CHAPTER THE FIRST ~~ THE BOY GROWS UP

1

Benham was the son of a schoolmaster. His father was assistant first at Cheltenham, and subsequently at Minchinghampton, and then he became head and later on sole proprietor of Martindale House, a high-class preparatory school at Seagate. He was extremely successful for some years, as success goes in the scholastic profession, and then disaster overtook him in the shape of a divorce. His wife, William Porphyry's mother, made the acquaintance of a rich young man named Nolan, who was recuperating at Seagate from the sequelae of snake-bite, malaria, and a gun accident in Brazil. She ran away with him, and she was divorced. She was, however, unable to marry him because he died at Wiesbaden only three days after the Reverend Harold Benham obtained his decree absolute. Instead, therefore, being a woman of great spirit, enterprise and sweetness, she married Godfrey Marayne, afterwards Sir Godfrey Marayne, the great London surgeon.

Nolan was a dark, rather melancholy and sentimental young man, and he left about a third of his very large fortune entirely to Mrs. Benham and the rest to her in trust for her son, whom he deemed himself to have

injured. With this and a husband already distinguished, she returned presently to London, and was on the whole fairly well received there.

It was upon the reverend gentleman at Seagate that the brunt of this divorce fell. There is perhaps a certain injustice in the fact that a schoolmaster who has lost his wife should also lose the more valuable proportion of his pupils, but the tone of thought in England is against any association of a schoolmaster with matrimonial irregularity. And also Mr. Benham remarried. It would certainly have been better for him if he could have produced a sister. His school declined and his efforts to resuscitate it only hastened its decay. Conceiving that he could now only appeal to the broader-minded, more progressive type of parent, he became an educational reformer, and wrote upon modernizing the curriculum with increasing frequency to the TIMES. He expended a considerable fraction of his dwindling capital upon a science laboratory and a fives court; he added a London Bachelor of Science with a Teaching Diploma to the school staff, and a library of about a thousand volumes, including the Hundred Best Books as selected by the late Lord Avebury, to the school equipment. None of these things did anything but enhance the suspicion of laxity his wife's escapade had created in the limited opulent and discreet class to which his establishment appealed. One boy who, under the influence of the Hundred Best Books, had quoted the ZEND-AVESTA to an irascible but influential grandfather, was withdrawn without notice or compensation in the middle of the term. It intensifies the tragedy of the Reverend Harold Benham's failure that in no essential respect did his school depart from the pattern of all other properly-conducted preparatory schools.

In appearance he was near the average of scholastic English gentlemen. He displayed a manifest handsomeness somewhat weakened by disregard and disuse, a large moustache and a narrow high forehead. His rather tired brown eyes were magnified by glasses. He was an active man in unimportant things, with a love for the phrase "ship-shape," and he played cricket better than any one else on the staff. He walked in wide strides, and would sometimes use the tail of his gown on the blackboard. Like so many clergymen and schoolmasters, he had early distrusted his natural impulse in conversation, and had adopted the defensive precaution of a rather formal and sonorous speech, which habit had made a part of him. His general effect was of one who is earnestly keeping up things that might otherwise give way, keeping them up by act and voice, keeping up an atmosphere of vigour and success in a school that was only too manifestly attenuated, keeping up a pretentious economy of administration in a school that must not be too manifestly impoverished, keeping up a claim to be in the scientific van and rather a flutterer of dovecots--with its method of manual training for example--keeping up ESPRIT DE CORPS and the manliness of himself and every one about him, keeping up his affection for his faithful second wife and his complete forgetfulness of and indifference to that spirit of distracting impulse and insubordination away there in London, who had once been his delight and insurmountable difficulty. "After my visits to her," wrote Benham, "he would show by a hundred little expressions and poses and acts how intensely he wasn't noting that anything of the sort had occurred."

But one thing that from the outset the father seemed to have failed to

keep up thoroughly was his intention to mould and dominate his son.

The advent of his boy had been a tremendous event in the reverend gentleman's life. It is not improbable that his disposition to monopolize the pride of this event contributed to the ultimate disruption of his family. It left so few initiatives within the home to his wife. He had been an early victim to that wave of philoprogenitive and educational enthusiasm which distinguished the closing decade of the nineteenth century. He was full of plans in those days for the education of his boy, and the thought of the youngster played a large part in the series of complicated emotional crises with which he celebrated the departure of his wife, crises in which a number of old school and college friends very generously assisted--spending weekends at Seagate for this purpose, and mingling tobacco, impassioned handclasps and suchlike consolation with much patient sympathetic listening to his carefully balanced analysis of his feelings. He declared that his son was now his one living purpose in life, and he sketched out a scheme of moral and intellectual training that he subsequently embodied in five very stimulating and intimate articles for the SCHOOL WORLD, but never put into more than partial operation.

"I have read my father's articles upon this subject," wrote Benham, "and I am still perplexed to measure just what I owe to him. Did he ever attempt this moral training he contemplated so freely? I don't think he did. I know now, I knew then, that he had something in his mind.... There were one or two special walks we had together, he invited me to accompany him with a certain portentousness, and we would go out

pregnantly making superficial remarks about the school cricket and return, discussing botany, with nothing said.

"His heart failed him.

"Once or twice, too, he seemed to be reaching out at me from the school pulpit.

"I think that my father did manage to convey to me his belief that there were these fine things, honour, high aims, nobilities. If I did not get this belief from him then I do not know how I got it. But it was as if he hinted at a treasure that had got very dusty in an attic, a treasure which he hadn't himself been able to spend...."

The father who had intended to mould his son ended by watching him grow, not always with sympathy or understanding. He was an overworked man assailed by many futile anxieties. One sees him striding about the establishment with his gown streaming out behind him urging on the groundsman or the gardener, or dignified, expounding the particular advantages of Seagate to enquiring parents, one sees him unnaturally cheerful and facetious at the midday dinner table, one imagines him keeping up high aspirations in a rather too hastily scribbled sermon in the school pulpit, or keeping up an enthusiasm for beautiful language in a badly-prepared lesson on Virgil, or expressing unreal indignation and unjustifiably exalted sentiments to evil doers, and one realizes his disadvantage against the quiet youngster whose retentive memory was storing up all these impressions for an ultimate judgment, and one

understands, too, a certain relief that mingled with his undeniable emotion when at last the time came for young Benham, "the one living purpose" of his life, to be off to Minchinghampton and the next step in the mysterious ascent of the English educational system.

Three times at least, and with an increased interval, the father wrote fine fatherly letters that would have stood the test of publication. Then his communications became comparatively hurried and matter-of-fact. His boy's return home for the holidays was always rather a stirring time for his private feelings, but he became more and more inexpressive. He would sometimes lay a hand on those growing shoulders and then withdraw it. They felt braced-up shoulders, stiffly inflexible or--they would wince. And when one has let the habit of indefinite feelings grow upon one, what is there left to say? If one did say anything one might be asked questions....

One or two of the long vacations they spent abroad together. The last of these occasions followed Benham's convalescence at Montana and his struggle with the Bisse; the two went to Zermatt and did several peaks and crossed the Theodule, and it was clear that their joint expeditions were a strain upon both of them. The father thought the son reckless, unskilful, and impatient; the son found the father's insistence upon guides, ropes, precautions, the recognized way, the highest point and back again before you get a chill, and talk about it sagely but very, very modestly over pipes, tiresome. He wanted to wander in deserts of ice and see over the mountains, and discover what it is to be benighted on a precipice. And gradually he was becoming familiar with his father's

repertory of Greek quotations. There was no breach between them, but each knew that holiday was the last they would ever spend together....

The court had given the custody of young William Porphyry into his father's hands, but by a generous concession it was arranged that his mother should have him to see her for an hour or so five times a year. The Nolan legacy, however, coming upon the top of this, introduced a peculiar complication that provided much work for tactful intermediaries, and gave great and increasing scope for painful delicacies on the part of Mr. Benham as the boy grew up.

"I see," said the father over his study pipe and with his glasses fixed on remote distances above the head of the current sympathizer, "I see more and more clearly that the tale of my sacrifices is not yet at an end.... In many respects he is like her.... Quick. Too quick.... He must choose. But I know his choice. Yes, yes,--I'm not blind. She's worked upon him.... I have done what I could to bring out the manhood in him. Perhaps it will bear the strain.... It will be a wrench, old man--God knows."

He did his very best to make it a wrench.

Benham's mother, whom he saw quarterly and also on the first of May, because it was her birthday, touched and coloured his imagination far more than his father did. She was now Lady Marayne, and a prominent, successful, and happy little lady. Her dereliction had been forgiven quite soon, and whatever whisper of it remained was very completely forgotten during the brief period of moral kindliness which followed the accession of King Edward the Seventh. It no doubt contributed to her social reinstatement that her former husband was entirely devoid of social importance, while, on the other hand, Sir Godfrey Marayne's temporary monopoly of the caecal operation which became so fashionable in the last decade of Queen Victoria's reign as to be practically epidemic, created a strong feeling in her favour.

She was blue-eyed and very delicately complexioned, quick-moving, witty, given to little storms of clean enthusiasm; she loved handsome things, brave things, successful things, and the respect and affection of all the world. She did quite what she liked upon impulse, and nobody ever thought ill of her.

Her family were the Mantons of Blent, quite good west-country people. She had broken away from them before she was twenty to marry Benham, whom she had idealized at a tennis party. He had talked of his work and she had seen it in a flash, the noblest work in the world, him at his daily divine toil and herself a Madonna surrounded by a troupe of Blessed Boys--all of good family, some of quite the best. For a time she had kept it up even more than he had, and then Nolan had distracted her with a realization of the heroism that goes to the ends of the earth.

She became sick with desire for the forests of Brazil, and the Pacific, and--a peak in Darien. Immediately the school was frowsty beyond endurance, and for the first time she let herself perceive how dreadfully a gentleman and a scholar can smell of pipes and tobacco. Only one course lay open to a woman of spirit....

For a year she did indeed live like a woman of spirit, and it was at Nolan's bedside that Marayne was first moved to admiration. She was plucky. All men love a plucky woman.

Sir Godfrey Marayne smelt a good deal of antiseptic soap, but he talked in a way that amused her, and he trusted as well as adored her. She did what she liked with his money, her own money, and her son's trust money, and she did very well. From the earliest Benham's visits were to a gracious presence amidst wealthy surroundings. The transit from the moral blamelessness of Seagate had an entirely misleading effect of ascent.

Their earlier encounters became rather misty in his memory; they occurred at various hotels in Seagate. Afterwards he would go, first taken by a governess, and later going alone, to Charing Cross, where he would be met, in earlier times by a maid and afterwards by a deferential manservant who called him "Sir," and conveyed, sometimes in a hansom cab and later in a smart brougham, by Trafalgar Square, Lower Regent Street, Piccadilly, and streets of increasing wealth and sublimity to Sir Godfrey's house in Desborough Street. Very naturally he fell into thinking of these discreet and well-governed West End streets as a part

of his mother's atmosphere.

The house had a dignified portico, and always before he had got down to the pavement the door opened agreeably and a second respectful manservant stood ready. Then came the large hall, with its noiseless carpets and great Chinese jars, its lacquered cabinets and the wide staircase, and floating down the wide staircase, impatient to greet him, light and shining as a flower petal, sweet and welcoming, radiating a joyfulness as cool and clear as a dewy morning, came his mother. "WELL, little man, my son," she would cry in her happy singing voice, "WELL?"

So he thought she must always be, but indeed these meetings meant very much to her, she dressed for them and staged them, she perceived the bright advantages of her rarity and she was quite determined to have her son when the time came to possess him. She kissed him but not oppressively, she caressed him cleverly; it was only on these rare occasions that he was ever kissed or caressed, and she talked to his shy boyishness until it felt a more spirited variety of manhood. "What have you been doing?" she asked, "since I saw you last."

She never said he had grown, but she told him he looked tall; and though the tea was a marvellous display it was never an obtrusive tea, it wasn't poked at a fellow; a various plenty flowed well within reach of one's arm, like an agreeable accompaniment to their conversation.

"What have you done? All sorts of brave things? Do you swim now? I can swim. Oh! I can swim half a mile. Some day we will swim races together.

Why not? And you ride?...

"The horse bolted--and you stuck on? Did you squeak? I stick on, but I HAVE to squeak. But you--of course, No! you mustn't. I'm just a little woman. And I ride big horses...."

And for the end she had invented a characteristic little ceremony.

She would stand up in front of him and put her hands on his shoulders and look into his face.

"Clean eyes?" she would say, "--still?"

Then she would take his ears in her little firm hands and kiss very methodically his eyes and his forehead and his cheeks and at last his lips. Her own eyes would suddenly brim bright with tears.

"GO," she would say.

That was the end.

It seemed to Benham as though he was being let down out of a sunlit fairyland to this grey world again.

The contrast between Lady Marayne's pretty amenities and the good woman at Seagate who urged herself almost hourly to forget that William Porphyry was not her own son, was entirely unfair. The second Mrs. Benham's conscientious spirit and a certain handsome ability about her fitted her far more than her predecessor for the onerous duties of a schoolmaster's wife, but whatever natural buoyancy she possessed was outweighed by an irrepressible conviction derived from an episcopal grandparent that the remarriage of divorced persons is sinful, and by a secret but well-founded doubt whether her husband loved her with a truly romantic passion. She might perhaps have borne either of these troubles singly, but the two crushed her spirit.

Her temperament was not one that goes out to meet happiness. She had reluctant affections and suspected rather than welcomed the facility of other people's. Her susceptibility to disagreeable impressions was however very ample, and life was fenced about with protections for her "feelings." It filled young Benham with inexpressible indignations that his sweet own mother, so gay, so brightly cheerful that even her tears were stars, was never to be mentioned in his stepmother's presence, and it was not until he had fully come to years of reflection that he began to realize with what honesty, kindness and patience this naturally not very happy lady had nursed, protected, mended for and generally mothered him.

As Benham grew to look manly and bear himself with pride, his mother's affection for him blossomed into a passion. She made him come down to London from Cambridge as often as she could; she went about with him; she made him squire her to theatres and take her out to dinners and sup with her at the Carlton, and in the summer she had him with her at Chexington Manor, the Hertfordshire house Sir Godfrey had given her. And always when they parted she looked into his eyes to see if they were still clean--whatever she meant by that--and she kissed his forehead and cheeks and eyes and lips. She began to make schemes for his career, she contrived introductions she judged would be useful to him later.

Everybody found the relationship charming. Some of the more conscientious people, it is true, pretended to think that the Reverend Harold Benham was a first husband and long since dead, but that was all. As a matter of fact, in his increasingly futile way he wasn't, either at Seagate or in the Educational Supplement of the TIMES. But even the most conscientious of us are not obliged to go to Seagate or read the Educational Supplement of the TIMES.

Lady Marayne's plans for her son's future varied very pleasantly. She was an industrious reader of biographies, and more particularly of the large fair biographies of the recently contemporary; they mentioned people she knew, they recalled scenes, each sowed its imaginative crop

upon her mind, a crop that flourished and flowered until a newer growth came to oust it. She saw her son a diplomat, a prancing pro-consul, an empire builder, a trusted friend of the august, the bold leader of new movements, the saviour of ancient institutions, the youngest, brightest, modernest of prime ministers--or a tremendously popular poet. As a rule she saw him unmarried--with a wonderful little mother at his elbow. Sometimes in romantic flashes he was adored by German princesses or eloped with Russian grand-duchesses! But such fancies were HORS D'OEUVRE. The modern biography deals with the career. Every project was bright, every project had GO--tremendous go. And they all demanded a hero, debonnaire and balanced. And Benham, as she began to perceive, wasn't balanced. Something of his father had crept into him, a touch of moral stiffness. She knew the flavour of that so well. It was a stumbling, an elaboration, a spoil-sport and weakness. She tried not to admit to herself that even in the faintest degree it was there. But it was there.

"Tell me all that you are doing NOW," she said to him one afternoon when she had got him to herself during his first visit to Chexington Manor. "How do you like Cambridge? Are you making friends? Have you joined that thing--the Union, is it?--and delivered your maiden speech? If you're for politics, Poff, that's your game. Have you begun it?"

She lay among splashes of sunshine on the red cushions in the punt, a little curled-up figure of white, with her sweet pale animated face warmed by the reflection of her red sunshade, and her eyes like little friendly heavens. And he, lean, and unconsciously graceful, sat at her

feet and admired her beyond measure, and rejoiced that now at last they were going to be ever so much together, and doubted if it would be possible ever to love any other woman so much as he did her.

He tried to tell her of Cambridge and his friends and the undergraduate life he was leading, but he found it difficult. All sorts of things that seemed right and good at Trinity seemed out of drawing in the peculiar atmosphere she created about her. All sorts of clumsiness and youthfulness in himself and his associates he felt she wouldn't accept, couldn't accept, that it would be wrong of her to accept. Before they could come before her they must wear a bravery. He couldn't, for instance, tell her how Billy Prothero, renouncing vanity and all social pretension, had worn a straw hat into November and the last stages of decay, and how it had been burnt by a special commission ceremonially in the great court. He couldn't convey to her the long sessions of beer and tobacco and high thinking that went on in Prothero's rooms into the small hours. A certain Gothic greyness and flatness and muddiness through which the Cambridge spirit struggles to its destiny, he concealed from her. What remained to tell was--attenuated. He could not romance. So she tried to fill in his jejune outlines. She tried to inspire a son who seemed most unaccountably up to nothing.

"You must make good friends," she said. "Isn't young Lord Breeze at your college? His mother the other day told me he was. And Sir Freddy Quenton's boy. And there are both the young Baptons at Cambridge."

He knew one of the Baptons.

"Poff," she said suddenly, "has it ever occurred to you what you are going to do afterwards. Do you know you are going to be quite well off?"

Benham looked up with a faint embarrassment. "My father said something. He was rather vague. It wasn't his affair--that kind of thing."

"You will be quite well off," she repeated, without any complicating particulars. "You will be so well off that it will be possible for you to do anything almost that you like in the world. Nothing will tie you. Nothing...."

"But--HOW well off?"

"You will have several thousands a year."

"Thousands?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"But--Mother, this is rather astounding.... Does this mean there are estates somewhere, responsibilities?"

"It is just money. Investments."

"You know, I've imagined--. I've thought always I should have to DO something."

"You MUST do something, Poff. But it needn't be for a living. The world is yours without that. And so you see you've got to make plans. You've got to know the sort of people who'll have things in their hands. You've got to keep out of--holes and corners. You've got to think of Parliament and abroad. There's the army, there's diplomacy. There's the Empire. You can be a Cecil Rhodes if you like. You can be a Winston...."

5

Perhaps it was only the innate eagerness of Lady Marayne which made her feel disappointed in her son's outlook upon life. He did not choose among his glittering possibilities, he did not say what he was going to be, proconsul, ambassador, statesman, for days. And he talked VAGUELY of wanting to do something fine, but all in a fog. A boy of nearly nineteen ought to have at least the beginnings of SAVOIR FAIRE.

Was he in the right set? Was he indeed in the right college? Trinity, by his account, seemed a huge featureless place--and might he not conceivably be LOST in it? In those big crowds one had to insist upon oneself. Poff never insisted upon himself--except quite at the wrong moment. And there was this Billy Prothero. BILLY! Like a goat or something. People called William don't get their Christian name insisted upon unless they are vulnerable somewhere. Any form of William stamps

a weakness, Willie, Willy, Will, Billy, Bill; it's a fearful handle for one's friends. At any rate Poff had escaped that. But this Prothero!

"But who IS this Billy Prothero?" she asked one evening in the walled garden.

"He was at Minchinghampton."

"But who IS he? Who is his father? Where does he come from?"

Benham sought in his mind for a space. "I don't know," he said at last. Billy had always been rather reticent about his people. She demanded descriptions. She demanded an account of Billy's furniture, Billy's clothes, Billy's form of exercise. It dawned upon Benham that for some inexplicable reason she was hostile to Billy. It was like the unmasking of an ambuscade. He had talked a lot about Prothero's ideas and the discussions of social reform and social service that went on in his rooms, for Billy read at unknown times, and was open at all hours to any argumentative caller. To Lady Marayne all ideas were obnoxious, a form of fogging; all ideas, she held, were queer ideas. "And does he call himself a Socialist?" she asked. "I THOUGHT he would."

"Poff," she cried suddenly, "you're not a SOCIALIST?"

"Such a vague term."

"But these friends of yours--they seem to be ALL Socialists. Red ties

and everything complete."

"They have ideas," he evaded. He tried to express it better. "They give one something to take hold of."

She sat up stiffly on the garden-seat. She lifted her finger at him, very seriously. "I hope," she said with all her heart, "that you will have nothing to do with such ideas. Nothing. SOCIALISM!"

"They make a case."

"Pooh! Any one can make a case."

"But--"

"There's no sense in them. What is the good of talking about upsetting everything? Just disorder. How can one do anything then? You mustn't. You mustn't. No. It's nonsense, little Poff. It's absurd. And you may spoil so much.... I HATE the way you talk of it.... As if it wasn't all--absolutely--RUBBISH...."

She was earnest almost to the intonation of tears.

Why couldn't her son go straight for his ends, clear tangible ends, as she had always done? This thinking about everything! She had never thought about anything in all her life for more than half an hour--and it had always turned out remarkably well.

Benham felt baffled. There was a pause. How on earth could he go on telling her his ideas if this was how they were to be taken?

"I wish sometimes," his mother said abruptly, with an unusually sharp note in her voice, "that you wouldn't look quite so like your father."

"But I'm NOT like my father!" said Benham puzzled.

"No," she insisted, and with an air of appealing to his soberer reason, "so why should you go LOOKING like him? That CONCERNED expression...."

She jumped to her feet. "Poff," she said, "I want to go and see the evening primroses pop. You and I are talking nonsense. THEY don't have ideas anyhow. They just pop--as God meant them to do. What stupid things we human beings are!"

Her philosophical moments were perhaps the most baffling of all.

6

Billy Prothero became the symbol in the mind of Lady Marayne for all that disappointed her in Benham. He had to become the symbol, because she could not think of complicated or abstract things, she had to make

things personal, and he was the only personality available. She fretted over his existence for some days therefore (once she awakened and thought about him in the night), and then suddenly she determined to grasp her nettle. She decided to seize and obliterate this Prothero.
He must come to Chexington and be thoroughly and conclusively led on, examined, ransacked, shown up, and disposed of for ever. At once. She was not quite clear how she meant to do this, but she was quite resolved that it had to be done. Anything is better than inaction.

There was a little difficulty about dates and engagements, but he came, and through the season of expectation Benham, who was now for the first time in contact with the feminine nature, was delighted at the apparent change to cordiality. So that he talked of Billy to his mother much more than he had ever done before.

Billy had been his particular friend at Minchinghampton, at least during the closing two years of his school life. Billy had fallen into friendship with Benham, as some of us fall in love, quite suddenly, when he saw Benham get down from the fence and be sick after his encounter with the bull. Already Billy was excited by admiration, but it was the incongruity of the sickness conquered him. He went back to the school with his hands more than usually in his pockets, and no eyes for anything but this remarkable strung-up fellow-creature. He felt he had never observed Benham before, and he was astonished that he had not done so.

Billy Prothero was a sturdy sort of boy, generously wanting in good

looks. His hair was rough, and his complexion muddy, and he walked about with his hands in his pockets, long flexible lips protruded in a whistle, and a rather shapeless nose well up to show he didn't care. Providence had sought to console him by giving him a keen eye for the absurdity of other people. He had a suggestive tongue, and he professed and practised cowardice to the scandal of all his acquaintances. He was said never to wash behind his ears, but this report wronged him. There had been a time when he did not do so, but his mother had won him to a promise, and now that operation was often the sum of his simple hasty toilet. His desire to associate himself with Benham was so strong that it triumphed over a defensive reserve. It enabled him to detect accessible moments, do inobtrusive friendly services, and above all amuse his quarry. He not only amused Benham, he stimulated him. They came to do quite a number of things together. In the language of schoolboy stories they became "inseparables."

Prothero's first desire, so soon as they were on a footing that enabled him to formulate desires, was to know exactly what Benham thought he was up to in crossing a field with a bull in it instead of going round, and by the time he began to understand that, he had conceived an affection for him that was to last a lifetime.

"I wasn't going to be bullied by a beast," said Benham.

"Suppose it had been an elephant?" Prothero cried.... "A mad elephant?... A pack of wolves?"

Benham was too honest not to see that he was entangled. "Well, suppose in YOUR case it had been a wild cat?... A fierce mastiff?... A mastiff?... A terrier?... A lap dog?"

"Yes, but my case is that there are limits."

Benham was impatient at the idea of limits. With a faintly malicious pleasure Prothero lugged him back to that idea.

"We both admit there are limits," Prothero concluded. "But between the absolutely impossible and the altogether possible there's the region of risk. You think a man ought to take that risk--" He reflected. "I think--no--I think NOT."

"If he feels afraid," cried Benham, seeing his one point. "If he feels afraid. Then he ought to take it...."

After a digestive interval, Prothero asked, "WHY? Why should he?"

The discussion of that momentous question, that Why? which Benham perhaps might never have dared ask himself, and which Prothero perhaps might never have attempted to answer if it had not been for the clash of their minds, was the chief topic of their conversation for many months. From Why be brave? it spread readily enough to Why be honest? Why be clean?--all the great whys of life.... Because one believes.... But why believe it? Left to himself Benham would have felt the mere asking of this question was a thing ignoble, not to be tolerated. It was, as it

were, treason to nobility. But Prothero put it one afternoon in a way that permitted no high dismissal of their doubts. "You can't build your honour on fudge, Benham. Like committing sacrilege--in order to buy a cloth for the altar."

By that Benham was slipped from the recognized code and launched upon speculations which became the magnificent research.

It was not only in complexion and stature and ways of thinking that Billy and Benham contrasted. Benham inclined a little to eloquence, he liked very clean hands, he had a dread of ridiculous outlines. Prothero lapsed readily into ostentatious slovenliness, when his hands were dirty he pitied them sooner than scrubbed them, he would have worn an overcoat with one tail torn off rather than have gone cold. Moreover, Prothero had an earthy liking for animals, he could stroke and tickle strange cats until they wanted to leave father and mother and all earthly possessions and follow after him, and he mortgaged a term's pocket money and bought and kept a small terrier in the school house against all law and tradition, under the baseless pretence that it was a stray animal of unknown origin. Benham, on the other hand, was shy with small animals and faintly hostile to big ones. Beasts he thought were just beasts. And Prothero had a gift for caricature, while Benham's aptitude was for music.

It was Prothero's eyes and pencil that first directed Benham to the poor indolences and evasions and insincerities of the masters. It was Prothero's wicked pictures that made him see the shrivelled absurdity

of the vulgar theology. But it was Benham who stood between Prothero and that rather coarsely conceived epicureanism that seemed his logical destiny. When quite early in their Cambridge days Prothero's revolt against foppery reached a nadir of personal neglect, and two philanthropists from the rooms below him, goaded beyond the normal tolerance of Trinity, and assisted by two sportsmen from Trinity Hall, burnt his misshapen straw hat (after partly filling it with gunpowder and iron filings) and sought to duck him in the fountain in the court, it was Benham, in a state between distress and madness, and armed with a horn-handled cane of exceptional size, who intervened, turned the business into a blend of wrangle and scuffle, introduced the degrading topic of duelling into a simple wholesome rag of four against one, carried him off under the cloud of horror created by this impropriety and so saved him, still only slightly wetted, not only from this indignity but from the experiment in rationalism that had provoked it.

Because Benham made it perfectly clear what he had thought and felt about this hat.

Such was the illuminating young man whom Lady Marayne decided to invite to Chexington, into the neighbourhood of herself, Sir Godfrey, and her circle of friends.

He was quite anxious to satisfy the requirements of Benham's people and to do his friend credit. He was still in the phase of being a penitent pig, and he inquired carefully into the needs and duties of a summer guest in a country house. He knew it was quite a considerable country house, and that Sir Godfrey wasn't Benham's father, but like most people, he was persuaded that Lady Marayne had divorced the parental Benham. He arrived dressed very neatly in a brown suit that had only one fault, it had not the remotest suggestion of having been made for him. It fitted his body fairly well, it did annex his body with only a few slight incompatibilities, but it repudiated his hands and face. He had a conspicuously old Gladstone bag and a conspicuously new despatch case, and he had forgotten black ties and dress socks and a hair brush. He arrived in the late afternoon, was met by Benham, in tennis flannels, looking smartened up and a little unfamiliar, and taken off in a spirited dog-cart driven by a typical groom. He met his host and hostess at dinner.

Sir Godfrey was a rationalist and a residuum. Very much of him, too much perhaps, had gone into the acquirement and perfect performance of the caecal operation; the man one met in the social world was what was left over. It had the effect of being quiet, but in its unobtrusive way knobby. He had a knobby brow, with an air about it of having recently been intent, and his conversation was curiously spotted with little knobby arrested anecdotes. If any one of any distinction was named, he would reflect and say, "Of course,--ah, yes, I know him, I know him. Yes, I did him a little service--in '96."

And something in his manner would suggest a satisfaction, or a dissatisfaction with confidential mysteries.

He welcomed Billy Prothero in a colourless manner, and made conversation about Cambridge. He had known one or two of the higher dons. One he had done at Cambridge quite recently. "The inns are better than they are at Oxford, which is not saying very much, but the place struck me as being changed. The men seemed younger...."

The burden of the conversation fell upon Lady Marayne. She looked extraordinarily like a flower to Billy, a little diamond buckle on a black velvet band glittered between the two masses of butter-coloured hair that flowed back from her forehead, her head was poised on the prettiest neck conceivable, and her shapely little shoulders and her shapely little arms came decidedly but pleasantly out of a softness and sparkle of white and silver and old rose. She talked what sounded like innocent commonplaces a little spiced by whim, though indeed each remark had an exploratory quality, and her soft blue eyes rested ever and again upon Billy's white tie. It seemed she did so by the merest inadvertency, but it made the young man wish he had after all borrowed a black one from Benham. But the manservant who had put his things out had put it out, and he hadn't been quite sure. Also she noted all the little things he did with fork and spoon and glass. She gave him an unusual sense of being brightly, accurately and completely visible.

Chexington, it seemed to Billy, was done with a large and costly and

easy completeness. The table with its silver and flowers was much more beautifully done than any table he had sat at before, and in the dimness beyond the brightness there were two men to wait on the four of them. The old grey butler was really wonderfully good....

"You shoot, Mr. Prothero?"

"You hunt, Mr. Prothero?"

"You know Scotland well, Mr. Prothero?"

These questions disturbed Prothero. He did not shoot, he did not hunt, he did not go to Scotland for the grouse, he did not belong, and Lady Marayne ought to have seen that he did not belong to the class that does these things.

"You ride much, Mr. Prothero?"

Billy conceived a suspicion that these innocent inquiries were designed to emphasize a contrast in his social quality. But he could not be sure. One never could be sure with Lady Marayne. It might be just that she did not understand the sort of man he was. And in that case ought he to maintain the smooth social surface unbroken by pretending as far as possible to be this kind of person, or ought he to make a sudden gap in it by telling his realities. He evaded the shooting question anyhow. He left it open for Lady Marayne and the venerable butler and Sir Godfrey and every one to suppose he just happened to be the sort of gentleman

of leisure who doesn't shoot. He disavowed hunting, he made it appear he travelled when he travelled in directions other than Scotland. But the fourth question brought him to bay. He regarded his questioner with his small rufous eye.

"I have never been across a horse in my life, Lady Marayne."

"Tut, tut," said Sir Godfrey. "Why!--it's the best of exercise.
Every man ought to ride. Good for the health. Keeps him fit. Prevents lodgments. Most trouble due to lodgments."

"I've never had a chance of riding. And I think I'm afraid of horses."

"That's only an excuse," said Lady Marayne. "Everybody's afraid of horses and nobody's really afraid of horses."

"But I'm not used to horses. You see--I live on my mother. And she can't afford to keep a stable."

His hostess did not see his expression of discomfort. Her pretty eyes were intent upon the peas with which she was being served.

"Does your mother live in the country?" she asked, and took her peas with fastidious exactness.

Prothero coloured brightly. "She lives in London."

"All the year?"

"All the year."

"But isn't it dreadfully hot in town in the summer?"

Prothero had an uncomfortable sense of being very red in the face. This kept him red. "We're suburban people," he said.

"But I thought--isn't there the seaside?"

"My mother has a business," said Prothero, redder than ever.

"O-oh!" said Lady Marayne. "What fun that must be for her?"

"It's a real business, and she has to live by it. Sometimes it's a worry."

"But a business of her own!" She surveyed the confusion of his visage with a sweet intelligence. "Is it an amusing sort of business, Mr. Prothero?"

Prothero looked mulish. "My mother is a dressmaker," he said. "In Brixton. She doesn't do particularly badly--or well. I live on my scholarship. I have lived on scholarships since I was thirteen. And you see, Lady Marayne, Brixton is a poor hunting country."

Lady Marayne felt she had unmasked Prothero almost indecently. Whatever happened there must be no pause. There must be no sign of a hitch.

"But it's good at tennis," she said. "You DO play tennis, Mr. Prothero?"

"I--I gesticulate," said Prothero.

Lady Marayne, still in flight from that pause, went off at a tangent.

"Poff, my dear," she said, "I've had a diving-board put at the deep end of the pond."

The remark hung unanswered for a moment. The transition had been too quick for Benham's state of mind.

"Do you swim, Mr. Prothero?" the lady asked, though a moment before she had determined that she would never ask him a question again. But this time it was a lucky question.

"Prothero mopped up the lot of us at Minchinghampton with his diving and swimming," Benham explained, and the tension was relaxed.

Lady Marayne spoke of her own swimming, and became daring and amusing at her difficulties with local feeling when first she swam in the pond.
The high road ran along the far side of the pond--"And it didn't wear a hedge or anything," said Lady Marayne. "That was what they didn't quite like. Swimming in an undraped pond...."

Prothero had been examined enough. Now he must be entertained. She told stories about the village people in her brightest manner. The third story she regretted as soon as she was fairly launched upon it; it was how she had interviewed the village dressmaker, when Sir Godfrey insisted upon her supporting local industries. It was very amusing but technical. The devil had put it into her head. She had to go through with it. She infused an extreme innocence into her eyes and fixed them on Prothero, although she felt a certain deepening pinkness in her cheeks was betraying her, and she did not look at Benham until her unhappy, but otherwise quite amusing anecdote, was dead and gone and safely buried under another....

But people ought not to go about having dressmakers for mothers....

And coming into other people's houses and influencing their sons....

8

That night when everything was over Billy sat at the writing-table of his sumptuous bedroom--the bed was gilt wood, the curtains of the three great windows were tremendous, and there was a cheval glass that showed the full length of him and seemed to look over his head for more,--and meditated upon this visit of his. It was more than he had been prepared

for. It was going to be a great strain. The sleek young manservant in an alpaca jacket, who said "Sir" whenever you looked at him, and who had seized upon and unpacked Billy's most private Gladstone bag without even asking if he might do so, and put away and displayed Billy's things in a way that struck Billy as faintly ironical, was unexpected. And it was unexpected that the brown suit, with its pockets stuffed with Billy's personal and confidential sundries, had vanished. And apparently a bath in a bathroom far down the corridor was prescribed for him in the morning; he hadn't thought of a dressing-gown. And after one had dressed, what did one do? Did one go down and wander about the house looking for the breakfast-room or wait for a gong? Would Sir Godfrey read Family Prayers? And afterwards did one go out or hang about to be entertained? He knew now quite clearly that those wicked blue eyes would mark his every slip. She did not like him. She did not like him, he supposed, because he was common stuff. He didn't play up to her world and her. He was a discord in this rich, cleverly elaborate household. You could see it in the servants' attitudes. And he was committed to a week of this.

Billy puffed out his cheeks to blow a sigh, and then decided to be angry and say "Damn!"

This way of living which made him uncomfortable was clearly an irrational and objectionable way of living. It was, in a cumbersome way, luxurious. But the waste of life of it, the servants, the observances, all concentrated on the mere detail of existence? There came a rap at the door. Benham appeared, wearing an expensive-looking dressing-jacket

which Lady Marayne had bought for him. He asked if he might talk for a bit and smoke. He sat down in a capacious chintz-covered easy chair beside Prothero, lit a cigarette, and came to the point after only a trivial hesitation.

"Prothero," he said, "you know what my father is."

"I thought he ran a preparatory school."

There was the profoundest resentment in Prothero's voice.

"And, all the same, I'm going to be a rich man."

"I don't understand," said Prothero, without any shadow of congratulation.

Benham told Prothero as much as his mother had conveyed to him of the resources of his wealth. Her version had been adapted to his tender years and the delicacies of her position. The departed Nolan had become an eccentric godfather. Benham's manner was apologetic, and he made it clear that only recently had these facts come to him. He had never suspected that he had had this eccentric godfather. It altered the outlook tremendously. It was one of the reasons that made Benham glad to have Prothero there, one wanted a man of one's own age, who understood things a little, to try over one's new ideas. Prothero listened with an unamiable expression.

"What would you do, Prothero, if you found yourself saddled with some thousands a year?"

"Godfathers don't grow in Brixton," said Prothero concisely.

"Well, what am I to do, Prothero?"

"Does all THIS belong to you?"

"No, this is my mother's."

"Godfather too?"

"I've not thought.... I suppose so. Or her own."

Prothero meditated.

"THIS life," he said at last, "this large expensiveness--..."

He left his criticism unfinished.

"I agree. It suits my mother somehow. I can't understand her living in any other way. But--for me...."

"What can one do with several thousands a year?"

Prothero's interest in this question presently swamped his petty

personal resentments. "I suppose," he said, "one might have rather a lark with money like that. One would be free to go anywhere. To set all sorts of things going.... It's clear you can't sell all you have and give it to the poor. That is pauperization nowadays. You might run a tremendously revolutionary paper. A real upsetting paper. How many thousands is it?"

"I don't know. SOME."

Prothero's interest was growing as he faced the possibilities.

"I've dreamt of a paper," he said, "a paper that should tell the brute truth about things."

"I don't know that I'm particularly built to be a journalist," Benham objected.

"You're not," said Billy.... "You might go into Parliament as a perfectly independent member.... Only you wouldn't get in...."

"I'm not a speaker," said Benham.

"Of course," said Billy, "if you don't decide on a game, you'll just go on like this. You'll fall into a groove, you'll--you'll hunt. You'll go to Scotland for the grouse."

For the moment Prothero had no further suggestions.

Benham waited for a second or so before he broached his own idea.

"Why, first of all, at any rate, Billy, shouldn't one use one's money to make the best of oneself? To learn things that men without money and leisure find it difficult to learn? By an accident, however unjust it is, one is in the position of a leader and a privileged person. Why not do one's best to give value as that?"

"Benham, that's the thin end of aristocracy!"

"Why not?"

"I hate aristocracy. For you it means doing what you like. While you are energetic you will kick about and then you will come back to this."

"That's one's own look-out," said Benham, after reflection.

"No, it's bound to happen."

Benham retreated a little from the immediate question.

"Well, we can't suddenly at a blow change the world. If it isn't to be plutocracy to-day it has to be aristocracy."

Prothero frowned over this, and then he made a sweeping proposition.

"YOU CANNOT HAVE ARISTOCRACY," he said, "BECAUSE, YOU SEE--ALL MEN ARE

RIDICULOUS. Democracy has to fight its way out from under plutocracy. There is nothing else to be done."

"But a man in my position--?"

"It's a ridiculous position. You may try to escape being ridiculous. You won't succeed."

It seemed to Benham for a moment as though Prothero had got to the bottom of the question, and then he perceived that he had only got to the bottom of himself. Benham was pacing the floor.

He turned at the open window, held out a long forefinger, and uttered his countervailing faith.

"Even if he is ridiculous, Prothero, a man may still be an aristocrat. A man may anyhow be as much of an aristocrat as he can be."

Prothero reflected. "No," he said, "it sounds all right, but it's wrong. I hate all these advantages and differences and distinctions. A man's a man. What you say sounds well, but it's the beginning of pretension, of pride--"

He stopped short.

"Better, pride than dishonour," said Benham, "better the pretentious life than the sordid life. What else is there?"

"A life isn't necessarily sordid because it isn't pretentious," said Prothero, his voice betraying a defensive disposition.

"But a life with a large income MUST be sordid unless it makes some sort of attempt to be fine...."

9

By transitions that were as natural as they were complicated and untraceable Prothero found his visit to Chexington developing into a tangle of discussions that all ultimately resolved themselves into an antagonism of the democratic and the aristocratic idea. And his part was, he found, to be the exponent of the democratic idea. The next day he came down early, his talk with Benham still running through his head, and after a turn or so in the garden he was attracted to the front door by a sound of voices, and found Lady Marayne had been up still earlier and was dismounting from a large effective black horse. This extorted an unwilling admiration from him. She greeted him very pleasantly and made a kind of introduction of her steed. There had been trouble at a gate, he was a young horse and fidgeted at gates; the dispute was still bright in her. Benham she declared was still in bed. "Wait till I have a mount

for him." She reappeared fitfully in the breakfast-room, and then he was left to Benham until just before lunch. They read and afterwards, as the summer day grew hot, they swam in the nude pond. She joined them in the water, splashing about in a costume of some elaboration and being very careful not to wet her hair. Then she came and sat with them on the seat under the big cedar and talked with them in a wrap that was pretty rather than prudish and entirely unmotherly. And she began a fresh attack upon him by asking him if he wasn't a Socialist and whether he didn't want to pull down Chexington and grow potatoes all over the park.

This struck Prothero as an inadequate statement of the Socialist project and he made an unsuccessful attempt to get it amended.

The engagement thus opened was renewed with great energy at lunch. Sir Godfrey had returned to London and the inmost aspect of his fellow-creatures, but the party of three was supplemented by a vague young lady from the village and an alert agent from the neighbouring Tentington estate who had intentions about a cottage. Lady Marayne insisted upon regarding Socialism as a proposal to reinaugurate the first French Revolution, as an inversion of society so that it would be bottom upward, as an attack upon rule, order, direction. "And what good are all these proposals? If you had the poor dear king beheaded, you'd only get a Napoleon. If you divided all the property up between everybody, you'd have rich and poor again in a year."

Billy perceived no way of explaining away this version of his Socialism that would not involve uncivil contradictions--and nobody ever

contradicted Lady Marayne.

"But, Lady Marayne, don't you think there is a lot of disorder and injustice in the world?" he protested.

"There would be ever so much more if your Socialists had their way."

"But still, don't you think--..."

It is unnecessary even to recapitulate these universal controversies of our time. The lunch-table and the dinner-table and the general talk of the house drifted more and more definitely at its own level in the same direction as the private talk of Prothero and Benham, towards the antagonism of the privileged few and the many, of the trained and traditioned against the natural and undisciplined, of aristocracy against democracy. At the week-end Sir Godfrey returned to bring fresh elements. He said that democracy was unscientific. "To deny aristocracy is to deny the existence of the fittest. It is on the existence of the fittest that progress depends."

"But do our social conditions exalt the fittest?" asked Prothero.

"That is another question," said Benham.

"Exactly," said Sir Godfrey. "That is another question. But speaking with some special knowledge, I should say that on the whole the people who are on the top of things OUGHT to be on the top of things. I agree

with Aristotle that there is such a thing as a natural inferior."

"So far as I can understand Mr. Prothero," said Lady Marayne, "he thinks that all the inferiors are the superiors and all the superiors inferior. It's quite simple...."

It made Prothero none the less indignant with this, that there was indeed a grain of truth in it. He hated superiors, he felt for inferiors.

10

At last came the hour of tipping. An embarrassed and miserable Prothero went slinking about the house distributing unexpected gold.

It was stupid, it was damnable; he had had to borrow the money from his mother....

Lady Marayne felt he had escaped her. The controversy that should have split these two young men apart had given them a new interest in each other. When afterwards she sounded her son, very delicately, to see if indeed he was aware of the clumsiness, the social ignorance and uneasiness, the complete unsuitability of his friend, she could get no more from him than that exasperating phrase, "He has ideas!"

What are ideas? England may yet be ruined by ideas.

He ought never to have gone to Trinity, that monster packet of everything. He ought to have gone to some little GOOD college, good all through. She ought to have asked some one who KNEW.

11

One glowing afternoon in October, as these two young men came over Magdalen Bridge after a long disputatious and rather tiring walk to Drayton--they had been talking of Eugenics and the "family"--Benham was almost knocked down by an American trotter driven by Lord Breeze. "Whup there!" said Lord Breeze in a voice deliberately brutal, and Benham, roused from that abstraction which is partly fatigue, had to jump aside and stumbled against the parapet as the gaunt pacer went pounding by.

Lord Breeze grinned the sort of grin a man remembers. And passed.

"Damnation!" said Benham with a face that had become suddenly very white.

Then presently. "Any fool can do that who cares to go to the trouble."

"That," said Prothero, taking up their unquenchable issue, "that is the feeling of democracy."

"I walk because I choose to," said Benham.

The thing rankled.

"This equestrianism," he began, "is a matter of time and money--time even more than money. I want to read. I want to deal with ideas....

"Any fool can drive...."

"Exactly," said Prothero.

"As for riding, it means no more than the elaborate study and cultivation of your horse. You have to know him. All horses are individuals. A made horse perhaps goes its round like an omnibus, but for the rest...."

Prothero made a noise of sympathetic assent.

"In a country where equestrianism is assertion I suppose one must be equestrian...."

That night some malignant spirit kept Benham awake, and great American trotters with vast wide-striding feet and long yellow teeth, uncontrollable, hard-mouthed American trotters, pounded over his angry

soul.

"Prothero," he said in hall next day, "we are going to drive to-morrow."

Next day, so soon as they had lunched, he led the way towards Maltby's, in Crosshampton Lane. Something in his bearing put a question into Prothero's mind. "Benham," he asked, "have you ever driven before?"

"NEVER," said Benham.

"Well?"

"I'm going to now."

Something between pleasure and alarm came into Prothero's eyes. He quickened his pace so as to get alongside his friend and scrutinize his pale determination. "Why are you doing this?" he asked.

"I want to do it."

"Benham, is it--EQUESTRIAN?"

Benham made no audible reply. They proceeded resolutely in silence.

An air of expectation prevailed in Maltby's yard. In the shafts of a high, bleak-looking vehicle with vast side wheels, a throne-like vehicle that impressed Billy Prothero as being a gig, a very large angular black

horse was being harnessed.

"This is mine," said Benham compactly.

"This is yours, sir," said an ostler.

"He looks--QUIET."

"You'll find him fresh enough, sir."

Benham made a complicated ascent to the driver's seat and was handed the reins. "Come on," he said, and Prothero followed to a less exalted seat at Benham's side. They seemed to be at a very great height indeed. The horse was then led out into Crosshampton Lane, faced towards Trinity Street and discharged. "Check," said Benham, and touched the steed with his whip. They started quite well, and the ostlers went back into the yard, visibly unanxious. It struck Prothero that perhaps driving was less difficult than he had supposed.

They went along Crosshampton Lane, that high-walled gulley, with dignity, with only a slight suggestion of the inaccuracy that was presently to become apparent, until they met a little old bearded don on a bicycle. Then some misunderstanding arose between Benham and the horse, and the little bearded don was driven into the narrow pavement and had to get off hastily. He made no comment, but his face became like a gargoyle. "Sorry," said Benham, and gave his mind to the corner. There was some difficulty about whether they were to turn to the right or the

left, but at last Benham, it seemed, carried his point, and they went along the narrow street, past the grey splendours of King's, and rather in the middle of the way.

Prothero considered the beast in front of him, and how proud and disrespectful a horse in a dogcart can seem to those behind it! Moreover, unaccustomed as he was to horses, he was struck by the strong resemblance a bird's-eye view of a horse bears to a fiddle, a fiddle with devil's ears.

"Of course," said Prothero, "this isn't a trotter."

"I couldn't get a trotter," said Benham.

"I thought I would try this sort of thing before I tried a trotter," he added.

And then suddenly came disaster.

There was a butcher's cart on the right, and Benham, mistrusting the intelligence of his steed, insisted upon an excessive amplitude of clearance. He did not reckon with the hand-barrow on his left, piled up with dirty plates from the lunch of Trinity Hall. It had been left there; its custodian was away upon some mysterious errand. Heaven knows why Trinity Hall exhibited the treasures of its crockery thus stained and deified in the Cambridge streets. But it did--for Benham's and Prothero's undoing. Prothero saw the great wheel over which he was

poised entangle itself with the little wheel of the barrow. "God!" he whispered, and craned, fascinated. The little wheel was manifestly intrigued beyond all self-control by the great wheel; it clung to it, it went before it, heedless of the barrow, of which it was an inseparable part. The barrow came about with an appearance of unwillingness, it locked against the great wheel; it reared itself towards Prothero and began, smash, smash, smash, to shed its higher plates. It was clear that Benham was grappling with a crisis upon a basis of inadequate experience. A number of people shouted haphazard things. Then, too late, the barrow had persuaded the little wheel to give up its fancy for the great wheel, and there was an enormous crash.

"Whoa!" cried Benham. "Whoa!" but also, unfortunately, he sawed hard at the horse's mouth.

The animal, being in some perplexity, danced a little in the narrow street, and then it had come about and it was backing, backing, on the narrow pavement and towards the plate-glass window of a book and newspaper shop. Benham tugged at its mouth much harder than ever. Prothero saw the window bending under the pressure of the wheel. A sense of the profound seriousness of life and of the folly of this expedition came upon him. With extreme nimbleness he got down just as the window burst. It went with an explosion like a pistol shot, and then a clatter of falling glass. People sprang, it seemed, from nowhere, and jostled about Prothero, so that he became a peripheral figure in the discussion. He perceived that a man in a green apron was holding the horse, and that various people were engaged in simultaneous conversation with Benham,

who with a pale serenity of face and an awful calm of manner, dealt with each of them in turn.

"I'm sorry," he was saying. "Somebody ought to have been in charge of the barrow. Here are my cards. I am ready to pay for any damage....

"The barrow ought not to have been there....

"Yes, I am going on. Of course I'm going on. Thank you."

He beckoned to the man who had held the horse and handed him half-a-crown. He glanced at Prothero as one might glance at a stranger. "Check!" he said. The horse went on gravely. Benham lifted out his whip. He appeared to have clean forgotten Prothero. Perhaps presently he would miss him. He went on past Trinity, past the ruddy brick of St. John's. The curve of the street hid him from Prothero's eyes.

Prothero started in pursuit. He glimpsed the dog-cart turning into Bridge Street. He had an impression that Benham used the whip at the corner, and that the dog-cart went forward out of sight with a startled jerk. Prothero quickened his pace.

But when he got to the fork between the Huntingdon Road and the Cottenham Road, both roads were clear.

He spent some time in hesitation. Then he went along the Huntingdon Road until he came upon a road-mender, and learnt that Benham had passed that

way. "Going pretty fast 'e was," said the road-mender, "and whipping 'is 'orse. Else you might 'a thought 'e was a boltin' with 'im." Prothero decided that if Benham came back at all he would return by way of Cottenham, and it was on the Cottenham Road that at last he encountered his friend again.

Benham was coming along at that good pace which all experienced horses when they are fairly turned back towards Cambridge display. And there was something odd about Benham, as though he had a large circular halo with a thick rim. This, it seemed, had replaced his hat. He was certainly hatless. The warm light of the sinking sun shone upon the horse and upon Benham's erect figure and upon his face, and gleams of fire kept flashing from his head to this rim, like the gleam of drawn swords seen from afar. As he drew nearer this halo detached itself from him and became a wheel sticking up behind him. A large, clumsy-looking bicycle was attached to the dog-cart behind. The expression of Benham's golden face was still a stony expression; he regarded his friend with hard eyes.

"You all right, Benham?" cried Prothero, advancing into the road.

His eye examined the horse. It looked all right, if anything it was a trifle subdued; there was a little foam about its mouth, but not very much.

"Whoa!" said Benham, and the horse stopped. "Are you coming up, Prothero?"

Prothero clambered up beside him. "I was anxious," he said.

"There was no need to be."

"You've broken your whip."

"Yes. It broke.... GET up!"

They proceeded on their way to Cambridge.

"Something has happened to the wheel," said Prothero, trying to be at his ease.

"Merely a splinter or so. And a spoke perhaps."

"And what is this behind?"

Benham made a half-turn of the head. "It's a motor-bicycle."

Prothero took in details.

"Some of it is missing."

"No, the front wheel is under the seat."

"Oh!"

"Did you find it?" Prothero asked, after an interval.

"You mean?"

"He ran into a motor-car--as I was passing. I was perhaps a little to blame. He asked me to bring his machine to Cambridge. He went on in the car.... It is all perfectly simple."

Prothero glanced at the splinters in the wheel with a renewed interest.

"Did your wheel get into it?" he asked. Benham affected not to hear. He was evidently in no mood for story-telling.

"Why did you get down, Prothero?" he asked abruptly, with the note of suppressed anger thickening his voice.

Prothero became vividly red. "I don't know," he said, after an interval.

"I DO," said Benham, and they went on in a rich and active silence to Cambridge, and the bicycle repair shop in Bridge Street, and Trinity College. At the gate of Trinity Benham stopped, and conveyed rather by acts than words that Prothero was to descend. He got down meekly enough, although he felt that the return to Maltby's yard might have many points of interest. But the spirit had gone out of him.

12

For three days the two friends avoided each other, and then Prothero went to Benham's room. Benham was smoking cigarettes--Lady Marayne, in the first warmth of his filial devotion, had prohibited his pipe--and reading Webb's INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY. "Hello!" he said coldly, scarcely looking up, and continued to read that absorbing work.

"I keep on thinking how I jumped down from that damned dog-cart," said Prothero, without any preface.

"It didn't matter in the least," said Benham distantly.

"Oh! ROT," said Prothero. "I behaved like a coward."

Benham shut his book.

"Benham," said Prothero. "You are right about aristocracy, and I am wrong. I've been thinking about it night and day."

Benham betrayed no emotion. But his tone changed. "Billy," he said, "there are cigarettes and whiskey in the corner. Don't make a fuss about a trifle."

"No whiskey," said Billy, and lit a cigarette. "And it isn't a trifle."

He came to Benham's hearthrug. "That business," he said, "has changed all my views. No--don't say something polite! I see that if one hasn't the habit of pride one is bound to get off a dogcart when it seems likely to smash. You have the habit of pride, and I haven't. So far as the habit of pride goes, I come over to the theory of aristocracy."

Benham said nothing, but he put down Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and reached out for and got and lit a cigarette.

"I give up 'Go as you please.' I give up the natural man. I admit training. I perceive I am lax and flabby, unguarded, I funk too much, I eat too much, and I drink too much. And, yet, what I have always liked in you, Benham, is just this--that you don't."

"I do," said Benham.

"Do what?"

"Funk."

"Benham, I believe that naturally you funk as much as I do. You're more a thing of nerves than I am, far more. But you keep yourself up to the mark, and I have let myself get flabby. You're so right. You're so utterly right. These last nights I've confessed it--aloud. I had an inkling of it--after that rag. But now it's as clear as daylight. I don't know if you mean to go on with me, after what's happened, but

anyhow I want you to know, whether you end our friendship or not--"

"Billy, don't be an old ass," said Benham.

Both young men paused for a moment. They made no demonstrations. But the strain was at an end between them.

"I've thought it all out," Billy went on with a sudden buoyancy. "We two are both of the same kind of men. Only you see, Benham, you have a natural pride and I haven't. You have pride. But we are both intellectuals. We both belong to what the Russians call the Intelligentsia. We have ideas, we have imagination, that is our strength. And that is our weakness. That makes us moral light-weights. We are flimsy and uncertain people. All intellectuals are flimsy and uncertain people. It's not only that they are critical and fastidious; they are weak-handed. They look about them; their attention wanders. Unless they have got a habit of controlling themselves and forcing themselves and holding themselves together."

"The habit of pride."

"Yes. And then--then we are lords of the world."

"All this, Billy," said Benham, "I steadfastly believe."

"I've seen it all now," said Prothero. "Lord! how clearly I see it! The intellectual is either a prince or he is a Greek slave in a Roman

household. He's got to hold his chin up or else he becomes--even as these dons we see about us--a thing that talks appointments, a toady, a port-wine bibber, a mass of detail, a conscious maker of neat sayings, a growing belly under a dwindling brain. Their gladness is drink or gratified vanity or gratified malice, their sorrow is indigestion or--old maid's melancholy. They are the lords of the world who will not take the sceptre.... And what I want to say to you, Benham, more than anything else is, YOU go on--YOU make yourself equestrian. You drive your horse against Breeze's, and go through the fire and swim in the ice-cold water and climb the precipice and drink little and sleep hard. And--I wish I could do so too."

"But why not?"

"Because I can't. Now I admit I've got shame in my heart and pride in my head, and I'm strung up. I might do something--this afternoon. But it won't last. YOU--you have pride in your bones. My pride will vanish at a laugh. My honour will go at a laugh. I'm just exalted by a crisis. That's all. I'm an animal of intelligence. Soul and pride are weak in me. My mouth waters, my cheek brightens, at the sight of good things. And I've got a lickerish tail, Benham. You don't know. You don't begin to imagine. I'm secretive. But I quiver with hot and stirring desires. And I'm indolent--dirty indolent. Benham, there are days when I splash my bath about without getting into it. There are days when I turn back from a walk because there's a cow in the field.... But, I spare you the viler details.... And it's that makes me hate fine people and try so earnestly to persuade myself that any man is as good as any man, if not

a trifle better. Because I know it isn't so...."

"Billy," said Benham, "you've the boldest mind that ever I met."

Prothero's face lit with satisfaction. Then his countenance fell again. "I know I'm better there," he said, "and yet, see how I let in a whole system of lies to cover my secret humiliations. There, at least, I will cling to pride. I will at least THINK free and clean and high. But you can climb higher than I can. You've got the grit to try and LIVE high. There you are, Benham."

Benham stuck one leg over the arm of his chair. "Billy," he said, "come and be--equestrian and stop this nonsense."

"No."

"Damn it--you DIVE!"

"You'd go in before me if a woman was drowning."

"Nonsense. I'm going to ride. Come and ride too. You've a cleverer way with animals than I have. Why! that horse I was driving the other day would have gone better alone. I didn't drive it. I just fussed it. I interfered. If I ride for ever, I shall never have decent hands, I shall always hang on my horse's mouth at a gallop, I shall never be sure at a jump. But at any rate I shall get hard. Come and get hard too."

"You can," said Billy, "you can. But not I! Heavens, the TROUBLE of it! The riding-school! The getting up early! No!--for me the Trumpington Road on foot in the afternoon. Four miles an hour and panting. And my fellowship and the combination-room port. And, besides, Benham, there's the expense. I can't afford the equestrian order."

"It's not so great."

"Not so great! I don't mean the essential expense. But--the incidentals. I don't know whether any one can realize how a poor man is hampered by the dread of minor catastrophes. It isn't so much that he is afraid of breaking his neck, Benham, as that he is afraid of breaking something he will have to pay for. For instance--. Benham! how much did your little expedition the other day--?"

He stopped short and regarded his friend with round eyes and raised eyebrows.

A reluctant grin overspread Benham's face. He was beginning to see the humour of the affair.

"The claim for the motor-bicycle isn't sent in yet. The repair of the mudguards of the car is in dispute. Trinity Hall's crockery, the plate-glass window, the whip-lash and wheel and so forth, the hire of the horse and trap, sundry gratuities.... I doubt if the total will come very much under fifty pounds. And I seem to have lost a hat somewhere."

Billy regarded his toes and cleared his throat.

"Depending as I do on a widowed mother in Brixton for all the expenditure that isn't covered by my pot-hunting--"

"Of course," said Benham, "it wasn't a fair sample afternoon."

"Still--"

"There's footer," said Benham, "we might both play footer."

"Or boxing."

"And, anyhow, you must come with me when I drive again. I'm going to start a trotter."

"If I miss another drive may I be--lost for ever," said Billy, with the utmost sincerity. "Never more will I get down, Benham, wherever you may take me. Short of muffing my fellowship I'm with you always.... Will it be an American trotter?"

"It will be the rawest, gauntest, ungainliest brute that ever scared the motor-bicycles on the Northampton Road. It will have the legs and stride of an ostrich. It will throw its feet out like dealing cards. It will lift its head and look the sun in the eye like a vulture. It will have teeth like the English spinster in a French comic paper.... And we will fly...."

"I shall enjoy it very much," said Prothero in a small voice after an interval for reflection. "I wonder where we shall fly. It will do us both a lot of good. And I shall insure my life for a small amount in my mother's interest.... Benham, I think I will, after all, take a whiskey.... Life is short...."

He did so and Benham strolled to the window and stood looking out upon the great court.

"We might do something this afternoon," said Benham.

"Splendid idea," reflected Billy over his whiskey. "Living hard and thinking hard. A sort of Intelligentsia that is BLOODED.... I shall, of course, come as far as I can with you."

In one of the bureau drawers that White in this capacity of literary executor was examining, there were two documents that carried back right to these early days. They were both products of this long wide undergraduate argumentation that had played so large a part in the making of Benham. One recorded the phase of maximum opposition, and one was the outcome of the concluding approach of the antagonists. They were debating club essays. One had been read to a club in Pembroke, a club called the ENQUIRERS, of which White also had been a member, and as he turned it over he found the circumstances of its reading coming back to his memory. He had been present, and Carnac's share in the discussion with his shrill voice and stumpy gestures would alone have sufficed to have made it a memorable occasion. The later one had been read to the daughter club of the ENQUIRERS, the SOCIAL ENQUIRERS, in the year after White had gone down, and it was new to him.

Both these papers were folded flat and neatly docketed; they were rather yellow and a little dog-eared, and with the outer sheet pencilled over with puzzling or illegible scribblings, Benham's memoranda for his reply. White took the earlier essay in his hand. At the head of the first page was written in large letters, "Go slowly, speak to the man at the back." It brought up memories of his own experiences, of rows of gaslit faces, and of a friendly helpful voice that said, "Speak up?"

Of course this was what happened to every intelligent contemporary, this

encounter with ideas, this restatement and ventilation of the old truths and the old heresies. Only in this way does a man make a view his own, only so does he incorporate it. These are our real turning points. The significant, the essential moments in the life of any one worth consideration are surely these moments when for the first time he faces towards certain broad ideas and certain broad facts. Life nowadays consists of adventures among generalizations. In class-rooms after the lecture, in studies in the small hours, among books or during solitary walks, the drama of the modern career begins. Suddenly a man sees his line, his intention. Yet though we are all of us writing long novels--White's world was the literary world, and that is how it looked to him--which profess to set out the lives of men, this part of the journey, this crucial passage among the Sphinxes, is still done--when it is done at all--slightly, evasively. Why?

White fell back on his professionalism. "It does not make a book. It makes a novel into a treatise, it turns it into a dissertation."

But even as White said this to himself he knew it was wrong, and it slid out of his thoughts again. Was not this objection to the play of ideas merely the expression of that conservative instinct which fights for every old convention? The traditional novel is a love story and takes ideas for granted, it professes a hero but presents a heroine. And to begin with at least, novels were written for the reading of heroines. Miss Lydia Languish sets no great store upon the contents of a man's head. That is just the stuffing of the doll. Eyes and heart are her game. And so there is never any more sphinx in the story than a lady may

impersonate. And as inevitably the heroine meets a man. In his own first success, White reflected, the hero, before he had gone a dozen pages, met a very pleasant young woman very pleasantly in a sunlit thicket; the second opened at once with a bicycle accident that brought two young people together so that they were never afterwards disentangled; the third, failing to produce its heroine in thirty pages, had to be rearranged. The next--

White returned from an unprofitable digression to the matter before him.

The first of Benham's early essays was written in an almost boyish hand, it was youthfully amateurish in its nervous disposition to definitions and distinctions, and in the elaborate linking of part to part. It was called TRUE DEMOCRACY. Manifestly it was written before the incident of the Trinity Hall plates, and most of it had been done after Prothero's visit to Chexington. White could feel that now inaudible interlocutor. And there were even traces of Sir Godfrey Marayne's assertion that democracy was contrary to biology. From the outset it was clear that whatever else it meant, True Democracy, following the analogy of True Politeness, True Courage, True Honesty and True Marriage, did not mean democracy at all. Benham was, in fact, taking Prothero's word, and trying to impose upon it his own solidifying and crystallizing opinion of life.

They were not as yet very large or well-formed crystals. The proposition he struggled to develop was this, that True Democracy did not mean an equal share in the government, it meant an equal opportunity to share in the government. Men were by nature and in the most various ways unequal. True Democracy aimed only at the removal of artificial inequalities....

It was on the truth of this statement, that men were by nature unequal, that the debate had turned. Prothero was passionately against the idea at that time. It was, he felt, separating himself from Benham more and more. He spoke with a personal bitterness. And he found his chief ally

in a rigorous and voluble Frenchman named Carnac, an aggressive Roman Catholic, who opened his speech by saying that the first aristocrat was the devil, and shocked Prothero by claiming him as probably the only other sound Christian in the room. Several biologists were present, and one tall, fair youth with a wearisome forefinger tried to pin Carnac with questions.

"But you must admit some men are taller than others?"

"Then the others are broader."

"Some are smaller altogether."

"Nimbler--it's notorious."

"Some of the smaller are less nimble than the others."

"Then they have better nightmares. How can you tell?"

The biologist was temporarily incapacitated, and the talk went on over his prostrate attempts to rally and protest.

A second biologist seemed to Benham to come nearer the gist of the dispute when he said that they were not discussing the importance of men, but their relative inequalities. Nobody was denying the equal importance of everybody. But there was a virtue of this man and a virtue of that. Nobody could dispute the equal importance of every wheel in a

machine, of every atom in the universe. Prothero and Carnac were angry because they thought the denial of absolute equality was a denial of equal importance. That was not so. Every man mattered in his place. But politically, or economically, or intellectually that might be a lowly place....

At this point Carnac interrupted with a whooping and great violence, and a volley of obscure French colloquialisms.

He was understood to convey that the speaker was a Jew, and did not in the least mean what he was saying....

The second paper was an altogether maturer and more characteristic production. It was no longer necessary to answer Prothero. Prothero had been incorporated. And Benham had fairly got away with his great idea. It was evident to White that this paper had been worked over on several occasions since its first composition and that Benham had intended to make it a part of his book. There were corrections in pencil and corrections in a different shade of ink, and there was an unfinished new peroration, that was clearly the latest addition of all. Yet its substance had been there always. It gave the youth just grown to manhood, but anyhow fully grown. It presented the far-dreaming intellectualist shaped.

Benham had called it ARISTOCRACY. But he was far away by now from political aristocracy.

This time he had not begun with definitions and generalizations, but with a curiously subjective appeal. He had not pretended to be theorizing at large any longer, he was manifestly thinking of his own life and as manifestly he was thinking of life as a matter of difficulty and unexpected thwartings.

"We see life," he wrote, "not only life in the world outside us, but life in our own selves, as an immense choice of possibilities; indeed, for us in particular who have come up here, who are not under any urgent

necessity to take this line or that, life is apparently pure choice. It is quite easy to think we are all going to choose the pattern of life we like best and work it out in our own way.... And, meanwhile, there is no great hurry....

"I want to begin by saying that choice isn't so easy and so necessary as it seems. We think we are going to choose presently, and in the end we may never choose at all. Choice needs perhaps more energy than we think. The great multitude of older people we can observe in the world outside there, haven't chosen either in the matter of the world outside, where they shall go, what they shall do, what part they shall play, or in the matter of the world within, what they will be and what they are determined they will never be. They are still in much the same state of suspended choice as we seem to be in, but in the meanwhile THINGS HAPPEN TO THEM. And things are happening to us, things will happen to us, while we still suppose ourselves in the wings waiting to be consulted about the casting of the piece....

"Nevertheless this immense appearance of choice which we get in the undergraduate community here, is not altogether illusion; it is more reality than illusion even if it has not the stable and complete reality it appears to have. And it is more a reality for us than it was for our fathers, and much more a reality now than it was a few centuries ago. The world is more confused and multitudinous than ever it was, the practicable world far wider, and ourselves far less under the pressure of inflexible moulding forces and inevitable necessities than any preceding generations. I want to put very clearly how I see the new

world, the present world, the world of novel choice to which our youth and inexperience faces, and I want to define to you a certain selection of choices which I am going to call aristocratic, and to which it is our manifest duty and destiny as the elect and favoured sons of our race to direct ourselves.

"It isn't any choice of Hercules I mean, any mere alternative whether we will be, how shall I put it?--the bridegrooms of pleasure or the bridegrooms of duty. It is infinitely vaster and more subtly moral than that. There are a thousand good lives possible, of which we may have one, lives which are soundly good, or a thousand bad lives, if you like, lives which are thoroughly bad--that's the old and perpetual choice, that has always been--but what is more evident to me and more remarkable and disconcerting is that there are nowadays ten thousand muddled lives lacking even so much moral definition, even so much consistency as is necessary for us to call them either good or bad, there are planless indeterminate lives, more and more of them, opening out as the possible lives before us, a perfect wilderness between salvation and damnation, a wilderness so vast and crowded that at last it seems as though the way to either hell or heaven would be lost in its interminable futility. Such planless indeterminate lives, plebeian lives, mere lives, fill the world, and the spectacle of whole nations, our whole civilization, seems to me to re-echo this planlessness, this indeterminate confusion of purpose. Plain issues are harder and harder to find, it is as if they had disappeared. Simple living is the countryman come to town. We are deafened and jostled and perplexed. There are so many things afoot that we get nothing....

"That is what is in my mind when I tell you that we have to gather ourselves together much more than we think. We have to clench ourselves upon a chosen end. We have to gather ourselves together out of the swill of this brimming world.

"Or--we are lost...."

("Swill of this brimming world," said White. "Some of this sounds uncommonly like Prothero." He mused for a moment and then resumed his reading.)

"That is what I was getting at when, three years ago, I made an attack upon Democracy to the mother society of this society, an attack that I expressed ill and failed to drive home. That is what I have come down now to do my best to make plainer. This age of confusion is Democracy; it is all that Democracy can ever give us. Democracy, if it means anything, means the rule of the planless man, the rule of the unkempt mind. It means as a necessary consequence this vast boiling up of collectively meaningless things.

"What is the quality of the common man, I mean of the man that is common to all of us, the man who is the Standard for such men as Carnac, the man who seems to be the ideal of the Catholic Democrat? He is the creature of a few fundamental impulses. He begins in blind imitation of the life about him. He lusts and takes a wife, he hungers and tills a field or toils in some other way to earn a living, a mere aimless

living, he fears and so he does not wander, he is jealous and stays by his wife and his job, is fiercely yet often stupidly and injuriously defensive of his children and his possessions, and so until he wearies. Then he dies and needs a cemetery. He needs a cemetery because he is so afraid of dissolution that even when he has ceased to be, he still wants a place and a grave to hold him together and prevent his returning to the All that made him. Our chief impression of long ages of mankind comes from its cemeteries. And this is the life of man, as the common man conceives and lives it. Beyond that he does not go, he never comprehends himself collectively at all, the state happens about him; his passion for security, his gregarious self-defensiveness, makes him accumulate upon himself until he congests in cities that have no sense of citizenship and states that have no structure; the clumsy, inconsecutive lying and chatter of his newspapers, his hoardings and music-halls gives the measure of his congested intelligences, the confusion of ugly, half empty churches and chapels and meeting-halls gauge the intensity of his congested souls, the tricks and slow blundering dishonesties of Diet and Congress and Parliament are his statecraft and his wisdom....

"I do not care if this instant I am stricken dead for pride. I say here now to you and to High Heaven that THIS LIFE IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME. I know there is a better life than this muddle about us, a better life possible now. I know it. A better individual life and a better public life. If I had no other assurances, if I were blind to the glorious intimations of art, to the perpetually widening promise of science, to the mysterious beckonings of beauty in form and colour and the

inaccessible mockery of the stars, I should still know this from the insurgent spirit within me....

"Now this better life is what I mean when I talk of Aristocracy. This idea of a life breaking away from the common life to something better, is the consuming idea in my mind.

"Constantly, recurrently, struggling out of the life of the farm and the shop, the inn and the market, the street and the crowd, is something that is not of the common life. Its way of thinking is Science, its dreaming is Art, its will is the purpose of mankind. It is not the common thing. But also it is not an unnatural thing. It is not as common as a rat, but it is no less natural than a panther.

"For it is as natural to be an explorer as it is to be a potato grower, it is rarer but it is as natural; it is as natural to seek explanations and arrange facts as it is to make love, or adorn a hut, or show kindness to a child. It is a folly I will not even dispute about, that man's only natural implement is the spade. Imagination, pride, exalted desire are just as much Man, as are hunger and thirst and sexual curiosities and the panic dread of unknown things....

"Now you see better what I mean about choice. Now you see what I am driving at. We have to choose each one for himself and also each one for the race, whether we will accept the muddle of the common life, whether we ourselves will be muddled, weakly nothings, children of luck, steering our artful courses for mean success and tawdry honours, or

whether we will be aristocrats, for that is what it amounts to, each one in the measure of his personal quality an aristocrat, refusing to be restrained by fear, refusing to be restrained by pain, resolved to know and understand up to the hilt of his understanding, resolved to sacrifice all the common stuff of his life to the perfection of his peculiar gift, a purged man, a trained, selected, artificial man, not simply free, but lordly free, filled and sustained by pride. Whether you or I make that choice and whether you or I succeed in realizing ourselves, though a great matter to ourselves, is, I admit, a small matter to the world. But the great matter is this, that THE CHOICE IS BEING MADE, that it will continue to be made, and that all around us, so that it can never be arrested and darkened again, is the dawn of human possibility...."

(White could also see his dead friend's face with its enthusiastic paleness, its disordered hair and the glowing darknesses in the eyes. On such occasions Benham always had an expression of ESCAPE. Temporary escape. And thus would his hand have clutched the reading-desk; thus would his long fingers have rustled these dry papers.)

"Man has reached a point when a new life opens before him....

"The old habitual life of man is breaking up all about us, and for the new life our minds, our imaginations, our habits and customs are all unprepared....

"It is only now, after some years of study and living, that I begin to

realize what this tremendous beginning we call Science means to mankind. Every condition that once justified the rules and imperatives, the manners and customs, the sentiments, the morality, the laws and limitations which make up the common life, has been or is being destroyed.... Two or three hundred years more and all that life will be as much a thing past and done with as the life that was lived in the age of unpolished stone....

"Man is leaving his ancestral shelters and going out upon the greatest adventure that ever was in space or time, he is doing it now, he is doing it in us as I stand here and read to you."

CHAPTER THE SECOND ~~ THE YOUNG MAN ABOUT TOWN

1

The oldest novel in the world at any rate, White reflected, was a story with a hero and no love interest worth talking about. It was the story of Tobias and how he came out from the shelters of his youth into this magic and intricate world. Its heroine was incidental, part of the spoil, a seven times relict....