

## XLI. THE ENVOY

So the story ends, dear Reader. Mr. Hoopdriver, sprawling down there among the bracken, must sprawl without our prying, I think, or listening to what chances to his breathing. And of what came of it all, of the six years and afterwards, this is no place to tell. In truth, there is no telling it, for the years have still to run. But if you see how a mere counter-jumper, a cad on castors, and a fool to boot, may come to feel the little insufficiencies of life, and if he has to any extent won your sympathies, my end is attained. (If it is not attained, may Heaven forgive us both!) Nor will we follow this adventurous young lady of ours back to her home at Surbiton, to her new struggle against Widgery and Mrs. Milton combined. For, as she will presently hear, that devoted man has got his reward. For her, also, your sympathies are invited.

The rest of this great holiday, too--five days there are left of it--is beyond the limits of our design. You see fitfully a slender figure in a dusty brown suit and heather mixture stockings, and brown shoes not intended to be cycled in, flitting Londonward through Hampshire and Berkshire and Surrey, going economically--for excellent reasons. Day by day he goes on, riding fitfully and for the most part through bye-roads, but getting a few miles to the north-eastward every day. He is a narrow-chested person, with a nose hot and tanned at the bridge with unwonted exposure, and brown, red-knuckled fists. A musing expression sits upon the face of this rider, you observe. Sometimes he whistles noiselessly to himself, sometimes he speaks aloud, "a juiced good try,

anyhow!" you hear; and sometimes, and that too often for my liking, he looks irritable and hopeless. "I know," he says, "I know. It's over and done. It isn't IN me. You ain't man enough, Hoopdriver. Look at yer silly hands!... Oh, my God!" and a gust of passion comes upon him and he rides furiously for a space.

Sometimes again his face softens. "Anyhow, if I'm not to see her--she's going to lend me books," he thinks, and gets such comfort as he can. Then again; "Books! What's books?" Once or twice triumphant memories of the earlier incidents nerve his face for a while. "I put the ky-bosh on HIS little game," he remarks. "I DID that," and one might even call him happy in these phases. And, by-the-bye, the machine, you notice, has been enamel-painted grey and carries a sonorous gong.

This figure passes through Basingstoke and Bagshot, Staines, Hampton, and Richmond. At last, in Putney High Street, glowing with the warmth of an August sunset and with all the 'prentice boys busy shutting up shop, and the work girls going home, and the shop folks peeping abroad, and the white 'buses full of late clerks and city folk rumbling home to their dinners, we part from him. He is back. To-morrow, the early rising, the dusting, and drudgery, begin again--but with a difference, with wonderful memories and still more wonderful desires and ambitions replacing those discrepant dreams.

He turns out of the High Street at the corner, dismounts with a sigh, and pushes his machine through the gates of the Antrobus stable yard, as

the apprentice with the high collar holds them open. There are words of greeting. "South Coast," you hear; and "splendid weather--splendid." He sighs. "Yes--swapped him off for a couple of sovs. It's a juiced good machine."

The gate closes upon him with a slam, and he vanishes from our ken.