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....

White had not read the book of Tobit for many years, and what he was really thinking of was not that ancient story at all, but Botticelli's picture, that picture of the sunlit morning of life. When you say "Tobias" that is what most intelligent people will recall. Perhaps you will remember how gaily and confidently the young man strides along with the armoured angel by his side. Absurdly enough, Benham and his dream of high aristocracy reminded White of that....

"We have all been Tobias in our time," said White.

If White had been writing this chapter he would have in all probability called it THE TOBIAS STAGE, forgetful that there was no Tobit behind Benham and an entirely different Sara in front of him.

2

From Cambridge Benham came to London. For the first time he was to live in London. Never before had he been in London for more than a few days at a time. But now, guided by his mother's advice, he was to have a flat in Finacue street, just round the corner from Desborough Street, a flat very completely and delightfully furnished under her supervision. It had an admirable study, in which she had arranged not only his books, but a number of others in beautiful old leather bindings that it had

amused her extremely to buy; it had a splendid bureau and business-like letter-filing cabinets, a neat little drawing-room and a dining-room, well-placed abundant electric lights, and a man called Merkle whom she had selected very carefully and who she felt would not only see to Benham's comfort but keep him, if necessary, up to the mark.

This man Merkle seemed quite unaware that humanity "here and now"--even as he was engaged in meticulously putting out Benham's clothes--was "leaving its ancestral shelters and going out upon the greatest adventure that ever was in space or time." If he had been told as much by Benham he would probably have said, "Indeed, sir," and proceeded accurately with his duties. And if Benham's voice had seemed to call for any additional remark, he would probably have added, "It's 'igh time, sir, something of the sort was done. Will you have the white wesket as before, sir, or a fresh one this evening?... Unless it's a very special occasion, sir.... Exactly, sir. THANK you, sir."

And when her son was properly installed in his apartments Lady Marayne came round one morning with a large experienced-looking portfolio and rendered an account of her stewardship of his estate that was already some months overdue. It was all very confused and confusing, and there were inexplicable incidents, a heavy overdraft at the bank for example, but this was Sir Godfrey's fault, she explained. "He never would help me with any of this business," she said. "I've had to add sometimes for HOURS. But, of course, you are a man, and when you've looked through it all, I know you'll understand."

He did look through it enough to see that it was undesirable that he should understand too explicitly, and, anyhow, he was manifestly very well off indeed, and the circumstances of the case, even as he understood them, would have made any businesslike book-keeping ungracious. The bankers submitted the corroborating account of securities, and he found himself possessed of his unconditional six thousand a year, with, as she put it, "the world at his feet." On the whole it seemed more wonderful to him now than when he had first heard of it. He kissed her and thanked her, and left the portfolio open for Merkle's entirely honest and respectful but very exact inspection, and walked back with her to Desborough Street, and all the while he was craving to ask the one tremendous question he knew he would never ask, which was just how exactly this beneficent Nolan came in....

Once or twice in the small hours, and on a number of other occasions, this unspeakable riddle assumed a portentous predominance in his mind. He was forced back upon his inner consciousness for its consideration. He could discuss it with nobody else, because that would have been discussing his mother.

Probably most young men who find themselves with riches at large in the world have some such perplexity as this mixed in with the gift. Such men as the Cecils perhaps not, because they are in the order of things, the rich young Jews perhaps not, because acquisition is their principle, but for most other intelligent inheritors there must be this twinge of conscientious doubt. "Why particularly am I picked out for so tremendous an advantage?" If the riddle is not Nolan, then it is rent, or it is the

social mischief of the business, or the particular speculative COUP that established their fortune.

"PECUNIA NON OLET," Benham wrote, "and it is just as well. Or the west-ends of the world would reek with deodorizers. Restitution is inconceivable; how and to whom? And in the meanwhile here we are lifted up by our advantage to a fantastic appearance of opportunity. Whether the world looks to us or not to do tremendous things, it ought to look to us. And above all we ought to look to ourselves. RICHESSE OBLIGE."

3

It is not to be supposed that Benham came to town only with a general theory of aristocracy. He had made plans for a career. Indeed, he had plans for several careers. None of them when brought into contrast with the great spectacle of London retained all the attractiveness that had saturated them at their inception.

They were all more or less political careers. Whatever a democratic man may be, Prothero and he had decided that an aristocratic man is a public man. He is made and protected in what he is by laws and the state and his honour goes out to the state. The aristocrat has no right to be a voluptuary or a mere artist or a respectable nonentity, or any such purely personal things. Responsibility for the aim and ordering of the

world is demanded from him as imperatively as courage.

Benham's deliberate assumption of the equestrian role brought him into contact with a new set of acquaintances, conscious of political destinies. They were amiable, hard young men, almost affectedly unaffected; they breakfasted before dawn to get in a day's hunting, and they saw to it that Benham's manifest determination not to discredit himself did not lead to his breaking his neck. Their bodies were beautifully tempered, and their minds were as flabby as Prothero's body. Among them were such men as Lord Breeze and Peter Westerton, and that current set of Corinthians who supposed themselves to be resuscitating the Young England movement and Tory Democracy. Poor movements which indeed have never so much lived as suffered chronic resuscitation. These were days when Tariff Reform was only an inglorious possibility for the Tory Party, and Young England had yet to demonstrate its mental quality in an anti-socialist campaign. Seen from the perspectives of Cambridge and Chexington, the Tory party was still a credible basis for the adventure of a young man with an aristocratic theory in his mind.

These were the days when the strain and extremity of a dangerous colonial war were fresh in people's minds, when the quality of the public consciousness was braced up by its recent response to unanticipated demands. The conflict of stupidities that had caused the war was overlaid and forgotten by a hundred thousand devotions, by countless heroic deaths and sufferings, by a pacification largely conceived and broadly handled. The nation had displayed a belated regard for its honour and a sustained passion for great unities. It was still

possible for Benham to regard the empire as a splendid opportunity, and London as the conceivable heart of the world. He could think of Parliament as a career, and of a mingling of aristocratic socialism based on universal service with a civilizing imperialism as a purpose....

But his thoughts had gone wider and deeper than that....

Already when Benham came to London he had begun to dream of possibilities that went beyond the accidental states and empires of to-day. Prothero's mind, replete with historical detail, could find nothing but absurdity in the alliances and dynasties and loyalties of our time. "Patched up things, Benham, temporary, pretentious. All very well for the undignified man, the democratic man, to take shelter under, all very well for the humourist to grin and bear, all very well for the crowd and the quack, but not for the aristocrat--No!--his mind cuts like steel and burns like fire. Lousy sheds they are, plastered hoardings... and such a damned nuisance too! For any one who wants to do honourable things! With their wars and their diplomacies, their tariffs and their encroachments; all their humbugging struggles, their bloody and monstrous struggles, that finally work out to no end at all.... If you are going for the handsome thing in life then the world has to be a united world, Benham, as a matter of course. That was settled when the railways and the telegraph came. Telephones, wireless telegraphy, aeroplanes insist on it. We've got to mediatise all this stuff, all these little crowns and boundaries and creeds, and so on, that stand in the way. Just as Italy had to be united in spite of all the rotten

little dukes and princes and republics, just as Germany had to be united in spite of its scores of kingdoms and duchies and liberties, so now the world. Things as they are may be fun for lawyers and politicians and court people and--douaniers; they may suit the loan-mongers and the armaments shareholders, they may even be more comfortable for the middle-aged, but what, except as an inconvenience, does that matter to you or me?"

Prothero always pleased Benham when he swept away empires. There was always a point when the rhetoric broke into gesture.

"We've got to sweep them away, Benham," he said, with a wide gesture of his arm. "We've got to sweep them all away."

Prothero helped himself to some more whiskey, and spoke hastily, because he was afraid some one else might begin. He was never safe from interruption in his own room. The other young men present sucked at their pipes and regarded him doubtfully. They were never quite certain whether Prothero was a prophet or a fool. They could not understand a mixed type, and he was so manifestly both.

"The only sane political work for an intelligent man is to get the world-state ready. For that we have to prepare an aristocracy--"

"Your world-state will be aristocratic?" some one interpolated.

"Of course it will be aristocratic. How can uninformed men think all

round the globe? Democracy dies five miles from the parish pump. It will be an aristocratic republic of all the capable men in the world...."

"Of course," he added, pipe in mouth, as he poured out his whiskey, "it's a big undertaking. It's an affair of centuries...."

And then, as a further afterthought: "All the more reason for getting to work at it...."

In his moods of inspiration Prothero would discourse through the tobacco smoke until that great world-state seemed imminent--and Part Two in the Tripos a thing relatively remote. He would talk until the dimly-lit room about him became impalpable, and the young men squatting about it in elaborately careless attitudes caught glimpses of cities that are still to be, bridges in wild places, deserts tamed and oceans conquered, mankind no longer wasted by bickerings, going forward to the conquest of the stars....

An aristocratic world-state; this political dream had already taken hold of Benham's imagination when he came to town. But it was a dream, something that had never existed, something that indeed may never materialize, and such dreams, though they are vivid enough in a study at night, fade and vanish at the rustle of a daily newspaper or the sound of a passing band. To come back again.... So it was with Benham. Sometimes he was set clearly towards this world-state that Prothero had talked into possibility. Sometimes he was simply abreast of the patriotic and socially constructive British Imperialism of Breeze and

Westerton. And there were moods when the two things were confused in his mind, and the glamour of world dominion rested wonderfully on the slack and straggling British Empire of Edward the Seventh--and Mr. Rudyard Kipling and Mr. Chamberlain. He did go on for a time honestly entertaining both these projects in his mind, each at its different level, the greater impalpable one and the lesser concrete one within it. In some unimaginable way he could suppose that the one by some miracle of ennoblement--and neglecting the Frenchman, the Russian, the German, the American, the Indian, the Chinaman, and, indeed, the greater part of mankind from the problem--might become the other....

All of which is recorded here, without excess of comment, as it happened, and as, in a mood of astonished reminiscences, he came finally to perceive it, and set it down for White's meditative perusal.

4

But to the enthusiasm of the young, dreams have something of the substance of reality and realities, something of the magic of dreams. The London to which Benham came from Cambridge and the disquisitions of Prothero was not the London of a mature and disillusioned vision. It was London seen magnified and distorted through the young man's crystalline intentions. It had for him a quality of multitudinous, unquenchable activity. Himself filled with an immense appetite for life, he was

unable to conceive of London as fatigued. He could not suspect these statesmen he now began to meet and watch, of jaded wills and petty spites, he imagined that all the important and influential persons in this large world of affairs were as frank in their private lives and as unembarrassed in their financial relationships as his untainted self. And he had still to reckon with stupidity. He believed in the statecraft of leader-writers and the sincerity of political programmes. And so regarded, what an avenue to Empire was Whitehall! How momentous was the sunrise in St. James's Park, and how significant the clustering knot of listeners and speakers beneath the tall column that lifts our Nelson to the windy sky!

For a time Benham was in love with the idea of London. He got maps of London and books about London. He made plans to explore its various regions. He tried to grasp it all, from the conscious picturesqueness of its garden suburbs to the factories of Croydon, from the clerk-villadoms of Ealing to the inky streams of Bow. In those days there were passenger steamboats that would take one from the meadows of Hampton Court past the whole spectacle of London out to the shipping at Greenwich and the towed liners, the incessant tugs, the heaving portals of the sea....
His time was far too occupied for him to carry out a tithe of these expeditions he had planned, but he had many walks that bristled with impressions. Northward and southward, eastward and westward a dreaming young man could wander into a wilderness of population, polite or sombre, poor, rich, or middle-class, but all ceaselessly active, all urgently pressing, as it seemed, to their part in the drama of the coming years. He loved the late afternoon, when every artery is injected

and gorged with the multitudinous home-going of the daily workers, he loved the time of lighting up, and the clustering excitements of the late hours. And he went out southward and eastward into gaunt regions of reeking toil. As yet he knew nothing of the realities of industrialism. He saw only the beauty of the great chimneys that rose against the sullen smoke-barred sunsets, and he felt only the romance of the lurid shuddering flares that burst out from squat stacks of brickwork and lit the emptiness of strange and slovenly streets....

And this London was only the foreground of the great scene upon which he, as a prosperous, well-befriended young Englishman, was free to play whatever part he could. This narrow turbid tidal river by which he walked ran out under the bridges eastward beneath the grey-blue clouds towards Germany, towards Russia, and towards Asia, which still seemed in those days so largely the Englishman's Asia. And when you turned about at Blackfriars Bridge this sense of the round world was so upon you that you faced not merely Westminster, but the icy Atlantic and America, which one could yet fancy was a land of Englishmen--Englishmen a little estranged. At any rate they assimilated, they kept the tongue. The shipping in the lower reaches below the Tower there carried the flags of every country under the sky.... As he went along the riverside he met a group of dusky students, Chinese or Japanese. Cambridge had abounded in Indians; and beneath that tall clock tower at Westminster it seemed as though the world might centre. The background of the Englishman's world reached indeed to either pole, it went about the earth, his background it was--for all that he was capable of doing. All this had awaited him....

Is it any wonder if a young man with an excitable imagination came at times to the pitch of audible threats? If the extreme indulgence of his opportunity and his sense of ability and vigour lifted his vanity at moments to the kingly pitch? If he ejaculated and made a gesture or so as he went along the Embankment?

5

In the disquisition upon choice that opened Benham's paper on ARISTOCRACY, he showed himself momentarily wiser than his day-dreams. For in these day-dreams he did seem to himself to be choosing among unlimited possibilities. Yet while he dreamt other influences were directing his movements. There were for instance his mother, Lady Marayne, who saw a very different London from what he did, and his mother Dame Nature, who cannot see London at all. She was busy in his blood as she is busy in the blood of most healthy young men; common experience must fill the gaps for us; and patiently and thoroughly she was preparing for the entrance of that heroine, whom not the most self-centred of heroes can altogether avoid....

And then there was the power of every day. Benham imagined himself at large on his liberating steed of property while indeed he was mounted on the made horse of Civilization; while he was speculating whither he

should go, he was already starting out upon the round. One hesitates upon the magnificent plan and devotion of one's lifetime and meanwhile there is usage, there are engagements. Every morning came Merkle, the embodiment of the established routine, the herald of all that the world expected and required Benham to be and do. Usually he awakened Benham with the opening of his door and the soft tinkle of the curtain rings as he let in the morning light. He moved softly about the room, gathering up and removing the crumpled hulls of yesterday; that done he reappeared at the bedside with a cup of admirable tea and one thin slice of bread-and-butter, reported on the day's weather, stood deferential for instructions. "You will be going out for lunch, sir. Very good, sir. White slips of course, sir. You will go down into the country in the afternoon? Will that be the serge suit, sir, or the brown?"

These matters settled, the new aristocrat could yawn and stretch like any aristocrat under the old dispensation, and then as the sound of running water from the bathroom ceased, stick his toes out of bed.

The day was tremendously indicated. World-states and aristocracies of steel and fire, things that were as real as coal-scuttles in Billy's rooms away there at Cambridge, were now remoter than Sirius.

He was expected to shave, expected to bath, expected to go in to the bright warmth and white linen and silver and china of his breakfast-table. And there he found letters and invitations, loaded with expectation. And beyond the coffee-pot, neatly folded, lay the TIMES, and the DAILY NEWS and the TELEGRAPH all with an air of requiring his

attention. There had been more fighting in Thibet and Mr. Ritchie had made a Free Trade speech at Croydon. The Japanese had torpedoed another Russian ironclad and a British cruiser was ashore in the East Indies. A man had been found murdered in an empty house in Hoxton and the King had had a conversation with General Booth. Tadpole was in for North Winchelsea, beating Taper by nine votes, and there had been a new cut in the Atlantic passenger rates. He was expected to be interested and excited by these things.

Presently the telephone bell would ring and he would hear the clear little voice of his mother full of imperative expectations. He would be round for lunch? Yes, he would be round to lunch. And the afternoon, had he arranged to do anything with his afternoon? No!--put off Chexington until tomorrow. There was this new pianist, it was really an EXPERIENCE, and one might not get tickets again. And then tea at Panton's. It was rather fun at Panton's.... Oh!--Weston Massinghay was coming to lunch. He was a useful man to know. So CLEVER.... So long, my dear little Son, till I see you....

So life puts out its Merkle threads, as the poacher puts his hair noose about the pheasant's neck, and while we theorize takes hold of us....

It came presently home to Benham that he had been down from Cambridge for ten months, and that he was still not a step forward with the realization of the new aristocracy. His political career waited. He had done a quantity of things, but their net effect was incoherence. He had not been merely passive, but his efforts to break away into creative

realities had added to rather than diminished his accumulating sense of futility.

The natural development of his position under the influence of Lady Marayne had enormously enlarged the circle of his acquaintances. He had taken part in all sorts of social occasions, and sat and listened to a representative selection of political and literary and social personages, he had been several times to the opera and to a great number and variety of plays, he had been attentively inconspicuous in several really good week-end parties. He had spent a golden October in North Italy with his mother, and escaped from the glowing lassitude of Venice for some days of climbing in the Eastern Alps. In January, in an outbreak of enquiry, he had gone with Lionel Maxim to St. Petersburg and had eaten zakuska, brightened his eyes with vodka, talked with a number of charming people of the war that was then imminent, listened to gipsy singers until dawn, careered in sledges about the most silent and stately of capitals, and returned with Lionel, discoursing upon autocracy and assassination, Japan, the Russian destiny, and the government of Peter the Great. That excursion was the most after his heart of all the dispersed employments of his first year. Through the rest of the winter he kept himself very fit, and still further qualified that nervous dislike for the horse that he had acquired from Prothero by hunting once a week in Essex. He was incurably a bad horseman; he rode without sympathy, he was unready and convulsive at hedges and ditches, and he judged distances badly. His white face and rigid seat and a certain joylessness of bearing in the saddle earned him the singular nickname, which never reached his ears, of the "Galvanized Corpse."

He got through, however, at the cost of four quite trifling spills and without damaging either of the horses he rode. And his physical self-respect increased.

On his writing-desk appeared a few sheets of manuscript that increased only very slowly. He was trying to express his Cambridge view of aristocracy in terms of Finacue Street, West.

The artistic and intellectual movements of London had made their various demands upon his time and energies. Art came to him with a noble assumption of his interest and an intention that presently became unpleasantly obvious to sell him pictures that he did not want to buy and explain away pictures that he did. He bought one or two modern achievements, and began to doubt if art and aristocracy had any necessary connection. At first he had accepted the assumption that they had. After all, he reflected, one lives rather for life and things than for pictures of life and things or pictures arising out of life and things. This Art had an air of saying something, but when one came to grips with it what had it to say? Unless it was Yah! The drama, and more particularly the intellectual drama, challenged his attention. In the hands of Shaw, Barker, Masefield, Galsworthy, and Hankin, it, too, had an air of saying something, but he found it extremely difficult to join on to his own demands upon life anything whatever that the intellectual drama had the air of having said. He would sit forward in the front row of the dress-circle with his cheek on his hand and his brow slightly knit. His intentness amused observant people. The drama that did not profess to be intellectual he went to with Lady Marayne, and usually

on first nights. Lady Marayne loved a big first night at St. James's Theatre or His Majesty's. Afterwards, perhaps, Sir Godfrey would join them at a supper party, and all sorts of clever and amusing people would be there saying keen intimate things about each other. He met Yeats, who told amusing stories about George Moore, and afterwards he met George Moore, who told amusing stories about Yeats, and it was all, he felt, great fun for the people who were in it. But he was not in it, and he had no very keen desire to be in it. It wasn't his stuff. He had, though they were nowadays rather at the back of his mind, quite other intentions. In the meanwhile all these things took up his time and distracted his attention.

There was, as yet, no practicable aviation to beguile a young man of spirit, but there were times when Benham found himself wondering whether there might not be something rather creditable in the possession and control of a motor-car of exceptional power. Only one might smash people up. Should an aristocrat be deterred by the fear of smashing people up? If it is a selfish fear of smashing people up, if it is nerves rather than pity? At any rate it did not come to the car.

6

Among other things that delayed Benham very greatly in the development of his aristocratic experiments was the advice that was coming to him

from every quarter. It came in extraordinary variety and volume, but always it had one unvarying feature. It ignored and tacitly contradicted his private intentions.

We are all of us disposed to be propagandists of our way of living, and the spectacle of a wealthy young man quite at large is enough to excite the most temperate of us without distinction of age or sex. "If I were you," came to be a familiar phrase in his ear. This was particularly the case with political people; and they did it not only from the natural infirmity of humanity, but because, when they seemed reluctant or satisfied with him as he was, Lady Marayne egged them on.

There was a general assumption that he was to go into Parliament, and most of his counsellors assumed further that on the whole his natural sympathies would take him into the Conservative party. But it was pointed out to him that just at present the Liberal party was the party of a young man's opportunity; sooner or later the swing of the pendulum which would weed the Conservatives and proliferate Liberals was bound to come, there was always more demand and opportunity for candidates on the Liberal side, the Tariff Reformers were straining their ministerial majority to the splitting point, and most of the old Liberal leaders had died off during the years of exile. The party was no longer dominated; it would tolerate ideas. A young man who took a distinctive line--provided it was not from the party point of view a vexatious or impossible line--might go very rapidly far and high. On the other hand, it was urged upon him that the Tariff Reform adventure called also for youth and energy. But there, perhaps, there was less scope for

the distinctive line--and already they had Garvin. Quite a number of Benham's friends pointed out to him the value of working out some special aspect of our national political interests. A very useful speciality was the Balkans. Mr. Pope, the well-known publicist, whose very sound and considerable reputation was based on the East Purblow Labour Experiment, met Benham at lunch and proposed to go with him in a spirit of instructive association to the Balkans, rub up their Greek together, and settle the problem of Albania. He wanted, he said, a foreign speciality to balance his East Purblow interest. But Lady Beach Mandarin warned Benham against the Balkans; the Balkans were getting to be too handy for Easter and summer holidays, and now that there were several good hotels in Servia and Montenegro and Sofia, they were being overdone. Everybody went to the Balkans and came back with a pet nationality. She loathed pet nationalities. She believed most people loathed them nowadays. It was stale: it was GLADSTONIAN. She was all for specialization in social reform. She thought Benham ought to join the Fabian Society and consult the Webbs. Quite a number of able young men had been placed with the assistance of the Webbs. They were, she said, "a perfect fount...." Two other people, independently of each other, pointed out to Benham the helpfulness of a few articles in the half-crown monthlies....

"What are the assumptions underlying all this?" Benham asked himself in a phase of lucidity.

And after reflection. "Good God! The assumptions! What do they think will satisfy me?..."

Everybody, however, did not point to Parliament. Several people seemed to think Travel, with a large T, was indicated. One distant cousin of Sir Godfrey's, the kind of man of the world who has long moustaches, was for big game shooting. "Get right out of all this while you are young," he said. "There's nothing to compare with stopping a charging lion at twenty yards. I've done it, my boy. You can come back for all this pow-wow afterwards." He gave the diplomatic service as a second choice. "There you are," he said, "first-rate social position, nothing to do, theatres, operas, pretty women, colour, life. The best of good times. Barring Washington, that is. But Washington, they say, isn't as bad as it used to be--since Teddy has Europeanized 'em...."

Even the Reverend Harold Benham took a subdued but thoughtful share in his son's admonition. He came up to the flat--due precautions were taken to prevent a painful encounter--he lunched at his son's new club, and he was visibly oppressed by the contrast between the young man's youthful fortunes and his own. As visibly he bore up bravely. "There are few men, Poff, who would not envy you your opportunities," he said. "You have the Feast of Life spread out at your feet.... I hope you have had yourself put up for the Athenaeum. They say it takes years. When I was a young man--and ambitious--I thought that some day I might belong to the Athenaeum.... One has to learn...."

And with an effect of detachment, just as though it didn't belong to the rest of him at all, there was beginning a sort of backstairs and underside to Benham's life. There is no need to discuss how inevitable that may or may not be in the case of a young man of spirit and large means, nor to embark upon the discussion of the temptations and opportunities of large cities. Several ladies, of various positions and qualities, had reflected upon his manifest need of education. There was in particular Mrs. Skelmersdale, a very pretty little widow with hazel eyes, black hair, a mobile mouth, and a pathetic history, who talked of old music to him and took him to a Dolmetsch concert in Clifford's Inn, and expanded that common interest to a general participation in his indefinite outlook. She advised him about his probable politics--everybody did that--but when he broke through his usual reserve and suggested views of his own, she was extraordinarily sympathetic. She was so sympathetic and in such a caressing way that she created a temporary belief in her understanding, and it was quite imperceptibly that he was drawn into the discussion of modern ethical problems. She herself was a rather stimulating instance of modern ethical problems. She told him something of her own story, and then their common topics narrowed down very abruptly. He found he could help her in several ways. There is, unhappily, a disposition on the part of many people, who ought to know better, to regard a role played by Joseph during his earlier days in Egypt as a ridiculous one. This point of view became very inopportunely dominant in Benham's mind when he was lunching TETE A TETE with Mrs. Skelmersdale at her flat....

The ensuing intimacy was of an entirely concealed and respectable nature, but a certain increased preoccupation in his manner set Lady Marayne thinking. He had as a matter of fact been taken by surprise.

Still he perceived that it is no excuse for a man that he has been taken by surprise. Surprises in one's own conduct ought not to happen. When they do happen then an aristocrat ought to stick to what he had done. He was now in a subtle and complicated relationship to Mrs. Skelmersdale, a relationship in which her pride had become suddenly a matter of tremendous importance. Once he had launched himself upon this affair, it was clear to him that he owed it to her never to humiliate her. And to go back upon himself now would be a tremendous humiliation for her. You see, he had helped her a little financially. And she looked to him, she wanted him....

She wasn't, he knew, altogether respectable. Indeed, poor dear, her ethical problems, already a little worn, made her seem at times anything but respectable. He had met her first one evening at Jimmy Gluckstein's when he was forming his opinion of Art. Her manifest want of interest in pictures had attracted him. And that had led to music. And to the mention of a Clementi piano, that short, gentle, sad, old, little sort of piano people will insist upon calling a spinet, in her flat.

And so to this....

It was very wonderful and delicious, this first indulgence of sense.

It was shabby and underhand.

The great god Pan is a glorious god. (And so was Swinburne.) And what can compare with the warmth of blood and the sheen of sunlit limbs?

But Priapus....

She was the most subtle, delightful and tender of created beings.

She had amazing streaks of vulgarity.

And some astonishing friends.

Once she had seemed to lead the talk deliberately to money matters.

She loved him and desired him. There was no doubt of it.

There was a curious effect about her as though when she went round the corner she would become somebody else. And a curious recurrent feeling that round the corner there was somebody else.

He had an extraordinary feeling that his mother knew about this business. This feeling came from nothing in her words or acts, but from some indefinable change in her eyes and bearing towards him. But how could she know?

It was unlikely that she and Mrs. Skelmersdale would ever meet, and it seemed to him that it would be a particularly offensive incident for them to meet.

There were times now when life took on a grey and boring quality such as it had never had before he met Mrs. Skelmersdale, and the only remedy was to go to her. She could restore his nervous tranquillity, his feeling of solidity and reality, his pride in himself. For a time, that is.

Nevertheless his mind was as a whole pervaded by the feeling that he ought not to have been taken by surprise.

And he had the clearest conviction in his mind that if now he could be put back again to the day before that lunch....

No! he should not have gone there to lunch.

He had gone there to see her Clementi piano.

Had he or had he not thought beforehand of any other possibility?

On a point so vital his memory was curiously unsure.

The worry and disorganization of Benham's life and thoughts increased as the spring advanced. His need in some way to pull things together became overpowering. He began to think of Billy Prothero, more and more did it seem desirable to have a big talk with Billy and place everything that had got disturbed. Benham thought of going to Cambridge for a week of exhaustive evenings. Small engagements delayed that expedition....

Then came a day in April when all the world seemed wrong to Benham. He was irritable; his will was unstable; whatever presented itself to be done presented itself as undesirable; he could settle to nothing. He had been keeping away from Mrs. Skelmersdale and in the morning there came a little note from her designed to correct this abstention. She understood the art of the attractive note. But he would not decide to go to her. He left the note unanswered.

Then came his mother at the telephone and it became instantly certain to Benham that he could not play the dutiful son that evening. He answered her that he could not come to dinner. He had engaged himself. "Where?"

"With some men."

There was a pause and then his mother's voice came, flattened by disappointment. "Very well then, little Poff. Perhaps I shall see you to-morrow."

He replaced the receiver and fretted back into his study, where the notes on aristocracy lay upon his desk, the notes he had been pretending to work over all the morning.

"Damned liar!" he said, and then, "Dirty liar!" He decided to lunch at the club, and in the afternoon he was moved to telephone an appointment with his siren. And having done that he was bound to keep it.

About one o'clock in the morning he found himself walking back to Finacue Street. He was no longer a fretful conflict of nerves, but if anything he was less happy than he had been before. It seemed to him that London was a desolate and inglorious growth.

London ten years ago was much less nocturnal than it is now. And not so brightly lit. Down the long streets came no traffic but an occasional hansom. Here and there a cat halted or bolted in the road. Near Piccadilly a policeman hovered artfully in a doorway, and then came a few belated prostitutes waylaying the passers-by, and a few youths and men, wearily lust driven.

As he turned up New Bond Street he saw a figure that struck him as familiar. Surely!--it was Billy Prothero! Or at any rate it was astonishingly like Billy Prothero. He glanced again and the likeness was more doubtful. The man had his back to Benham, he was halting and looking back at a woman.

By some queer flash of intuition it came to Benham that even if this

was not Prothero, still Prothero did these things. It might very well be Prothero even, though, as he now saw, it wasn't. Everybody did these things....

It came into Benham's head for the first time that life could be tiresome.

This Bond Street was a tiresome place; with its shops all shut and muffled, its shops where in the crowded daytime one bought costly furniture, costly clothes, costly scent, sweets, bibelots, pictures, jewellery, presents of all sorts, clothes for Mrs. Skelmersdale, sweets for Mrs. Skelmersdale, presents for Mrs. Skelmersdale, all the elaborate fittings and equipage of--THAT!

"Good night, dear," a woman drifted by him.

"I've SAID good night," he cried, "I've SAID good night," and so went on to his flat. The unquenchable demand, the wearisome insatiability of sex! When everything else has gone, then it shows itself bare in the bleak small hours. And at first it had seemed so light a matter! He went to bed, feeling dog-tired, he went to bed at an hour and with a finished completeness that Merkle would have regarded as entirely becoming in a young gentleman of his position.

And a little past three o'clock in the morning he awoke to a mood of indescribable desolation. He awoke with a start to an agony of remorse and self-reproach.

9

For a time he lay quite still staring at the darkness, then he groaned and turned over. Then, suddenly, like one who fancies he hears a strange noise, he sat up in bed and listened. "Oh, God!" he said at last.

And then: "Oh! The DIRTINESS of life! The dirty muddle of life!

"What are we doing with life? What are we all doing with life?

"It isn't only this poor Milly business. This only brings it to a head. Of course she wants money...."

His thoughts came on again.

"But the ugliness!

"Why did I begin it?"

He put his hands upon his knees and pressed his eyes against the backs of his hands and so remained very still, a blankness beneath his own question.

After a long interval his mind moved again.

And now it was as if he looked upon his whole existence, he seemed to see in a large, clear, cold comprehensiveness, all the wasted days, the fruitless activities, the futilities, the perpetual postponements that had followed his coming to London. He saw it all as a joyless indulgence, as a confusion of playthings and undisciplined desires, as a succession of days that began amiably and weakly, that became steadily more crowded with ignoble and trivial occupations, that had sunken now to indignity and uncleanness. He was overwhelmed by that persuasion, which only freshly soiled youth can feel in its extreme intensity, that life was slipping away from him, that the sands were running out, that in a little while his existence would be irretrievably lost.

By some trick of the imagination he saw life as an interminable Bond Street, lit up by night lamps, desolate, full of rubbish, full of the very best rubbish, trappings, temptations, and down it all he drove, as the damned drive, wearily, inexplicably.

WHAT ARE WE UP TO WITH LIFE! WHAT ARE WE MAKING OF LIFE!

But hadn't he intended to make something tremendous of life? Hadn't he come to London trailing a glory?...

He began to remember it as a project. It was the project of a great World-State sustained by an aristocracy of noble men. He was to have been one of those men, too fine and far-reaching for the dull manoeuvers

of such politics as rule the world to-day. The project seemed still large, still whitely noble, but now it was unlit and dead, and in the foreground he sat in the flat of Mrs. Skelmersdale, feeling dissipated and fumbling with his white tie. And she was looking tired. "God!" he said. "How did I get there?"

And then suddenly he reached out his arms in the darkness and prayed aloud to the silences.

"Oh, God! Give me back my visions! Give me back my visions!"

He could have imagined he heard a voice calling upon him to come out into life, to escape from the body of this death. But it was his own voice that called to him....

10

The need for action became so urgent in him, that he got right out of his bed and sat on the edge of it. Something had to be done at once. He did not know what it was but he felt that there could be no more sleep, no more rest, no dressing nor eating nor going forth before he came to decisions. Christian before his pilgrimage began was not more certain of this need of flight from the life of routine and vanities.

What was to be done?

In the first place he must get away and think about it all, think himself clear of all these--these immediacies, these associations and relations and holds and habits. He must get back to his vision, get back to the God in his vision. And to do that he must go alone.

He was clear he must go alone. It was useless to go to Prothero, one weak man going to a weaker. Prothero he was convinced could help him not at all, and the strange thing is that this conviction had come to him and had established itself incontestably because of that figure at the street corner, which had for just one moment resembled Prothero. By some fantastic intuition Benham knew that Prothero would not only participate but excuse. And he knew that he himself could endure no excuses. He must cut clear of any possibility of qualification. This thing had to be stopped. He must get away, he must get free, he must get clean. In the extravagance of his reaction Benham felt that he could endure nothing but solitary places and to sleep under the open sky.

He wanted to get right away from London and everybody and lie in the quiet darkness and stare up at the stars.

His plans grew so definite that presently he was in his dressing-gown and turning out the maps in the lower drawer of his study bureau. He would go down into Surrey with a knapsack, wander along the North Downs until the Guildford gap was reached, strike across the Weald country to the South Downs and then beat eastward. The very thought of it brought

a coolness to his mind. He knew that over those southern hills one could be as lonely as in the wilderness and as free to talk to God. And there he would settle something. He would make a plan for his life and end this torment.

When Merkle came in to him in the morning he was fast asleep.

The familiar curtain rings awakened Benham. He turned his head over, stared for a moment and then remembered.

"Merkle," he said, "I am going for a walking tour. I am going off this morning. Haven't I a rucksack?"

"You 'ave a sort of canvas bag, sir, with pockets to it," said Merkle. "Will you be needing the VERY 'eavy boots with 'obnails--Swiss, I fancy, sir--or your ordinary shooting boots?"

"And when may I expect you back, sir?" asked Merkle as the moment for departure drew near.

"God knows," said Benham, "I don't."

"Then will there be any address for forwarding letters, sir?"

Benham hadn't thought of that. For a moment he regarded Merkle's scrupulous respect with a transient perplexity.

"I'll let you know, Merkle," he said. "I'll let you know."

For some days at least, notes, telephone messages, engagements, all this fuss and clamour about nothing, should clamour for him in vain....

11

"But how closely," cried White, in a mood of cultivated enthusiasm; "how closely must all the poor little stories that we tell to-day follow in the footsteps of the Great Exemplars! A little while ago and the springtime freshness of Tobias irradiated the page. Now see! it is Christian--."

Indeed it looked extremely like Christian as Benham went up across the springy turf from Epsom Downs station towards the crest of the hill. Was he not also fleeing in the morning sunlight from the City of Destruction? Was he not also seeking that better city whose name is Peace? And there was a bundle on his back. It was the bundle, I think, that seized most firmly upon the too literary imagination of White.

But the analogy of the bundle was a superficial one. Benham had not the slightest desire to lose it from his shoulders. It would have inconvenienced him very greatly if he had done so. It did not contain his sins. Our sins nowadays are not so easily separated. It contained a

light, warm cape-coat he had bought in Switzerland and which he intended to wrap about him when he slept under the stars, and in addition Merkle had packed it with his silk pyjamas, an extra pair of stockings, tooth-brush, brush and comb, a safety razor.... And there were several sheets of the Ordnance map.

12

The urgency of getting away from something dominated Benham to the exclusion of any thought of what he might be getting to. That muddle of his London life had to be left behind. First, escape....

Over the downs great numbers of larks were singing. It was warm April that year and early. All the cloud stuff in the sky was gathered into great towering slow-sailing masses, and the rest was blue of the intensest. The air was so clean that Benham felt it clean in the substance of his body. The chestnuts down the hill to the right were flowering, the beeches were luminously green, and the oaks in the valley foaming gold. And sometimes it was one lark filled his ears, and sometimes he seemed to be hearing all the larks for miles about him. Presently over the crest he would be out of sight of the grand stand and the men exercising horses, and that brace of red-jacketed golfers....

What was he to do?

For a time he could think of nothing to do except to keep up and out of the valley. His whole being seemed to have come to his surfaces to look out at the budding of the year and hear the noise of the birds. And then he got into a long road from which he had to escape, and trespassing southward through plantations he reached the steep edge of the hills and sat down over above a great chalk pit somewhere near Dorking and surveyed all the tumbled wooded spaces of the Weald.... It is after all not so great a country this Sussex, nor so hilly, from deepest valley to highest crest is not six hundred feet, yet what a greatness of effect it can achieve! There is something in those downland views which, like sea views, lifts a mind out to the skies. All England it seemed was there to Benham's vision, and the purpose of the English, and his own purpose in the world. For a long time he surveyed the large delicacy of the detail before him, the crests, the tree-protected houses, the fields and farmsteads, the distant gleams of water. And then he became interested in the men who were working in the chalk pit down below.

They at any rate were not troubled with the problem of what to do with their lives.

13

Benham found his mind was now running clear, and so abundantly that he

could scarcely, he felt, keep pace with it. As he thought his flow of ideas was tinged with a fear that he might forget what he was thinking. In an instant, for the first time in his mental existence, he could have imagined he had discovered Labour and seen it plain. A little while ago and he had seemed a lonely man among the hills, but indeed he was not lonely, these men had been with him all the time, and he was free to wander, to sit here, to think and choose simply because those men down there were not free. HE WAS SPENDING THEIR LEISURE.... Not once but many times with Prothero had he used the phrase RICHESSE OBLIGE. Now he remembered it. He began to remember a mass of ideas that had been overlaid and stifling within him. This was what Merkle and the club servants and the entertainments and engagements and his mother and the artistic touts and the theatrical touts and the hunting and the elaboration of games and--Mrs. Skelmersdale and all that had clustered thickly round him in London had been hiding from him. Those men below there had not been trusted to choose their work; they had been given it. And he had been trusted....

And now to grapple with it! Now to get it clear! What work was he going to do? That settled, he would deal with his distractions readily enough. Until that was settled he was lax and exposed to every passing breeze of invitation.

"What work am I going to do? What work am I going to do?" He repeated it.

It is the only question for the aristocrat. What amusement? That for

a footman on holiday. That for a silly child, for any creature that is kept or led or driven. That perhaps for a tired invalid, for a toiler worked to a rag. But able-bodied amusement! The arms of Mrs. Skelmersdale were no worse than the solemn aimlessness of hunting, and an evening of dalliance not an atom more reprehensible than an evening of chatter. It was the waste of him that made the sin. His life in London had been of a piece together. It was well that his intrigue had set a light on it, put a point to it, given him this saving crisis of the nerves. That, indeed, is the chief superiority of idle love-making over other more prevalent forms of idleness and self-indulgence; it does at least bear its proper label. It is reprehensible. It brings your careless honour to the challenge of concealment and shabby evasions and lies....

But in this pellucid air things took their proper proportions again.

And now what was he to do?

"Politics," he said aloud to the turf and the sky.

Is there any other work for an aristocratic man?... Science? One could admit science in that larger sense that sweeps in History, or Philosophy. Beyond that whatever work there is is work for which men are paid. Art? Art is nothing aristocratic except when it is a means of scientific or philosophical expression. Art that does not argue nor demonstrate nor discover is merely the craftsman's impudence.

He pulled up at this and reflected for a time with some distinguished instances in his mind. They were so distinguished, so dignified, they took their various arts with so admirable a gravity that the soul of this young man recoiled from the verdicts to which his reasoning drove him. "It's not for me to judge them," he decided, "except in relation to myself. For them there may be tremendous significances in Art. But if these do not appear to me, then so far as I am concerned they do not exist for me. They are not in my world. So far as they attempt to invade me and control my attitudes or my outlook, or to judge me in any way, there is no question of their impudence. Impudence is the word for it. My world is real. I want to be really aristocratic, really brave, really paying for the privilege of not being a driven worker. The things the artist makes are like the things my private dream-artist makes, relaxing, distracting. What can Art at its greatest be, pure Art that is, but a more splendid, more permanent, transmissible reverie! The very essence of what I am after is NOT to be an artist...."

After a large and serious movement through his mind he came back to Science, Philosophy or Politics as the sole three justifications for the usurpation of leisure.

So far as devotion to science went, he knew he had no specific aptitude for any departmentalized subject, and equally he felt no natural call to philosophy. He was left with politics....

"Or else, why shouldn't I go down there and pick up a shovel and set to work? To make leisure for my betters...."

And now it was that he could take up the real trouble that more than anything else had been keeping him ineffective and the prey of every chance demand and temptation during the last ten months. He had not been able to get himself into politics, and the reason why he had not been able to do so was that he could not induce himself to fit in. Statecraft was a remote and faded thing in the political life of the time; politics was a choice of two sides in a game, and either side he found equally unattractive. Since he had come down from Cambridge the Tariff Reform people had gone far to capture the Conservative party. There was little chance of a candidature for him without an adhesion to that. And he could find nothing he could imagine himself working for in the declarations of the Tariff Reform people. He distrusted them, he disliked them. They took all the light and pride out of imperialism, they reduced it to a shabby conspiracy of the British and their colonies against foreign industrialism. They were violent for armaments and hostile to education. They could give him no assurance of any scheme of growth and unification, and no guarantees against the manifest dangers of economic disturbance and political corruption a tariff involves. Imperialism without noble imaginations, it seemed to him, was simply nationalism with megalomania. It was swaggering, it was greed, it was German; its enthusiasm was forced, its nobility a vulgar lie. No. And when he turned to the opposite party he found little that was more attractive. They were prepared, it seemed, if they came into office, to pull the legislature of the British Isles to pieces in obedience to the Irish demand for Home Rule, and they were totally unprepared with any scheme for doing this that had even a chance of success. In the twenty

years that had elapsed since Gladstone's hasty and disastrous essay in political surgery they had studied nothing, learnt nothing, produced no ideas whatever in the matter. They had not had the time. They had just negotiated, like the mere politicians they were, for the Nationalist vote. They seemed to hope that by a marvel God would pacify Ulster. Lord Dunraven, Plunkett, were voices crying in the wilderness. The sides in the party game would as soon have heeded a poet.... But unless Benham was prepared to subscribe either to Home Rule or Tariff Reform there was no way whatever open to him into public life. He had had some decisive conversations. He had no illusions left upon that score....

Here was the real barrier that had kept him inactive for ten months. Here was the problem he had to solve. This was how he had been left out of active things, a prey to distractions, excitements, idle temptations--and Mrs. Skelmersdale.

Running away to shoot big game or explore wildernesses was no remedy. That was just running away. Aristocrats do not run away. What of his debt to those men down there in the quarry? What of his debt to the unseen men in the mines away in the north? What of his debt to the stokers on the liners, and to the clerks in the city? He reiterated the cardinal article of his creed: The aristocrat is a privileged man in order that he may be a public and political man.

But how is one to be a political man when one is not in politics?

Benham frowned at the Weald. His ideas were running thin.

He might hammer at politics from the outside. And then again how? He would make a list of all the things that he might do. For example he might write. He rested one hand on his knee and lifted one finger and regarded it. COULD he write? There were one or two men who ran papers and seemed to have a sort of independent influence. Strachey, for example, with his SPECTATOR; Maxse, with his NATIONAL REVIEW. But they were grown up, they had formed their ideas. He had to learn first.

He lifted a second finger. How to learn? For it was learning that he had to do.

When one comes down from Oxford or Cambridge one falls into the mistake of thinking that learning is over and action must begin. But until one perceives clearly just where one stands action is impossible.

How is one with no experience of affairs to get an experience of affairs when the door of affairs is closed to one by one's own convictions? Outside of affairs how can one escape being flimsy? How can one escape becoming merely an intellectual like those wordy Fabians, those writers, poseurs, and sham publicists whose wrangles he had attended? And, moreover, there is danger in the leisure of your intellectual. One cannot be always reading and thinking and discussing and inquiring....

WOULD IT NOT BE BETTER AFTER ALL TO MAKE A CONCESSION, SWALLOW HOME RULE

OR TARIFF REFORM, AND SO AT LEAST GET HIS HANDS ON THINGS?

And then in a little while the party conflict would swallow him up?

Still it would engage him, it would hold him. If, perhaps, he did not let it swallow him up. If he worked with an eye open for opportunities of self-assertion....

The party game had not altogether swallowed "Mr. Arthur."...

But every one is not a Balfour....

He reflected profoundly. On his left knee his left hand rested with two fingers held up. By some rapid mental alchemy these fingers had now become Home Rule and Tariff Reform. His right hand which had hitherto taken no part in the controversy, had raised its index finger by imperceptible degrees. It had been raised almost subconsciously. And by still obscurer processes this finger had become Mrs. Skelmersdale. He recognized her sudden reappearance above the threshold of consciousness with mild surprise. He had almost forgotten her share in these problems. He had supposed her dismissed to an entirely subordinate position....

Then he perceived that the workmen in the chalk pit far below had knocked off and were engaged upon their midday meal. He understood why his mind was no longer moving forward with any alacrity.

Food?

The question where he should eat arose abruptly and dismissed all other

problems from his mind. He unfolded a map. Here must be the chalk pit, here was Dorking. That village was Brockham Green. Should he go down to Dorking or this way over Box Hill to the little inn at Burford Bridge.
He would try the latter.

14

The April sunset found our young man talking to himself for greater emphasis, and wandering along a turfy cart-track through a wilderness mysteriously planted with great bushes of rhododendra on the Downs above Shere. He had eaten a belated lunch at Burford Bridge, he had got some tea at a little inn near a church with a splendid yew tree, and for the rest of the time he had wandered and thought. He had travelled perhaps a dozen or fifteen miles, and a good way from his first meditations above the Dorking chalk pit.

He had recovered long ago from that remarkable conception of an active if dishonest political career as a means of escaping Mrs. Skelmersdale and all that Mrs. Skelmersdale symbolized. That would be just louting from one bad thing to another. He had to settle Mrs. Skelmersdale clean and right, and he had to do as exquisitely right in politics as he could devise. If the public life of the country had got itself into a stupid antagonism of two undesirable things, the only course for a sane man of honour was to stand out from the parties and try and get them back to

sound issues again. There must be endless people of a mind with himself in this matter. And even if there were not, if he was the only man in the world, he still had to follow his lights and do the right. And his business was to find out the right....

He came back from these imaginative excursions into contemporary politics with one idea confirmed in his mind, an idea that had been indeed already in his mind during his Cambridge days. This was the idea of working out for himself, thoroughly and completely, a political scheme, a theory of his work and duty in the world, a plan of the world's future that should give a rule for his life. The Research Magnificent was emerging. It was an alarmingly vast proposal, but he could see no alternative but submission, a plebeian's submission to the currents of life about him.

Little pictures began to flit before his imagination of the way in which he might build up this tremendous inquiry. He would begin by hunting up people, everybody who seemed to have ideas and promise ideas he would get at. He would travel far--and exhaustively. He would, so soon as the ideas seemed to indicate it, hunt out facts. He would learn how the world was governed. He would learn how it did its thinking. He would live sparingly. ("Not TOO sparingly," something interpolated.) He would work ten or twelve hours a day. Such a course of investigation must pass almost of its own accord into action and realization. He need not trouble now how it would bring him into politics. Inevitably somewhere it would bring him into politics. And he would travel. Almost at once he would travel. It is the manifest duty of every young aristocrat to

travel. Here he was, ruling India. At any rate, passively, through the mere fact of being English, he was ruling India. And he knew nothing of India. He knew nothing indeed of Asia. So soon as he returned to London his preparations for this travel must begin, he must plot out the men to whom he would go, and so contrive that also he would go round the world. Perhaps he would get Lionel Maxim to go with him. Or if Maxim could not come, then possibly Prothero. Some one surely could be found, some one thinking and talking of statecraft and the larger idea of life. All the world is not swallowed up in every day....

15

His mind shifted very suddenly from these large proposals to an entirely different theme. These mental landslips are not unusual when men are thinking hard and wandering. He found himself holding a trial upon himself for Presumptuousness, for setting himself up against the wisdom of the ages, and the decisions of all the established men in the world, for being in short a Presumptuous Sort of Ass. He was judge and jury and prosecutor, but rather inexplicably the defence was conducted in an irregular and undignified way by some inferior stratum of his being.

At first the defence contented itself with arguments that did at least aim to rebut the indictment. The decisions of all the established men in the world were notoriously in conflict. However great was the gross

wisdom of the ages the net wisdom was remarkably small. Was it after all so very immodest to believe that the Liberals were right in what they said about Tariff Reform, and the Tories right in their criticism of Home Rule?

And then suddenly the defence threw aside its mask and insisted that Benham had to take this presumptuous line because there was no other tolerable line possible for him.

"Better die with the Excelsior chap up the mountains," the defence interjected.

Than what?

Consider the quality Benham had already betrayed. He was manifestly incapable of a decent modest mediocre existence. Already he had ceased to be--if one may use so fine a word for genteel abstinence--virtuous. He didn't ride well, he hadn't good hands, and he hadn't good hands for life. He must go hard and harsh, high or low. He was a man who needed BITE in his life. He was exceptionally capable of boredom. He had been bored by London. Social occasions irritated him, several times he had come near to gross incivilities, art annoyed him, sport was an effort, wholesome perhaps, but unattractive, music he loved, but it excited him. The defendant broke the sunset calm by uttering amazing and improper phrases.

"I can't smug about in a state of falsified righteousness like these

Crampton chaps.

"I shall roll in women. I shall rollick in women. If, that is, I stay in London with nothing more to do than I have had this year past.

"I've been sliding fast to it....

"NO! I'M DAMNED IF I DO!..."

For some time he had been bothered by a sense of something, something else, awaiting his attention. Now it came swimming up into his consciousness. He had forgotten. He was, of course, going to sleep out under the stars.

He had settled that overnight, that was why he had this cloak in his rucksack, but he had settled none of the details. Now he must find some place where he could lie down. Here, perhaps, in this strange forgotten wilderness of rhododendra.

He turned off from the track and wandered among the bushes. One might lie down anywhere here. But not yet; it was as yet barely twilight. He consulted his watch. HALF-PAST SEVEN.

Nearly dinner-time....

No doubt Christian during the earlier stages of his pilgrimage noticed the recurrence of the old familiar hours of his life of emptiness and vanity. Or rather of vanity--simply. Why drag in the thought of emptiness just at this point?...

It was very early to go to bed.

He might perhaps sit and think for a time. Here for example was a mossy

bank, a seat, and presently a bed. So far there were only three stars visible but more would come. He dropped into a reclining attitude. DAMP!

When one thinks of sleeping out under the stars one is apt to forget the dew.

He spread his Swiss cloak out on the soft thick carpeting of herbs and moss, and arranged his knapsack as a pillow. Here he would lie and recapitulate the thoughts of the day. (That squealing might be a young fox.) At the club at present men would be sitting about holding themselves back from dinner. Excellent the clear soup always was at the club! Then perhaps a Chateaubriand. That--what was that? Soft and large and quite near and noiseless. An owl!

The damp feeling was coming through his cloak. And this April night air had a knife edge. Early ice coming down the Atlantic perhaps. It was wonderful to be here on the top of the round world and feel the icebergs away there. Or did this wind come from Russia? He wasn't quite clear just how he was oriented, he had turned about so much. Which was east? Anyhow it was an extremely cold wind.

What had he been thinking? Suppose after all that ending with Mrs. Skelmersdale was simply a beginning. So far he had never looked sex in the face....

He sat up and sneezed violently.

It would be ridiculous to start out seeking the clue to one's life and be driven home by rheumatic fever. One should not therefore incur the risk of rheumatic fever.

Something squealed in the bushes.

It was impossible to collect one's thoughts in this place. He stood up. The night was going to be bitterly cold, savagely, cruelly cold....

No. There was no thinking to be done here, no thinking at all. He would go on along the track and presently he would strike a road and so come to an inn. One can solve no problems when one is engaged in a struggle with the elements. The thing to do now was to find that track again....

It took Benham two hours of stumbling and walking, with a little fence climbing and some barbed wire thrown in, before he got down into Shere to the shelter of a friendly little inn. And then he negotiated a satisfying meal, with beef-steak as its central fact, and stipulated for a fire in his bedroom.

The landlord was a pleasant-faced man; he attended to Benham himself and displayed a fine sense of comfort. He could produce wine, a half-bottle of Australian hock, Big Tree brand No. 8, a virile wine, he thought of sardines to precede the meal, he provided a substantial Welsh rarebit by way of a savoury, he did not mind in the least that it was nearly ten o'clock. He ended by suggesting coffee. "And a liqueur?"

Benham had some Benedictine!

One could not slight such sympathetic helpfulness. The Benedictine was genuine. And then came the coffee.

The cup of coffee was generously conceived and honestly made.

A night of clear melancholy ensued….

17

Hitherto Benham had not faced in any detail the problem of how to break with Mrs. Skelmersdale. Now he faced it pessimistically. She would, he knew, be difficult to break with. (He ought never to have gone there to lunch.) There would be something ridiculous in breaking off. In all sorts of ways she might resist. And face to face with her he might find himself a man divided against himself. That opened preposterous possibilities. On the other hand it was out of the question to do the business by letter. A letter hits too hard; it lies too heavy on the wound it has made. And in money matters he could be generous. He must be generous. At least financial worries need not complicate her distresses of desertion. But to suggest such generosities on paper, in cold ink, would be outrageous. And, in brief--he ought not to have gone there to lunch. After that he began composing letters at a great rate. Delicate--explanatory. Was it on the whole best to be explanatory?...

It was going to be a tremendous job, this breaking with her. And it had begun so easily....

There was, he remembered with amazing vividness, a little hollow he had found under her ear, and how when he kissed her there it always made her forget her worries and ethical problems for a time and turn to him....

"No," he said grimly, "it must end," and rolled over and stared at the black....

Like an insidious pedlar, that old rascal whom young literary gentlemen call the Great God Pan, began to spread his wares in the young man's memory....

After long and feverish wanderings of the mind, and some talking to himself and walking about the room, he did at last get a little away from Mrs. Skelmersdale.

He perceived that when he came to tell his mother about this journey around the world there would be great difficulties. She would object very strongly, and if that did not do then she would become extremely abusive, compare him to his father, cry bitterly, and banish him suddenly and heartbrokenly from her presence for ever. She had done that twice already--once about going to the opera instead of listening to a lecture on Indian ethnology and once about a week-end in Kent.... He hated hurting his mother, and he was beginning to know now how easily she was hurt. It is an abominable thing to hurt one's mother--whether one has a justification or whether one hasn't.

Recoiling from this, he was at once resumed by Mrs. Skelmersdale. Who had in fact an effect of really never having been out of the room. But now he became penitent about her. His penitence expanded until it was on a nightmare scale. At last it blotted out the heavens. He felt like one of those unfortunate victims of religious mania who are convinced they have committed the Sin against the Holy Ghost. (Why had he gone there to lunch? That was the key to it. WHY had he gone there to lunch?)... He

began to have remorse for everything, for everything he had ever done, for everything he had ever not done, for everything in the world. In a moment of lucidity he even had remorse for drinking that stout honest cup of black coffee….

And so on and so on and so on….

When daylight came it found Benham still wide awake. Things crept mournfully out of the darkness into a reproachful clearness. The sound of birds that had been so delightful on the yesterday was now no longer agreeable. The thrushes, he thought, repeated themselves a great deal.

He fell asleep as it seemed only a few minutes before the landlord, accompanied by a great smell of frying bacon, came to call him.

The second day opened rather dully for Benham. There was not an idea left in his head about anything in the world. It was--SOLID. He walked through Bramley and Godalming and Witley and so came out upon the purple waste of Hindhead. He strayed away from the road and found a sunny place of turf amidst the heather and lay down and slept for an hour or so. He arose refreshed. He got some food at the Huts Inn on the Hindhead crest and went on across sunlit heathery wildernesses variegated by patches of spruce and fir and silver birch. And then suddenly his mental inanition was at an end and his thoughts were wide and brave again. He was astonished that for a moment he could have forgotten that he was vowed to the splendid life.

"Continence by preoccupation;" he tried the phrase....

"A man must not give in to fear; neither must he give in to sex. It's the same thing really. The misleading of instinct."

This set the key of his thought throughout the afternoon--until Amanda happened to him.

CHAPTER THE THIRD ~~ AMANDA