

“I had to take the carving knife from the boy,” Mrs Verloc continued, a little sleepily now. “He was shouting and stamping and sobbing. He can’t stand the notion of any cruelty. He would have stuck that officer like a pig if he had seen him then. It’s true, too! Some people don’t deserve much mercy.” Mrs Verloc’s voice ceased, and the expression of her motionless eyes became more and more contemplative and veiled during the long pause. “Comfortable, dear?” she asked in a faint, far-away voice. “Shall I put out the light now?”

The dreary conviction that there was no sleep for him held Mr Verloc mute and hopelessly inert in his fear of darkness. He made a great effort.

“Yes. Put it out,” he said at last in a hollow tone.

#### **CHAPTER IV**

Most of the thirty or so little tables covered by red cloths with a white design stood ranged at right angles to the deep brown wainscoting of the underground hall. Bronze chandeliers with many globes depended from the low, slightly vaulted ceiling, and the fresco paintings ran flat and dull all round the walls without windows, representing scenes of the chase and of outdoor revelry in mediæval costumes. Varlets in green jerkins brandished hunting knives and raised on high tankards of foaming beer.

“Unless I am very much mistaken, you are the man who would know the inside of this confounded affair,” said the robust Ossipon, leaning over, his elbows far out on the table and his feet tucked back completely under his chair. His eyes stared with wild eagerness.

An upright semi-grand piano near the door, flanked by two palms in pots, executed suddenly all by itself a valse tune with aggressive virtuosity. The din it raised was deafening. When it ceased, as abruptly as it had started, the bespectacled, dingy little man who faced Ossipon behind a heavy glass mug full of beer emitted calmly what had the sound of a general proposition.

“In principle what one of us may or may not know as to any given fact can’t be a matter for inquiry to the others.”

“Certainly not,” Comrade Ossipon agreed in a quiet undertone. “In principle.”

With his big florid face held between his hands he continued to stare hard, while the dingy little man in spectacles coolly took a drink of beer and stood the glass mug back on the table. His flat, large ears departed widely from the sides of his skull, which looked frail enough for Ossipon to crush between thumb and forefinger; the dome of the forehead seemed to rest on the rim of the spectacles; the flat cheeks, of a greasy, unhealthy complexion, were merely smudged by the miserable poverty of a thin dark whisker. The lamentable inferiority of the whole physique was made ludicrous by the supremely self-confident bearing of the individual. His speech was curt, and he had a particularly impressive manner of keeping silent.

Ossipon spoke again from between his hands in a mutter.

“Have you been out much to-day?”

“No. I stayed in bed all the morning,” answered the other. “Why?”

“Oh! Nothing,” said Ossipon, gazing earnestly and quivering inwardly with the desire to find out something, but obviously intimidated by the little man’s overwhelming air of unconcern. When talking with this comrade—which happened but rarely—the big Ossipon suffered from a sense of moral and even physical insignificance. However, he ventured another question. “Did you walk down here?”

“No; omnibus,” the little man answered readily enough. He lived far away in Islington, in a small house down a shabby street, littered with straw and dirty paper, where out of school hours a troop of assorted children ran and squabbled with a shrill, joyless, rowdy clamour. His single back room, remarkable for having an extremely large cupboard, he rented furnished from two elderly spinsters, dressmakers in a humble way with a clientele of servant girls mostly. He had a heavy padlock put on the cupboard, but otherwise he was a model lodger, giving no trouble, and requiring practically no attendance. His oddities were that he insisted on being present when his room was being swept, and that when he went out he locked his door, and took the key away with him.

Ossipon had a vision of these round black-rimmed spectacles progressing along the streets on the top of an omnibus, their self-confident glitter falling here and there on the walls of houses or lowered upon the heads of the unconscious stream of people on the pavements. The ghost of a sickly smile altered the set of Ossipon’s thick lips at the thought of the walls nodding, of people running for life at the sight of those spectacles. If they had only known! What a panic! He murmured interrogatively: “Been sitting long here?”

“An hour or more,” answered the other negligently, and took a pull at the dark beer. All his movements—the way he grasped the mug, the act of drinking, the way he set the heavy glass down and folded his arms—had a firmness, an assured precision which made the big and muscular Ossipon, leaning forward with staring eyes and protruding lips, look the picture of eager indecision.

“An hour,” he said. “Then it may be you haven’t heard yet the news I’ve heard just now—in the street. Have you?”

The little man shook his head negatively the least bit. But as he gave no indication of curiosity Ossipon ventured to add that he had heard it just outside the place. A newspaper boy had yelled the thing under his very nose, and not being prepared for anything of that sort, he was very much startled and upset. He had to come in there with a dry mouth. “I never thought of finding you here,” he added, murmuring steadily, with his elbows planted on the table.

“I come here sometimes,” said the other, preserving his provoking coolness of demeanour.

“It’s wonderful that you of all people should have heard nothing of it,” the big Ossipon continued. His eyelids snapped nervously upon the shining eyes. “You of all people,” he repeated tentatively. This obvious restraint argued an incredible and inexplicable timidity of the big fellow before the calm little man, who again lifted the glass mug, drank, and put it down with brusque and assured movements. And that was all.

Ossipon after waiting for something, word or sign, that did not come, made an effort to assume a sort of indifference.

“Do you,” he said, deadening his voice still more, “give your stuff to anybody who’s up to asking you for it?”

“My absolute rule is never to refuse anybody—as long as I have a pinch by me,” answered the little man with decision.

“That’s a principle?” commented Ossipon.

“It’s a principle.”

“And you think it’s sound?”

The large round spectacles, which gave a look of staring self-confidence to the sallow face, confronted Ossipon like sleepless, unwinking orbs flashing a cold fire.

“Perfectly. Always. Under every circumstance. What could stop me? Why should I not? Why should I think twice about it?”

Ossipon gasped, as it were, discreetly.

“Do you mean to say you would hand it over to a ‘teck’ if one came to ask you for your wares?”

The other smiled faintly.

“Let them come and try it on, and you will see,” he said. “They know me, but I know also every one of them. They won’t come near me—not they.”

His thin livid lips snapped together firmly. Ossipon began to argue.

“But they could send someone—rig a plant on you. Don’t you see? Get the stuff from you in that way, and then arrest you with the proof in their hands.”

“Proof of what? Dealing in explosives without a licence perhaps.” This was meant for a contemptuous jeer, though the expression of the thin, sickly face remained unchanged, and the utterance was negligent. “I don’t think there’s one of them anxious to make that arrest. I don’t think they could get one of them to apply for a warrant. I mean one of the best. Not one.”

“Why?” Ossipon asked.

“Because they know very well I take care never to part with the last handful of my wares. I’ve it always by me.” He touched the breast of his coat lightly. “In a thick glass flask,” he added.

“So I have been told,” said Ossipon, with a shade of wonder in his voice. “But I didn’t know if—”

“They know,” interrupted the little man crisply, leaning against the straight chair back, which rose higher than his fragile head. “I shall never be arrested. The game isn’t good enough for any policeman of them all. To deal with a man like me you require sheer, naked, inglorious heroism.” Again his lips closed with a self-confident snap. Ossipon repressed a movement of impatience.

“Or recklessness—or simply ignorance,” he retorted. “They’ve only to get somebody for the job who does not know you carry enough stuff in your pocket to blow yourself and everything within sixty yards of you to pieces.”

“I never affirmed I could not be eliminated,” rejoined the other. “But that wouldn’t be an arrest. Moreover, it’s not so easy as it looks.”

“Bah!” Ossipon contradicted. “Don’t be too sure of that. What’s to prevent half-a-dozen of them jumping upon you from behind in the street? With your arms pinned to your sides you could do nothing—could you?”

“Yes; I could. I am seldom out in the streets after dark,” said the little man impassively, “and never very late. I walk always with my right hand closed round the india-rubber ball which I have in my trouser pocket. The pressing of this ball actuates a detonator inside the flask I carry in my pocket. It’s the principle of the pneumatic instantaneous shutter for a camera lens. The tube leads up—”

With a swift disclosing gesture he gave Ossipon a glimpse of an india-rubber tube, resembling a slender brown worm, issuing from the armhole of his waistcoat and plunging into the inner breast pocket of his jacket. His clothes, of a nondescript brown mixture, were threadbare and marked with stains, dusty in the folds, with ragged button-holes. “The detonator is partly mechanical, partly chemical,” he explained, with casual condescension.

“It is instantaneous, of course?” murmured Ossipon, with a slight shudder.

“Far from it,” confessed the other, with a reluctance which seemed to twist his mouth dolorously. “A full twenty seconds must elapse from the moment I press the ball till the explosion takes place.”

“Phew!” whistled Ossipon, completely appalled. “Twenty seconds! Horrors! You mean to say that you could face that? I should go crazy—”

“Wouldn’t matter if you did. Of course, it’s the weak point of this special system, which is only for my own use. The worst is that the manner of exploding is always the weak point with us. I am trying to invent a detonator that would adjust itself to all conditions of action, and even to unexpected changes of conditions. A variable and yet perfectly precise mechanism. A really intelligent detonator.”

“Twenty seconds,” muttered Ossipon again. “Ough! And then—”

With a slight turn of the head the glitter of the spectacles seemed to gauge the size of the beer saloon in the basement of the renowned Silenus Restaurant.

“Nobody in this room could hope to escape,” was the verdict of that survey. “Nor

yet this couple going up the stairs now.”

The piano at the foot of the staircase clanged through a mazurka with brazen impetuosity, as though a vulgar and impudent ghost were showing off. The keys sank and rose mysteriously. Then all became still. For a moment Ossipon imagined the overlit place changed into a dreadful black hole belching horrible fumes choked with ghastly rubbish of smashed brickwork and mutilated corpses. He had such a distinct perception of ruin and death that he shuddered again. The other observed, with an air of calm sufficiency:

“In the last instance it is character alone that makes for one’s safety. There are very few people in the world whose character is as well established as mine.”

“I wonder how you managed it,” growled Ossipon.

“Force of personality,” said the other, without raising his voice; and coming from the mouth of that obviously miserable organism the assertion caused the robust Ossipon to bite his lower lip. “Force of personality,” he repeated, with ostentatious calm. “I have the means to make myself deadly, but that by itself, you understand, is absolutely nothing in the way of protection. What is effective is the belief those people have in my will to use the means. That’s their impression. It is absolute. Therefore I am deadly.”

“There are individuals of character amongst that lot too,” muttered Ossipon ominously.

“Possibly. But it is a matter of degree obviously, since, for instance, I am not impressed by them. Therefore they are inferior. They cannot be otherwise. Their character is built upon conventional morality. It leans on the social order. Mine stands free from everything artificial. They are bound in all sorts of conventions. They depend on life, which, in this connection, is a historical fact surrounded by all sorts of restraints and considerations, a complex organised fact open to attack at every point; whereas I depend on death, which knows no restraint and cannot be attacked. My superiority is evident.”

“This is a transcendental way of putting it,” said Ossipon, watching the cold glitter of the round spectacles. “I’ve heard Karl Yundt say much the same thing not very long ago.”

“Karl Yundt,” mumbled the other contemptuously, “the delegate of the International Red Committee, has been a posturing shadow all his life. There are three of you delegates, aren’t there? I won’t define the other two, as you are one of them. But what you say means nothing. You are the worthy delegates for

revolutionary propaganda, but the trouble is not only that you are as unable to think independently as any respectable grocer or journalist of them all, but that you have no character whatever.”

Ossipon could not restrain a start of indignation.

“But what do you want from us?” he exclaimed in a deadened voice. “What is it you are after yourself?”

“A perfect detonator,” was the peremptory answer. “What are you making that face for? You see, you can’t even bear the mention of something conclusive.”

“I am not making a face,” growled the annoyed Ossipon bearishly.

“You revolutionists,” the other continued, with leisurely self-confidence, “are the slaves of the social convention, which is afraid of you; slaves of it as much as the very police that stands up in the defence of that convention. Clearly you are, since you want to revolutionise it. It governs your thought, of course, and your action too, and thus neither your thought nor your action can ever be conclusive.” He paused, tranquil, with that air of close, endless silence, then almost immediately went on. “You are not a bit better than the forces arrayed against you—than the police, for instance. The other day I came suddenly upon Chief Inspector Heat at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. He looked at me very steadily. But I did not look at him. Why should I give him more than a glance? He was thinking of many things—of his superiors, of his reputation, of the law courts, of his salary, of newspapers—of a hundred things. But I was thinking of my perfect detonator only. He meant nothing to me. He was as insignificant as—I can’t call to mind anything insignificant enough to compare him with—except Karl Yundt perhaps. Like to like. The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality—counter moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical. He plays his little game—so do you propagandists. But I don’t play; I work fourteen hours a day, and go hungry sometimes. My experiments cost money now and again, and then I must do without food for a day or two. You’re looking at my beer. Yes. I have had two glasses already, and shall have another presently. This is a little holiday, and I celebrate it alone. Why not? I’ve the grit to work alone, quite alone, absolutely alone. I’ve worked alone for years.”

Ossipon’s face had turned dusky red.

“At the perfect detonator—eh?” he sneered, very low.

“Yes,” retorted the other. “It is a good definition. You couldn’t find anything half



so precise to define the nature of your activity with all your committees and delegations. It is I who am the true propagandist.”

“We won’t discuss that point,” said Ossipon, with an air of rising above personal considerations. “I am afraid I’ll have to spoil your holiday for you, though. There’s a man blown up in Greenwich Park this morning.”

“How do you know?”

“They have been yelling the news in the streets since two o’clock. I bought the paper, and just ran in here. Then I saw you sitting at this table. I’ve got it in my pocket now.”

He pulled the newspaper out. It was a good-sized rosy sheet, as if flushed by the warmth of its own convictions, which were optimistic. He scanned the pages rapidly.

“Ah! Here it is. Bomb in Greenwich Park. There isn’t much so far. Half-past eleven. Foggy morning. Effects of explosion felt as far as Romney Road and Park Place. Enormous hole in the ground under a tree filled with smashed roots and broken branches. All round fragments of a man’s body blown to pieces. That’s all. The rest’s mere newspaper gup. No doubt a wicked attempt to blow up the Observatory, they say. H’m. That’s hardly credible.”

He looked at the paper for a while longer in silence, then passed it to the other, who after gazing abstractedly at the print laid it down without comment.

It was Ossipon who spoke first—still resentful.

“The fragments of only one man, you note. Ergo: blew himself up. That spoils your day off for you—don’t it? Were you expecting that sort of move? I hadn’t the slightest idea—not the ghost of a notion of anything of the sort being planned to come off here—in this country. Under the present circumstances it’s nothing short of criminal.”

The little man lifted his thin black eyebrows with dispassionate scorn.

“Criminal! What is that? What is crime? What can be the meaning of such an assertion?”

“How am I to express myself? One must use the current words,” said Ossipon impatiently. “The meaning of this assertion is that this business may affect our position very adversely in this country. Isn’t that crime enough for you? I am



convinced you have been giving away some of your stuff lately.”

Ossipon stared hard. The other, without flinching, lowered and raised his head slowly.

“You have!” burst out the editor of the F. P. leaflets in an intense whisper. “No! And are you really handing it over at large like this, for the asking, to the first fool that comes along?”

“Just so! The condemned social order has not been built up on paper and ink, and I don’t fancy that a combination of paper and ink will ever put an end to it, whatever you may think. Yes, I would give the stuff with both hands to every man, woman, or fool that likes to come along. I know what you are thinking about. But I am not taking my cue from the Red Committee. I would see you all hounded out of here, or arrested—or beheaded for that matter—without turning a hair. What happens to us as individuals is not of the least consequence.”

He spoke carelessly, without heat, almost without feeling, and Ossipon, secretly much affected, tried to copy this detachment.

“If the police here knew their business they would shoot you full of holes with revolvers, or else try to sand-bag you from behind in broad daylight.”

The little man seemed already to have considered that point of view in his dispassionate self-confident manner.

“Yes,” he assented with the utmost readiness. “But for that they would have to face their own institutions. Do you see? That requires uncommon grit. Grit of a special kind.”

Ossipon blinked.

“I fancy that’s exactly what would happen to you if you were to set up your laboratory in the States. They don’t stand on ceremony with their institutions there.”

“I am not likely to go and see. Otherwise your remark is just,” admitted the other. “They have more character over there, and their character is essentially anarchistic. Fertile ground for us, the States—very good ground. The great Republic has the root of the destructive matter in her. The collective temperament is lawless. Excellent. They may shoot us down, but—”

“You are too transcendental for me,” growled Ossipon, with moody concern.

“Logical,” protested the other. “There are several kinds of logic. This is the enlightened kind. America is all right. It is this country that is dangerous, with her idealistic conception of legality. The social spirit of this people is wrapped up in scrupulous prejudices, and that is fatal to our work. You talk of England being our only refuge! So much the worse. Capua! What do we want with refuges? Here you talk, print, plot, and do nothing. I daresay it’s very convenient for such Karl Yundts.”

He shrugged his shoulders slightly, then added with the same leisurely assurance: “To break up the superstition and worship of legality should be our aim. Nothing would please me more than to see Inspector Heat and his likes take to shooting us down in broad daylight with the approval of the public. Half our battle would be won then; the disintegration of the old morality would have set in in its very temple. That is what you ought to aim at. But you revolutionists will never understand that. You plan the future, you lose yourselves in reveries of economical systems derived from what is; whereas what’s wanted is a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life. That sort of future will take care of itself if you will only make room for it. Therefore I would shovel my stuff in heaps at the corners of the streets if I had enough for that; and as I haven’t, I do my best by perfecting a really dependable detonator.”

Ossipon, who had been mentally swimming in deep waters, seized upon the last word as if it were a saving plank.

“Yes. Your detonators. I shouldn’t wonder if it weren’t one of your detonators that made a clean sweep of the man in the park.”

A shade of vexation darkened the determined sallow face confronting Ossipon.

“My difficulty consists precisely in experimenting practically with the various kinds. They must be tried after all. Besides—”

Ossipon interrupted.

“Who could that fellow be? I assure you that we in London had no knowledge— Couldn’t you describe the person you gave the stuff to?”

The other turned his spectacles upon Ossipon like a pair of searchlights.

“Describe him,” he repeated slowly. “I don’t think there can be the slightest objection now. I will describe him to you in one word—Verloc.”

Ossipon, whom curiosity had lifted a few inches off his seat, dropped back, as if hit in the face.

“Verloc! Impossible.”

The self-possessed little man nodded slightly once.

“Yes. He’s the person. You can’t say that in this case I was giving my stuff to the first fool that came along. He was a prominent member of the group as far as I understand.”

“Yes,” said Ossipon. “Prominent. No, not exactly. He was the centre for general intelligence, and usually received comrades coming over here. More useful than important. Man of no ideas. Years ago he used to speak at meetings—in France, I believe. Not very well, though. He was trusted by such men as Latorre, Moser and all that old lot. The only talent he showed really was his ability to elude the attentions of the police somehow. Here, for instance, he did not seem to be looked after very closely. He was regularly married, you know. I suppose it’s with her money that he started that shop. Seemed to make it pay, too.”

Ossipon paused abruptly, muttered to himself “I wonder what that woman will do now?” and fell into thought.

The other waited with ostentatious indifference. His parentage was obscure, and he was generally known only by his nickname of Professor. His title to that designation consisted in his having been once assistant demonstrator in chemistry at some technical institute. He quarrelled with the authorities upon a question of unfair treatment. Afterwards he obtained a post in the laboratory of a manufactory of dyes. There too he had been treated with revolting injustice. His struggles, his privations, his hard work to raise himself in the social scale, had filled him with such an exalted conviction of his merits that it was extremely difficult for the world to treat him with justice—the standard of that notion depending so much upon the patience of the individual. The Professor had genius, but lacked the great social virtue of resignation.

“Intellectually a nonentity,” Ossipon pronounced aloud, abandoning suddenly the inward contemplation of Mrs Verloc’s bereaved person and business. “Quite an ordinary personality. You are wrong in not keeping more in touch with the comrades, Professor,” he added in a reproving tone. “Did he say anything to you—give you some idea of his intentions? I hadn’t seen him for a month. It seems impossible that he should be gone.”

“He told me it was going to be a demonstration against a building,” said the

Professor. "I had to know that much to prepare the missile. I pointed out to him that I had hardly a sufficient quantity for a completely destructive result, but he pressed me very earnestly to do my best. As he wanted something that could be carried openly in the hand, I proposed to make use of an old one-gallon copal varnish can I happened to have by me. He was pleased at the idea. It gave me some trouble, because I had to cut out the bottom first and solder it on again afterwards. When prepared for use, the can enclosed a wide-mouthed, well-corked jar of thick glass packed around with some wet clay and containing sixteen ounces of X2 green powder. The detonator was connected with the screw top of the can. It was ingenious—a combination of time and shock. I explained the system to him. It was a thin tube of tin enclosing a—"

Ossipon's attention had wandered.

"What do you think has happened?" he interrupted.

"Can't tell. Screwed the top on tight, which would make the connection, and then forgot the time. It was set for twenty minutes. On the other hand, the time contact being made, a sharp shock would bring about the explosion at once. He either ran the time too close, or simply let the thing fall. The contact was made all right—that's clear to me at any rate. The system's worked perfectly. And yet you would think that a common fool in a hurry would be much more likely to forget to make the contact altogether. I was worrying myself about that sort of failure mostly. But there are more kinds of fools than one can guard against. You can't expect a detonator to be absolutely fool-proof."

He beckoned to a waiter. Ossipon sat rigid, with the abstracted gaze of mental travail. After the man had gone away with the money he roused himself, with an air of profound dissatisfaction.

"It's extremely unpleasant for me," he mused. "Karl has been in bed with bronchitis for a week. There's an even chance that he will never get up again. Michaelis's luxuriating in the country somewhere. A fashionable publisher has offered him five hundred pounds for a book. It will be a ghastly failure. He has lost the habit of consecutive thinking in prison, you know."

The Professor on his feet, now buttoning his coat, looked about him with perfect indifference.

"What are you going to do?" asked Ossipon wearily. He dreaded the blame of the Central Red Committee, a body which had no permanent place of abode, and of whose membership he was not exactly informed. If this affair eventuated in the stoppage of the modest subsidy allotted to the publication of the F. P. pamphlets,

then indeed he would have to regret Verloc's inexplicable folly.

"Solidarity with the extremest form of action is one thing, and silly recklessness is another," he said, with a sort of moody brutality. "I don't know what came to Verloc. There's some mystery there. However, he's gone. You may take it as you like, but under the circumstances the only policy for the militant revolutionary group is to disclaim all connection with this damned freak of yours. How to make the disclaimer convincing enough is what bothers me."

The little man on his feet, buttoned up and ready to go, was no taller than the seated Ossipon. He levelled his spectacles at the latter's face point-blank.

"You might ask the police for a testimonial of good conduct. They know where every one of you slept last night. Perhaps if you asked them they would consent to publish some sort of official statement."

"No doubt they are aware well enough that we had nothing to do with this," mumbled Ossipon bitterly. "What they will say is another thing." He remained thoughtful, disregarding the short, owlish, shabby figure standing by his side. "I must lay hands on Michaelis at once, and get him to speak from his heart at one of our gatherings. The public has a sort of sentimental regard for that fellow. His name is known. And I am in touch with a few reporters on the big dailies. What he would say would be utter bosh, but he has a turn of talk that makes it go down all the same."

"Like treacle," interjected the Professor, rather low, keeping an impassive expression.

The perplexed Ossipon went on communing with himself half audibly, after the manner of a man reflecting in perfect solitude.

"Confounded ass! To leave such an imbecile business on my hands. And I don't even know if—"

He sat with compressed lips. The idea of going for news straight to the shop lacked charm. His notion was that Verloc's shop might have been turned already into a police trap. They will be bound to make some arrests, he thought, with something resembling virtuous indignation, for the even tenor of his revolutionary life was menaced by no fault of his. And yet unless he went there he ran the risk of remaining in ignorance of what perhaps it would be very material for him to know. Then he reflected that, if the man in the park had been so very much blown to pieces as the evening papers said, he could not have been identified. And if so, the police could have no special reason for watching Verloc's shop more

closely than any other place known to be frequented by marked anarchists—no more reason, in fact, than for watching the doors of the Silenus. There would be a lot of watching all round, no matter where he went. Still—

“I wonder what I had better do now?” he muttered, taking counsel with himself.

A rasping voice at his elbow said, with sedate scorn:

“Fasten yourself upon the woman for all she’s worth.”

After uttering these words the Professor walked away from the table. Ossipon, whom that piece of insight had taken unawares, gave one ineffectual start, and remained still, with a helpless gaze, as though nailed fast to the seat of his chair. The lonely piano, without as much as a music stool to help it, struck a few chords courageously, and beginning a selection of national airs, played him out at last to the tune of “Blue Bells of Scotland.” The painfully detached notes grew faint behind his back while he went slowly upstairs, across the hall, and into the street.

In front of the great doorway a dismal row of newspaper sellers standing clear of the pavement dealt out their wares from the gutter. It was a raw, gloomy day of the early spring; and the grimy sky, the mud of the streets, the rags of the dirty men, harmonised excellently with the eruption of the damp, rubbishy sheets of paper soiled with printers’ ink. The posters, maculated with filth, garnished like tapestry the sweep of the curbstone. The trade in afternoon papers was brisk, yet, in comparison with the swift, constant march of foot traffic, the effect was of indifference, of a disregarded distribution. Ossipon looked hurriedly both ways before stepping out into the cross-currents, but the Professor was already out of sight.