

Chapter 5. The Noticeable Conduct of Professor Chadd

Basil Grant had comparatively few friends besides myself; yet he was the reverse of an unsociable man. He would talk to any one anywhere, and talk not only well but with perfectly genuine concern and enthusiasm for that person's affairs. He went through the world, as it were, as if he were always on the top of an omnibus or waiting for a train. Most of these chance acquaintances, of course, vanished into darkness out of his life. A few here and there got hooked on to him, so to speak, and became his lifelong intimates, but there was an accidental look about all of them as if they were windfalls, samples taken at random, goods fallen from a goods train or presents fished out of a bran-pie. One would be, let us say, a veterinary surgeon with the appearance of a jockey; another, a mild prebendary with a white beard and vague views; another, a young captain in the Lancers, seemingly exactly like other captains in the Lancers; another, a small dentist from Fulham, in all reasonable certainty precisely like every other dentist from Fulham. Major Brown, small, dry, and dapper, was one of these; Basil had made his acquaintance over a discussion in a hotel cloak-room about the right hat, a discussion which reduced the little major almost to a kind of masculine hysterics, the compound of the selfishness of an old bachelor and the scrupulosity of an old maid. They had gone home in a cab together and then dined with each other twice a week until they died. I myself was another. I had met Grant while he was still a judge, on the balcony of the National Liberal Club, and exchanged a few words about the weather. Then we had talked for about an hour about politics and God; for men always talk about the most important things to total strangers. It is because in the total stranger we perceive man himself; the image of God is not disguised by resemblances to an uncle or doubts of the wisdom of a moustache.

One of the most interesting of Basil's motley group of acquaintances was Professor Chadd. He was known to the ethnological world (which is a very interesting world, but a long way off this one) as the second greatest, if not the greatest, authority on the relations of savages to language. He was known to the neighbourhood of Hart Street, Bloomsbury, as a bearded man with a bald head, spectacles, and a patient face, the face of an unaccountable Nonconformist who had forgotten how to be angry. He went to and fro between the British Museum and a selection of blameless tea-shops, with an armful of books and a poor but honest umbrella. He was never seen without the books and the umbrella, and was supposed (by the lighter wits of the Persian MS. room) to go to bed with them in his little brick villa in the neighbourhood of Shepherd's Bush. There he lived with three sisters, ladies of solid goodness, but sinister demeanour. His life was happy, as are almost all the lives of methodical students, but one would not have

called it exhilarating. His only hours of exhilaration occurred when his friend, Basil Grant, came into the house, late at night, a tornado of conversation.

Basil, though close on sixty, had moods of boisterous babyishness, and these seemed for some reason or other to descend upon him particularly in the house of his studious and almost dingy friend. I can remember vividly (for I was acquainted with both parties and often dined with them) the gaiety of Grant on that particular evening when the strange calamity fell upon the professor. Professor Chadd was, like most of his particular class and type (the class that is at once academic and middle-class), a Radical of a solemn and old-fashioned type. Grant was a Radical himself, but he was that more discriminating and not uncommon type of Radical who passes most of his time in abusing the Radical party. Chadd had just contributed to a magazine an article called 'Zulu Interests and the New Makango Frontier', in which a precise scientific report of his study of the customs of the people of T'Chaka was reinforced by a severe protest against certain interferences with these customs both by the British and the Germans. He was sitting with the magazine in front of him, the lamplight shining on his spectacles, a wrinkle in his forehead, not of anger, but of perplexity, as Basil Grant strode up and down the room, shaking it with his voice, with his high spirits and his heavy tread.

"It's not your opinions that I object to, my esteemed Chadd," he was saying, "it's you. You are quite right to champion the Zulus, but for all that you do not sympathize with them. No doubt you know the Zulu way of cooking tomatoes and the Zulu prayer before blowing one's nose; but for all that you don't understand them as well as I do, who don't know an assegai from an alligator. You are more learned, Chadd, but I am more Zulu. Why is it that the jolly old barbarians of this earth are always championed by people who are their antithesis? Why is it? You are sagacious, you are benevolent, you are well informed, but, Chadd, you are not savage. Live no longer under that rosy illusion. Look in the glass. Ask your sisters. Consult the librarian of the British Museum. Look at this umbrella." And he held up that sad but still respectable article. "Look at it. For ten mortal years to my certain knowledge you have carried that object under your arm, and I have no sort of doubt that you carried it at the age of eight months, and it never occurred to you to give one wild yell and hurl it like a javelin--thus--"

And he sent the umbrella whizzing past the professor's bald head, so that it knocked over a pile of books with a crash and left a vase rocking.

Professor Chadd appeared totally unmoved, with his face still lifted to the lamp and the wrinkle cut in his forehead.

"Your mental processes," he said, "always go a little too fast. And they are stated

without method. There is no kind of inconsistency"--and no words can convey the time he took to get to the end of the word--"between valuing the right of the aborigines to adhere to their stage in the evolutionary process, so long as they find it congenial and requisite to do so. There is, I say, no inconsistency between this concession which I have just described to you and the view that the evolutionary stage in question is, nevertheless, so far as we can form any estimate of values in the variety of cosmic processes, definable in some degree as an inferior evolutionary stage."

Nothing but his lips had moved as he spoke, and his glasses still shone like two pallid moons.

Grant was shaking with laughter as he watched him.

"True," he said, "there is no inconsistency, my son of the red spear. But there is a great deal of incompatibility of temper. I am very far from being certain that the Zulu is on an inferior evolutionary stage, whatever the blazes that may mean. I do not think there is anything stupid or ignorant about howling at the moon or being afraid of devils in the dark. It seems to me perfectly philosophical. Why should a man be thought a sort of idiot because he feels the mystery and peril of existence itself? Suppose, my dear Chadd, suppose it is we who are the idiots because we are not afraid of devils in the dark?"

Professor Chadd slit open a page of the magazine with a bone paper-knife and the intent reverence of the bibliophile.

"Beyond all question," he said, "it is a tenable hypothesis. I allude to the hypothesis which I understand you to entertain, that our civilization is not or may not be an advance upon, and indeed (if I apprehend you), is or may be a retrogression from states identical with or analogous to the state of the Zulus. Moreover, I shall be inclined to concede that such a proposition is of the nature, in some degree at least, of a primary proposition, and cannot adequately be argued, in the same sense, I mean, that the primary proposition of pessimism, or the primary proposition of the non-existence of matter, cannot adequately be argued. But I do not conceive you to be under the impression that you have demonstrated anything more concerning this proposition than that it is tenable, which, after all, amounts to little more than the statement that it is not a contradiction in terms."

Basil threw a book at his head and took out a cigar.

"You don't understand," he said, "but, on the other hand, as a compensation, you don't mind smoking. Why you don't object to that disgustingly barbaric rite I can't

think. I can only say that I began it when I began to be a Zulu, about the age of ten. What I maintained was that although you knew more about Zulus in the sense that you are a scientist, I know more about them in the sense that I am a savage. For instance, your theory of the origin of language, something about its having come from the formulated secret language of some individual creature, though you knocked me silly with facts and scholarship in its favour, still does not convince me, because I have a feeling that that is not the way that things happen. If you ask me why I think so I can only answer that I am a Zulu; and if you ask me (as you most certainly will) what is my definition of a Zulu, I can answer that also. He is one who has climbed a Sussex apple-tree at seven and been afraid of a ghost in an English lane."

"Your process of thought--" began the immovable Chadd, but his speech was interrupted. His sister, with that masculinity which always in such families concentrates in sisters, flung open the door with a rigid arm and said:

"James, Mr Bingham of the British Museum wants to see you again."

The philosopher rose with a dazed look, which always indicates in such men the fact that they regard philosophy as a familiar thing, but practical life as a weird and unnerving vision, and walked dubiously out of the room.

"I hope you do not mind my being aware of it, Miss Chadd," said Basil Grant, "but I hear that the British Museum has recognized one of the men who have deserved well of their commonwealth. It is true, is it not, that Professor Chadd is likely to be made keeper of Asiatic manuscripts?"

The grim face of the spinster betrayed a great deal of pleasure and a great deal of pathos also. "I believe it's true," she said. "If it is, it will not only be great glory which women, I assure you, feel a great deal, but great relief, which they feel more; relief from worry from a lot of things. James' health has never been good, and while we are as poor as we are he had to do journalism and coaching, in addition to his own dreadful grinding notions and discoveries, which he loves more than man, woman, or child. I have often been afraid that unless something of this kind occurred we should really have to be careful of his brain. But I believe it is practically settled."

"I am delighted," began Basil, but with a worried face, "but these red-tape negotiations are so terribly chancy that I really can't advise you to build on hope, only to be hurled down into bitterness. I've known men, and good men like your brother, come nearer than this and be disappointed. Of course, if it is true--"

"If it is true," said the woman fiercely, "it means that people who have never lived

may make an attempt at living."

Even as she spoke the professor came into the room still with the dazed look in his eyes.

"Is it true?" asked Basil, with burning eyes.

"Not a bit true," answered Chadd after a moment's bewilderment. "Your argument was in three points fallacious."

"What do you mean?" demanded Grant.

"Well," said the professor slowly, "in saying that you could possess a knowledge of the essence of Zulu life distinct from--"

"Oh! confound Zulu life," cried Grant, with a burst of laughter. "I mean, have you got the post?"

"You mean the post of keeper of the Asiatic manuscripts," he said, opening his eye with childlike wonder. "Oh, yes, I got that. But the real objection to your argument, which has only, I admit, occurred to me since I have been out of the room, is that it does not merely presuppose a Zulu truth apart from the facts, but infers that the discovery of it is absolutely impeded by the facts."

"I am crushed," said Basil, and sat down to laugh, while the professor's sister retired to her room, possibly, possibly not.

It was extremely late when we left the Chadds, and it is an extremely long and tiresome journey from Shepherd's Bush to Lambeth. This may be our excuse for the fact that we (for I was stopping the night with Grant) got down to breakfast next day at a time inexpressibly criminal, a time, in point of fact, close upon noon. Even to that belated meal we came in a very lounging and leisurely fashion. Grant, in particular, seemed so dreamy at table that he scarcely saw the pile of letters by his plate, and I doubt if he would have opened any of them if there had not lain on the top that one thing which has succeeded amid modern carelessness in being really urgent and coercive--a telegram. This he opened with the same heavy distraction with which he broke his egg and drank his tea. When he read it he did not stir a hair or say a word, but something, I know not what, made me feel that the motionless figure had been pulled together suddenly as strings are tightened on a slack guitar. Though he said nothing and did not move, I knew that he had been for an instant cleared and sharpened with a shock of cold water. It was scarcely any surprise to me when a man who had drifted sullenly to his seat and fallen into it, kicked it away like a cur from under him

and came round to me in two strides.

"What do you make of that?" he said, and flattened out the wire in front of me.

It ran: "Please come at once. James' mental state dangerous. Chadd."

"What does the woman mean?" I said after a pause, irritably. "Those women have been saying that the poor old professor was mad ever since he was born."

"You are mistaken," said Grant composedly. "It is true that all sensible women think all studious men mad. It is true, for the matter of that, all women of any kind think all men of any kind mad. But they don't put it in telegrams, any more than they wire to you that grass is green or God all-merciful. These things are truisms, and often private ones at that. If Miss Chadd has written down under the eye of a strange woman in a post-office that her brother is off his head you may be perfectly certain that she did it because it was a matter of life and death, and she can think of no other way of forcing us to come promptly."

"It will force us of course," I said, smiling.

"Oh, yes," he replied; "there is a cab-rank near."

Basil scarcely said a word as we drove across Westminster Bridge, through Trafalgar Square, along Piccadilly, and up the Uxbridge Road. Only as he was opening the gate he spoke.

"I think you will take my word for it, my friend," he said; "this is one of the most queer and complicated and astounding incidents that ever happened in London or, for that matter, in any high civilization."

"I confess with the greatest sympathy and reverence that I don't quite see it," I said. "Is it so very extraordinary or complicated that a dreamy somnambulant old invalid who has always walked on the borders of the inconceivable should go mad under the shock of great joy? Is it so very extraordinary that a man with a head like a turnip and a soul like a spider's web should not find his strength equal to a confounding change of fortunes? Is it, in short, so very extraordinary that James Chadd should lose his wits from excitement?"

"It would not be extraordinary in the least," answered Basil, with placidity. "It would not be extraordinary in the least," he repeated, "if the professor had gone mad. That was not the extraordinary circumstance to which I referred."

"What," I asked, stamping my foot, "was the extraordinary thing?"

"The extraordinary thing," said Basil, ringing the bell, "is that he has not gone mad from excitement."

The tall and angular figure of the eldest Miss Chadd blocked the doorway as the door opened. Two other Miss Chadds seemed in the same way to be blocking the narrow passage and the little parlour. There was a general sense of their keeping something from view. They seemed like three black-clad ladies in some strange play of Maeterlinck, veiling the catastrophe from the audience in the manner of the Greek chorus.

"Sit down, won't you?" said one of them, in a voice that was somewhat rigid with pain. "I think you had better be told first what has happened."

Then, with her bleak face looking unmeaningly out of the window, she continued, in an even and mechanical voice:

"I had better state everything that occurred just as it occurred. This morning I was clearing away the breakfast things, my sisters were both somewhat unwell, and had not come down. My brother had just gone out of the room, I believe, to fetch a book. He came back again, however, without it, and stood for some time staring at the empty grate. I said, 'Were you looking for anything I could get?' He did not answer, but this constantly happens, as he is often very abstracted. I repeated my question, and still he did not answer. Sometimes he is so wrapped up in his studies that nothing but a touch on the shoulder would make him aware of one's presence, so I came round the table towards him. I really do not know how to describe the sensation which I then had. It seems simply silly, but at the moment it seemed something enormous, upsetting one's brain. The fact is, James was standing on one leg."

Grant smiled slowly and rubbed his hands with a kind of care.

"Standing on one leg?" I repeated.

"Yes," replied the dead voice of the woman without an inflection to suggest that she felt the fantasticality of her statement. "He was standing on the left leg and the right drawn up at a sharp angle, the toe pointing downwards. I asked him if his leg hurt him. His only answer was to shoot the leg straight at right angles to the other, as if pointing to the other with his toe to the wall. He was still looking quite gravely at the fireplace.

"James, what is the matter?" I cried, for I was thoroughly frightened. James gave three kicks in the air with the right leg, flung up the other, gave three kicks in the

air with it also and spun round like a teetotum the other way. 'Are you mad?' I cried. 'Why don't you answer me?' He had come to a standstill facing me, and was looking at me as he always does, with his lifted eyebrows and great spectacled eyes. When I had spoken he remained a second or two motionless, and then his only reply was to lift his left foot slowly from the floor and describe circles with it in the air. I rushed to the door and shouted for Christina. I will not dwell on the dreadful hours that followed. All three of us talked to him, implored him to speak to us with appeals that might have brought back the dead, but he has done nothing but hop and dance and kick with a solemn silent face. It looks as if his legs belonged to some one else or were possessed by devils. He has never spoken to us from that time to this."

"Where is he now?" I said, getting up in some agitation. "We ought not to leave him alone."

"Doctor Colman is with him," said Miss Chadd calmly. "They are in the garden. Doctor Colman thought the air would do him good. And he can scarcely go into the street."

Basil and I walked rapidly to the window which looked out on the garden. It was a small and somewhat smug suburban garden; the flower beds a little too neat and like the pattern of a coloured carpet; but on this shining and opulent summer day even they had the exuberance of something natural, I had almost said tropical. In the middle of a bright and verdant but painfully circular lawn stood two figures. One of them was a small, sharp-looking man with black whiskers and a very polished hat (I presume Dr Colman), who was talking very quietly and clearly, yet with a nervous twitch, as it were, in his face. The other was our old friend, listening with his old forbearing expression and owlish eyes, the strong sunlight gleaming on his glasses as the lamplight had gleamed the night before, when the boisterous Basil had rallied him on his studious decorum. But for one thing the figure of this morning might have been the identical figure of last night. That one thing was that while the face listened reposefully the legs were industriously dancing like the legs of a marionette. The neat flowers and the sunny glitter of the garden lent an indescribable sharpness and incredibility to the prodigy--the prodigy of the head of a hermit and the legs of a harlequin. For miracles should always happen in broad daylight. The night makes them credible and therefore commonplace.

The second sister had by this time entered the room and came somewhat drearily to the window.

"You know, Adelaide," she said, "that Mr Bingham from the Museum is coming again at three."

"I know," said Adelaide Chadd bitterly. "I suppose we shall have to tell him about this. I thought that no good fortune would ever come easily to us."

Grant suddenly turned round. "What do you mean?" he said. "What will you have to tell Mr Bingham?"

"You know what I shall have to tell him," said the professor's sister, almost fiercely. "I don't know that we need give it its wretched name. Do you think that the keeper of Asiatic manuscripts will be allowed to go on like that?" And she pointed for an instant at the figure in the garden, the shining, listening face and the unresting feet.

Basil Grant took out his watch with an abrupt movement. "When did you say the British Museum man was coming?" he said.

"Three o'clock," said Miss Chadd briefly.

"Then I have an hour before me," said Grant, and without another word threw up the window and jumped out into the garden. He did not walk straight up to the doctor and lunatic, but strolling round the garden path drew near them cautiously and yet apparently carelessly. He stood a couple of feet off them, seemingly counting halfpence out of his trousers pocket, but, as I could see, looking up steadily under the broad brim of his hat.

Suddenly he stepped up to Professor Chadd's elbow, and said, in a loud familiar voice, "Well, my boy, do you still think the Zulus our inferiors?"

The doctor knitted his brows and looked anxious, seeming to be about to speak. The professor turned his bald and placid head towards Grant in a friendly manner, but made no answer, idly flinging his left leg about.

"Have you converted Dr Colman to your views?" Basil continued, still in the same loud and lucid tone.

Chadd only shuffled his feet and kicked a little with the other leg, his expression still benevolent and inquiring. The doctor cut in rather sharply. "Shall we go inside, professor?" he said. "Now you have shown me the garden. A beautiful garden. A most beautiful garden. Let us go in," and he tried to draw the kicking ethnologist by the elbow, at the same time whispering to Grant: "I must ask you not to trouble him with questions. Most risky. He must be soothed."

Basil answered in the same tone, with great coolness:

"Of course your directions must be followed out, doctor. I will endeavour to do so, but I hope it will not be inconsistent with them if you will leave me alone with my poor friend in this garden for an hour. I want to watch him. I assure you, Dr Colman, that I shall say very little to him, and that little shall be as soothing as-- as syrup."

The doctor wiped his eyeglass thoughtfully.

"It is rather dangerous for him," he said, "to be long in the strong sun without his hat. With his bald head, too."

"That is soon settled," said Basil composedly, and took off his own big hat and clapped it on the egglike skull of the professor. The latter did not turn round but danced away with his eyes on the horizon.

The doctor put on his glasses again, looked severely at the two for some seconds, with his head on one side like a bird's, and then saying, shortly, "All right," strutted away into the house, where the three Misses Chadd were all looking out from the parlour window on to the garden. They looked out on it with hungry eyes for a full hour without moving, and they saw a sight which was more extraordinary than madness itself.

Basil Grant addressed a few questions to the madman, without succeeding in making him do anything but continue to caper, and when he had done this slowly took a red note-book out of one pocket and a large pencil out of another.

He began hurriedly to scribble notes. When the lunatic skipped away from him he would walk a few yards in pursuit, stop, and make notes again. Thus they followed each other round and round the foolish circle of turf, the one writing in pencil with the face of a man working out a problem, the other leaping and playing like a child.

After about three-quarters of an hour of this imbecile scene, Grant put the pencil in his pocket, but kept the note-book open in his hand, and walking round the mad professor, planted himself directly in front of him.

Then occurred something that even those already used to that wild morning had not anticipated or dreamed. The professor, on finding Basil in front of him, stared with a blank benignity for a few seconds, and then drew up his left leg and hung it bent in the attitude that his sister had described as being the first of all his antics. And the moment he had done it Basil Grant lifted his own leg and held it out rigid before him, confronting Chadd with the flat sole of his boot. The

professor dropped his bent leg, and swinging his weight on to it kicked out the other behind, like a man swimming. Basil crossed his feet like a saltire cross, and then flung them apart again, giving a leap into the air. Then before any of the spectators could say a word or even entertain a thought about the matter, both of them were dancing a sort of jig or hornpipe opposite each other; and the sun shone down on two madmen instead of one.

They were so stricken with the deafness and blindness of monomania that they did not see the eldest Miss Chadd come out feverishly into the garden with gestures of entreaty, a gentleman following her. Professor Chadd was in the wildest posture of a pas-de- quatre, Basil Grant seemed about to turn a cart-wheel, when they were frozen in their follies by the steely voice of Adelaide Chadd saying, "Mr Bingham of the British Museum."

Mr Bingham was a slim, well-clad gentleman with a pointed and slightly effeminate grey beard, unimpeachable gloves, and formal but agreeable manners. He was the type of the over-civilized, as Professor Chadd was of the uncivilized pedant. His formality and agreeableness did him some credit under the circumstances. He had a vast experience of books and a considerable experience of the more dilettante fashionable salons. But neither branch of knowledge had accustomed him to the spectacle of two grey-haired middle-class gentlemen in modern costume throwing themselves about like acrobats as a substitute for an after-dinner nap.

The professor continued his antics with perfect placidity, but Grant stopped abruptly. The doctor had reappeared on the scene, and his shiny black eyes, under his shiny black hat, moved restlessly from one of them to the other.

"Dr Colman," said Basil, turning to him, "will you entertain Professor Chadd again for a little while? I am sure that he needs you. Mr Bingham, might I have the pleasure of a few moments' private conversation? My name is Grant."

Mr Bingham, of the British Museum, bowed in a manner that was respectful but a trifle bewildered.

"Miss Chadd will excuse me," continued Basil easily, "if I know my way about the house." And he led the dazed librarian rapidly through the back door into the parlour.

"Mr Bingham," said Basil, setting a chair for him, "I imagine that Miss Chadd has told you of this distressing occurrence."

"She has, Mr Grant," said Bingham, looking at the table with a sort of

compassionate nervousness. "I am more pained than I can say by this dreadful calamity. It seems quite heart-rending that the thing should have happened just as we have decided to give your eminent friend a position which falls far short of his merits. As it is, of course--really, I don't know what to say. Professor Chadd may, of course, retain--I sincerely trust he will--his extraordinarily valuable intellect. But I am afraid--I am really afraid--that it would not do to have the curator of the Asiatic manuscripts--er--dancing about."

"I have a suggestion to make," said Basil, and sat down abruptly in his chair, drawing it up to the table.

"I am delighted, of course," said the gentleman from the British Museum, coughing and drawing up his chair also.

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked for just the moments required for Basil to clear his throat and collect his words, and then he said:

"My proposal is this. I do not know that in the strict use of words you could altogether call it a compromise, still it has something of that character. My proposal is that the Government (acting, as I presume, through your Museum) should pay Professor Chadd L800 a year until he stops dancing."

"Eight hundred a year!" said Mr Bingham, and for the first time lifted his mild blue eyes to those of his interlocutor--and he raised them with a mild blue stare. "I think I have not quite understood you. Did I understand you to say that Professor Chadd ought to be employed, in his present state, in the Asiatic manuscript department at eight hundred a year?"

Grant shook his head resolutely.

"No," he said firmly. "No. Chadd is a friend of mine, and I would say anything for him I could. But I do not say, I cannot say, that he ought to take on the Asiatic manuscripts. I do not go so far as that. I merely say that until he stops dancing you ought to pay him L800 Surely you have some general fund for the endowment of research."

Mr Bingham looked bewildered.

"I really don't know," he said, blinking his eyes, "what you are talking about. Do you ask us to give this obvious lunatic nearly a thousand a year for life?"

"Not at all," cried Basil, keenly and triumphantly. "I never said for life. Not at all."

"What for, then?" asked the meek Bingham, suppressing an instinct meekly to tear his hair. "How long is this endowment to run? Not till his death? Till the Judgement day?"

"No," said Basil, beaming, "but just what I said. Till he has stopped dancing." And he lay back with satisfaction and his hands in his pockets.

Bingham had by this time fastened his eyes keenly on Basil Grant and kept them there.

"Come, Mr Grant," he said. "Do I seriously understand you to suggest that the Government pay Professor Chadd an extraordinarily high salary simply on the ground that he has (pardon the phrase) gone mad? That he should be paid more than four good clerks solely on the ground that he is flinging his boots about in the back yard?"

"Precisely," said Grant composedly.

"That this absurd payment is not only to run on with the absurd dancing, but actually to stop with the absurd dancing?"

"One must stop somewhere," said Grant. "Of course."

Bingham rose and took up his perfect stick and gloves.

"There is really nothing more to be said, Mr Grant," he said coldly. "What you are trying to explain to me may be a joke--a slightly unfeeling joke. It may be your sincere view, in which case I ask your pardon for the former suggestion. But, in any case, it appears quite irrelevant to my duties. The mental morbidity, the mental downfall, of Professor Chadd, is a thing so painful to me that I cannot easily endure to speak of it. But it is clear there is a limit to everything. And if the Archangel Gabriel went mad it would sever his connection, I am sorry to say, with the British Museum Library."

He was stepping towards the door, but Grant's hand, flung out in dramatic warning, arrested him.

"Stop!" said Basil sternly. "Stop while there is yet time. Do you want to take part in a great work, Mr Bingham? Do you want to help in the glory of Europe--in the glory of science? Do you want to carry your head in the air when it is bald or white because of the part that you bore in a great discovery? Do you want--"

Bingham cut in sharply:

"And if I do want this, Mr Grant--"

"Then," said Basil lightly, "your task is easy. Get Chadd L800 a year till he stops dancing."

With a fierce flap of his swinging gloves Bingham turned impatiently to the door, but in passing out of it found it blocked. Dr Colman was coming in.

"Forgive me, gentlemen," he said, in a nervous, confidential voice, "the fact is, Mr Grant, I--er--have made a most disturbing discovery about Mr Chadd."

Bingham looked at him with grave eyes.

"I was afraid so," he said. "Drink, I imagine."

"Drink!" echoed Colman, as if that were a much milder affair. "Oh, no, it's not drink."

Mr Bingham became somewhat agitated, and his voice grew hurried and vague. "Homicidal mania--" he began.

"No, no," said the medical man impatiently.

"Thinks he's made of glass," said Bingham feverishly, "or says he's God--or--"

"No," said Dr Colman sharply; "the fact is, Mr Grant, my discovery is of a different character. The awful thing about him is--"

"Oh, go on, sir," cried Bingham, in agony.

"The awful thing about him is," repeated Colman, with deliberation, "that he isn't mad."

"Not mad!"

"There are quite well-known physical tests of lunacy," said the doctor shortly; "he hasn't got any of them."

"But why does he dance?" cried the despairing Bingham. "Why doesn't he answer us? Why hasn't he spoken to his family?"

"The devil knows," said Dr Colman coolly. "I'm paid to judge of lunatics, but not of

fools. The man's not mad."

"What on earth can it mean? Can't we make him listen?" said Mr Bingham. "Can none get into any kind of communication with him?"

Grant's voice struck in sudden and clear, like a steel bell:

"I shall be very happy," he said, "to give him any message you like to send."

Both men stared at him.

"Give him a message?" they cried simultaneously. "How will you give him a message?"

Basil smiled in his slow way.

"If you really want to know how I shall give him your message," he began, but Bingham cried:

"Of course, of course," with a sort of frenzy.

"Well," said Basil, "like this." And he suddenly sprang a foot into the air, coming down with crashing boots, and then stood on one leg.

His face was stern, though this effect was slightly spoiled by the fact that one of his feet was making wild circles in the air.

"You drive me to it," he said. "You drive me to betray my friend. And I will, for his own sake, betray him."

The sensitive face of Bingham took on an extra expression of distress as of one anticipating some disgraceful disclosure. "Anything painful, of course--" he began.

Basil let his loose foot fall on the carpet with a crash that struck them all rigid in their feeble attitudes.

"Idiots!" he cried. "Have you seen the man? Have you looked at James Chadd going dismally to and fro from his dingy house to your miserable library, with his futile books and his confounded umbrella, and never seen that he has the eyes of a fanatic? Have you never noticed, stuck casually behind his spectacles and above his seedy old collar, the face of a man who might have burned heretics, or died for the philosopher's stone? It is all my fault, in a way: I lit the dynamite of

his deadly faith. I argued against him on the score of his famous theory about language--the theory that language was complete in certain individuals and was picked up by others simply by watching them. I also chaffed him about not understanding things in rough and ready practice. What has this glorious bigot done? He has answered me. He has worked out a system of language of his own (it would take too long to explain); he has made up, I say, a language of his own. And he has sworn that till people understand it, till he can speak to us in this language, he will not speak in any other. And he shall not. I have understood, by taking careful notice; and, by heaven, so shall the others. This shall not be blown upon. He shall finish his experiment. He shall have L800 a year from somewhere till he has stopped dancing. To stop him now is an infamous war on a great idea. It is religious persecution."

Mr Bingham held out his hand cordially.

"I thank you, Mr Grant," he said. "I hope I shall be able to answer for the source of the L800 and I fancy that I shall. Will you come in my cab?"

"No, thank you very much, Mr Bingham," said Grant heartily. "I think I will go and have a chat with the professor in the garden."

The conversation between Chadd and Grant appeared to be personal and friendly. They were still dancing when I left.