

Pritchard covered his face with his hands for a moment, like a child shutting out an ugliness.

"And to think of her at Hauraki!" he murmured--"with 'er 'air-ribbon on my beer. 'Ada,' she said to her niece... Oh, my Gawd!"...

"On a summer afternoon, when the honeysuckle blooms,
And all Nature seems at rest,
Underneath the bower, 'mid the perfume of the flower,
Sat a maiden with the one she loves the best----"

sang the picnic-party waiting for their train at Glengariff.

"Well, I don't know how you feel about it," said Pyecroft, "but 'avin' seen 'is face for five consecutive nights on end, I'm inclined to finish what's left of the beer an' thank Gawd he's dead!"

BELOW THE MILL DAM

"OUR FATHERS ALSO"

By--they are by with mirth and tears,

Wit or the works of Desire--

Cushioned about on the kindly years
Between the wall and the fire.

The grapes are pressed, the corn is shocked--
Standeth no more to glean;
For the Gates of Love and Learning locked
When they went out between.

All lore our Lady Venus bares
Signalled it was or told
By the dear lips long given to theirs
And longer to the mould.

All Profit, all Device, all Truth
Written it was or said
By the mighty men of their mighty youth.
Which is mighty being dead.

The film that floats before their eyes
The Temple's Veil they call;
And the dust that on the Shewbread lies
Is holy over all.

Warn them of seas that slip our yoke
Of slow conspiring stars--
The ancient Front of Things unbroke
But heavy with new wars?

By--they are by with mirth and tears.
Wit or the waste of Desire--
Cushioned about on the kindly years
Between the wall and the fire.

BELOW THE MILL DAM

"Book--Book--Domesday Book!" They were letting in the water for the evening stint at Robert's Mill, and the wooden Wheel where lived the Spirit of the Mill settled to its nine hundred year old song: "Here Azor, a freeman, held one rod, but it never paid geld. Nun-nun-nunquam geldavit. Here Reinbert has one villein and four cottars with one plough--and wood for six hogs and two fisheries of sixpence and a mill of ten shillings--unum molinum--one mill. Reinbert's mill--Robert's Mill. Then and afterwards and now--tunc et post et modo--Robert's Mill. Book--Book--Domesday Book!"

"I confess," said the Black Rat on the crossbeam, luxuriously trimming his whiskers--"I confess I am not above appreciating my position and all it means." He was a genuine old English black rat, a breed which, report says, is rapidly diminishing before the incursions of the brown variety.

"Appreciation is the surest sign of inadequacy," said the Grey Cat, coiled up on a piece of sacking.

"But I know what you mean," she added. "To sit by right at the heart of things--eh?"

"Yes," said the Black Rat, as the old mill shook and the heavy stones thuttered on the grist. "To possess--er--all this environment as an integral part of one's daily life must insensibly of course ... You see?"

"I feel," said the Grey Cat. "Indeed, if we are not saturated with the spirit of the Mill, who should be?"

"Book--Book--Domesday Book!" the Wheel, set to his work, was running off the tenure of the whole rape, for he knew Domesday Book backwards and forwards: "In Ferle tenuit Abbatia de Wiltuna unam hidam et unam virgam et dimidiam. Nunquam geldavit. And Agemond, a freeman, has half a hide and one rod. I remember Agemond well. Charmin' fellow--friend of mine. He married a Norman girl in the days when we rather looked down on the Normans as upstarts. An' Agemond's dead? So he is. Eh, dearie me! dearie me! I remember the wolves howling outside his door in the big frost of Ten Fifty-Nine.... Essewelde hundredum nunquam geldum reddidit. Book! Book! Domesday Book!"

"After all," the Grey Cat continued, "atmospere is life. It is the influences under which we live that count in the long run. Now, outside"--she cocked one ear towards the half-opened door--"there is an absurd convention that rats and cats are, I won't go so far as to say natural enemies, but opposed forces. Some such ruling may be crudely effective--I don't for a minute presume to set up my standards as final--among the

ditches; but from the larger point of view that one gains by living at the heart of things, it seems for a rule of life a little overstrained. Why, because some of your associates have, shall I say, liberal views on the ultimate destination of a sack of--er--middlings don't they call them----"

"Something of that sort," said the Black Rat, a most sharp and sweet-toothed judge of everything ground in the mill for the last three years.

"Thanks--middlings be it. Why, as I was saying, must I disarrange my fur and my digestion to chase you round the dusty arena whenever we happen to meet?"

"As little reason," said the Black Rat, "as there is for me, who, I trust, am a person of ordinarily decent instincts, to wait till you have gone on a round of calls, and then to assassinate your very charming children."

"Exactly! It has its humorous side though." The Grey Cat yawned. "The miller seems afflicted by it. He shouted large and vague threats to my address, last night at tea, that he wasn't going to keep cats who 'caught no mice.' Those were his words. I remember the grammar sticking in my throat like a herring-bone."

"And what did you do?"

"What does one do when a barbarian utters? One ceases to utter and removes. I removed--towards his pantry. It was a riposte he might appreciate."

"Really those people grow absolutely insufferable," said the Black Rat.

"There is a local ruffian who answers to the name of Mangles--a builder--who has taken possession of the outhouses on the far side of the Wheel for the last fortnight. He has constructed cubical horrors in red brick where those deliciously picturesque pigstyes used to stand. Have you noticed?"

"There has been much misdirected activity of late among the humans. They jabber inordinately. I haven't yet been able to arrive at their reason for existence." The Cat yawned.

"A couple of them came in here last week with wires, and fixed them all about the walls. Wires protected by some abominable composition, ending in iron brackets with glass bulbs. Utterly useless for any purpose and artistically absolutely hideous. What do they mean?"

"Aaah! I have known four-and-twenty leaders of revolt in Faenza," said the Cat, who kept good company with the boarders spending a summer at the Mill Farm. "It means nothing except that humans occasionally bring their dogs with them. I object to dogs in all forms."

"Shouldn't object to dogs," said the Wheel sleepily.... "The Abbot of Wilton kept the best pack in the county. He enclosed all the Harryngton Woods to Sturt Common. Aluric, a freeman, was dispossessed of his holding. They tried the case at Lewes, but he got no change out of William de Warrenne on the bench. William de Warrenne fined Aluric eight and fourpence for treason, and the Abbot of Wilton excommunicated him for

blasphemy. Aluric was no sportsman. Then the Abbot's brother married ... I've forgotten her name, but she was a charmin' little woman. The Lady Philippa was her daughter. That was after the barony was conferred. She rode devilish straight to hounds. They were a bit throatier than we breed now, but a good pack: one of the best. The Abbot kept 'em in splendid shape. Now, who was the woman the Abbot kept? Book--Book! I shall have to go right back to Domesday and work up the centuries: Modo per omnia reddit burgum tunc--tunc--tunc! Was it burgum or hundredum? I shall remember in a minute. There's no hurry." He paused as he turned over silvered with showering drops.

"This won't do," said the Waters in the sluice. "Keep moving."

The Wheel swung forward; the Waters roared on the buckets and dropped down to the darkness below.

"Noisier than usual," said the Black Rat. "It must have been raining up the valley."

"Floods maybe," said the Wheel dreamily. "It isn't the proper season, but they can come without warning. I shall never forget the big one--when the Miller went to sleep and forgot to open the hatches. More than two hundred years ago it was, but I recall it distinctly. Most unsettling."

"We lifted that wheel off his bearings," cried the Waters. "We said, 'Take away that bauble!' And in the morning he was five mile down the valley--hung up in a tree."

"Vulgar!" said the Cat. "But I am sure he never lost his dignity."

"We don't know. He looked like the Ace of Diamonds when we had finished with him.... Move on there! Keep on moving. Over! Get over!"

"And why on this day more than any other," said the Wheel stately. "I am not aware that my department requires the stimulus of external pressure to keep it up to its duties. I trust I have the elementary instincts of a gentleman."

"Maybe," the Waters answered together, leaping down on the buckets. "We only know that you are very stiff on your bearings. Over, get over!"

The Wheel creaked and groaned. There was certainly greater pressure upon him that he had ever felt, and his revolutions had increased from six and three-quarters to eight and a third per minute. But the uproar between the narrow, weed-hung walls annoyed the Grey Cat.

"Isn't it almost time," she said plaintively, "that the person who is paid to understand these things shuts off those vehement drippings with that screw-thing on the top of that box-thing."

"They'll be shut off at eight o'clock as usual," said Rat; "then we can go to dinner."

"But we shan't be shut off till ever so late," said the Waters gaily. "We

shall keep it up all night."

"The ineradicable offensiveness of youth is partially compensated for by its eternal hopefulness," said the Cat. "Our dam is not, I am glad to say, designed to furnish water for more than four hours at a time. Reserve is Life."

"Thank goodness!" said the Black Rat. "Then they can return to their native ditches."

"Ditches!" cried the Waters; "Raven's Gill Brook is no ditch. It is almost navigable, and we come from there away." They slid over solid and compact till the Wheel thudded under their weight.

"Raven's Gill Brook," said the Rat. "I never heard of Raven's Gill."

"We are the waters of Harpenden Brook--down from under Callton Rise. Phew! how the race stinks compared with the heather country." Another five foot of water flung itself against the Wheel, broke, roared, gurgled, and was gone.

"Indeed," said the Grey Cat, "I am sorry to tell you that Raven's Gill Brook is cut off from this valley by an absolutely impassable range of mountains, and Callton Rise is more than nine miles away. It belongs to another system entirely."

"Ah yes," said the Rat, grinning, "but we forget that, for the young,

water always runs uphill."

"Oh, hopeless! hopeless! hopeless!" cried the Waters, descending open-palmed upon the Wheel "There is nothing between here and Raven's Gill Brook that a hundred yards of channelling and a few square feet of concrete could not remove; and hasn't removed!"

"And Harpenden Brook is north of Raven's Gill and runs into Raven's Gill at the foot of Callton Rise, where ilex trees are, and we come from there!" These were the glassy, clear waters of the high chalk.

"And Batten's Ponds, that are fed by springs, have been led through Trott's Wood, taking the spare water from the old Witches' Spring under Churt Haw, and we--we--we are their combined waters!" Those were the Waters from the upland bogs and moors--a porter-coloured, dusky, and foam-flecked flood.

"It's all very interesting," purred the Cat to the sliding waters, "and I have no doubt that Trott's Woods and Bott's Woods are tremendously important places; but if you could manage to do your work--whose value I don't in the least dispute--a little more soberly, I, for one, should be grateful."

"Book--book--book--book--book--Domesday Book!" The urged Wheel was fairly clattering now: "In Burgelstaltone a monk holds of Earl Godwin one hide and a half with eight villeins. There is a church--and a monk.... I remember that monk. Blessed if he could rattle his rosary off any quicker

than I am doing now ... and wood for seven hogs. I must be running twelve to the minute ... almost as fast as Steam. Damnable invention, Steam! ... Surely it's time we went to dinner or prayers--or something. Can't keep up this pressure, day in and day out, and not feel it. I don't mind for myself, of course. Noblesse oblige, you know. I'm only thinking of the Upper and the Nether Millstones. They came out of the common rock. They can't be expected to----"

"Don't worry on our account, please," said the Millstones huskily. "So long as you supply the power we'll supply the weight and the bite."

"Isn't it a trifle blasphemous, though, to work you in this way?" grunted the Wheel. "I seem to remember something about the Mills of God grinding 'slowly.' Slowly was the word!"

"But we are not the Mills of God. We're only the Upper and the Nether Millstones. We have received no instructions to be anything else. We are actuated by power transmitted through you."

"Ah, but let us be merciful as we are strong. Think of all the beautiful little plants that grow on my woodwork. There are five varieties of rare moss within less than one square yard--and all these delicate jewels of nature are being grievously knocked about by this excessive rush of the water."

"Umph!" growled the Millstones. "What with your religious scruples and your taste for botany we'd hardly know you for the Wheel that put the

carter's son under last autumn. You never worried about him!"

"He ought to have known better."

"So ought your jewels of nature. Tell 'em to grow where it's safe."

"How a purely mercantile life debases and brutalises!" said the Cat to the Rat.

"They were such beautiful little plants too," said the Rat tenderly.

"Maiden's-tongue and hart's-hair fern trellising all over the wall just as they do on the sides of churches in the Downs. Think what a joy the sight of them must be to our sturdy peasants pulling hay!"

"Golly!" said the Millstones. "There's nothing like coming to the heart of things for information"; and they returned to the song that all English water-mills have sung from time beyond telling:

There was a jovial miller once
Lived on the River Dee,
And this the burden of his song
For ever used to be.

Then, as fresh grist poured in and dulled the note:

I care for nobody--no not I,
And nobody cares for me.

"Even these stones have absorbed something of our atmosphere," said the Grey Cat. "Nine-tenths of the trouble in this world comes from lack of detachment."

"One of your people died from forgetting that, didn't she?" said the Rat.

"One only. The example has sufficed us for generations."

"Ah! but what happened to Don't Care?" the Waters demanded.

"Brutal riding to death of the casual analogy is another mark of provincialism!" The Grey Cat raised her tufted chin. "I am going to sleep. With my social obligations I must snatch rest when I can; but, as our old friend here says, Noblesse oblige.... Pity me! Three functions to-night in the village, and a barn dance across the valley!"

"There's no chance, I suppose, of your looking in on the loft about two. Some of our young people are going to amuse themselves with a new sacque-dance--best white flour only," said the Black Rat.

"I believe I am officially supposed not to countenance that sort of thing, but youth is youth. ... By the way, the humans set my milk-bowl in the loft these days; I hope your youngsters respect it."

"My dear lady," said the Black Rat, bowing, "you grieve me. You hurt me inexpressibly. After all these years, too!"

"A general crush is so mixed--highways and hedges--all that sort of thing --and no one can answer for one's best friends. I never try. So long as mine are amusin' and in full voice, and can hold their own at a tile-party, I'm as catholic as these mixed waters in the dam here!"

"We aren't mixed. We have mixed. We are one now," said the Waters sulkily.

"Still uttering?" said the Cat. "Never mind, here's the Miller coming to shut you off. Ye-es, I have known--four--or five is it?--and twenty leaders of revolt in Faenza.... A little more babble in the dam, a little more noise in the sluice, a little extra splashing on the wheel, and then----"

"They will find that nothing has occurred," said the Black Rat. "The old things persist and survive and are recognised--our old friend here first of all. By the way," he turned toward the Wheel, "I believe we have to congratulate you on your latest honour."

"Profoundly well deserved--even if he had never--as he has---laboured strenuously through a long life for the amelioration of millkind," said the Cat, who belonged to many tile and outhouse committees. "Doubly deserved, I may say, for the silent and dignified rebuke his existence offers to the clattering, fidgety-footed demands of--er--some people. What form did the honour take?"

"It was," said the Wheel bashfully, "a machine-moulded pinion."

"Pinions! Oh, how heavenly!" the Black Rat sighed. "I never see a bat without wishing for wings."

"Not exactly that sort of pinion," said the Wheel, "but a really ornate circle of toothed iron wheels. Absurd, of course, but gratifying. Mr. Mangles and an associate herald invested me with it personally--on my left rim--the side that you can't see from the mill. I hadn't meant to say anything about it--or the new steel straps round my axles--bright red, you know--to be worn on all occasions--but, without false modesty, I assure you that the recognition cheered me not a little."

"How intensely gratifying!" said the Black Rat. "I must really steal an hour between lights some day and see what they are doing on your left side."

"By the way, have you any light on this recent activity of Mr. Mangles?" the Grey Cat asked. "He seems to be building small houses on the far side of the tail-race. Believe me, I don't ask from any vulgar curiosity."

"It affects our Order," said the Black Rat simply but firmly.

"Thank you," said the Wheel. "Let me see if I can tabulate it properly. Nothing like system in accounts of all kinds. Book! Book! Book! On the side of the Wheel towards the hundred of Burgelstaltone, where till now was a sty of three hogs, Mangles, a freeman, with four villeins, and two

carts of two thousand bricks, has a new small house of five yards and a half, and one roof of iron and a floor of cement. Then, now, and afterwards beer in large tankards. And Felden, a stranger, with three villeins and one very great cart, deposits on it one engine of iron and brass and a small iron mill of four feet, and a broad strap of leather. And Mangles, the builder, with two villeins, constructs the floor for the same, and a floor of new brick with wires for the small mill. There are there also chalices filled with iron and water, in number fifty-seven. The whole is valued at one hundred and seventy-four pounds.... I'm sorry I can't make myself clearer, but you can see for yourself."

"Amazingly lucid," said the Cat. She was the more to be admired because the language of Domesday Book is not, perhaps, the clearest medium wherein to describe a small but complete electric-light installation, deriving its power from a water-wheel by means of cogs and gearing.

"See for yourself--by all means, see for yourself," said the Waters, spluttering and choking with mirth.

"Upon my word," said the Black Rat furiously, "I may be at fault, but I wholly fail to perceive where these offensive eavesdroppers--er--come in. We were discussing a matter that solely affected our Order."

Suddenly they heard, as they had heard many times before, the Miller shutting off the water. To the rattle and rumble of the labouring stones succeeded thick silence, punctuated with little drops from the stayed wheel. Then some water-bird in the dam fluttered her wings as she slid to

her nest, and the plop of a water-rat sounded like the fall of a log in the water.

"It is all over--it always is all over at just this time. Listen, the Miller is going to bed--as usual. Nothing has occurred," said the Cat.

Something creaked in the house where the pig-styes had stood, as metal engaged on metal with a clink and a burr.

"Shall I turn her on?" cried the Miller.

"Ay," said the voice from the dynamo-house.

"A human in Mangles' new house!" the Rat squeaked.

"What of it?" said the Grey Cat. "Even supposing Mr. Mangles' cats'-meat-coloured hovel ululated with humans, can't you see for yourself--that--?"

There was a solid crash of released waters leaping upon the wheel more furiously than ever, a grinding of cogs, a hum like the hum of a hornet, and then the unvisited darkness of the old mill was scattered by intolerable white light. It threw up every cobweb, every burl and knot in the beams and the floor; till the shadows behind the flakes of rough plaster on the wall lay clear-cut as shadows of mountains on the photographed moon.

"See! See! See!" hissed the Waters in full flood. "Yes, see for

yourselves. Nothing has occurred. Can't you see?"

The Rat, amazed, had fallen from his foothold and lay half-stunned on the floor. The Cat, following her instinct, leaped nigh to the ceiling, and with flattened ears and bared teeth backed in a corner ready to fight whatever terror might be loosed on her. But nothing happened. Through the long aching minutes nothing whatever happened, and her wire-brush tail returned slowly to its proper shape.

"Whatever it is," she said at last, "it's overdone. They can never keep it up, you know."

"Much you know," said the Waters. "Over you go, old man. You can take the full head of us now. Those new steel axle-straps of yours can stand anything. Come along, Raven's Gill, Harpenden, Callton Rise, Batten's Ponds, Witches' Spring, all together! Let's show these gentlemen how to work!"

"But--but--I thought it was a decoration. Why--why--why--it only means more work for me!"

"Exactly. You're to supply about sixty eight-candle lights when required. But they won't be all in use at once----"

"Ah! I thought as much," said the Cat. "The reaction is bound to come."

"And" said the Waters, "you will do the ordinary work of the mill as

well."

"Impossible!" the old Wheel quivered as it drove. "Aluric never did it--nor Azor, nor Reinbert. Not even William de Warrenne or the Papal Legate. There's no precedent for it. I tell you there's no precedent for working a wheel like this."

"Wait a while! We're making one as fast as we can. Aluric and Co. are dead. So's the Papal Legate. You've no notion how dead they are, but we're here--the Waters of Five Separate Systems. We're just as interesting as Domesday Book. Would you like to hear about the land-tenure in Trott's Wood? It's squat-right, chiefly." The mocking Waters leaped one over the other, chuckling and chattering profanely.

"In that hundred Jenkins, a tinker, with one dog--*unis canis*--holds, by the Grace of God and a habit he has of working hard, *unam hidam*--a large potato patch. Charmin' fellow, Jenkins. Friend of ours. Now, who the dooce did Jenkins keep? ... In the hundred of Callton is one charcoal-burner *irreligiosissimus homo*--a bit of a rip--but a thorough sportsman. *Ibi est ecclesia*. *Non multum*. Not much of a church, *quia* because, *episcopus* the Vicar irritated the Nonconformists *tunc et post et modo*--then and afterwards and now--until they built a cut-stone Congregational chapel with red brick facings that did not return itself--*defendebat se*--at four thousand pounds."

"Charcoal-burners, vicars, schismatics, and red brick facings," groaned the Wheel. "But this is sheer blasphemy. What waters have they let in upon

me?"

"Floods from the gutters. Faugh, this light is positively sickening!" said the Cat, rearranging her fur.

"We come down from the clouds or up from the springs, exactly like all other waters everywhere. Is that what's surprising you?" sang the Waters.

"Of course not. I know my work if you don't. What I complain of is your lack of reverence and repose. You've no instinct of deference towards your betters--your heartless parody of the Sacred volume (the Wheel meant Domesday Book)--proves it."

"Our betters?" said the Waters most solemnly. "What is there in all this dammed race that hasn't come down from the clouds, or----"

"Spare me that talk, please," the Wheel persisted. "You'd never understand. It's the tone--your tone that we object to."

"Yes. It's your tone," said the Black Rat, picking himself up limb by limb.

"If you thought a trifle more about the work you're supposed to do, and a trifle less about your precious feelings, you'd render a little more duty in return for the power vested in you--we mean wasted on you," the Waters replied.

"I have been some hundreds of years laboriously acquiring the knowledge which you see fit to challenge so light-heartedly," the Wheel jarred.

"Challenge him! Challenge him!" clamoured the little waves riddling down through the tail-race. "As well now as later. Take him up!"

The main mass of the Waters plunging on the Wheel shocked that well-bolted structure almost into box-lids by saying: "Very good. Tell us what you suppose yourself to be doing at the present moment."

"Waiving the offensive form of your question, I answer, purely as a matter of courtesy, that I am engaged in the trituration of farinaceous substances whose ultimate destination it would be a breach of the trust reposed in me to reveal."

"Fiddle!" said the Waters. "We knew it all along! The first direct question shows his ignorance of his own job. Listen, old thing. Thanks to us, you are now actuating a machine of whose construction you know nothing, that that machine may, over wires of whose ramifications you are, by your very position, profoundly ignorant, deliver a power which you can never realise, to localities beyond the extreme limits of your mental horizon, with the object of producing phenomena which in your wildest dreams (if you ever dream) you could never comprehend. Is that clear, or would you like it all in words of four syllables?"

"Your assumptions are deliciously sweeping, but may I point out that a decent and--the dear old Abbot of Wilton would have put it in his resonant

monkish Latin much better than I can--a scholarly reserve, does not necessarily connote blank vacuity of mind on all subjects."

"Ah, the dear old Abbot of Wilton," said the Rat sympathetically, as one nursed in that bosom. "Charmin' fellow--thorough scholar and gentleman. Such a pity!"

"Oh, Sacred Fountains!" the Waters were fairly boiling. "He goes out of his way to expose his ignorance by triple bucketfuls. He creaks to high Heaven that he is hopelessly behind the common order of things! He invites the streams of Five Watersheds to witness his su-su-su-pernal incompetence, and then he talks as though there were untold reserves of knowledge behind him that he is too modest to bring forward. For a bland, circular, absolutely sincere impostor, you're a miracle, O Wheel!"

"I do not pretend to be anything more than an integral portion of an accepted and not altogether mushroom institution."

"Quite so," said the Waters. "Then go round--hard----"

"To what end?" asked the Wheel.

"Till a big box of tanks in your house begins to fizz and fume--gassing is the proper word."

"It would be," said the Cat, sniffing.

"That will show that your accumulators are full. When the accumulators are exhausted, and the lights burn badly, you will find us whacking you round and round again."

"The end of life as decreed by Mangles and his creatures is to go whacking round and round for ever," said the Cat.

"In order," the Rat said, "that you may throw raw and unnecessary illumination upon all the unloveliness in the world. Unloveliness which we shall--er--have always with us. At the same time you will riotously neglect the so-called little but vital graces that make up Life."

"Yes, Life," said the Cat, "with its dim delicious half-tones and veiled indeterminate distances. Its surprisals, escapes, encounters, and dizzying leaps--its full-throated choruses in honour of the morning star, and its melting reveries beneath the sun-warmed wall."

"Oh, you can go on the tiles, Pussalina, just the same as usual," said the laughing Waters. "We sha'n't interfere with you."

"On the tiles, forsooth!" hissed the Cat.

"Well, that's what it amounts to," persisted the Waters. "We see a good deal of the minor graces of life on our way down to our job."

"And--but I fear I speak to deaf ears--do they never impress you?" said the Wheel.

"Enormously," said the Waters. "We have already learned six refined synonyms for loafing."

"But (here again I feel as though preaching in the wilderness) it never occurs to you that there may exist some small difference between the wholly animal--ah--rumination of bovine minds and the discerning, well-apportioned leisure of the finer type of intellect?"

"Oh, yes. The bovine mind goes to sleep under a hedge and makes no bones about it when it's shouted at. We've seen that--in haying-time--all along the meadows. The finer type is wide awake enough to fudge up excuses for shirking, and mean enough to get stuffy when its excuses aren't accepted. Turn over!"

"But, my good people, no gentleman gets stuffy as you call it. A certain proper pride, to put it no higher, forbids---"

"Nothing that he wants to do if he really wants to do it. Get along! What are you giving us? D'you suppose we've scoured half heaven in the clouds, and half earth in the mists, to be taken in at this time of the day by a bone-idle, old hand-quern of your type?"

"It is not for me to bandy personalities with you. I can only say that I simply decline to accept the situation."

"Decline away. It doesn't make any odds. They'll probably put in a turbine

if you decline too much."

"What's a turbine?" said the Wheel, quickly.

"A little thing you don't see, that performs surprising revolutions. But you won't decline. You'll hang on to your two nice red-strapped axles and your new machine-moulded pinions like--a--like a leech on a lily stem! There's centuries of work in your old bones if you'd only apply yourself to it; and, mechanically, an overshot wheel with this head of water is about as efficient as a turbine."

"So in future I am to be considered mechanically? I have been painted by at least five Royal Academicians."

"Oh, you can be painted by five hundred when you aren't at work, of course. But while you are at work you'll work. You won't half-stop and think and talk about rare plants and dicky-birds and farinaceous fiduciary interests. You'll continue to revolve, and this new head of water will see that you do so continue."

"It is a matter on which it would be exceedingly ill-advised to form a hasty or a premature conclusion. I will give it my most careful consideration," said the Wheel.

"Please do," said the Waters gravely. "Hullo! Here's the Miller again."

The Cat coiled herself in a picturesque attitude on the softest corner of

a sack, and the Rat without haste, yet certainly without rest, slipped behind the sacking as though an appointment had just occurred to him.

In the doorway, with the young Engineer, stood the Miller grinning amazedly.

"Well--well--well! 'tis true-ly won'erful. An' what a power o' dirt! It come over me now looking at these lights, that I've never rightly seen my own mill before. She needs a lot bein' done to her."

"Ah! I suppose one must make oneself moderately agreeable to the baser sort. They have their uses. This thing controls the dairy." The Cat, pinching on her toes, came forward and rubbed her head against the Miller's knee.

"Ay, you pretty puss," he said, stooping. "You're as big a cheat as the rest of 'em that catch no mice about me. A won'erful smooth-skinned, rough-tongued cheat you be. I've more than half a mind----"

"She does her work well," said the Engineer, pointing to where the Rat's beady eyes showed behind the sacking. "Cats and Rats livin' together--see?"

"Too much they do--too long they've done. I'm sick and tired of it. Go and take a swim and larn to find your own vittles honest when you come out, Pussy."

"My word!" said the Waters, as a sprawling Cat landed all unannounced in the centre of the tail-race. "Is that you, Mewsalina? You seem to have been quarrelling with your best friend. Get over to the left. It's shallowest there. Up on that alder-root with all four paws. Good-night!"

"You'll never get any they rats," said the Miller, as the young Engineer struck wrathfully with his stick at the sacking. "They're not the common sort. They're the old black English sort."

"Are they, by Jove? I must catch one to stuff, some day."

* * * * *

Six months later, in the chill of a January afternoon, they were letting in the Waters as usual.

"Come along! It's both gears this evening," said the Wheel, kicking joyously in the first rush of the icy stream. "There's a heavy load of grist just in from Lamber's Wood. Eleven miles it came in an hour and a half in our new motor-lorry, and the Miller's rigged five new five-candle lights in his cow-stables. I'm feeding 'em to-night. There's a cow due to calve. Oh, while I think of it, what's the news from Callton Rise?"

"The waters are finding their level as usual--but why do you ask?" said the deep outpouring Waters.

"Because Mangles and Felden and the Miller are talking of increasing the

plant here and running a saw-mill by electricity. I was wondering whether we----"

"I beg your pardon," said the Waters chuckling. "What did you say?"

"Whether we, of course, had power enough for the job. It will be a biggish contract. There's all Harpenden Brook to be considered and Batten's Ponds as well, and Witches' Fountain, and the Churt's Hawd system.

"We've power enough for anything in the world," said the Waters. "The only question is whether you could stand the strain if we came down on you full head."

"Of course I can," said the Wheel. "Mangles is going to turn me into a set of turbines--beauties."

"Oh--er--I suppose it's the frost that has made us a little thick-headed, but to whom are we talking?" asked the amazed Waters.

"To me--the Spirit of the Mill, of course."

"Not to the old Wheel, then?"

"I happen to be living in the old Wheel just at present. When the turbines are installed I shall go and live in them. What earthly difference does it make?"

"Absolutely none," said the Waters, "in the earth or in the waters under the earth. But we thought turbines didn't appeal to you."

"Not like turbines? Me? My dear fellows, turbines are good for fifteen hundred revolutions a minute--and with our power we can drive 'em at full speed. Why, there's nothing we couldn't grind or saw or illuminate or heat with a set of turbines! That's to say if all the Five Watersheds are agreeable."

"Oh, we've been agreeable for ever so long."

"Then why didn't you tell me?"

"Don't know. Suppose it slipped our memory."

The Waters were holding themselves in for fear of bursting with mirth.

"How careless of you! You should keep abreast of the age, my dear fellows. We might have settled it long ago, if you'd only spoken. Yes, four good turbines and a neat brick penstock--eh? This old Wheel's absurdly out of date."

"Well," said the Cat, who after a little proud seclusion had returned to her place impenitent as ever. "Praised be Pasht and the Old Gods, that whatever may have happened I, at least, have preserved the Spirit of the Mill!"

She looked round as expecting her faithful ally, the Black Rat; but that very week the Engineer had caught and stuffed him, and had put him in a glass case; he being a genuine old English black rat. That breed, the report says, is rapidly diminishing before the incursions of the brown variety.