "Will wonders never cease? Have the two greatest marvels been achieved? Have you turned altruistic, and has Wayne turned selfish? Are you the patriot, and he the tyrant?"

"It is not from Wayne himself altogether that the evil comes," answered Barker. "He, indeed, is now mostly wrapped in dreams, and sits with his old sword beside the fire. But Notting Hill is the tyrant, your Majesty. Its Council and its crowds have been so intoxicated by the spreading over the whole city of Wayne's old ways and visions, that they try to meddle with every one, and rule every one, and civilise every one, and tell every one what is good for him. I do not deny the great impulse which his old war, wild as it seemed, gave to the civic life of our time. It came when I was still a young man, and I admit it enlarged my career. But we are not going to see our own cities flouted and thwarted from day to day because of something Wayne did for us all nearly a quarter of a century ago. I am just waiting here for news upon this very matter. It is rumoured that Notting Hill has vetoed the statue of General Wilson they are putting up opposite Chepstow Place. If that is so, it is a black and white shameless breach of the terms on which we surrendered to Turnbull after the battle of the Tower. We were to keep our own

customs and self-government. If that is so--"

"It is so," said a deep voice; and both men turned round.

A burly figure in purple robes, with a silver eagle hung round his neck and moustaches almost as florid as his plumes, stood in the doorway.

"Yes," he said, acknowledging the King's start, "I am Provost Buck, and the news is true. These men of the Hill have forgotten that we fought round the Tower as well as they, and that it is sometimes foolish, as well as base, to despise the conquered."

"Let us step outside," said Barker, with a grim composure.

Buck did so, and stood rolling his eyes up and down the lamp-lit street.

"I would like to have a go at smashing all this," he muttered, "though I am over sixty. I would like--"

His voice ended in a cry, and he reeled back a step, with his hands to his eyes, as he had done in those streets twenty years before.

"Darkness!" he cried--"darkness again! What does it mean?"

For in truth every lamp in the street had gone out, so that they could not see even each other's outline, except faintly. The voice of the chemist came with startling cheerfulness out of the density.

"Oh, don't you know?" he said. "Did they never tell you this is the Feast of the Lamps, the anniversary of the great battle that almost lost and just saved Notting Hill? Don't you know, your Majesty, that on this night twenty-one years ago we saw Wilson's green uniforms charging down this street, and driving Wayne and Turnbull back upon the gas-works, fighting with their handful like fiends from hell? And that then, in that great hour, Wayne sprang through a window of the gas-works, with one blow of his hand brought darkness on the whole city, and then with a cry like a lion's, that was heard through four streets, flew at Wilson's men, sword in hand, and swept them, bewildered as they were, and ignorant of the map, clear out of the sacred street again? And don't you know that upon that night every year all lights are turned out for half an hour while we sing the Notting Hill anthem in the darkness? Hark! there it begins."

Through the night came a crash of drums, and then a strong swell of human voices--

"When the world was in the balance, there was night on Notting Hill, (There was night on Notting Hill): it was nobler than the day; On the cities where the lights are and the firesides glow, From the seas and from the deserts came the thing we did not know, Came the darkness, came the darkness, came the darkness on the foe, And the old guard of God turned to bay. For the old guard of God turns to bay, turns to bay, And the stars fall down before it ere its banners fall to-day: For when armies were around us as a howling and a horde, When falling was the citadel and broken was the sword, The darkness came upon them like the Dragon of the Lord, When the old guard of God turned to bay."

The voices were just uplifting themselves in a second verse when they were stopped by a scurry and a yell. Barker had bounded into the street with a cry of "South Kensington!" and a drawn dagger. In less time than a man could blink, the whole packed street was full of curses and struggling. Barker was flung back against the shop-front, but used the second only to draw his sword as well as his dagger, and calling out, "This is not the first time I've come through the thick of you," flung himself again into the press. It was evident that he had drawn blood at last, for a more violent outcry arose, and many other knives and swords were discernible in the faint light. Barker, after having wounded more than one man, seemed on the point of being flung back again, when Buck suddenly stepped out into the street. He had no weapon, for he affected rather the peaceful magnificence of the great burgher, than the pugnacious dandyism which had replaced the old sombre dandyism in Barker. But with a blow of his clenched fist he broke the pane of the next shop, which was the old curiosity shop, and, plunging in his hand, snatched a kind of Japanese scimitar, and calling out, "Kensington! Kensington!" rushed to Barker's assistance.

Barker's sword was broken, but he was laying about him with his dagger. Just as Buck ran up, a man of Notting Hill struck Barker down, but Buck struck the man down on top of him, and Barker sprang up again, the blood running down his face.

Suddenly all these cries were cloven by a great voice, that seemed to fall out of heaven. It was terrible to Buck and Barker and the King, from its seeming to come out the empty skies; but it was more terrible because it was a familiar voice, and one which at the same time they had not heard for so long.

"Turn up the lights," said the voice from above them, and for a moment there was no reply, but only a tumult.

"In the name of Notting Hill and of the great Council of the City, turn up the lights."

There was again a tumult and a vagueness for a moment, then the whole street and every object in it sprang suddenly out of the darkness, as every lamp sprang into life. And looking up they saw, standing upon a balcony near the roof of one of the highest houses, the figure and the face of Adam Wayne, his red hair blowing behind him, a little streaked with grey.

"What is this, my people?" he said. "Is it altogether impossible to make a thing good without it immediately insisting on being wicked? The glory of Notting Hill in having achieved its independence, has been enough for me to dream of for many years, as I sat beside the fire. Is it really not enough for you, who have had so many other affairs to excite and distract you? Notting Hill is a nation. Why should it condescend to be a mere Empire? You wish to pull down the statue of General Wilson, which the men of Bayswater have so rightly erected in Westbourne Grove. Fools! Who erected that statue? Did Bayswater erect it? No. Notting Hill erected it. Do you not see that it is the glory of our achievement that we have infected the other cities with the idealism of Notting Hill? It is we who have created not only our own side, but both sides of this controversy. O too humble fools, why should you wish to destroy your enemies? You have done something more to them. You have created your enemies. You wish to pull down that gigantic silver hammer, which stands, like an obelisk, in the centre of the Broadway of Hammersmith. Fools! Before Notting Hill arose, did any person passing through Hammersmith Broadway expect to see there a gigantic silver hammer? You wish to abolish the great bronze figure of a knight standing upon the artificial bridge at Knightsbridge. Fools! Who would have thought of it before Notting Hill arose? I have even heard, and with deep pain I have heard it, that the evil eye of our imperial envy has been cast towards the remote horizon of the west, and that we have objected to the great black monument of a crowned raven, which commemorates the skirmish of Ravenscourt Park. Who created all these things? Were they there before we came? Cannot you be content with that destiny which was enough for Athens, which was enough for Nazareth? the destiny, the humble purpose, of creating a new world. Is Athens angry because Romans and Florentines have adopted her phraseology for expressing their own patriotism? Is Nazareth angry because as a little village it has become the type of all little villages out of which, as the Snobs say, no good can come? Has Athens asked every one to wear the chlamys? Are all followers of the Nazarene compelled to wear turbans. No! but the soul of Athens went forth and made men drink hemlock, and the soul of Nazareth went forth and made men consent to be crucified. So has the soul of Notting Hill gone forth and made men realise what it is to live in a city. Just as we inaugurated our symbols and ceremonies, so they have inaugurated theirs; and are you so mad as to contend against them? Notting Hill is right; it has always been right. It has moulded itself on its own necessities, its own sine qua non; it has accepted its own ultimatum. Because it is a nation it

has created itself; and because it is a nation it can destroy itself. Notting Hill shall always be the judge. If it is your will because of this matter of General Wilson's statue to make war upon Bayswater--"

A roar of cheers broke in upon his words, and further speech was impossible. Pale to the lips, the great patriot tried again and again to speak; but even his authority could not keep down the dark and roaring masses in the street below him. He said something further, but it was not audible. He descended at last sadly from the garret in which he lived, and mingled with the crowd at the foot of the houses. Finding General Turnbull, he put his hand on his shoulder with a queer affection and gravity, and said--

"To-morrow, old man, we shall have a new experience, as fresh as the flowers of spring. We shall be defeated. You and I have been through three battles together, and have somehow or other missed this peculiar delight. It is unfortunate that we shall not probably be able to exchange our experiences, because, as it most annoyingly happens, we shall probably both be dead."

Turnbull looked dimly surprised.

"I don't mind so much about being dead," he said, "but why should you say that we shall be defeated?"

"The answer is very simple," replied Wayne, calmly. "It is because we ought to be defeated. We have been in the most horrible holes before now; but in all those I was perfectly certain that the stars were on our side, and that we ought to get out. Now I know that we ought not to get out; and that takes away from me everything with which I won."

As Wayne spoke he started a little, for both men became aware that a third figure was listening to them--a small figure with wondering eyes.

"Is it really true, my dear Wayne," said the King, interrupting, "that you think you will be beaten to-morrow?"

"There can be no doubt about it whatever," replied Adam Wayne; "the real reason is the one of which I have just spoken. But as a concession to your materialism, I will add that they have an organised army of a hundred allied cities against our one. That in itself, however, would be unimportant."

Quin, with his round eyes, seemed strangely insistent.

"You are quite sure," he said, "that you must be beaten?"

"I am afraid," said Turnbull, gloomily, "that there can be no doubt about it."

"Then," cried the King, flinging out his arms, "give me a halberd! Give me a halberd, somebody! I desire all men to witness that I, Auberon, King of England, do here and now abdicate, and implore the Provost of Notting Hill to permit me to enlist in his army. Give me a halberd!"

He seized one from some passing guard, and, shouldering it, stamped solemnly after the shouting columns of halberdiers which were, by this time, parading the streets. He had, however, nothing to do with the wrecking of the statue of General Wilson, which took place before morning.

CHAPTER II--The Last Battle

The day was cloudy when Wayne went down to die with all his army in Kensington Gardens; it was cloudy again when that army had been swallowed up by the vast armies of a new world. There had been an almost uncanny interval of sunshine, in which the Provost of Notting Hill, with all the placidity of an onlooker, had gazed across to the hostile armies on the great spaces of verdure opposite; the long strips of green and blue and gold lay across the park in squares and oblongs like a proposition in Euclid wrought in a rich embroidery. But the sunlight was a weak and, as it were, a wet sunlight, and was soon swallowed up. Wayne spoke to the King, with a queer sort of coldness and languor, as to the military operations. It was as he had said the night before--that being deprived of his sense of an impracticable rectitude, he was, in effect, being deprived of everything. He was out of date, and at sea in a mere world of compromise and competition, of Empire against Empire, of the tolerably right and the tolerably wrong. When his eye fell on the King, however, who was marching very gravely with a top hat and a halberd, it brightened slightly.

"Well, your Majesty," he said, "you at least ought to be proud to-day. If your children are fighting each other, at least those who win are your children. Other kings have distributed justice, you have distributed life. Other kings have ruled a nation, you have created nations. Others have made kingdoms, you have begotten them. Look at your children, father!" and he stretched his hand out towards the enemy.

Auberon did not raise his eyes.

"See how splendidly," cried Wayne, "the new cities come on--the new cities from across the river. See where Battersea advances over there--under the flag of the Lost Dog; and Putney--don't you see the Man on the White Boar shining on their standard as the sun catches it? It is the coming of a new age, your Majesty. Notting Hill is not a common empire; it is a thing like Athens, the mother of a mode of life, of a manner of living, which shall renew the youth of the world--a thing like Nazareth. When I was young I remember, in the old dreary days, wiseacres used to write books about how trains would get faster, and all the world be one empire, and tram-cars go to the moon. And even as a child I used to say to myself, 'Far more likely that we shall go on the crusades again, or worship the gods of the city.' And so it has been. And I am glad, though this is my last battle."

Even as he spoke there came a crash of steel from the left, and he turned his

head.

"Wilson!" he cried, with a kind of joy. "Red Wilson has charged our left. No one can hold him in; he eats swords. He is as keen a soldier as Turnbull, but less patient--less really great. Ha! and Barker is moving. How Barker has improved; how handsome he looks! It is not all having plumes; it is also having a soul in one's daily life. Ha!"

And another crash of steel on the right showed that Barker had closed with Notting Hill on the other side.

"Turnbull is there!" cried Wayne. "See him hurl them back! Barker is checked! Turnbull charges--wins! But our left is broken. Wilson has smashed Bowles and Mead, and may turn our flank. Forward, the Provost's Guard!"

And the whole centre moved forward, Wayne's face and hair and sword flaming in the van.

The King ran suddenly forward.

The next instant a great jar that went through it told that it had met the enemy. And right over against them through the wood of their own weapons Auberon saw the Purple Eagle of Buck of North Kensington.

On the left Red Wilson was storming the broken ranks, his little green figure conspicuous even in the tangle of men and weapons, with the flaming red moustaches and the crown of laurel. Bowles slashed at his head and tore away some of the wreath, leaving the rest bloody, and, with a roar like a bull's, Wilson sprang at him, and, after a rattle of fencing, plunged his point into the chemist, who fell, crying, "Notting Hill!" Then the Notting Hillers wavered, and Bayswater swept them back in confusion. Wilson had carried everything before him.

On the right, however, Turnbull had carried the Red Lion banner with a rush against Barker's men, and the banner of the Golden Birds bore up with difficulty against it. Barker's men fell fast. In the centre Wayne and Buck were engaged, stubborn and confused. So far as the fighting went, it was precisely equal. But the fighting was a farce. For behind the three small armies with which Wayne's small army was engaged lay the great sea of the allied armies, which looked on as yet as scornful spectators, but could have broken all four armies by moving a finger.

Suddenly they did move. Some of the front contingents, the pastoral chiefs from Shepherd's Bush, with their spears and fleeces, were seen advancing, and the

rude clans from Paddington Green. They were advancing for a very good reason. Buck, of North Kensington, was signalling wildly; he was surrounded, and totally cut off. His regiments were a struggling mass of people, islanded in a red sea of Notting Hill.

The allies had been too careless and confident. They had allowed Barker's force to be broken to pieces by Turnbull, and the moment that was done, the astute old leader of Notting Hill swung his men round and attacked Buck behind and on both sides. At the same moment Wayne cried, "Charge!" and struck him in front like a thunderbolt.

Two-thirds of Buck's men were cut to pieces before their allies could reach them. Then the sea of cities came on with their banners like breakers, and swallowed Notting Hill for ever. The battle was not over, for not one of Wayne's men would surrender, and it lasted till sundown, and long after. But it was decided; the story of Notting Hill was ended.

When Turnbull saw it, he ceased a moment from fighting, and looked round him. The evening sunlight struck his face; it looked like a child's.

"I have had my youth," he said. Then, snatching an axe from a man, he dashed into the thick of the spears of Shepherd's Bush, and died somewhere far in the depths of their reeling ranks. Then the battle roared on; every man of Notting Hill was slain before night.

Wayne was standing by a tree alone after the battle. Several men approached him with axes. One struck at him. His foot seemed partly to slip; but he flung his hand out, and steadied himself against the tree.

Barker sprang after him, sword in hand, and shaking with excitement.

"How large now, my lord," he cried, "is the Empire of Notting Hill?"

Wayne smiled in the gathering dark.

"Always as large as this," he said, and swept his sword round in a semicircle of silver.

Barker dropped, wounded in the neck; and Wilson sprang over his body like a tiger-cat, rushing at Wayne. At the same moment there came behind the Lord of the Red Lion a cry and a flare of yellow, and a mass of the West Kensington halberdiers ploughed up the slope, knee-deep in grass, bearing the yellow banner of the city before them, and shouting aloud.

At the same second Wilson went down under Wayne's sword, seemingly smashed like a fly. The great sword rose again like a bird, but Wilson seemed to rise with it, and, his sword being broken, sprang at Wayne's throat like a dog. The foremost of the yellow halberdiers had reached the tree and swung his axe above the struggling Wayne. With a curse the King whirled up his own halberd, and dashed the blade in the man's face. He reeled and rolled down the slope, just as the furious Wilson was flung on his back again. And again he was on his feet, and again at Wayne's throat. Then he was flung again, but this time laughing triumphantly. Grasped in his hand was the red and yellow favour that Wayne wore as Provost of Notting Hill. He had torn it from the place where it had been carried for twenty-five years.

With a shout the West Kensington men closed round Wayne, the great yellow banner flapping over his head.

"Where is your favour now, Provost?" cried the West Kensington leader.

And a laugh went up.

Adam struck at the standard-bearer and brought him reeling forward. As the banner stooped, he grasped the yellow folds and tore off a shred. A halberdier struck him on the shoulder, wounding bloodily.

"Here is one colour!" he cried, pushing the yellow into his belt; "and here!" he cried, pointing to his own blood--"here is the other."

At the same instant the shock of a sudden and heavy halberd laid the King stunned or dead. In the wild visions of vanishing consciousness, he saw again something that belonged to an utterly forgotten time, something that he had seen somewhere long ago in a restaurant. He saw, with his swimming eyes, red and yellow, the colours of Nicaragua.

Quin did not see the end. Wilson, wild with joy, sprang again at Adam Wayne, and the great sword of Notting Hill was whirled above once more. Then men ducked instinctively at the rushing noise of the sword coming down out of the sky, and Wilson of Bayswater was smashed and wiped down upon the floor like a fly. Nothing was left of him but a wreck; but the blade that had broken him was broken. In dying he had snapped the great sword and the spell of it; the sword of Wayne was broken at the hilt. One rush of the enemy carried Wayne by force against the tree. They were too close to use halberd or even sword; they were breast to breast, even nostrils to nostrils. But Buck got his dagger free.

"Kill him!" he cried, in a strange stifled voice. "Kill him! Good or bad, he is none of us! Do not be blinded by the face!... God! have we not been blinded all along!" and he drew his arm back for a stab, and seemed to close his eyes.

Wayne did not drop the hand that hung on to the tree-branch. But a mighty heave went over his breast and his whole huge figure, like an earthquake over great hills. And with that convulsion of effort he rent the branch out of the tree, with tongues of torn wood; and, swaying it once only, he let the splintered club fall on Buck, breaking his neck. The planner of the Great Road fell face foremost dead, with his dagger in a grip of steel.

"For you and me, and for all brave men, my brother," said Wayne, in his strange chant, "there is good wine poured in the inn at the end of the world."

The packed men made another lurch or heave towards him; it was almost too dark to fight clearly. He caught hold of the oak again, this time getting his hand into a wide crevice and grasping, as it were, the bowels of the tree. The whole crowd, numbering some thirty men, made a rush to tear him away from it; they hung on with all their weight and numbers, and nothing stirred. A solitude could not have been stiller than that group of straining men. Then there was a faint sound.

"His hand is slipping," cried two men in exultation.

"You don't know much of him," said another, grimly (a man of the old war). "More likely his bone cracks."

"It is neither--by God, it is neither!" said one of the first two.

"What is it, then?" asked the second.

"The tree is falling," he replied.

"As the tree falleth, so shall it lie," said Wayne's voice out of the darkness, and it had the same sweet and yet horrible air that it had had throughout, of coming from a great distance, from before or after the event. Even when he was struggling like an eel or battering like a madman, he spoke like a spectator. "As the tree falleth, so shall it lie," he said. "Men have called that a gloomy text. It is the essence of all exultation. I am doing now what I have done all my life, what is the only happiness, what is the only universality. I am clinging to something. Let it fall, and there let it lie. Fools, you go about and see the kingdoms of the earth, and are liberal and wise and cosmopolitan, which is all that the devil can give you--all that he could offer to Christ, only to be spurned away. I am doing what

the truly wise do. When a child goes out into the garden and takes hold of a tree, saying, 'Let this tree be all I have,' that moment its roots take hold on hell and its branches on the stars. The joy I have is what the lover knows when a woman is everything. It is what a savage knows when his idol is everything. It is what I know when Notting Hill is everything. I have a city. Let it stand or fall."

As he spoke, the turf lifted itself like a living thing, and out of it rose slowly, like crested serpents, the roots of the oak. Then the great head of the tree, that seemed a green cloud among grey ones, swept the sky suddenly like a broom, and the whole tree heeled over like a ship, smashing every one in its fall.

CHAPTER III--Two Voices

In a place in which there was total darkness for hours, there was also for hours total silence. Then a voice spoke out of the darkness, no one could have told from where, and said aloud--

"So ends the Empire of Notting Hill. As it began in blood, so it ended in blood, and all things are always the same."

And there was silence again, and then again there was a voice, but it had not the same tone; it seemed that it was not the same voice.

"If all things are always the same, it is because they are always heroic. If all things are always the same, it is because they are always new. To each man one soul only is given; to each soul only is given a little power--the power at some moments to outgrow and swallow up the stars. If age after age that power comes upon men, whatever gives it to them is great. Whatever makes men feel old is mean--an empire or a skin-flint shop. Whatever makes men feel young is great--a great war or a love-story. And in the darkest of the books of God there is written a truth that is also a riddle. It is of the new things that men tire--of fashions and proposals and improvements and change. It is the old things that startle and intoxicate. It is the old things that are young. There is no sceptic who does not feel that many have doubted before. There is no rich and fickle man who does not feel that all his novelties are ancient. There is no worshipper of change who does not feel upon his neck the vast weight of the weariness of the universe. But we who do the old things are fed by nature with a perpetual infancy. No man who is in love thinks that any one has been in love before. No woman who has a child thinks that there have been such things as children. No people that fight for their own city are haunted with the burden of the broken empires. Yes, O dark voice, the world is always the same, for it is always unexpected."

A little gust of wind blew through the night, and then the first voice answered--

"But in this world there are some, be they wise or foolish, whom nothing intoxicates. There are some who see all your disturbances like a cloud of flies. They know that while men will laugh at your Notting Hill, and will study and rehearse and sing of Athens and Jerusalem, Athens and Jerusalem were silly suburbs like your Notting Hill. They know that the earth itself is a suburb, and can feel only drearily and respectably amused as they move upon it."

"They are philosophers or they are fools," said the other voice. "They are not men."

Men live, as I say, rejoicing from age to age in something fresher than progress--in the fact that with every baby a new sun and a new moon are made. If our ancient humanity were a single man, it might perhaps be that he would break down under the memory of so many loyalties, under the burden of so many diverse heroisms, under the load and terror of all the goodness of men. But it has pleased God so to isolate the individual soul that it can only learn of all other souls by hearsay, and to each one goodness and happiness come with the youth and violence of lightning, as momentary and as pure. And the doom of failure that lies on all human systems does not in real fact affect them any more than the worms of the inevitable grave affect a children's game in a meadow. Notting Hill has fallen; Notting Hill has died. But that is not the tremendous issue. Notting Hill has lived."

"But if," answered the other voice, "if what is achieved by all these efforts be only the common contentment of humanity, why do men so extravagantly toil and die in them? Has nothing been done by Notting Hill than any chance clump of farmers or clan of savages would not have done without it? What might have been done to Notting Hill if the world had been different may be a deep question; but there is a deeper. What could have happened to the world if Notting Hill had never been?"

The other voice replied--

"The same that would have happened to the world and all the starry systems if an apple-tree grew six apples instead of seven; something would have been eternally lost. There has never been anything in the world absolutely like Notting Hill. There will never be anything quite like it to the crack of doom. I cannot believe anything but that God loved it as He must surely love anything that is itself and unreplaceable. But even for that I do not care. If God, with all His thunders, hated it, I loved it."

And with the voice a tall, strange figure lifted itself out of the débris in the half-darkness.

The other voice came after a long pause, and as it were hoarsely.

"But suppose the whole matter were really a hocus-pocus. Suppose that whatever meaning you may choose in your fancy to give to it, the real meaning of the whole was mockery. Suppose it was all folly. Suppose--"

"I have been in it," answered the voice from the tall and strange figure, "and I know it was not."

A smaller figure seemed half to rise in the dark.

"Suppose I am God," said the voice, "and suppose I made the world in idleness. Suppose the stars, that you think eternal, are only the idiot fireworks of an everlasting schoolboy. Suppose the sun and the moon, to which you sing alternately, are only the two eyes of one vast and sneering giant, opened alternately in a never-ending wink. Suppose the trees, in my eyes, are as foolish as enormous toad-stools. Suppose Socrates and Charlemagne are to me only beasts, made funnier by walking on their hind legs. Suppose I am God, and having made things, laugh at them."

"And suppose I am man," answered the other. "And suppose that I give the answer that shatters even a laugh. Suppose I do not laugh back at you, do not blaspheme you, do not curse you. But suppose, standing up straight under the sky, with every power of my being, I thank you for the fools' paradise you have made. Suppose I praise you, with a literal pain of ecstasy, for the jest that has brought me so terrible a joy. If we have taken the child's games, and given them the seriousness of a Crusade, if we have drenched your grotesque Dutch garden with the blood of martyrs, we have turned a nursery into a temple. I ask you, in the name of Heaven, who wins?"

The sky close about the crests of the hills and trees was beginning to turn from black to grey, with a random suggestion of the morning. The slight figure seemed to crawl towards the larger one, and the voice was more human.

"But suppose, friend," it said, "suppose that, in a bitterer and more real sense, it was all a mockery. Suppose that there had been, from the beginning of these great wars, one who watched them with a sense that is beyond expression, a sense of detachment, of responsibility, of irony, of agony. Suppose that there were one who knew it was all a joke."

The tall figure answered--

"He could not know it. For it was not all a joke."

And a gust of wind blew away some clouds that sealed the sky-line, and showed a strip of silver behind his great dark legs. Then the other voice came, having crept nearer still.

"Adam Wayne," it said, "there are men who confess only in articulo mortis; there are people who blame themselves only when they can no longer help others. I am one of them. Here, upon the field of the bloody end of it all, I come to tell you plainly what you would never understand before. Do you know who I am?"

"I know you, Auberon Quin," answered the tall figure, "and I shall be glad to unburden your spirit of anything that lies upon it."

"Adam Wayne," said the other voice, "of what I have to say you cannot in common reason be glad to unburden me. Wayne, it was all a joke. When I made these cities, I cared no more for them than I care for a centaur, or a merman, or a fish with legs, or a pig with feathers, or any other absurdity. When I spoke to you solemnly and encouragingly about the flag of your freedom and the peace of your city, I was playing a vulgar practical joke on an honest gentleman, a vulgar practical joke that has lasted for twenty years. Though no one could believe it of me, perhaps, it is the truth that I am a man both timid and tender-hearted. I never dared in the early days of your hope, or the central days of your supremacy, to tell you this; I never dared to break the colossal calm of your face. God knows why I should do it now, when my farce has ended in tragedy and the ruin of all your people! But I say it now. Wayne, it was done as a joke."

There was silence, and the freshening breeze blew the sky clearer and clearer, leaving great spaces of the white dawn.

At last Wayne said, very slowly--

"You did it all only as a joke?"

"Yes," said Quin, briefly.

"When you conceived the idea," went on Wayne, dreamily, "of an army for Bayswater and a flag for Notting Hill, there was no gleam, no suggestion in your mind that such things might be real and passionate?"

"No," answered Auberon, turning his round white face to the morning with a dull and splendid sincerity; "I had none at all."

Wayne sprang down from the height above him and held out his hand.

"I will not stop to thank you," he said, with a curious joy in his voice, "for the great good for the world you have actually wrought. All that I think of that I have said to you a moment ago, even when I thought that your voice was the voice of a derisive omnipotence, its laughter older than the winds of heaven. But let me say what is immediate and true. You and I, Auberon Quin, have both of us throughout our lives been again and again called mad. And we are mad. We are mad, because we are not two men, but one man. We are mad, because we are two lobes of the same brain, and that brain has been cloven in two. And if you ask for

the proof of it, it is not hard to find. It is not merely that you, the humorist, have been in these dark days stripped of the joy of gravity. It is not merely that I, the fanatic, have had to grope without humour. It is that, though we seem to be opposite in everything, we have been opposite like man and woman, aiming at the same moment at the same practical thing. We are the father and the mother of the Charter of the Cities."

Quin looked down at the débris of leaves and timber, the relics of the battle and stampede, now glistening in the growing daylight, and finally said--

"Yet nothing can alter the antagonism--the fact that I laughed at these things and you adored them."

Wayne's wild face flamed with something god-like, as he turned it to be struck by the sunrise.

"I know of something that will alter that antagonism, something that is outside us, something that you and I have all our lives perhaps taken too little account of. The equal and eternal human being will alter that antagonism, for the human being sees no real antagonism between laughter and respect, the human being, the common man, whom mere geniuses like you and me can only worship like a god. When dark and dreary days come, you and I are necessary, the pure fanatic, the pure satirist. We have between us remedied a great wrong. We have lifted the modern cities into that poetry which every one who knows mankind knows to be immeasurably more common than the commonplace. But in healthy people there is no war between us. We are but the two lobes of the brain of a ploughman. Laughter and love are everywhere. The cathedrals, built in the ages that loved God, are full of blasphemous grotesques. The mother laughs continually at the child, the lover laughs continually at the lover, the wife at the husband, the friend at the friend. Auberon Quin, we have been too long separated; let us go out together. You have a halberd and I a sword, let us start our wanderings over the world. For we are its two essentials. Come, it is already day."

In the blank white light Auberon hesitated a moment. Then he made the formal salute with his halberd, and they went away together into the unknown world.

THE END