

XI. OMISSIONS

Now the rest of the acts of Mr. Hoopdriver in Guildford, on the great opening day of his holidays, are not to be detailed here. How he wandered about the old town in the dusk, and up to the Hogsback to see the little lamps below and the little stars above come out one after another; how he returned through the yellow-lit streets to the Yellow Hammer Coffee Tavern and supped bravely in the commercial room--a Man among Men; how he joined in the talk about flying-machines and the possibilities of electricity, witnessing that flying-machines were "dead certain to come," and that electricity was "wonderful, wonderful"; how he went and watched the billiard playing and said, "Left 'em" several times with an oracular air; how he fell a-yawning; and how he got out his cycling map and studied it intently,--are things that find no mention here. Nor will I enlarge upon his going into the writing-room, and marking the road from London to Guildford with a fine, bright line of the reddest of red ink. In his little cyclist hand-book there is a diary, and in the diary there is an entry of these things--it is there to this day, and I cannot do better than reproduce it here to witness that this book is indeed a true one, and no lying fable written to while away an hour.

At last he fell a-yawning so much that very reluctantly indeed he set about finishing this great and splendid day. (Alas! that all days must end at last!) He got his candle in the hall from a friendly waiting-maid, and passed upward--whither a modest novelist, who writes

for the family circle, dare not follow. Yet I may tell you that he knelt down at his bedside, happy and drowsy, and said, "Our Father 'chartin' heaven," even as he had learnt it by rote from his mother nearly twenty years ago. And anon when his breathing had become deep and regular, we may creep into his bedroom and catch him at his dreams. He is lying upon his left side, with his arm under the pillow. It is dark, and he is hidden; but if you could have seen his face, sleeping there in the darkness, I think you would have perceived, in spite of that treasured, thin, and straggling moustache, in spite of your memory of the coarse words he had used that day, that the man before you was, after all, only a little child asleep.