BOOK THE SECOND

THE RISE OF TONO-BUNGAY

CHAPTER THE FIRST

HOW I BECAME A LONDON STUDENT AND WENT ASTRAY

I came to live in London, as I shall tell you, when I was nearly twenty-two. Wimblehurst dwindles in perspective, is now in this book a little place far off, Bladesover no more than a small pinkish speck of frontage among the distant Kentish hills; the scene broadens out, becomes multitudinous and limitless, full of the sense of vast irrelevant movement. I do not remember my second coming to London as I do my first, for my early impressions, save that an October memory of softened amber sunshine stands out, amber sunshine falling on grey house fronts I know not where. That, and a sense of a large tranquillity.

I could fill a book, I think, with a more or less imaginary account of how I came to apprehend London, how first in one aspect and then in another it grew in my mind. Each day my accumulating impressions were added to and qualified and brought into relationship with new ones; they fused inseparably with others that were purely personal and accidental. I find myself with a certain comprehensive perception of London,

complete indeed, incurably indistinct in places and yet in some way a whole that began with my first visit and is still being mellowed and enriched.

London!

At first, no doubt, it was a chaos of streets and people and buildings and reasonless going to and fro. I do not remember that I ever struggled very steadily to understand it, or explored it with any but a personal and adventurous intention. Yet in time there has grown up in me a kind of theory of London; I do think I see lines of an ordered structure out of which it has grown, detected a process that is something more than a confusion of casual accidents though indeed it may be no more than a process of disease.

I said at the outset of my first book that I find in Bladesover the clue to all England. Well, I certainly imagine it is the clue to the structure of London. There have been no revolutions no deliberate restatements or abandonments of opinion in England since the days of the fine gentry, since 1688 or thereabouts, the days when Bladesover was built; there have been changes, dissolving forest replacing forest, if you will; but then it was that the broad lines of the English system set firmly. And as I have gone to and fro in London in certain regions constantly the thought has recurred this is Bladesover House, this answers to Bladesover House. The fine gentry may have gone; they have indeed largely gone, I think; rich merchants may have replaced them,

financial adventurers or what not. That does not matter; the shape is still Bladesover.

I am most reminded of Bladesover and Eastry by all those regions round about the West End parks; for example, estate parks, each more or less in relation to a palace or group of great houses. The roads and back ways of Mayfair and all about St. James's again, albeit perhaps of a later growth in point of time, were of the very spirit and architectural texture of the Bladesover passages and yards; they had the same smells, the space, the large cleanest and always going to and fro where one met unmistakable Olympians and even more unmistakable valets, butlers, footmen in mufti. There were moments when I seemed to glimpse down areas the white panelling, the very chintz of my mother's room again.

I could trace out now on a map what I would call the Great-House region; passing south-westward into Belgravia, becoming diffused and sporadic westward, finding its last systematic outbreak round and about Regent's Park. The Duke of Devonshire's place in Piccadilly, in all its insolent ugliness, pleases me particularly; it is the quintessence of the thing; Apsley House is all in the manner of my theory, Park Lane has its quite typical mansions, and they run along the border of the Green Park and St. James's. And I struck out a truth one day in Cromwell Road quite suddenly, as I looked over the Natural History Museum "By Jove," said I "but this is the little assemblage of cases of stuffed birds and animals upon the Bladesover staircase grown enormous, and yonder as the corresponding thing to the Bladesover curios and porcelain is the Art

Museume and there in the little observatories in Exhibition Road is old Sir Cuthbert's Gregorian telescope that I hunted out in the storeroom and put together." And diving into the Art Museum under this inspiration, I came to a little reading-room and found as I had inferred, old brown books!

It was really a good piece of social comparative anatomy I did that day; all these museums and libraries that are dotted over London between Piccadilly and West Kensington, and indeed the museum and library movement throughout the world, sprang from the elegant leisure of the gentlemen of taste. Theirs were the first libraries, the first houses of culture; by my rat-like raids into the Bladesover saloon I became, as it were, the last dwindled representative of such a man of letters as Swift. But now these things have escaped out of the Great House altogether, and taken on a strange independent life of their own.

It is this idea of escaping parts from the seventeenth century system of Bladesover, of proliferating and overgrowing elements from the Estates, that to this day seems to me the best explanation, not simply of London, but of all England. England is a country of great Renascence landed gentlefolk who have been unconsciously outgrown and overgrown. The proper shops for Bladesover custom were still to be found in Regent Street and Bond Street in my early London days in those days they had been but lightly touched by the American's profaning hand--and in Piccadilly. I found the doctor's house of the country village or country town up and down Harley Street, multiplied but not otherwise different,

and the family solicitor (by the hundred) further eastward in the abandoned houses of a previous generation of gentlepeople, and down in Westminster, behind Palladian fronts, the public offices sheltered in large Bladesoverish rooms and looked out on St. James's Park. The Parliament Houses of lords and gentlemen, the parliament house that was horrified when merchants and brewers came thrusting into it a hundred years ago, stood out upon its terrace gathering the whole system together into a head.

And the more I have paralleled these things with my Bladesover-Eastry model, the more evident it has become to me that the balance is not the same, and the more evident is the presence of great new forces, blind forces of invasion, of growth. The railway termini on the north side of London have been kept as remote as Eastry had kept the railway-station from Wimblehurst, they stop on the very outskirts of the estates, but from the south, the South Eastern railway had butted its great stupid rusty iron head of Charing Cross station, that great head that came smashing down in 1905--clean across the river, between Somerset House and Whitehall. The south side had no protecting estate. Factory chimneys smoke right over against Westminster with an air of carelessly not having permission, and the whole effect of industrial London and of all London east of Temple Bar and of the huge dingy immensity of London port is to me of something disproportionately large, something morbidly expanded, without plan or intention, dark and sinister toward the clean clear social assurance of the West End. And south of this central London, south-east, south-west, far west, north-west, all round the

northern hills, are similar disproportionate growths, endless streets of undistinguished houses, undistinguished industries, shabby families, second-rate shops, inexplicable people who in a once fashionable phrase do not "exist." All these aspects have suggested to my mind at times, do suggest to this day, the unorganised, abundant substance of some tumorous growth-process, a process which indeed bursts all the outlines of the affected carcass and protrudes such masses as ignoble comfortable Croydon, as tragic impoverished West Ham. To this day I ask myself will those masses ever become structural, will they indeed shape into anything new whatever, or is that cancerous image their true and ultimate diagnosis?...

Moreover, together with this hypertrophy there is an immigration of elements that have never understood and never will understand the great tradition, wedges of foreign settlement embedded in the heart of this yeasty English expansion. One day I remember wandering eastward out of pure curiosity--it must have been in my early student days--and discovering a shabbily bright foreign quarter, shops displaying Hebrew placards and weird, unfamiliar commodities and a concourse of bright-eyed, eagle-nosed people talking some incomprehensible gibberish between the shops and the barrows. And soon I became quite familiar with the devious, vicious, dirtily-pleasant eroticism of Soho. I found those crowded streets a vast relief from the dull grey exterior of Brompton where I lodged and lived my daily life. In Soho, indeed, I got my first inkling of the factor of replacement that is so important in both the English and the American process.

Even in the West End, in Mayfair and the square, about Pall Mall, Ewart was presently to remind me the face of the old aristocratic dignity was fairer than its substance; here were actors and actresses, here money lenders and Jews, here bold financial adventurers, and I thought of my uncle's frayed cuff as he pointed out this house in Park Lane and that. That was so and so's who made a corner in borax, and that palace belonged to that hero among modern adventurers, Barmentrude, who used to be an I.D.B.,--an illicit diamond buyer that is to say. A city of Bladesovers, the capital of a kingdom of Bladesovers, all much shaken and many altogether in decay, parasitically occupied, insidiously replaced by alien, unsympathetic and irresponsible elements; and with a ruling an adventitious and miscellaneous empire of a quarter of this daedal earth complex laws, intricate social necessities, disturbing insatiable suggestions, followed from this. Such was the world into which I had come, into which I had in some way to thrust myself and fit my problem, my temptations, my efforts, my patriotic instinct, all my moral instincts, my physical appetites, my dreams and my sanity.

London! I came up to it, young and without advisers, rather priggish, rather dangerously open-minded and very open-eyed, and with something--it is, I think, the common gift of imaginative youth, and I claim it unblushingly--fine in me, finer than the world and seeking fine responses. I did not want simply to live or simply to live happily or well; I wanted to serve and do and make--with some nobility. It was in me. It is in half the youth of the world.

II

I had come to London as a scholar. I had taken the Vincent Bradley scholarship of the Pharmaceutical Society, but I threw this up when I found that my work of the Science and Art Department in mathematics, physics and chemistry had given me one of the minor Technical Board Scholarships at the Consolidated Technical Schools at South Kensington. This latter was in mechanics and metallurgy; and I hesitated between the two. The Vincent Bradley gave me L70 a year and quite the best start-off a pharmaceutical chemist could have; the South Kensington thing was worth about twenty-two shillings a week, and the prospects it opened were vague. But it meant far more scientific work than the former, and I was still under the impulse of that great intellectual appetite that is part of the adolescence of men of my type. Moreover it seemed to lead towards engineering, in which I imagined--I imagine to this day--my particular use is to be found. I took its greater uncertainty as a fair risk. I came up very keen, not doubting that the really hard and steady industry that had carried me through Wimblehurst would go on still in the new surroundings.

Only from the very first it didn't....

When I look back now at my Wimblehurst days, I still find myself surprised at the amount of steady grinding study, of strenuous self-discipline that I maintained throughout my apprenticeship. In many

ways I think that time was the most honourable period in my life. I wish I could say with a certain mind that my motives in working so well were large and honourable too. To a certain extent they were so; there was a fine sincere curiosity, a desire for the strength and power of scientific knowledge and a passion for intellectual exercise; but I do not think those forces alone would have kept me at it so grimly and closely if Wimblehurst had not been so dull, so limited and so observant. Directly I came into the London atmosphere, tasting freedom, tasting irresponsibility and the pull of new forces altogether, my discipline fell from me like a garment. Wimblehurst to a youngster in my position offered no temptations worth counting, no interests to conflict with study, no vices--such vices as it offered were coarsely stripped of any imaginative glamourfull drunkenness, clumsy leering shameful lust, no social intercourse even to waste one's time, and on the other hand it would minister greatly to the self-esteem of a conspicuously industrious student. One was marked as "clever," one played up to the part, and one's little accomplishment stood out finely in one's private reckoning against the sunlit small ignorance of that agreeable place. One went with an intent rush across the market square, one took one's exercise with as dramatic a sense of an ordered day as an Oxford don, one burnt the midnight oil quite consciously at the rare respectful, benighted passer-by. And one stood out finely in the local paper with one's unapproachable yearly harvest of certificates. Thus I was not only a genuinely keen student, but also a little of a prig and poseur in those days--and the latter kept the former at it, as London made clear.

Moreover Wimblehurst had given me no outlet in any other direction.

But I did not realise all this when I came to London, did not perceive how the change of atmosphere began at once to warp and distribute my energies. In the first place I became invisible. If I idled for a day, no one except my fellow-students (who evidently had no awe for me) remarked it. No one saw my midnight taper; no one pointed me out as I crossed the street as an astonishing intellectual phenomenon. In the next place I became inconsiderable. In Wimblehurst I felt I stood for Science; nobody there seemed to have so much as I and to have it so fully and completely. In London I walked ignorant in an immensity, and it was clear that among my fellow-students from the midlands and the north I was ill-equipped and under-trained. With the utmost exertion I should only take a secondary position among them. And finally, in the third place, I was distracted by voluminous new interests; London took hold of me, and Science, which had been the universe, shrank back to the dimensions of tiresome little formulae compacted in a book. I came to London in late September, and it was a very different London from that great greyly-overcast, smoke-stained house-wilderness of my first impressions. I reached it by Victoria and not by Cannon Street, and its centre was now in Exhibition Road. It shone, pale amber, blue-grey and tenderly spacious and fine under clear autumnal skies, a London of hugely handsome buildings and vistas and distances, a London of gardens and labyrinthine tall museums, of old trees and remote palaces and artificial waters. I lodged near by in West Brompton at a house in a little square.

So London faced me the second time, making me forget altogether for a while the grey, drizzling city visage that had first looked upon me. I settled down and went to and fro to my lectures and laboratory; in the beginning I worked hard, and only slowly did the curiosity that presently possessed me to know more of this huge urban province arise, the desire to find something beyond mechanism that I could serve, some use other than learning. With this was a growing sense of loneliness, a desire for adventure and intercourse. I found myself in the evenings poring over a map of London I had bought, instead of copying out lecture notes--and on Sundays I made explorations, taking omnibus rides east and west and north and south, and to enlarging and broadening the sense of great swarming hinterlands of humanity with whom I had no dealings, of whom I knew nothing....

The whole illimitable place teemed with suggestions of indefinite and sometimes outrageous possibility, of hidden but magnificent meanings.

It wasn't simply that I received a vast impression of space and multitude and opportunity; intimate things also were suddenly dragged from neglected, veiled and darkened corners into an acute vividness of perception. Close at hand in the big art museum I came for the first time upon the beauty of nudity, which I had hitherto held to be a shameful secret, flaunted and gloried in; I was made aware of beauty as not only permissible, but desirable and frequent and of a thousand hitherto unsuspected rich aspects of life. One night in a real rapture,

I walked round the upper gallery of the Albert Hall and listened for the first time to great music; I believe now that it was a rendering of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony....

My apprehension of spaces and places was reinforced by a quickened apprehension of persons. A constant stream of people passed by me, eyes met and challenged mine and passed--more and more I wanted then to stay--if I went eastward towards Piccadilly, women who seemed then to my boyish inexperience softly splendid and alluring, murmured to me as they passed. Extraordinarily life unveiled. The very hoardings clamoured strangely at one's senses and curiosities. One bought pamphlets and papers full of strange and daring ideas transcending one's boldest; in the parks one heard men discussing the very existence of God, denying the rights of property, debating a hundred things that one dared not think about in Wimblehurst. And after the ordinary overcast day, after dull mornings, came twilight, and London lit up and became a thing of white and yellow and red jewels of light and wonderful floods of golden illumination and stupendous and unfathomable shadows--and there were no longer any mean or shabby people--but a great mysterious movement of unaccountable beings....

Always I was coming on the queerest new aspects. Late one Saturday night I found myself one of a great slow-moving crowd between the blazing shops and the flaring barrows in the Harrow Road; I got into conversation with two bold-eyed girls, bought them boxes of chocolate, made the acquaintance of father and mother and various younger brothers

and sisters, sat in a public-house hilariously with them all, standing and being stood drinks, and left them in the small hours at the door of "home," never to see them again. And once I was accosted on the outskirts of a Salvation Army meeting in one of the parks by a silk-hatted young man of eager and serious discourse, who argued against scepticism with me, invited me home to tea into a clean and cheerful family of brothers and sisters and friends, and there I spent the evening singing hymns to the harmonium (which reminded me of half-forgotten Chatham), and wishing all the sisters were not so obviously engaged....

Then on the remote hill of this boundless city-world I found Ewart.

III

How well I remember the first morning, a bright Sunday morning in early October, when I raided in upon Ewart! I found my old schoolfellow in bed in a room over an oil-shop in a back street at the foot of Highgate Hill. His landlady, a pleasant, dirty young woman with soft-brown eyes, brought down his message for me to come up; and up I went. The room presented itself as ample and interesting in detail and shabby with a quite commendable shabbiness. I had an impression of brown walls--they were papered with brown paper--of a long shelf along one side of the room, with dusty plaster casts and a small cheap lay figure of a horse, of a table and something of grey wax partially covered with a cloth, and of scattered drawings. There was a gas stove in one corner, and some

enameled ware that had been used for overnight cooking. The oilcloth on the floor was streaked with a peculiar white dust. Ewart himself was not in the first instance visible, but only a fourfold canvas screen at the end of the room from which shouts proceeded of "Come on!" then his wiry black hair, very much rumpled, and a staring red-brown eye and his stump of a nose came round the edge of this at a height of about three feet from the ground "It's old Ponderevo!" he said, "the Early bird! And he's caught the worm! By Jove, but it's cold this morning! Come round here and sit on the bed!"

I walked round, wrung his hand, and we surveyed one another.

He was lying on a small wooden fold-up bed, the scanty covering of which was supplemented by an overcoat and an elderly but still cheerful pair of check trousers, and he was wearing pajamas of a virulent pink and green. His neck seemed longer and more stringy than it had been even in our schooldays, and his upper lip had a wiry black moustache. The rest of his ruddy, knobby countenance, his erratic hair and his general hairy leanness had not even--to my perceptions grown.

"By Jove!" he said, "you've got quite decent-looking, Ponderevo! What do you think of me?"

"You're all right. What are you doing here?"

"Art, my son--sculpture! And incidentally--" He hesitated. "I ply a

trade. Will you hand me that pipe and those smoking things? So! You can't make coffee, eh? Well, try your hand. Cast down this screen--no--fold it up and so we'll go into the other room. I'll keep in bed all the same. The fire's a gas stove. Yes. Don't make it bang. too loud as you light it--I can't stand it this morning. You won't smoke ... Well, it does me good to see you again, Ponderevo. Tell me what you're doing, and how you're getting on."

He directed me in the service of his simple hospitality, and presently I came back to his bed and sat down and smiled at him there, smoking comfortably, with his hands under his head, surveying me.

"How's Life's Morning, Ponderevo? By Jove, it must be nearly six years since we met! They've got moustaches. We've fleshed ourselves a bit, eh? And you?"

I felt a pipe was becoming after all, and that lit, I gave him a favourable sketch of my career.

"Science! And you've worked like that! While I've been potting round doing odd jobs for stone-masons and people, and trying to get to sculpture. I've a sort of feeling that the chisel--I began with painting, Ponderevo, and found I was colour-blind, colour-blind enough to stop it. I've drawn about and thought about--thought more particularly. I give myself three days a week as an art student, and the rest of the time I've a sort of trade that keeps me. And we're still

in the beginning of things, young men starting. Do you remember the old times at Goudhurst, our doll's-house island, the Retreat of the Ten Thousand Young Holmes and the rabbits, eh? It's surprising, if you think of it, to find we are still young. And we used to talk of what we would be, and we used to talk of love! I suppose you know all about that now, Ponderevo?"

I finished and hesitated on some vague foolish lie, "No," I said, a little ashamed of the truth. "Do you? I've been too busy."

"I'm just beginning--just as we were then. Things happen."

He sucked at his pipe for a space and stared at the plaster cast of a flayed hand that hung on the wall.

"The fact is, Ponderevo, I'm beginning to find life a most extraordinary queer set-out; the things that pull one, the things that don't. The wants--This business of sex. It's a net. No end to it, no way out of it, no sense in it. There are times when women take possession of me, when my mind is like a painted ceiling at Hampton Court with the pride of the flesh sprawling all over it. WHY?... And then again sometimes when I have to encounter a woman, I am overwhelmed by a terror of tantalising boredom--I fly, I hide, I do anything. You've got your scientific explanations perhaps; what's Nature and the universe up to in that matter?"

"It's her way, I gather, of securing the continuity of the species."

"But it doesn't," said Ewart. "That's just it! No. I have succumbed to--dissipation--down the hill there. Euston Road way. And it was damned ugly and mean, and I hate having done it. And the continuity of the species--Lord!... And why does Nature make a man so infernally ready for drinks? There's no sense in that anyhow." He sat up in bed, to put this question with the greater earnestness. "And why has she given me a most violent desire towards sculpture and an equally violent desire to leave off work directly I begin it, eh?... Let's have some more coffee. I put it to you, these things puzzle me, Ponderevo. They dishearten me. They keep me in bed."

He had an air of having saved up these difficulties for me for some time. He sat with his chin almost touching his knees, sucking at his pipe.

"That's what I mean," he went on, "when I say life is getting on to me as extraordinarily queer, I don't see my game, nor why I was invited. And I don't make anything of the world outside either. What do you make of it?"

"London," I began. "It's--so enormous!"

"Isn't it! And it's all up to nothing. You find chaps keeping grocers' shops--why the DEVIL, Ponderevo, do they keep grocers' shops? They

all do it very carefully, very steadily, very meanly. You find people running about and doing the most remarkable things being policemen, for example, and burglars. They go about these businesses quite gravely and earnestly. I somehow--can't go about mine. Is there any sense in it at all--anywhere?"

"There must be sense in it," I said. "We're young."

"We're young--yes. But one must inquire. The grocer's a grocer because, I suppose, he sees he comes in there. Feels that on the whole it amounts to a call.... But the bother is I don't see where I come in at all. Do you?"

"Where you come in?"

"No, where you come in."

"Not exactly, yet," I said. "I want to do some good in the world--something--something effectual, before I die. I have a sort of idea my scientific work--I don't know."

"Yes," he mused. "And I've got a sort of idea my sculpture,--but now it is to come in and WHY,--I've no idea at all." He hugged his knees for a space. "That's what puzzles me, Ponderevo, no end."

He became animated. "If you will look in that cupboard," he said,

"you will find an old respectable looking roll on a plate and a knife somewhere and a gallipot containing butter. You give them me and I'll make my breakfast, and then if you don't mind watching me paddle about at my simple toilet I'll get up. Then we'll go for a walk and talk about this affair of life further. And about Art and Literature and anything else that crops up on the way.... Yes, that's the gallipot. Cockroach got in it? Chuck him out--damned interloper...."

So in the first five minutes of our talk, as I seem to remember it now, old Ewart struck the note that ran through all that morning's intercourse....

To me it was a most memorable talk because it opened out quite new horizons of thought. I'd been working rather close and out of touch with Ewart's free gesticulating way. He was pessimistic that day and sceptical to the very root of things. He made me feel clearly, what I had not felt at all before, the general adventurousness of life, particularly of life at the stage we had reached, and also the absence of definite objects, of any concerted purpose in the lives that were going on all round us. He made me feel, too, how ready I was to take up commonplace assumptions. Just as I had always imagined that somewhere in social arrangements there was certainly a Head-Master who would intervene if one went too far, so I had always had a sort of implicit belief that in our England there were somewhere people who understood what we were all, as a nation, about. That crumpled into his pit of doubt and vanished.

He brought out, sharply cut and certain, the immense effect of purposelessness in London that I was already indistinctly feeling. We found ourselves at last returning through Highgate Cemetery and Waterlow Park--and Ewart was talking.

"Look at it there," he said, stopping and pointing to the great vale of London spreading wide and far. "It's like a sea--and we swim in it. And at last down we go, and then up we come--washed up here." He swung his arms to the long slopes about us, tombs and headstones in long perspectives, in limitless rows.

"We're young, Ponderevo, but sooner or later our whitened memories will wash up on one of these beaches, on some such beach as this. George Ponderevo, F.R.S., Sidney Ewart, R.I.P. Look at the rows of 'em!"

He paused. "Do you see that hand? The hand, I mean, pointing upward, on the top of a blunted obelisk. Yes. Well, that's what I do for a living--when I'm not thinking, or drinking, or prowling, or making love, or pretending I'm trying to be a sculptor without either the money or the morals for a model. See? And I do those hearts afire and those pensive angel guardians with the palm of peace. Damned well I do 'em and damned cheap! I'm a sweated victim, Ponderevo..."

That was the way of it, anyhow. I drank deep of talk that day; we went into theology, into philosophy; I had my first glimpse of socialism. I

felt as though I had been silent in a silence since I and he had parted. At the thought of socialism Ewart's moods changed for a time to a sort of energy. "After all, all this confounded vagueness might be altered. If you could get men to work together..."

It was a good talk that rambled through all the universe. I thought I was giving my mind refreshment, but indeed it was dissipation. All sorts of ideas, even now, carry me back as it were to a fountain-head, to Waterlow Park and my resuscitated Ewart. There stretches away south of us long garden slopes and white gravestones and the wide expanse of London, and somewhere in the picture is a red old wall, sun-warmed, and a great blaze of Michaelmas daisies set off with late golden sunflowers and a drift of mottled, blood-red, fallen leaves. It was with me that day as though I had lifted my head suddenly out of dull and immediate things and looked at life altogether.... But it played the very devil with the copying up of my arrears of notes to which I had vowed the latter half of that day.

After that reunion Ewart and I met much and talked much, and in our subsequent encounters his monologue was interrupted and I took my share. He had exercised me so greatly that I lay awake at nights thinking him over, and discoursed and answered him in my head as I went in the morning to the College. I am by nature a doer and only by the way a critic; his philosophical assertion of the incalculable vagueness of life which fitted his natural indolence roused my more irritable and energetic nature to active protests. "It's all so pointless," I said,

"because people are slack and because it's in the ebb of an age. But you're a socialist. Well, let's bring that about! And there's a purpose. There you are!"

Ewart gave me all my first conceptions of socialism; in a little while I was an enthusiastic socialist and he was a passive resister to the practical exposition of the theories he had taught me. "We must join some organisation," I said. "We ought to do things.... We ought to go and speak at street corners. People don't know."

You must figure me a rather ill-dressed young man in a state of great earnestness, standing up in that shabby studio of his and saying these things, perhaps with some gesticulations, and Ewart with a clay-smudged face, dressed perhaps in a flannel shirt and trousers, with a pipe in his mouth, squatting philosophically at a table, working at some chunk of clay that never got beyond suggestion.

"I wonder why one doesn't want to," he said.

It was only very slowly I came to gauge Ewart's real position in the scheme of things, to understand how deliberate and complete was this detachment of his from the moral condemnation and responsibilities that played so fine a part in his talk. His was essentially the nature of an artistic appreciator; he could find interest and beauty in endless aspects of things that I marked as evil, or at least as not negotiable; and the impulse I had towards self-deception, to sustained and

consistent self-devotion, disturbed and detached and pointless as it was at that time, he had indeed a sort of admiration for but no sympathy. Like many fantastic and ample talkers he was at bottom secretive, and he gave me a series of little shocks of discovery throughout our intercourse.

The first of these came in the realisation that he quite seriously meant to do nothing in the world at all towards reforming the evils he laid bare in so easy and dexterous a manner. The next came in the sudden appearance of a person called "Milly"--I've forgotten her surname--whom I found in his room one evening, simply attired in a blue wrap--the rest of her costume behind the screen--smoking cigarettes and sharing a flagon of an amazingly cheap and self-assertive grocer's wine Ewart affected, called "Canary Sack." "Hullo!" said Ewart, as I came in. "This is Milly, you know. She's been being a model--she IS a model really.... (keep calm, Ponderevo!) Have some sack?"

Milly was a woman of thirty, perhaps, with a broad, rather pretty face, a placid disposition, a bad accent and delightful blond hair that waved off her head with an irrepressible variety of charm; and whenever Ewart spoke she beamed at him. Ewart was always sketching this hair of hers and embarking upon clay statuettes of her that were never finished. She was, I know now, a woman of the streets, whom Ewart had picked up in the most casual manner, and who had fallen in love with him, but my inexperience in those days was too great for me to place her then, and Ewart offered no elucidations. She came to him, he went to her, they

took holidays together in the country when certainly she sustained her fair share of their expenditure. I suspect him now even of taking money from her. Odd old Ewart! It was a relationship so alien to my orderly conceptions of honour, to what I could imagine any friend of mine doing, that I really hardly saw it with it there under my nose. But I see it and I think I understand it now....

Before I fully grasped the discursive manner in which Ewart was committed to his particular way in life, I did, I say, as the broad constructive ideas of socialism took hold of me, try to get him to work with me in some definite fashion as a socialist.

"We ought to join on to other socialists," I said.

"They've got something."

"Let's go and look at some first."

After some pains we discovered the office of the Fabian Society, lurking in a cellar in Clement's Inn; and we went and interviewed a rather discouraging secretary who stood astraddle in front of a fire and questioned us severely and seemed to doubt the integrity of our intentions profoundly. He advised us to attend the next open meeting in Clifford's Inn and gave us the necessary data. We both contrived to get to the affair, and heard a discursive gritty paper on Trusts and one of the most inconclusive discussions you can imagine. Three-quarters of

the speakers seemed under some jocular obsession which took the form of pretending to be conceited. It was a sort of family joke, and as strangers to the family we did not like it.... As we came out through the narrow passage from Clifford's Inn to the Strand, Ewart suddenly pitched upon a wizened, spectacled little man in a vast felt hat and a large orange tie.

"How many members are there in this Fabian Society of yours?" he asked.

The little man became at once defensive in his manner.

"About seven hundred," he said; "perhaps eight."

"Like--like the ones here?"

The little man gave a nervous self-satisfied laugh. "I suppose they're up to sample," he said.

The little man dropped out of existence and we emerged upon the Strand. Ewart twisted his arm into a queerly eloquent gesture that gathered up all the tall facades of the banks, the business places, the projecting clock and towers of the Law Courts, the advertisements, the luminous signs, into one social immensity, into a capitalistic system gigantic and invincible.

"These socialists have no sense of proportion," he said. "What can you

expect of them?"

IV

Ewart, as the embodiment of talk, was certainly a leading factor in my conspicuous failure to go on studying. Social theory in its first crude form of Democratic Socialism gripped my intelligence more and more powerfully. I argued in the laboratory with the man who shared my bench until we quarreled and did not speak and also I fell in love.

The ferment of sex had been creeping into my being like a slowly advancing tide through all my Wimblehurst days, the stimulus of London was like the rising of a wind out of the sea that brings the waves in fast and high. Ewart had his share in that. More and more acutely and unmistakably did my perception of beauty, form and sound, my desire for adventure, my desire for intercourse, converge on this central and commanding business of the individual life. I had to get me a mate.

I began to fall in love faintly with girls I passed in the street, with women who sat before me in trains, with girl fellow-students, with ladies in passing carriages, with loiterers at the corners, with neat-handed waitresses in shops and tea-rooms, with pictures even of girls and women. On my rare visits to the theatre I always became exalted, and found the actresses and even the spectators about me mysterious, attractive, creatures of deep interest and desire. I had a stronger and stronger sense that among these glancing, passing

multitudes there was somewhere one who was for me. And in spite of every antagonistic force in the world, there was something in my very marrow that insisted: "Stop! Look at this one! Think of her! Won't she do? This signifies--this before all things signifies! Stop! Why are you hurrying by? This may be the predestined person--before all others."

It is odd that I can't remember when first I saw Marion, who became my wife--whom I was to make wretched, who was to make me wretched, who was to pluck that fine generalised possibility of love out of my early manhood and make it a personal conflict. I became aware of her as one of a number of interesting attractive figures that moved about in my world, that glanced back at my eyes, that flitted by with a kind of averted watchfulness. I would meet her coming through the Art Museum, which was my short cut to the Brompton Road, or see her sitting, reading as I thought, in one of the bays of the Education Library. But really, as I found out afterwards, she never read. She used to come there to eat a bun in quiet. She was a very gracefully-moving figure of a girl then, very plainly dressed, with dark brown hair I remember, in a knot low on her neck behind that confessed the pretty roundness of her head and harmonised with the admirable lines of ears and cheek, the grave serenity of mouth and brow.

She stood out among the other girls very distinctly because they dressed more than she did, struck emphatic notes of colour, startled one by novelties in hats and bows and things. I've always hated the rustle, the disconcerting colour boundaries, the smart unnatural angles of women's

clothes. Her plain black dress gave her a starkness....

I do remember, though, how one afternoon I discovered the peculiar appeal of her form for me. I had been restless with my work and had finally slipped out of the Laboratory and come over to the Art Museum to lounge among the pictures. I came upon her in an odd corner of the Sheepshanks gallery, intently copying something from a picture that hung high. I had just been in the gallery of casts from the antique, my mind was all alive with my newly awakened sense of line, and there she stood with face upturned, her body drooping forward from the hips just a little--memorably graceful--feminine.

After that I know I sought to see her, felt a distinctive emotion at her presence, began to imagine things about her. I no longer thought of generalised womanhood or of this casual person or that. I thought of her.

An accident brought us together. I found myself one Monday morning in an omnibus staggering westward from Victoria--I was returning from a Sunday I'd spent at Wimblehurst in response to a unique freak of hospitality on the part of Mr. Mantell. She was the sole other inside passenger. And when the time came to pay her fare, she became an extremely scared, disconcerted and fumbling young woman; she had left her purse at home.

Luckily I had some money.

She looked at me with startled, troubled brown eyes; she permitted my proffered payment to the conductor with a certain ungraciousness that seemed a part of her shyness, and then as she rose to go, she thanked me with an obvious affectation of ease.

"Thank you so much," she said in a pleasant soft voice; and then less gracefully, "Awfully kind of you, you know."

I fancy I made polite noises. But just then I wasn't disposed to be critical. I was full of the sense of her presence; her arm was stretched out over me as she moved past me, the gracious slenderness of her body was near me. The words we used didn't seem very greatly to matter. I had vague ideas of getting out with her--and I didn't.

That encounter, I have no doubt, exercised me enormously. I lay awake at night rehearsing it, and wondering about the next phase of our relationship. That took the form of the return of my twopence. I was in the Science Library, digging something out of the Encyclopedia Britannica, when she appeared beside me and placed on the open page an evidently premeditated thin envelope, bulgingly confessing the coins within.

"It was so very kind of you," she said, "the other day. I don't know what I should have done, Mr.--"

I supplied my name. "I knew," I said, "you were a student here."

"Not exactly a student. I--"

"Well, anyhow, I knew you were here frequently. And I'm a student myself at the Consolidated Technical Schools."

I plunged into autobiography and questionings, and so entangled her in a conversation that got a quality of intimacy through the fact that, out of deference to our fellow-readers, we were obliged to speak in undertones. And I have no doubt that in substance it was singularly banal. Indeed I have an impression that all our early conversations were incredibly banal. We met several times in a manner half-accidental, half furtive and wholly awkward. Mentally I didn't take hold of her. I never did take hold of her mentally. Her talk, I now know all too clearly, was shallow, pretentious, evasive. Only--even to this day--I don't remember it as in any way vulgar. She was, I could see quite clearly, anxious to overstate or conceal her real social status, a little desirous to be taken for a student in the art school and a little ashamed that she wasn't. She came to the museum to "copy things," and this, I gathered, had something to do with some way of partially earning her living that I wasn't to inquire into. I told her things about myself, vain things that I felt might appeal to her, but that I learnt long afterwards made her think me "conceited." We talked of books, but there she was very much on her guard and secretive, and rather more freely of pictures. She "liked" pictures. I think from the outset I appreciated and did not for a moment resent that hers was a commonplace mind, that she was the unconscious

custodian of something that had gripped my most intimate instinct, that she embodied the hope of a possibility, was the careless proprietor of a physical quality that had turned my head like strong wine. I felt I had to stick to our acquaintance, flat as it was. Presently we should get through these irrelevant exterior things, and come to the reality of love beneath.

I saw her in dreams released, as it were, from herself, beautiful, worshipful, glowing. And sometimes when we were together, we would come on silences through sheer lack of matter, and then my eyes would feast on her, and the silence seemed like the drawing back of a curtain--her superficial self. Odd, I confess. Odd, particularly, the enormous hold of certain things about her upon me, a certain slight rounded duskiness of skin, a certain perfection of modelling in her lips, her brow, a certain fine flow about the shoulders. She wasn't indeed beautiful to many people--these things are beyond explaining. She had manifest defects of form and feature, and they didn't matter at all. Her complexion was bad, but I don't think it would have mattered if it had been positively unwholesome. I had extraordinarily limited, extraordinarily painful, desires. I longed intolerably to kiss her lips.

V

The affair was immensely serious and commanding to me. I don't remember that in these earlier phases I had any thought of turning back at all. It was clear to me that she regarded me with an eye entirely

more critical than I had for her, that she didn't like my scholarly untidiness, my want of even the most commonplace style. "Why do you wear collars like that?" she said, and sent me in pursuit of gentlemanly neckwear. I remember when she invited me a little abruptly one day to come to tea at her home on the following Sunday and meet her father and mother and aunt, that I immediately doubted whether my hitherto unsuspected best clothes would create the impression she desired me to make on her belongings. I put off the encounter until the Sunday after, to get myself in order. I had a morning coat made and I bought a silk hat, and had my reward in the first glance of admiration she ever gave me. I wonder how many of my sex are as preposterous. I was, you see, abandoning all my beliefs, my conventions unasked. I was forgetting myself immensely. And there was a conscious shame in it all. Never a word--did I breathe to Ewart--to any living soul of what was going on.

Her father and mother and aunt struck me as the dismalest of people, and her home in Walham Green was chiefly notable for its black and amber tapestry carpets and curtains and table-cloths, and the age and irrelevance of its books, mostly books with faded gilt on the covers. The windows were fortified against the intrusive eye by cheap lace curtains and an "art pot" upon an unstable octagonal table. Several framed Art School drawings of Marion's, bearing official South Kensington marks of approval, adorned the room, and there was a black and gilt piano with a hymn-book on the top of it. There were draped mirrors over all the mantels, and above the sideboard in the dining-room in which we sat at tea was a portrait of her father, villainously

truthful after the manner of such works. I couldn't see a trace of the beauty I found in her in either parent, yet she somehow contrived to be like them both.

These people pretended in a way that reminded me of the Three Great Women in my mother's room, but they had not nearly so much social knowledge and did not do it nearly so well. Also, I remarked, they did it with an eye on Marion. They had wanted to thank me, they said, for the kindness to their daughter in the matter of the 'bus fare, and so accounted for anything unusual in their invitation. They posed as simple gentlefolk, a little hostile to the rush and gadding-about of London, preferring a secluded and unpretentious quiet.

When Marion got out the white table-cloth from the sideboard-drawer for tea, a card bearing the word "APARTMENTS" fell to the floor. I picked it up and gave it to her before I realised from her quickened colour that I should not have seen it; that probably had been removed from the window in honour of my coming.

Her father spoke once in a large remote way of he claims of business engagements, and it was only long afterwards I realised that he was a supernumerary clerk in the Walham Green Gas Works and otherwise a useful man at home. He was a large, loose, fattish man with unintelligent brown eyes magnified by spectacles; he wore an ill-fitting frock-coat and a paper collar, and he showed me, as his great treasure and interest, a large Bible which he had grangerised with photographs of pictures. Also

he cultivated the little garden-yard behind the house, and he had a small greenhouse with tomatoes. "I wish I 'ad 'eat," he said. "One can do such a lot with 'eat. But I suppose you can't 'ave everything you want in this world."

Both he and Marion's mother treated her with a deference that struck me as the most natural thing in the world. Her own manner changed, became more authoritative and watchful, her shyness disappeared. She had taken a line of her own I gathered, draped the mirror, got the second-hand piano, and broken her parents in.

Her mother must once have been a pretty woman; she had regular features and Marion's hair without its lustre, but she was thin and careworn. The aunt, Miss Ramboat, was a large, abnormally shy person very like her brother, and I don't recall anything she said on this occasion.

To begin with there was a good deal of tension, Marion was frightfully nervous and every one was under the necessity of behaving in a mysteriously unreal fashion until I plunged, became talkative and made a certain ease and interest. I told them of the schools, of my lodgings, of Wimblehurst and my apprenticeship days. "There's a lot of this Science about nowadays," Mr. Ramboat reflected; "but I sometimes wonder a bit what good it is?"

I was young enough to be led into what he called "a bit of a discussion," which Marion truncated before our voices became unduly

raised. "I dare say," she said, "there's much to be said on both sides."

I remember Marion's mother asked me what church I attended, and that I replied evasively. After tea there was music and we sang hymns. I doubted if I had a voice when this was proposed, but that was held to be a trivial objection, and I found sitting close beside the sweep of hair from Marion's brow had many compensations. I discovered her mother sitting in the horsehair armchair and regarding us sentimentally. I went for a walk with Marion towards Putney Bridge, and then there was more singing and a supper of cold bacon and pie, after which Mr. Ramboat and I smoked. During that walk, I remember, she told me the import of her sketchings and copyings in the museum. A cousin of a friend of hers whom she spoke of as Smithie, had developed an original business in a sort of tea-gown garment which she called a Persian Robe, a plain sort of wrap with a gaily embroidered yoke, and Marion went there and worked in the busy times. In the times that weren't busy she designed novelties in yokes by an assiduous use of eyes and note-book in the museum, and went home and traced out the captured forms on the foundation material. "I don't get much," said Marion, "but it's interesting, and in the busy times we work all day. Of course the workgirls are dreadfully common, but we don't say much to them. And Smithie talks enough for ten."

I quite understood the workgirls were dreadfully common.

I don't remember that the Walham Green menage and the quality of these people, nor the light they threw on Marion, detracted in the slightest

degree at that time from the intent resolve that held me to make her mine. I didn't like them. But I took them as part of the affair. Indeed, on the whole, I think they threw her up by an effect of contrast; she was so obviously controlling them, so consciously superior to them.

More and more of my time did I give to this passion that possessed me. I began to think chiefly of ways of pleasing Marion, of acts of devotion, of treats, of sumptuous presents for her, of appeals she would understand. If at times she was manifestly unintelligent, in her ignorance became indisputable, I told myself her simple instincts were worth all the education and intelligence in the world. And to this day I think I wasn't really wrong about her. There was something extraordinarily fine about her, something simple and high, that flickered in and out of her ignorance and commonness and limitations like the tongue from the mouth of a snake....

One night I was privileged to meet her and bring her home from an entertainment at the Birkbeck Institute. We came back on the underground railway and we travelled first-class--that being the highest class available. We were alone in the carriage, and for the first time I ventured to put my arm about her.

"You mustn't," she said feebly.

"I love you," I whispered suddenly with my heart beating wildly, drew her to me, drew all her beauty to me and kissed her cool and unresisting

lips.

"Love me?" she said, struggling away from me, "Don't!" and then, as the train ran into a station, "You must tell no one.... I don't know.... You shouldn't have done that...."

Then two other people got in with us and terminated my wooing for a time.

When we found ourselves alone together, walking towards Battersea, she had decided to be offended. I parted from her unforgiven and terribly distressed.

When we met again, she told me I must never say "that" again.

I had dreamt that to kiss her lips was ultimate satisfaction. But it was indeed only the beginning of desires. I told her my one ambition was to marry her.

"But," she said, "you're not in a position--What's the good of talking like that?"

I stared at her. "I mean to," I said.

"You can't," she answered. "It will be years"

"But I love you," I insisted.

I stood not a yard from the sweet lips I had kissed; I stood within arm's length of the inanimate beauty I desired to quicken, and I saw opening between us a gulf of years, toil, waiting, disappointments and an immense uncertainty.

"I love you," I said. "Don't you love me?"

She looked me in the face with grave irresponsive eyes.

"I don't know," she said. "I LIKE you, of course.... One has to be sensibl..."

I can remember now my sense of frustration by her unresilient reply. I should have perceived then that for her my ardour had no quickening fire. But how was I to know? I had let myself come to want her, my imagination endowed her with infinite possibilities. I wanted her and wanted her, stupidly and instinctively....

"But," I said "Love--!"

"One has to be sensible," she replied. "I like going about with you. Can't we keep as we are?'"

VI

Well, you begin to understand my breakdown now, I have been copious enough with these apologia. My work got more and more spiritless, my behaviour degenerated, my punctuality declined; I was more and more outclassed in the steady grind by my fellow-students. Such supplies of moral energy as I still had at command shaped now in the direction of serving Marion rather than science.

I fell away dreadfully, more and more I shirked and skulked; the humped men from the north, the pale men with thin, clenched minds, the intent, hard-breathing students I found against me, fell at last from keen rivalry to moral contempt. Even a girl got above me upon one of the lists. Then indeed I made it a point of honour to show by my public disregard of every rule that I really did not even pretend to try.

So one day I found myself sitting in a mood of considerable astonishment in Kensington Gardens, reacting on a recent heated interview with the school Registrar in which I had displayed more spirit than sense. I was astonished chiefly at my stupendous falling away from all the militant ideals of unflinching study I had brought up from Wimblehurst. I had displayed myself, as the Registrar put it, "an unmitigated rotter." My failure to get marks in the written examination had only been equalled by the insufficiency of my practical work.

"I ask you," the Registrar had said, "what will become of you when your scholarship runs out?"

It certainly was an interesting question. What was going to become of me?

It was clear there would be nothing for me in the schools as I had once dared to hope; there seemed, indeed, scarcely anything in the world except an illpaid assistantship in some provincial organized Science School or grammar school. I knew that for that sort of work, without a degree or any qualification, one earned hardly a bare living and had little leisure to struggle up to anything better. If only I had even as little as fifty pounds I might hold out in London and take my B.Sc. degree, and quadruple my chances! My bitterness against my uncle returned at the thought. After all, he had some of my money still, or ought to have. Why shouldn't I act within my rights, threaten to 'take proceedings'? I meditated for a space on the idea, and then returned to the Science Library and wrote him a very considerable and occasionally pungent letter.

That letter to my uncle was the nadir of my failure. Its remarkable consequences, which ended my student days altogether, I will tell in the next chapter.

I say "my failure." Yet there are times when I can even doubt whether that period was a failure at all, when I become defensively critical of those exacting courses I did not follow, the encyclopaedic process of scientific exhaustion from which I was distracted. My mind was not

inactive, even if it fed on forbidden food. I did not learn what my professors and demonstrators had resolved I should learn, but I learnt many things. My mind learnt to swing wide and to swing by itself.

After all, those other fellows who took high places in the College examinations and were the professor's model boys haven't done so amazingly. Some are professors themselves, some technical experts; not one can show things done such as I, following my own interest, have achieved. For I have built boats that smack across the water like whiplashes; no one ever dreamt of such boats until I built them; and I have surprised three secrets that are more than technical discoveries, in the unexpected hiding-places of Nature. I have come nearer flying than any man has done. Could I have done as much if I had had a turn for obeying those rather mediocre professors at the college who proposed to train my mind? If I had been trained in research--that ridiculous contradiction in terms--should I have done more than produce additions to the existing store of little papers with blunted conclusions, of which there are already too many? I see no sense in mock modesty upon this matter. Even by the standards of worldly success I am, by the side of my fellow-students, no failure. I had my F.R.S. by the time I was thirty-seven, and if I am not very wealthy poverty is as far from me as the Spanish Inquisition. Suppose I had stamped down on the head of my wandering curiosity, locked my imagination in a box just when it wanted to grow out to things, worked by so-and-so's excellent method and so-and-so's indications, where should I be now?

I may be all wrong in this. It may be I should be a far more efficient man than I am if I had cut off all those divergent expenditures of energy, plugged up my curiosity about society with more currently acceptable rubbish or other, abandoned Ewart, evaded Marion instead of pursuing her, concentrated. But I don't believe it!

However, I certainly believed it completely and was filled with remorse on that afternoon when I sat dejectedly in Kensington Gardens and reviewed, in the light of the Registrar's pertinent questions my first two years in London.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

THE DAWN COMES, AND MY UNCLE APPEARS IN A NEW SILK HAT

I

Throughout my student days I had not seen my uncle. I refrained from going to him in spite of an occasional regret that in this way I estranged myself from my aunt Susan, and I maintained a sulky attitude of mind towards him. And I don't think that once in all that time I gave a thought to that mystic word of his that was to alter all the world for us. Yet I had not altogether forgotten it. It was with a touch of memory, dim transient perplexity if no more--why did this thing seem in some way personal?--that I read a new inscription upon the hoardings:

THE SECRET OF VIGOUR,
TONO-BUNGAY.

That was all. It was simple and yet in some way arresting. I found myself repeating the word after I had passed; it roused one's attention like the sound of distant guns. "Tono"--what's that? and deep, rich, unhurrying;--"BUN--gay!"

Then came my uncle's amazing telegram, his answer to my hostile note: "Come to me at once you are wanted three hundred a year certain tono-bungay."

"By Jove!" I cried, "of course!

"It's something--. A patent-medicine! I wonder what he wants with me."

In his Napoleonic way my uncle had omitted to give an address. His telegram had been handed in at Farringdon Road, and after complex meditations I replied to Ponderevo, Farringdon Road, trusting to the rarity of our surname to reach him.

"Where are you?" I asked.

His reply came promptly:

"192A, Raggett Street, E.C."

The next day I took an unsanctioned holiday after the morning's lecture. I discovered my uncle in a wonderfully new silk hat--oh, a splendid hat! with a rolling brim that went beyond the common fashion. It was decidedly too big for him--that was its only fault. It was stuck on the back of his head, and he was in a white waistcoat and shirt sleeves. He welcomed me with a forgetfulness of my bitter satire and my hostile abstinence that was almost divine. His glasses fell off at the sight of me. His round inexpressive eyes shone brightly. He held out his plump short hand.

"Here we are, George! What did I tell you? Needn't whisper it now, my boy. Shout it--LOUD! spread it about! Tell every one! Tono--TONO--, TONO-BUNGAY!"

Raggett Street, you must understand, was a thoroughfare over which some one had distributed large quantities of cabbage stumps and leaves. It opened out of the upper end of Farringdon Street, and 192A was a shop with the plate-glass front coloured chocolate, on which several of the same bills I had read upon the hoardings had been stuck. The floor was covered by street mud that had been brought in on dirty boots, and three energetic young men of the hooligan type, in neck-wraps and caps, were packing wooden cases with papered-up bottles, amidst much straw and confusion. The counter was littered with these same swathed bottles, of a pattern then novel but now amazingly familiar in the world, the blue paper with the coruscating figure of a genially nude giant, and the printed directions of how under practically all circumstances to take Tono-Bungay. Beyond the counter on one side opened a staircase down which I seem to remember a girl descending with a further consignment of bottles, and the rest of the background was a high partition, also chocolate, with "Temporary Laboratory" inscribed upon it in white letters, and over a door that pierced it, "Office." Here I rapped, inaudible amid much hammering, and then entered unanswered to find my uncle, dressed as I have described, one hand gripping a sheath of letters, and the other scratching his head as he dictated to one of three toiling typewriter girls. Behind him was a further partition and a door inscribed "ABSOLUTELY PRIVATE--NO ADMISSION," thereon. This

partition was of wood painted the universal chocolate, up to about eight feet from the ground, and then of glass. Through the glass I saw dimly a crowded suggestion of crucibles and glass retorts, and--by Jove!--yes!--the dear old Wimblehurst air-pump still! It gave me quite a little thrill--that air-pump! And beside it was the electrical machine--but something--some serious trouble--had happened to that. All these were evidently placed on a shelf just at the level to show.

"Come right into the sanctum," said my uncle, after he had finished something about "esteemed consideration," and whisked me through the door into a room that quite amazingly failed to verify the promise of that apparatus. It was papered with dingy wall-paper that had peeled in places; it contained a fireplace, an easy-chair with a cushion, a table on which stood two or three big bottles, a number of cigar-boxes on the mantel, whisky Tantalus and a row of soda syphons. He shut the door after me carefully.

"Well, here we are!" he said. "Going strong! Have a whisky, George? No!--Wise man! Neither will I! You see me at it! At it--hard!"

"Hard at what?"

"Read it," and he thrust into my hand a label--that label that has now become one of the most familiar objects of the chemist's shop, the greenish-blue rather old-fashioned bordering, the legend, the name in good black type, very clear, and the strong man all set about with

lightning flashes above the double column of skilful lies in red--the label of Tono-Bungay. "It's afloat," he said, as I stood puzzling at this. "It's afloat. I'm afloat!" And suddenly he burst out singing in that throaty tenor of his--

"I'm afloat, I'm afloat on the fierce flowing tide, The ocean's my home and my bark is my bride!

"Ripping song that is, George. Not so much a bark as a solution, but still--it does! Here we are at it! By-the-by! Half a mo'! I've thought of a thing." He whisked out, leaving me to examine this nuclear spot at leisure while his voice became dictatorial without. The den struck me as in its large grey dirty way quite unprecedented and extraordinary. The bottles were all labelled simply A, B, C, and so forth, and that dear old apparatus above, seen from this side, was even more patiently "on the shelf" than when it had been used to impress Wimblehurst. I saw nothing for it but to sit down in the chair and await my uncle's explanations. I remarked a frock-coat with satin lapels behind the door; there was a dignified umbrella in the corner and a clothes-brush and a hat-brush stood on a side-table. My uncle returned in five minutes looking at his watch--a gold watch--"Gettin' lunch-time, George," he said. "You'd better come and have lunch with me!"

"How's Aunt Susan?" I asked.

"Exuberant. Never saw her so larky. This has bucked her up something

wonderful--all this."

"All what?"

"Tono-Bungay."

"What is Tono-Bungay?" I asked.

My uncle hesitated. "Tell you after lunch, George," he said. "Come along!" and having locked up the sanctum after himself, led the way along a narrow dirty pavement, lined with barrows and swept at times by avalanche-like porters bearing burthens to vans, to Farringdon Street. He hailed a passing cab superbly, and the cabman was infinitely respectful. "Schafer's," he said, and off we went side by side--and with me more and more amazed at all these things--to Schafer's Hotel, the second of the two big places with huge lace curtain-covered windows, near the corner of Blackfriars Bridge.

I will confess I felt a magic charm in our relative proportions as the two colossal, pale-blue-and-red liveried porters of Schafers' held open the inner doors for us with a respectful salutation that in some manner they seemed to confine wholly to my uncle. Instead of being about four inches taller, I felt at least the same size as he, and very much slenderer. Still more respectful--waiters relieved him of the new hat and the dignified umbrella, and took his orders for our lunch. He gave them with a fine assurance.

He nodded to several of the waiters.

"They know me, George, already," he said. "Point me out. Live place! Eye for coming men!"

The detailed business of the lunch engaged our attention for a while, and then I leant across my plate. "And NOW?" said I.

"It's the secret of vigour. Didn't you read that label?"

"Yes, but--"

"It's selling like hot cakes."

"And what is it?" I pressed.

"Well," said my uncle, and then leant forward and spoke softly under cover of his hand, "It's nothing more or less than..."

(But here an unfortunate scruple intervenes. After all, Tono-Bungay is still a marketable commodity and in the hands of purchasers, who bought it from--among other vendors--me. No! I am afraid I cannot give it away--)

"You see," said my uncle in a slow confidential whisper, with eyes

very wide and a creased forehead, "it's nice because of the" (here he mentioned a flavouring matter and an aromatic spirit), "it's stimulating because of" (here he mentioned two very vivid tonics, one with a marked action on the kidney.) "And the" (here he mentioned two other ingredients) "makes it pretty intoxicating. Cocks their tails. Then there's" (but I touch on the essential secret.) "And there you are. I got it out of an old book of recipes--all except the" (here he mentioned the more virulent substance, the one that assails the kidneys), "which is my idea! Modern touch! There you are!"

He reverted to the direction of our lunch.

Presently he was leading the way to the lounge--sumptuous piece in red morocco and yellow glazed crockery, with incredible vistas of settees and sofas and things, and there I found myself grouped with him in two excessively upholstered chairs with an earthenware Moorish table between us bearing coffee and Benedictine, and I was tasting the delights of a tenpenny cigar. My uncle smoked a similar cigar in an habituated manner, and he looked energetic and knowing and luxurious and most unexpectedly a little bounder, round the end of it. It was just a trivial flaw upon our swagger, perhaps that we both were clear our cigars had to be "mild." He got obliquely across the spaces of his great armchair so as to incline confidentially to my ear, he curled up his little legs, and I, in my longer way, adopted a corresponding receptive obliquity. I felt that we should strike an unbiased observer as a couple of very deep and wily and developing and repulsive persons.

"I want to let you into this"--puff--"George," said my uncle round the end of his cigar. "For many reasons."

His voice grew lower and more cunning. He made explanations that to my inexperience did not completely explain. I retain an impression of a long credit and a share with a firm of wholesale chemists, of a credit and a prospective share with some pirate printers, of a third share for a leading magazine and newspaper proprietor.

"I played 'em off one against the other," said my uncle. I took his point in an instant. He had gone to each of them in turn and said the others had come in.

"I put up four hundred pounds," said my uncle, "myself and my all. And you know--"

He assumed a brisk confidence. "I hadn't five hundred pence. At least--"

For a moment he really was just a little embarrassed. "I DID" he said, "produce capital. You see, there was that trust affair of yours--I ought, I suppose--in strict legality--to have put that straight first. Zzzz....

"It was a bold thing to do," said my uncle, shifting the venue from the region of honour to the region of courage. And then with a

characteristic outburst of piety, "Thank God it's all come right!

"And now, I suppose, you ask where do YOU come in? Well, fact is I've always believed in you, George. You've got--it's a sort of dismal grit. Bark your shins, rouse you, and you'll go! You'd rush any position you had a mind to rush. I know a bit about character, George--trust me. You've got--" He clenched his hands and thrust them out suddenly, and at the same time said, with explosive violence, "Wooosh! Yes. You have! The way you put away that Latin at Wimblehurst; I've never forgotten it.

"Wo-oo-oo-osh! Your science and all that! Wo-oo-oo-osh! I know my limitations. There's things I can do, and" (he spoke in a whisper, as though this was the first hint of his life's secret) "there's things I can't. Well, I can create this business, but I can't make it go. I'm too voluminous--I'm a boiler-over, not a simmering stick-at-it. You keep on HOTTING UP AND HOTTING UP. Papin's digester. That's you, steady and long and piling up,--then, wo-oo-oo-oo-osh. Come in and stiffen these niggers. Teach them that wo-oo-oo-oo-osh. There you are! That's what I'm after. You! Nobody else believes you're more than a boy. Come right in with me and be a man. Eh, George? Think of the fun of it--a thing on the go--a Real Live Thing! Wooshing it up! Making it buzz and spin! Whoo-oo-oo."--He made alluring expanding circles in the air with his hand. "Eh?"

His proposal, sinking to confidential undertones again, took more definite shape. I was to give all my time and energy to developing and

organising. "You shan't write a single advertisement, or give a single assurance" he declared. "I can do all that." And the telegram was no flourish; I was to have three hundred a year. Three hundred a year. ("That's nothing," said my uncle, "the thing to freeze on to, when the time comes, is your tenth of the vendor's share.")

Three hundred a year certain, anyhow! It was an enormous income to me. For a moment I was altogether staggered. Could there be that much money in the whole concern? I looked about me at the sumptuous furniture of Schafer's Hotel. No doubt there were many such incomes.

My head was spinning with unwonted Benedictine and Burgundy.

"Let me go back and look at the game again," I said. "Let me see upstairs and round about."

I did.

"What do you think of it all?" my uncle asked at last.

"Well, for one thing," I said, "why don't you have those girls working in a decently ventilated room? Apart from any other consideration, they'd work twice as briskly. And they ought to cover the corks before labelling round the bottle."

"Why?" said my uncle.

"Because--they sometimes make a mucker of the cork job, and then the label's wasted."

"Come and change it, George," said my uncle, with sudden fervour "Come here and make a machine of it. You can. Make it all slick, and then make it woosh. I know you can. Oh! I know you can."

II

I seem to remember very quick changes of mind after that lunch. The muzzy exaltation of the unaccustomed stimulants gave way very rapidly to a model of pellucid and impartial clairvoyance which is one of my habitual mental states. It is intermittent; it leaves me for weeks together, I know, but back it comes at last like justice on circuit, and calls up all my impression, all my illusions, all my willful and passionate proceedings. We came downstairs again into that inner room which pretended to be a scientific laboratory through its high glass lights, and indeed was a lurking place. My uncle pressed a cigarette on me, and I took it and stood before the empty fireplace while he propped his umbrella in the corner, deposited the new silk hat that was a little too big for him on the table, blew copiously and produced a second cigar.

It came into my head that he had shrunken very much in size since the Wimblehurst days, that the cannon ball he had swallowed was rather more

evident and shameless than it had been, his skin less fresh and the nose between his glasses, which still didn't quite fit, much redder. And just then he seemed much laxer in his muscles and not quite as alertly quick in his movements. But he evidently wasn't aware of the degenerative nature of his changes as he sat there, looking suddenly quite little under my eyes.

"Well, George!" he said, quite happily unconscious of my silent criticism, "what do you think of it all?"

"Well," I said, "in the first place--it's a damned swindle!"

"Tut! tut!" said my uncle. "It's as straight as--It's fair trading!"

"So much the worse for trading," I said.

"It's the sort of thing everybody does. After all, there's no harm in the stuff--and it may do good. It might do a lot of good--giving people confidence, f'rinstance, against an epidemic. See? Why not? don't see where your swindle comes in."

"H'm," I said. "It's a thing you either see or don't see."

"I'd like to know what sort of trading isn't a swindle in its way. Everybody who does a large advertised trade is selling something common on the strength of saying it's uncommon. Look at Chickson--they made him

a baronet. Look at Lord Radmore, who did it on lying about the alkali in soap! Rippin' ads those were of his too!"

"You don't mean to say you think doing this stuff up in bottles and swearing it's the quintessence of strength and making poor devils buy it at that, is straight?"

"Why not, George? How do we know it mayn't be the quintessence to them so far as they're concerned?"

"Oh!" I said, and shrugged my shoulders.

"There's Faith. You put Faith in 'em.... I grant our labels are a bit emphatic. Christian Science, really. No good setting people against the medicine. Tell me a solitary trade nowadays that hasn't to be--emphatic. It's the modern way! Everybody understands it--everybody allows for it."

"But the world would be no worse and rather better, if all this stuff of yours was run down a conduit into the Thames."

"Don't see that, George, at all. 'Mong other things, all our people would be out of work. Unemployed! I grant you Tono-Bungay MAY be--not QUITE so good a find for the world as Peruvian bark, but the point is, George--it MAKES TRADE! And the world lives on trade. Commerce! A romantic exchange of commodities and property. Romance. 'Magination. See? You must look at these things in a broad light. Look at the

wood--and forget the trees! And hang it, George! we got to do these things! There's no way unless you do. What do YOU mean to do--anyhow?"

"There's ways of living," I said, "Without either fraud or lying."

"You're a bit stiff, George. There's no fraud in this affair, I'll bet my hat. But what do you propose to do? Go as chemist to some one who IS running a business, and draw a salary without a share like I offer you. Much sense in that! It comes out of the swindle as you call it--just the same."

"Some businesses are straight and quiet, anyhow; supply a sound article that is really needed, don't shout advertisements."

"No, George. There you're behind the times. The last of that sort was sold up 'bout five years ago."

"Well, there's scientific research."

"And who pays for that? Who put up that big City and Guilds place at South Kensington? Enterprising business men! They fancy they'll have a bit of science going on, they want a handy Expert ever and again, and there you are! And what do you get for research when you've done it? Just a bare living and no outlook. They just keep you to make discoveries, and if they fancy they'll use 'em they do."

"One can teach."

"How much a year, George? How much a year? I suppose you must respect Carlyle! Well, you take Carlyle's test--solvency. (Lord! what a book that French Revolution of his is!) See what the world pays teachers and discoverers and what it pays business men! That shows the ones it really wants. There's a justice in these big things, George, over and above the apparent injustice. I tell you it wants trade. It's Trade that makes the world go round! Argosies! Venice! Empire!"

My uncle suddenly rose to his feet.

"You think it over, George. You think it over! And come up on Sunday to the new place--we got rooms in Gower Street now--and see your aunt. She's often asked for you, George often and often, and thrown it up at me about that bit of property--though I've always said and always will, that twenty-five shillings in the pound is what I'll pay you and interest up to the nail. And think it over. It isn't me I ask you to help. It's yourself. It's your aunt Susan. It's the whole concern. It's the commerce of your country. And we want you badly. I tell you straight, I know my limitations. You could take this place, you could make it go! I can see you at it--looking rather sour. Woosh is the word, George."

And he smiled endearingly.

"I got to dictate a letter," he said, ending the smile, and vanished into the outer room.

III

I didn't succumb without a struggle to my uncle's allurements. Indeed, I held out for a week while I contemplated life and my prospects. It was a crowded and muddled contemplation. It invaded even my sleep.

My interview with the Registrar, my talk with my uncle, my abrupt discovery of the hopeless futility of my passion for Marion, had combined to bring me to sense of crisis. What was I going to do with life?

I remember certain phases of my indecisions very well.

I remember going home from our talk. I went down Farringdon Street to the Embankment because I thought to go home by Holborn and Oxford Street would be too crowded for thinking.... That piece of Embankment from Blackfriars to Westminster still reminds me of that momentous hesitation.

You know, from first to last, I saw the business with my eyes open, I saw its ethical and moral values quite clearly. Never for a moment do I remember myself faltering from my persuasion that the sale of Tono-Bungay was a thoroughly dishonest proceeding. The stuff was, I

perceived, a mischievous trash, slightly stimulating, aromatic and attractive, likely to become a bad habit and train people in the habitual use of stronger tonics and insidiously dangerous to people with defective kidneys. It would cost about sevenpence the large bottle to make, including bottling, and we were to sell it at half a crown plus the cost of the patent medicine stamp. A thing that I will confess deterred me from the outset far more than the sense of dishonesty in this affair, was the supreme silliness of the whole concern. I still clung to the idea that the world of men was or should be a sane and just organisation, and the idea that I should set myself gravely, just at the fine springtime of my life, to developing a monstrous bottling and packing warehouse, bottling rubbish for the consumption of foolish, credulous and depressed people, had in it a touch of insanity. My early beliefs still clung to me. I felt assured that somewhere there must be a hitch in the fine prospect of ease and wealth under such conditions; that somewhere, a little overgrown, perhaps, but still traceable, lay a neglected, wasted path of use and honour for me.

My inclination to refuse the whole thing increased rather than diminished at first as I went along the Embankment. In my uncle's presence there had been a sort of glamour that had prevented an outright refusal. It was a revival of affection for him I felt in his presence, I think, in part, and in part an instinctive feeling that I must consider him as my host. But much more was it a curious persuasion he had the knack of inspiring--a persuasion not so much of his integrity and capacity as of the reciprocal and yielding foolishness of the world. One

felt that he was silly and wild, but in some way silly and wild after the fashion of the universe. After all, one must live somehow. I astonished him and myself by temporising.

"No," said I, "I'll think it over!"

And as I went along the embankment the first effect was all against my uncle. He shrank--for a little while he continued to shrink--in perspective until he was only a very small shabby little man in a dirty back street, sending off a few hundred bottles of rubbish to foolish buyers. The great buildings on the right of us, the Inns and the School Board place--as it was then--Somerset House, the big hotels, the great bridges, Westminster's outlines ahead, had an effect of grey largeness that reduced him to the proportions of a busy black beetle in a crack in the floor.

And then my eye caught the advertisements on the south side of "Sorber's Food," of "Cracknell's Ferric Wine," very bright and prosperous signs, illuminated at night, and I realised how astonishingly they looked at home there, how evidently part they were in the whole thing.

I saw a man come charging out of Palace Yard--the policeman touched his helmet to him--with a hat and a bearing astonishingly like my uncle's. After all,--didn't Cracknell himself sit in the House?

Tono-Bungay shouted at me from a hoarding near Adelphi Terrace; I saw

it afar off near Carfax Street; it cried out again upon me in Kensington High Street, and burst into a perfect clamour; six or seven times I saw it as I drew near my diggings. It certainly had an air of being something more than a dream.

Yes, I thought it over--thoroughly enough.... Trade rules the world. Wealth rather than trade! The thing was true, and true too was my uncle's proposition that the quickest way to get wealth is to sell the cheapest thing possible in the dearest bottle. He was frightfully right after all. Pecunnia non olet,--a Roman emperor said that. Perhaps my great heroes in Plutarch were no more than such men, fine now only because they are distant; perhaps after all this Socialism to which I had been drawn was only a foolish dream, only the more foolish because all its promises were conditionally true. Morris and these others played with it wittingly; it gave a zest, a touch of substance, to their aesthetic pleasures. Never would there be good faith enough to bring such things about. They knew it; every one, except a few young fools, knew it. As I crossed the corner of St. James's Park wrapped in thought, I dodged back just in time to escape a prancing pair of greys. A stout, common-looking woman, very magnificently dressed, regarded me from the carriage with a scornful eye. "No doubt," thought I, "a pill-vendor's wife...."

Running through all my thoughts, surging out like a refrain, was my uncle's master-stroke, his admirable touch of praise: "Make it all slick--and then make it go Woosh. I know you can! Oh! I KNOW you can!"

IV

Ewart as a moral influence was unsatisfactory. I had made up my mind to put the whole thing before him, partly to see how he took it, and partly to hear how it sounded when it was said. I asked him to come and eat with me in an Italian place near Panton Street where one could get a curious, interesting, glutting sort of dinner for eighteen-pence. He came with a disconcerting black-eye that he wouldn't explain. "Not so much a black-eye," he said, "as the aftermath of a purple patch.... What's your difficulty?"

"I'll tell you with the salad," I said.

But as a matter of fact I didn't tell him. I threw out that I was doubtful whether I ought to go into trade, or stick to teaching in view of my deepening socialist proclivities; and he, warming with the unaccustomed generosity of a sixteen-penny Chianti, ran on from that without any further inquiry as to my trouble.

His utterances roved wide and loose.

"The reality of life, my dear Ponderevo," I remember him saying very impressively and punctuating with the nut-crackers as he spoke, "is Chromatic Conflict ... and Form. Get hold of that and let all these other questions go. The Socialist will tell you one sort of colour and

shape is right, the Individualist another. What does it all amount to? What DOES it all amount to? NOTHING! I have no advice to give anyone,--except to avoid regrets. Be yourself, seek after such beautiful things as your own sense determines to be beautiful. And don't mind the headache in the morning.... For what, after all, is a morning, Ponderevo? It isn't like the upper part of a day!"

He paused impressively.

"What Rot!" I cried, after a confused attempt to apprehend him.

"Isn't it! And it's my bedrock wisdom in the matter! Take it or leave it, my dear George; take it or leave it."... He put down the nut-crackers out of my reach and lugged a greasy-looking note-book from his pocket. "I'm going to steal this mustard pot," he said.

I made noises of remonstrance.

"Only as a matter of design. I've got to do an old beast's tomb.

"Wholesale grocer. I'll put it on his corners,--four mustard pots. I dare say he'd be glad of a mustard plaster now to cool him, poor devil, where he is. But anyhow,--here goes!"

V

It came to me in the small hours that the real moral touchstone for this great doubting of mind was Marion. I lay composing statements of my problem and imagined myself delivering them to her--and she, goddess-like and beautiful; giving her fine, simply-worded judgment.

"You see, it's just to give one's self over to the Capitalistic System," I imagined myself saying in good Socialist jargon; "it's surrendering all one's beliefs. We MAY succeed, we MAY grow rich, but where would the satisfaction be?"

Then she would say, "No! That wouldn't be right."

"But the alternative is to wait!"

Then suddenly she would become a goddess. She would turn upon me frankly and nobly, with shining eyes, with arms held out. "No," she would say, "we love one another. Nothing ignoble shall ever touch us. We love one another. Why wait to tell each other that, dear? What does it matter that we are poor and may keep poor?"

But indeed the conversation didn't go at all in that direction. At the sight of her my nocturnal eloquence became preposterous and all the moral values altered altogether. I had waited for her outside the door of the Parsian-robe establishment in Kensington High Street and walked home with her thence. I remember how she emerged into the warm evening light and that she wore a brown straw hat that made her, for once not

only beautiful but pretty.

"I like that hat," I said by way of opening; and she smiled her rare delightful smile at me.

"I love you," I said in an undertone, as we jostled closer on the pavement.

She shook her head forbiddingly, but she still smiled. Then--"Be sensible!"

The High Street pavement is too narrow and crowded for conversation and we were some way westward before we spoke again.

"Look here," I said; "I want you, Marion. Don't you understand? I want you."

"Now!" she cried warningly.

I do not know if the reader will understand how a passionate lover, an immense admiration and desire, can be shot with a gleam of positive hatred. Such a gleam there was in me at the serene self-complacency of that "NOW!" It vanished almost before I felt it. I found no warning in it of the antagonisms latent between us.

"Marion," I said, "this isn't a trifling matter to me. I love you; I

would die to get you.... Don't you care?"

"But what is the good?"

"You don't care," I cried. "You don't care a rap!"

"You know I care," she answered. "If I didn't--If I didn't like you very much, should I let you come and meet me--go about with you?"

"Well then," I said, "promise to marry me!"

"If I do, what difference will it make?"

We were separated by two men carrying a ladder who drove between us unawares.

"Marion," I asked when we got together again, "I tell you I want you to marry me."

"We can't."

"Why not?"

"We can't marry--in the street."

"We could take our chance!"

"I wish you wouldn't go on talking like this. What is the good?"

She suddenly gave way to gloom. "It's no good marrying" she said. "One's only miserable. I've seen other girls. When one's alone one has a little pocket-money anyhow, one can go about a little. But think of being married and no money, and perhaps children--you can't be sure...."

She poured out this concentrated philosophy of her class and type in jerky uncompleted sentences, with knitted brows, with discontented eyes towards the westward glow--forgetful, it seemed, for a moment even of me.

"Look here, Marion," I said abruptly, "what would you marry on?"

"What IS the good?" she began.

"Would you marry on three hundred a year?"

She looked at me for a moment. "That's six pounds a week," she said. "One could manage on that, easily. Smithie's brother--No, he only gets two hundred and fifty. He married a typewriting girl."

"Will you marry me if I get three hundred a year?"

She looked at me again, with a curious gleam of hope.

"IF!" she said.

I held out my hand and looked her in the eyes. "It's a bargain," I said.

She hesitated and touched my hand for an instant. "It's silly," she remarked as she did so. "It means really we're--" She paused.

"Yes?" said I.

"Engaged. You'll have to wait years. What good can it do you?"

"Not so many years." I answered.

For a moment she brooded.

Then she glanced at me with a smile, half-sweet, half-wistful, that has stuck in my memory for ever.

"I like you!" she said. "I shall like to be engaged to you."

And, faint on the threshold of hearing, I caught her ventured "dear!" It's odd that in writing this down my memory passed over all that intervened and I feel it all again, and once again I'm Marion's boyish lover taking great joy in such rare and little things.

VI

At last I went to the address my uncle had given me in Gower Street, and found my aunt Susan waiting tea for him.

Directly I came into the room I appreciated the change in outlook that the achievement of Tono-Bungay had made almost as vividly as when I saw my uncle's new hat. The furniture of the room struck upon my eye as almost stately. The chairs and sofa were covered with chintz which gave it a dim, remote flavour of Bladesover; the mantel, the cornice, the gas pendant were larger and finer than the sort of thing I had grown accustomed to in London. And I was shown in by a real housemaid with real tails to her cap, and great quantities of reddish hair. There was my aunt too looking bright and pretty, in a blue-patterned tea-wrap with bows that seemed to me the quintessence of fashion. She was sitting in a chair by the open window with quite a pile of yellow-labelled books on the occasional table beside her. Before the large, paper-decorated fireplace stood a three-tiered cake-stand displaying assorted cakes, and a tray with all the tea equipage except the teapot, was on the large centre-table. The carpet was thick, and a spice of adventure was given it by a number of dyed sheep-skin mats.

"Hello!" said my aunt as I appeared. "It's George!"

"Shall I serve the tea now, Mem?" said the real housemaid, surveying our greeting coldly.

"Not till Mr. Ponderevo comes, Meggie," said my aunt, and grimaced with extraordinary swiftness and virulence as the housemaid turned her back.

"Meggie she calls herself," said my aunt as the door closed, and left me to infer a certain want of sympathy.

"You're looking very jolly, aunt," said I.

"What do you think of all this old Business he's got?" asked my aunt.

"Seems a promising thing," I said.

"I suppose there is a business somewhere?"

"Haven't you seen it?"

"'Fraid I'd say something AT it George, if I did. So he won't let me. It came on quite suddenly. Brooding he was and writing letters and sizzling something awful--like a chestnut going to pop. Then he came home one day saying Tono-Bungay till I thought he was clean off his onion, and singing--what was it?"

"'I'm afloat, I'm afloat,'" I guessed.

"The very thing. You've heard him. And saying our fortunes were made.

Took me out to the Ho'burm Restaurant, George,--dinner, and we had champagne, stuff that blows up the back of your nose and makes you go SO, and he said at last he'd got things worthy of me--and we moved here next day. It's a swell house, George. Three pounds a week for the rooms. And he says the Business'll stand it."

She looked at me doubtfully.

"Either do that or smash," I said profoundly.

We discussed the question for a moment mutely with our eyes. My aunt slapped the pile of books from Mudie's.

"I've been having such a Go of reading, George. You never did!"

"What do you think of the business?" I asked.

"Well, they've let him have money," she said, and thought and raised her eyebrows.

"It's been a time," she went on. "The flapping about! Me sitting doing nothing and him on the go like a rocket. He's done wonders. But he wants you, George--he wants you. Sometimes he's full of hope--talks of when we're going to have a carriage and be in society--makes it seem so natural and topsy-turvy, I hardly know whether my old heels aren't up here listening to him, and my old head on the floor.... Then he gets

depressed. Says he wants restraint. Says he can make a splash but can't keep on. Says if you don't come in everything will smash--But you are coming in?"

She paused and looked at me.

"Well--"

"You don't say you won't come in!"

"But look here, aunt," I said, "do you understand quite?... It's a quack medicine. It's trash."

"There's no law against selling quack medicine that I know of," said my aunt. She thought for a minute and became unusually grave. "It's our only chance, George," she said. "If it doesn't go..."

There came the slamming of a door, and a loud bellowing from the next apartment through the folding doors. "Here-er Shee Rulk lies Poo Tom Bo--oling."

"Silly old Concertina! Hark at him, George!" She raised her voice. "Don't sing that, you old Walrus, you! Sing 'I'm afloat!'"

One leaf of the folding doors opened and my uncle appeared.

"Hullo, George! Come along at last? Gossome tea-cake, Susan?"

"Thought it over George?" he said abruptly.

"Yes," said I.

"Coming in?"

I paused for a last moment and nodded yes.

"Ah!" he cried. "Why couldn't you say that a week ago?"

"I've had false ideas about the world," I said. "Oh! they don't matter now! Yes, I'll come, I'll take my chance with you, I won't hesitate again."

And I didn't. I stuck to that resolution for seven long years.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

HOW WE MADE TONO-BUNGAY HUM

I

So I made my peace with my uncle, and we set out upon this bright enterprise of selling slightly injurious rubbish at one-and-three-halfpence and two-and-nine a bottle, including the Government stamp. We made Tono-Bungay hum! It brought us wealth, influence, respect, the confidence of endless people. All that my uncle promised me proved truth and understatement; Tono-Bungay carried me to freedoms and powers that no life of scientific research, no passionate service of humanity could ever have given me....

It was my uncle's genius that did it. No doubt he needed me,--I was, I will admit, his indispensable right hand; but his was the brain to conceive. He wrote every advertisement; some of them even he sketched. You must remember that his were the days before the Time took to enterprise and the vociferous hawking of that antiquated Encyclopedia. That alluring, button-holing, let-me-just-tell-you-quite-soberly-something-you-ought-to-know style of newspaper advertisement, with every now and then a convulsive jump of some attractive phrase into capitals, was then almost a novelty. "Many people who are MODERATELY well think they are QUITE well," was one of his early efforts. The jerks in capitals were, "DO NOT NEED DRUGS OR

MEDICINE," and "SIMPLY A PROPER REGIMEN TO GET YOU IN TONE." One was warned against the chemist or druggist who pushed "much-advertised nostrums" on one's attention. That trash did more harm than good. The thing needed was regimen--and Tono-Bungay!

Very early, too, was that bright little quarter column, at least it was usually a quarter column in the evening papers: "HILARITY--Tono-Bungay. Like Mountain Air in the Veins." The penetrating trio of questions: "Are you bored with your Business? Are you bored with your Dinner. Are you bored with your Wife?"--that, too, was in our Gower Street days. Both these we had in our first campaign when we worked London south central, and west; and then, too, we had our first poster--the HEALTH, BEAUTY, AND STRENGTH one. That was his design; I happen still to have got by me the first sketch he made for it. I have reproduced it here with one or two others to enable the reader to understand the mental quality that initiated these familiar ornaments of London.

(The second one is about eighteen months later, the germ of the well-known "Fog" poster; the third was designed for an influenza epidemic, but never issued.)

These things were only incidental in my department.

I had to polish them up for the artist and arrange the business of printing and distribution, and after my uncle had had a violent and needless quarrel with the advertising manager of the Daily Regulator

about the amount of display given to one of his happy thoughts, I also took up the negotiations of advertisements for the press.

We discussed and worked out distribution together first in the drawing-room floor in Gower Street with my aunt sometimes helping very shrewdly, and then, with a steadily improving type of cigar and older and older whisky, in his smuggery at their first house, the one in Beckenham. Often we worked far into the night sometimes until dawn.

We really worked infernally hard, and, I recall, we worked with a very decided enthusiasm, not simply on my uncle's part but mine, It was a game, an absurd but absurdly interesting game, and the points were scored in cases of bottles. People think a happy notion is enough to make a man rich, that fortunes can be made without toil. It's a dream, as every millionaire (except one or two lucky gamblers) can testify; I doubt if J.D. Rockefeller in the early days of Standard Oil, worked harder than we did. We worked far into the night--and we also worked all day. We made a rule to be always dropping in at the factory unannounced to keep things right--for at first we could afford no properly responsible underlings--and we traveled London, pretending to be our own representatives and making all sorts of special arrangements.

But none of this was my special work, and as soon as we could get other men in, I dropped the traveling, though my uncle found it particularly interesting and kept it up for years. "Does me good, George, to see the chaps behind their counters like I was once," he explained. My special

and distinctive duty was to give Tono-Bungay substance and an outward and visible bottle, to translate my uncle's great imaginings into the creation of case after case of labelled bottles of nonsense, and the punctual discharge of them by railway, road and steamer towards their ultimate goal in the Great Stomach of the People. By all modern standards the business was, as my uncle would say, "absolutely bona fide." We sold our stuff and got the money, and spent the money honestly in lies and clamour to sell more stuff. Section by section we spread it over the whole of the British Isles; first working the middle-class London suburbs, then the outer suburbs, then the home counties, then going (with new bills and a more pious style of "ad") into Wales, a great field always for a new patent-medicine, and then into Lancashire.

My uncle had in his inner office a big map of England, and as we took up fresh sections of the local press and our consignments invaded new areas, flags for advertisements and pink underlines for orders showed our progress.

"The romance of modern commerce, George!" my uncle would say, rubbing his hands together and drawing in air through his teeth. "The romance of modern commerce, eh? Conquest. Province by province. Like sogers."

We subjugated England and Wales; we rolled over the Cheviots with a special adaptation containing eleven per cent. of absolute alcohol; "Tono-Bungay: Thistle Brand." We also had the Fog poster adapted to a kilted Briton in a misty Highland scene.

Under the shadow of our great leading line we were presently taking subsidiary specialties into action; "Tono-Bungay Hair Stimulant" was our first supplement. Then came "Concentrated Tono-Bungay" for the eyes. That didn't go, but we had a considerable success with the Hair Stimulant. We broached the subject, I remember, in a little catechism beginning: "Why does the hair fall out? Because the follicles are fagged. What are the follicles?..." So it went on to the climax that the Hair Stimulant contained all "The essential principles of that most reviving tonic, Tono-Bungay, together with an emollient and nutritious oil derived from crude Neat's Foot Oil by a process of refinement, separation and deodorization.... It will be manifest to any one of scientific attainments that in Neat's Foot Oil derived from the hoofs and horns of beasts, we must necessarily have a natural skin and hair lubricant."

And we also did admirable things with our next subsidiaries, "Tono-Bungay Lozenges," and "Tono-Bungay Chocolate." These we urged upon the public for their extraordinary nutritive and recuperative value in cases of fatigue and strain. We gave them posters and illustrated advertisements showing climbers hanging from marvelously vertical cliffs, cyclist champions upon the track, mounted messengers engaged in Aix-to-Ghent rides, soldiers lying out in action under a hot sun. "You can GO for twenty-four hours," we declared, "on Tono-Bungay Chocolate." We didn't say whether you could return on the same commodity. We also showed a dreadfully barristerish barrister, wig, side-whiskers, teeth,

a horribly life-like portrait of all existing barristers, talking at a table, and beneath, this legend: "A Four Hours' Speech on Tono-Bungay Lozenges, and as fresh as when he began." Then brought in regiments of school-teachers, revivalist ministers, politicians and the like. I really do believe there was an element of "kick" in the strychnine in these lozenges, especially in those made according to our earlier formula. For we altered all our formulae--invariably weakening them enormously as sales got ahead.

In a little while--so it seems to me now--we were employing travelers and opening up Great Britain at the rate of a hundred square miles a day. All the organisation throughout was sketched in a crude, entangled, half-inspired fashion by my uncle, and all of it had to be worked out into a practicable scheme of quantities and expenditure by me. We had a lot of trouble finding our travelers; in the end at least half of them were Irish-Americans, a wonderful breed for selling medicine. We had still more trouble over our factory manager, because of the secrets of the inner room, and in the end we got a very capable woman, Mrs. Hampton Diggs, who had formerly managed a large millinery workroom, whom we could trust to keep everything in good working order without finding out anything that wasn't put exactly under her loyal and energetic nose. She conceived a high opinion of Tono-Bungay and took it in all forms and large quantities so long as I knew her. It didn't seem to do her any harm. And she kept the girls going quite wonderfully.

My uncle's last addition to the Tono-Bungay group was the Tono-Bungay

Mouthwash. The reader has probably read a hundred times that inspiring inquiry of his, "You are Young Yet, but are you Sure Nothing has Aged your Gums?"

And after that we took over the agency for three or four good American lines that worked in with our own, and could be handled with it; Texan Embrocation, and "23--to clear the system" were the chief....

I set down these bare facts. To me they are all linked with the figure of my uncle. In some of the old seventeenth and early eighteenth century prayerbooks at Bladesover there used to be illustrations with long scrolls coming out of the mouths of the wood-cut figures. I wish I could write all this last chapter on a scroll coming out of the head of my uncle, show it all the time as unfolding and pouring out from a short, fattening, small-legged man with stiff cropped hair, disobedient glasses on a perky little nose, and a round stare behind them. I wish I could show you him breathing hard and a little through his nose as his pen scrabbled out some absurd inspiration for a poster or a picture page, and make you hear his voice, charged with solemn import like the voice of a squeaky prophet, saying, "George! list'n! I got an ideer. I got a notion! George!"

I should put myself into the same picture. Best setting for us, I think, would be the Beckenham snuggery, because there we worked hardest. It would be the lamplit room of the early nineties, and the clock upon the mantel would indicate midnight or later. We would be sitting on either

side of the fire, I with a pipe, my uncle with a cigar or cigarette. There would be glasses standing inside the brass fender. Our expressions would be very grave. My uncle used to sit right back in his armchair; his toes always turned in when he was sitting down and his legs had a way of looking curved, as though they hadn't bones or joints but were stuffed with sawdust.

"George, whad'yer think of T.B. for sea-sickness?" he would say.

"No good that I can imagine."

"Oom! No harm TRYING, George. We can but try."

I would suck my pipe. "Hard to get at. Unless we sold our stuff specially at the docks. Might do a special at Cook's office, or in the Continental Bradshaw."

"It 'ud give 'em confidence, George."

He would Zzzz, with his glasses reflecting the red of the glowing coals.

"No good hiding our light under a Bushel," he would remark.

I never really determined whether my uncle regarded Tono-Bungay as a fraud, or whether he didn't come to believe in it in a kind of way by the mere reiteration of his own assertions. I think that his average

attitude was one of kindly, almost parental, toleration. I remember saying on one occasion, "But you don't suppose this stuff ever did a human being the slightest good all?" and how his face assumed a look of protest, as of one reproving harshness and dogmatism.

"You've a hard nature, George," he said. "You're too ready to run things down. How can one TELL? How can one venture to TELL!..."

I suppose any creative and developing game would have interested me in those years. At any rate, I know I put as much zeal into this Tono-Bungay as any young lieutenant could have done who suddenly found himself in command of a ship. It was extraordinarily interesting to me to figure out the advantage accruing from this shortening of the process or that, and to weigh it against the capital cost of the alteration. I made a sort of machine for sticking on the labels, that I patented; to this day there is a little trickle of royalties to me from that. I also contrived to have our mixture made concentrated, got the bottles, which all came sliding down a guarded slant-way, nearly filled with distilled water at one tap, and dripped our magic ingredients in at the next. This was an immense economy of space for the inner sanctum. For the bottling we needed special taps, and these, too, I invented and patented.

We had a sort of endless band of bottles sliding along an inclined glass trough made slippery with running water. At one end a girl held them up to the light, put aside any that were imperfect and placed the others in the trough; the filling was automatic; at the other end a girl slipped

in the cork and drove it home with a little mallet. Each tank, the little one for the vivifying ingredients and the big one for distilled water, had a level indicator, and inside I had a float arrangement that stopped the slide whenever either had sunk too low. Another girl stood ready with my machine to label the corked bottles and hand them to the three packers, who slipped them into their outer papers and put them, with a pad of corrugated paper between each pair, into a little groove from which they could be made to slide neatly into position in our standard packing-case. It sounds wild, I know, but I believe I was the first man in the city of London to pack patent medicines through the side of the packing-case, to discover there was a better way in than by the lid. Our cases packed themselves, practically; had only to be put into position on a little wheeled tray and when full pulled to the lift that dropped them to the men downstairs, who padded up the free space and nailed on top and side. Our girls, moreover, packed with corrugated paper and matchbook-wood box partitions when everybody else was using expensive young men to pack through the top of the box with straw, many breakages and much waste and confusion.

II

As I look back at them now, those energetic years seem all compacted to a year or so; from the days of our first hazardous beginning in Farringdon Street with barely a thousand pounds' worth of stuff or credit all told--and that got by something perilously like snatching--to the days when my uncle went to the public on behalf of himself and me

(one-tenth share) and our silent partners, the drug wholesalers and the printing people and the owner of that group of magazines and newspapers, to ask with honest confidence for L150,000. Those silent partners were remarkably sorry, I know, that they had not taken larger shares and given us longer credit when the subscriptions came pouring in. My uncle had a clear half to play with (including the one-tenth understood to be mine).

L150,000--think of it!--for the goodwill in a string of lies and a trade in bottles of mitigated water! Do you realise the madness of the world that sanctions such a thing? Perhaps you don't. At times use and wont certainly blinded me. If it had not been for Ewart, I don't think I should have had an inkling of the wonderfulness of this development of my fortunes; I should have grown accustomed to it, fallen in with all its delusions as completely as my uncle presently did. He was immensely proud of the flotation. "They've never been given such value," he said, "for a dozen years." But Ewart, with his gesticulating hairy hands and bony wrists, his single-handed chorus to all this as it played itself over again in my memory, and he kept my fundamental absurdity illuminated for me during all this astonishing time.

"It's just on all fours with the rest of things," he remarked; "only more so. You needn't think you're anything out of the way."

I remember one disquisition very distinctly. It was just after Ewart had been to Paris on a mysterious expedition to "rough in" some work for

a rising American sculptor. This young man had a commission for an allegorical figure of Truth (draped, of course) for his State Capitol, and he needed help. Ewart had returned with his hair cut en brosse and with his costume completely translated into French. He wore, I remember, a bicycling suit of purplish-brown, baggy beyond ageing--the only creditable thing about it was that it had evidently not been made for him--a voluminous black tie, a decadent soft felt hat and several French expletives of a sinister description. "Silly clothes, aren't they?" he said at the sight of my startled eye. "I don't know why I got'm. They seemed all right over there."

He had come down to our Raggett Street place to discuss a benevolent project of mine for a poster by him, and he scattered remarkable discourse over the heads (I hope it was over the heads) of our bottlers.

"What I like about it all, Ponderevo, is its poetry.... That's where we get the pull of the animals. No animal would ever run a factory like this. Think!... One remembers the Beaver, of course. He might very possibly bottle things, but would he stick a label round 'em and sell 'em? The Beaver is a dreamy fool, I'll admit, him and his dams, but after all there's a sort of protection about 'em, a kind of muddy practicality! They prevent things getting at him. And it's not your poetry only. It's the poetry of the customer too. Poet answering to poet--soul to soul. Health, Strength and Beauty--in a bottle--the magic philtre! Like a fairy tale....

"Think of the people to whom your bottles of footle go! (I'm calling it footle, Ponderevo, out of praise," he said in parenthesis.)

"Think of the little clerks and jaded women and overworked people. People overstrained with wanting to do, people overstrained with wanting to be.... People, in fact, overstrained.... The real trouble of life, Ponderevo, isn't that we exist--that's a vulgar error; the real trouble is that we DON'T really exist and we want to. That's what this--in the highest sense--just stands for! The hunger to be--for once--really alive--to the finger tips!...

"Nobody wants to do and be the things people are--nobody. YOU don't want to preside over this--this bottling; I don't want to wear these beastly clothes and be led about by you; nobody wants to keep on sticking labels on silly bottles at so many farthings a gross. That isn't existing! That's--sus--substratum. None of us want to be what we are, or to do what we do. Except as a sort of basis. What do we want? You know. I know. Nobody confesses. What we all want to be is something perpetually young and beautiful--young Joves--young Joves, Ponderevo"--his voice became loud, harsh and declamatory--"pursuing coy half-willing nymphs through everlasting forests."...

There was a just-perceptible listening hang in the work about us.

"Come downstairs," I interrupted, "we can talk better there."

"I can talk better here," he answered.

He was just going on, but fortunately the implacable face of Mrs. Hampton Diggs appeared down the aisle of bottling machines.

"All right," he said, "I'll come."

In the little sanctum below, my uncle was taking a digestive pause after his lunch and by no means alert. His presence sent Ewart back to the theme of modern commerce, over the excellent cigar my uncle gave him. He behaved with the elaborate deference due to a business magnate from an unknown man.

"What I was pointing out to your nephew, sir," said Ewart, putting both elbows on the table, "was the poetry of commerce. He doesn't, you know, seem to see it at all."

My uncle nodded brightly. "Whad I tell 'im," he said round his cigar.

"We are artists. You and I, sir, can talk, if you will permit me, as one artist to another. It's advertisement has--done it. Advertisement has revolutionised trade and industry; it is going to revolutionise the world. The old merchant used to tote about commodities; the new one creates values. Doesn't need to tote. He takes something that isn't worth anything--or something that isn't particularly worth anything--and he makes it worth something. He takes mustard that is just like anybody

else's mustard, and he goes about saying, shouting, singing, chalking on walls, writing inside people's books, putting it everywhere, 'Smith's Mustard is the Best.' And behold it is the best!"

"True," said my uncle, chubbily and with a dreamy sense of mysticism; "true!"

"It's just like an artist; he takes a lump of white marble on the verge of a lime-kiln, he chips it about, he makes--he makes a monument to himself--and others--a monument the world will not willingly let die. Talking of mustard, sir, I was at Clapham Junction the other day, and all the banks are overgrown with horse radish that's got loose from a garden somewhere. You know what horseradish is--grows like wildfire--spreads--spreads. I stood at the end of the platform looking at the stuff and thinking about it. 'Like fame,' I thought, 'rank and wild where it isn't wanted. Why don't the really good things in life grow like horseradish?' I thought. My mind went off in a peculiar way it does from that to the idea that mustard costs a penny a tin--I bought some the other day for a ham I had. It came into my head that it would be ripping good business to use horseradish to adulterate mustard. I had a sort of idea that I could plunge into business on that, get rich and come back to my own proper monumental art again. And then I said, 'But why adulterate? I don't like the idea of adulteration.'"

"Shabby," said my uncle, nodding his head. "Bound to get found out!"

"And totally unnecessary, too! Why not do up a mixture--three-quarters pounded horseradish and a quarter mustard--give it a fancy name--and sell it at twice the mustard price. See? I very nearly started the business straight away, only something happened. My train came along."

"Jolly good ideer," said my uncle. He looked at me. "That really is an ideer, George," he said.

"Take shavin's, again! You know that poem of Longfellow's, sir, that sounds exactly like the first declension. What is it?--'Marr's a maker, men say!'"

My uncle nodded and gurgled some quotation that died away.

"Jolly good poem, George," he said in an aside to me.

"Well, it's about a carpenter and a poetic Victorian child, you know, and some shavin's. The child made no end out of the shavin's. So might you. Powder 'em. They might be anything. Soak 'em in jipper,--Xylo-tobacco! Powder'em and get a little tar and turpentinous smell in,--wood-packing for hot baths--a Certain Cure for the scourge of Influenza! There's all these patent grain foods,--what Americans call cereals. I believe I'm right, sir, in saying they're sawdust."

"No!" said my uncle, removing his cigar; "as far as I can find out it's really grain,--spoilt grain.... I've been going into that."

"Well, there you are!" said Ewart. "Say it's spoilt grain. It carried out my case just as well. Your modern commerce is no more buying and selling than sculpture. It's mercy--it's salvation. It's rescue work! It takes all sorts of fallen commodities by the hand and raises them. Cana isn't in it. You turn water--into Tono-Bungay."

"Tono-Bungay's all right," said my uncle, suddenly grave. "We aren't talking of Tono-Bungay."

"Your nephew, sir, is hard; he wants everything to go to a sort of predestinated end; he's a Calvinist of Commerce. Offer him a dustbin full of stuff; he calls it refuse--passes by on the other side. Now YOU, sir you'd make cinders respect themselves."

My uncle regarded him dubiously for a moment. But there was a touch of appreciation in his eye.

"Might make 'em into a sort of sanitary brick," he reflected over his cigar end.

"Or a friable biscuit. Why NOT? You might advertise: 'Why are Birds so Bright? Because they digest their food perfectly! Why do they digest their food so perfectly? Because they have a gizzard! Why hasn't man a gizzard? Because he can buy Ponderevo's Asphalt Triturating, Friable Biscuit--Which is Better.'"

He delivered the last words in a shout, with his hairy hand flourished in the air....

"Damn clever fellow," said my uncle, after he had one. "I know a man when I see one. He'd do. But drunk, I should say. But that only makes some chap brighter. If he WANTS to do that poster, he can. Zzzz. That ideer of his about the horseradish. There's something in that, George. I'm going to think over that...."

I may say at once that my poster project came to nothing in the end, though Ewart devoted an interesting week to the matter. He let his unfortunate disposition to irony run away with him. He produced a picture of two beavers with a subtle likeness, he said, to myself and my uncle--the likeness to my uncle certainly wasn't half bad--and they were bottling rows and rows of Tono-Bungay, with the legend "Modern commerce." It certainly wouldn't have sold a case, though he urged it on me one cheerful evening on the ground that it would "arouse curiosity." In addition he produced a quite shocking study of my uncle, excessively and needlessly nude, but, so far as I was able to judge, an admirable likeness, engaged in feats of strength of a Gargantuan type before an audience of deboshed and shattered ladies. The legend, "Health, Beauty, Strength," below, gave a needed point to his parody. This he hung up in the studio over the oil shop, with a flap of brown paper; by way of a curtain over it to accentuate its libellous offence.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

MARION I

As I look back on those days in which we built up the great Tono-Bungay property out of human hope and credit for bottles and rent and printing, I see my life as it were arranged in two parallel columns of unequal width, a wider, more diffused, eventful and various one which continually broadens out, the business side of my life, and a narrow, darker and darkling one shot ever and again with a gleam of happiness, my home-life with Marion. For, of course, I married Marion.

I didn't, as a matter of fact, marry her until a year after Tono-Bungay was thoroughly afloat, and then only after conflicts and discussions of a quite strenuous sort. By that time I was twenty-four. It seems the next thing to childhood now. We were both in certain directions unusually ignorant and simple; we were temperamentally antagonistic, and we hadn't--I don't think we were capable of--an idea in common. She was young and extraordinarily conventional--she seemed never to have an idea of her own but always the idea of her class--and I was young and sceptical, enterprising and passionate; the two links that held us together were the intense appeal her physical beauty had for me, and her appreciation of her importance in my thoughts. There can be no doubt of my passion for her. In her I had discovered woman desired. The nights I have lain awake on account of her, writhing, biting my wrists in a fever

of longing! ...

I have told how I got myself a silk hat and black coat to please her on Sunday--to the derision of some of my fellow-students who charged to meet me, and how we became engaged. But that was only the beginning of our difference. To her that meant the beginning of a not unpleasant little secrecy, an occasional use of verbal endearments, perhaps even kisses. It was something to go on indefinitely, interfering in no way with her gossiping spells of work at Smithie's. To me it was a pledge to come together into the utmost intimacy of soul and body so soon as we could contrive it....

I don't know if it will strike the reader that I am setting out to discuss the queer, unwise love relationship and my bungle of a marriage with excessive solemnity. But to me it seems to reach out to vastly wider issues than our little personal affair. I've thought over my life. In these last few years I've tried to get at least a little wisdom out of it. And in particular I've thought over this part of my life. I'm enormously impressed by the ignorant, unguided way in which we two entangled ourselves with each other. It seems to me the queerest thing in all this network of misunderstandings and misstatements and faulty and ramshackle conventions which makes up our social order as the individual meets it, that we should have come together so accidentally and so blindly. Because we were no more than samples of the common fate. Love is not only the cardinal fact in the individual life, but the most important concern of the community; after all, the way in which the

young people of this generation pair off determines the fate of the nation; all the other affairs of the State are subsidiary to that. And we leave it to flushed and blundering youth to stumble on its own significance, with nothing to guide in but shocked looks and sentimental twaddle and base whisperings and cant-smeared examples.

I have tried to indicate something of my own sexual development in the preceding chapter. Nobody was ever frank and decent with me in this relation; nobody, no book, ever came and said to me thus and thus is the world made, and so and so is necessary. Everything came obscurely, indefinitely, perplexingly; and all I knew of law or convention in the matter had the form of threatenings and prohibitions. Except through the furtive, shameful talk of my coevals at Goudhurst and Wimblehurst, I was not even warned against quite horrible dangers. My ideas were made partly of instinct, partly of a romantic imagination, partly woven out of a medley of scraps of suggestion that came to me haphazard. I had read widely and confusedly "Vathek," Shelley, Tom Paine, Plutarch, Carlyle, Haeckel, William Morris, the Bible, the Freethinker, the Clarion, "The Woman Who Did,"--I mention the ingredients that come first to mind. All sorts of ideas were jumbled up in me and never a lucid explanation. But it was evident to me that the world regarded Shelley, for example, as a very heroic as well as beautiful person; and that to defy convention and succumb magnificently to passion was the proper thing to do to gain the respect and affection of all decent people.

And the make-up of Marion's mind in the matter was an equally irrational

affair. Her training had been one, not simply of silences, but suppressions. An enormous force of suggestion had so shaped her that the intense natural fastidiousness of girlhood had developed into an absolute perversion of instinct. For all that is cardinal in this essential business of life she had one inseparable epithet--"horrid." Without any such training she would have been a shy lover, but now she was an impossible one. For the rest she had derived, I suppose, partly from the sort of fiction she got from the Public Library, and partly from the workroom talk at Smithie's. So far as the former origin went, she had an idea of love as a state of worship and service on the part of the man and of condescension on the part of the woman. There was nothing "horrid" about it in any fiction she had read. The man gave presents, did services, sought to be in every way delightful. The woman "went out" with him, smiled at him, was kissed by him in decorous secrecy, and if he chanced to offend, denied her countenance and presence. Usually she did something "for his good" to him, made him go to church, made him give up smoking or gambling, smartened him up. Quite at the end of the story came a marriage, and after that the interest ceased.

That was the tenor of Marion's fiction; but I think the work-table conversation at Smithie's did something to modify that. At Smithie's it was recognised, I think, that a "fellow" was a possession to be desired; that it was better to be engaged to a fellow than not; that fellows had to be kept--they might be mislaid, they might even be stolen. There was a case of stealing at Smithie's, and many tears.

Smithie I met before we were married, and afterwards she became a frequent visitor to our house at Ealing. She was a thin, bright-eyed, hawk-nosed girl of thirtyodd, with prominent teeth, a high-pitched, eager voice and a disposition to be urgently smart in her dress. Her hats were startling and various, but invariably disconcerting, and she talked in a rapid, nervous flow that was hilarious rather than witty, and broken by little screams of "Oh, my dear!" and "you never did!" She was the first woman I ever met who used scent. Poor old Smithie! What a harmless, kindly soul she really was, and how heartily I detested her! Out of the profits on the Persian robes she supported a sister's family of three children, she "helped" a worthless brother, and overflowed in help even to her workgirls, but that didn't weigh with me in those youthfully-narrow times. It was one of the intense minor irritations of my married life that Smithie's whirlwind chatter seemed to me to have far more influence with Marion than anything I had to say. Before all things I coveted her grip upon Marion's inaccessible mind.

In the workroom at Smithie's, I gathered, they always spoke of me demurely as "A Certain Person." I was rumoured to be dreadfully "clever," and there were doubts--not altogether without justification--of the sweetness of my temper.

II

Well, these general explanations will enable the reader to understand the distressful times we two had together when presently I began to feel

on a footing with Marion and to fumble conversationally for the mind and the wonderful passion I felt, obstinately and stupidity, must be in her. I think she thought me the maddest of sane men; "clever," in fact, which at Smithie's was, I suppose, the next thing to insanity, a word intimating incomprehensible and incalculable motives.... She could be shocked at anything, she misunderstood everything, and her weapon was a sulky silence that knitted her brows, spoilt her mouth and robbed her face of beauty. "Well, if we can't agree, I don't see why you should go on talking," she used to say. That would always enrage me beyond measure. Or, "I'm afraid I'm not clever enough to understand that."

Silly little people! I see it all now, but then I was no older than she and I couldn't see anything but that Marion, for some inexplicable reason, wouldn't come alive.

We would contrive semi-surreptitious walks on Sunday, and part speechless with the anger of indefinable offences. Poor Marion! The things I tried to put before her, my fermenting ideas about theology, about Socialism, about aesthetics--the very words appalled her, gave her the faint chill of approaching impropriety, the terror of a very present intellectual impossibility. Then by an enormous effort I would suppress myself for a time and continue a talk that made her happy, about Smithie's brother, about the new girl who had come to the workroom, about the house we would presently live in. But there we differed a little. I wanted to be accessible to St. Paul's or Cannon Street Station, and she had set her mind quite resolutely upon Eating.... It

wasn't by any means quarreling all the time, you understand. She liked me to play the lover "nicely"; she liked the effect of going about--we had lunches, we went to Earl's Court, to Kew, to theatres and concerts, but not often to concerts, because, though Marion "liked" music, she didn't like "too much of it," to picture shows--and there was a nonsensical sort of babytalk I picked up--I forget where now--that became a mighty peacemaker.

Her worst offence for me was an occasional excursion into the Smithie style of dressing, debased West Kensington. For she had no sense at all of her own beauty. She had no comprehension whatever of beauty of the body, and she could slash her beautiful lines to rags with hat-brims and trimmings. Thank Heaven! a natural refinement, a natural timidity, and her extremely slender purse kept her from the real Smithie efflorescence! Poor, simple, beautiful, kindly limited Marion! Now that I am forty-five, I can look back at her with all my old admiration and none of my old bitterness with a new affection and not a scrap of passion, and take her part against the equally stupid, drivingly-energetic, sensuous, intellectual sprawl I used to be. I was a young beast for her to have married--a hound beast. With her it was my business to understand and control--and I exacted fellowship, passion....

We became engaged, as I have told; we broke it off and joined again. We went through a succession of such phases. We had no sort of idea what was wrong with us. Presently we were formally engaged. I had a wonderful

interview with her father, in which he was stupendously grave and H--less, wanted to know about my origins and was tolerant (exasperatingly tolerant) because my mother was a servant, and afterwards her mother took to kissing me, and I bought a ring. But the speechless aunt, I gathered, didn't approve--having doubts of my religiosity. Whenever we were estranged we could keep apart for days; and to begin with, every such separation was a relief. And then I would want her; a restless longing would come upon me. I would think of the flow of her arms, of the soft, gracious bend of her body. I would lie awake or dream of a transfigured Marion of light and fire. It was indeed Dame Nature driving me on to womankind in her stupid, inexorable way; but I thought it was the need of Marion that troubled me. So I always went back to Marion at last and made it up and more or less conceded or ignored whatever thing had parted us, and more and more I urged her to marry me....

In the long run that became a fixed idea. It entangled my will and my pride; I told myself I was not going to be beaten. I hardened to the business. I think, as a matter of fact, my real passion for Marion had waned enormously long before we were married, that she had lived it down by sheer irresponsiveness. When I felt sure of my three hundred a year she stipulated for delay, twelve months' delay, "to see how things would turn out." There were times when she seemed simply an antagonist holding out irritatingly against something I had to settle. Moreover, I began to be greatly distracted by the interest and excitement of Tono-Bungay's success, by the change and movement in things, the going to and fro.

I would forget her for days together, and then desire her with an irritating intensity at last, one Saturday afternoon, after a brooding morning, I determined almost savagely that these delays must end.

I went off to the little home at Walham Green, and made Marion come with me to Putney Common. Marion wasn't at home when I got there and I had to fret for a time and talk to her father, who was just back from his office, he explained, and enjoying himself in his own way in the greenhouse.

"I'm going to ask your daughter to marry me!" I said. "I think we've been waiting long enough."

"I don't approve of long engagements either," said her father. "But Marion will have her own way about it, anyhow. Seen this new powdered fertiliser?"

I went in to talk to Mrs. Ramboat. "She'll want time to get her things," said Mrs. Ramboat....

I and Marion sat down together on a little seat under some trees at the top of Putney Hill, and I came to my point abruptly.

"Look here, Marion," I said, "are you going to marry me or are you not?"

She smiled at me. "Well," she said, "we're engaged--aren't we?"

"That can't go on for ever. Will you marry me next week?"

She looked me in the face. "We can't," she said.

"You promised to marry me when I had three hundred a year."

She was silent for a space. "Can't we go on for a time as we are? We COULD marry on three hundred a year. But it means a very little house. There's Smithie's brother. They manage on two hundred and fifty, but that's very little. She says they have a semi-detached house almost on the road, and hardly a bit of garden. And the wall to next-door is so thin they hear everything. When her baby cries--they rap. And people stand against the railings and talk.... Can't we wait? You're doing so well."

An extraordinary bitterness possessed me at this invasion of the stupendous beautiful business of love by sordid necessity. I answered her with immense restraint.

"If," I said, "we could have a double-fronted, detached house--at Ealing, say--with a square patch of lawn in front and a garden behind--and--and a tiled bathroom."

"That would be sixty pounds a year at least."

"Which means five hundred a year.... Yes, well, you see, I told my uncle I wanted that, and I've got it."

"Got what?"

"Five hundred pounds a year."

"Five hundred pounds!"

I burst into laughter that had more than a taste of bitterness.

"Yes," I said, "really! and NOW what do you think?"

"Yes," she said, a little flushed; "but be sensible! Do you really mean you've got a Rise, all at once, of two hundred a year?"

"To marry on--yes."

She scrutinised me a moment. "You've done this as a surprise!" she said, and laughed at my laughter. She had become radiant, and that made me radiant, too.

"Yes," I said, "yes," and laughed no longer bitterly.

She clasped her hands and looked me in the eyes.

She was so pleased that I forgot absolutely my disgust of a moment before. I forgot that she had raised her price two hundred pounds a year and that I had bought her at that.

"Come!" I said, standing up; "let's go towards the sunset, dear, and talk about it all. Do you know--this is a most beautiful world, an amazingly beautiful world, and when the sunset falls upon you it makes you into shining gold. No, not gold--into golden glass.... Into something better that either glass or gold."...

And for all that evening I wooed her and kept her glad. She made me repeat my assurances over again and still doubted a little.

We furnished that double-fronted house from attic--it ran to an attic--to cellar, and created a garden.

"Do you know Pampas Grass?" said Marion. "I love Pampas Grass... if there is room."

"You shall have Pampas Grass," I declared. And there were moments as we went in imagination about that house together, when my whole being cried out to take her in my arms--now. But I refrained. On that aspect of life I touched very lightly in that talk, very lightly because I had had my lessons. She promised to marry me within two months' time. Shyly, reluctantly, she named a day, and next afternoon, in heat and wrath, we "broke it off" again for the last time. We split upon procedure.

I refused flatly to have a normal wedding with wedding cake, in white favours, carriages and the rest of it. It dawned upon me suddenly in conversation with her and her mother, that this was implied. I blurted out my objection forthwith, and this time it wasn't any ordinary difference of opinion; it was a "row." I don't remember a quarter of the things we flung out in that dispute. I remember her mother reiterating in tones of gentle remonstrance: "But, George dear, you must have a cake--to send home." I think we all reiterated things. I seem to remember a refrain of my own: "A marriage is too sacred a thing, too private a thing, for this display. Her father came in and stood behind me against the wall, and her aunt appeared beside the sideboard and stood with arms, looking from speaker to speaker, a sternly gratified prophetess. It didn't occur to me then! How painful it was to Marion for these people to witness my rebellion.

"But, George," said her father, "what sort of marriage do you want? You don't want to go to one of those there registry offices?"

"That's exactly what I'd like to do. Marriage is too private a thing--"

"I shouldn't feel married," said Mrs. Ramboat.

"Look here, Marion," I said; "we are going to be married at a registry office. I don't believe in all these fripperies and superstitions, and I won't submit to them. I've agreed to all sorts of things to please you."

"What's he agreed to?" said her father--unheeded.

"I can't marry at a registry office," said Marion, sallow-white.

"Very well," I said. "I'll marry nowhere else."

"I can't marry at a registry office."

"Very well," I said, standing up, white and tense and it amazed me, but I was also exultant; "then we won't marry at all."

She leant forward over the table, staring blankly. But presently her half-averted face began to haunt me as she had sat at the table, and her arm and the long droop of her shoulder.

III

The next day I did an unexampled thing. I sent a telegram to my uncle, "Bad temper not coming to business," and set off for Highgate and Ewart. He was actually at work--on a bust of Millie, and seemed very glad for any interruption.

"Ewart, you old Fool," I said, "knock off and come for a day's gossip. I'm rotten. There's a sympathetic sort of lunacy about you. Let's go to Staines and paddle up to Windsor."

"Girl?" said Ewart, putting down a chisel.

"Yes."

That was all I told him of my affair.

"I've got no money," he remarked, to clear up ambiguity in my invitation.

We got a jar of shandy-gaff, some food, and, on Ewart's suggestion, two Japanese sunshades in Staines; we demanded extra cushions at the boathouse and we spent an enormously soothing day in discourse and meditation, our boat moored in a shady place this side of Windsor.
I seem to remember Ewart with a cushion forward, only his heels and sunshade and some black ends of hair showing, a voice and no more, against the shining, smoothly-streaming mirror of the trees and bushes.

"It's not worth it," was the burthen of the voice. "You'd better get yourself a Millie, Ponderevo, and then you wouldn't feel so upset."

"No," I said decidedly, "that's not my way."

A thread of smoke ascended from Ewart for a while, like smoke from an altar.

"Everything's a muddle, and you think it isn't. Nobody knows where

we are--because, as a matter of fact we aren't anywhere. Are women property--or are they fellow-creatures? Or a sort of proprietary goddesses? They're so obviously fellow-creatures. You believe in the goddess?"

"No," I said, "that's not my idea."

"What is your idea?"

"Well"

"H'm," said Ewart, in my pause.

"My idea," I said, "is to meet one person who will belong to me--to whom I shall belong--body and soul. No half-gods! Wait till she comes. If she comes at all.... We must come to each other young and pure."

"There's no such thing as a pure person or an impure person.... Mixed to begin with."

This was so manifestly true that it silenced me altogether.

"And if you belong to her and she to you, Ponderevo--which end's the head?"

I made no answer except an impatient "oh!"

For a time we smoked in silence....

"Did I tell you, Ponderevo, of a wonderful discovery I've made?" Ewart began presently.

"No," I said, "what is it?"

"There's no Mrs. Grundy."

"No?"

"No! Practically not. I've just thought all that business out. She's merely an instrument, Ponderevo. She's borne the blame. Grundy's a man. Grundy unmasked. Rather lean and out of sorts. Early middle age. With bunchy black whiskers and a worried eye. Been good so far, and it's fretting him! Moods! There's Grundy in a state of sexual panic, for example,--'For God's sake cover it up! They get together--they get together! It's too exciting! The most dreadful things are happening!' Rushing about--long arms going like a windmill. 'They must be kept apart!' Starts out for an absolute obliteration of everything absolute separations. One side of the road for men, and the other for women, and a hoarding--without posters between them. Every boy and girl to be sewed up in a sack and sealed, just the head and hands and feet out until twenty-one. Music abolished, calico garments for the lower animals! Sparrows to be suppressed--ab-so-lutely."

I laughed abruptly.

"Well, that's Mr. Grundy in one mood--and it puts Mrs. Grundy--She's a much-maligned person, Ponderevo--a rake at heart--and it puts her in a most painful state of fluster--most painful! She's an amenable creature. When Grundy tells her things are shocking, she's shocked--pink and breathless. She goes about trying to conceal her profound sense of guilt behind a haughty expression....

"Grundy, meanwhile, is in a state of complete whirlabout. Long lean knuckly hands pointing and gesticulating! 'They're still thinking of things--thinking of things! It's dreadful. They get it out of books. I can't imagine where they get it! I must watch! There're people over there whispering! Nobody ought to whisper!--There's something suggestive in the mere act! Then, pictures! In the museum--things too dreadful for words. Why can't we have pure art--with the anatomy all wrong and pure and nice--and pure fiction pure poetry, instead of all this stuff with allusions--allusions?... Excuse me! There's something up behind that locked door! The keyhole! In the interests of public morality--yes, Sir, as a pure good man--I insist--I'LL look--it won't hurt me--I insist on looking my duty--M'm'm--the keyhole!'"

He kicked his legs about extravagantly, and I laughed again.

"That's Grundy in one mood, Ponderevo. It isn't Mrs. Grundy. That's one

of the lies we tell about women. They're too simple. Simple! Woman ARE simple! They take on just what men tell 'em."

Ewart meditated for a space. "Just exactly as it's put to them," he said, and resumed the moods of Mr. Grundy.

"Then you get old Grundy in another mood. Ever caught him nosing, Ponderevo? Mad with the idea of mysterious, unknown, wicked, delicious things. Things that aren't respectable. Wow! Things he mustn't do!... Any one who knows about these things, knows there's just as much mystery and deliciousness about Grundy's forbidden things as there is about eating ham. Jolly nice if it's a bright morning and you're well and hungry and having breakfast in the open air. Jolly unattractive if you're off colour. But Grundy's covered it all up and hidden it and put mucky shades and covers over it until he's forgotten it. Begins to fester round it in his mind. Has dreadful struggles--with himself about impure thoughts.... Then you set Grundy with hot ears,--curious in undertones. Grundy on the loose, Grundy in a hoarse whisper and with furtive eyes and convulsive movements--making things indecent. Evolving--in dense vapours--indecency!

"Grundy sins. Oh, yes, he's a hypocrite. Sneaks round a corner and sins ugly. It's Grundy and his dark corners that make vice, vice! We artists--we have no vices.

"And then he's frantic with repentance. And wants to be cruel to fallen

women and decent harmless sculptors of the simple nude--like me--and so back to his panic again."

"Mrs. Grundy, I suppose, doesn't know he sins," I remarked.

"No? I'm not so sure.... But, bless her heart she's a woman.... She's a woman. Then again you get Grundy with a large greasy smile--like an accident to a butter tub--all over his face, being Liberal Minded--Grundy in his Anti-Puritan moments, 'trying not to see Harm in it'--Grundy the friend of innocent pleasure. He makes you sick with the Harm he's trying not to see in it...

"And that's why everything's wrong, Ponderevo. Grundy, damn him! stands in the light, and we young people can't see. His moods affect us. We catch his gusts of panic, his disease of nosing, his greasiness. We don't know what we may think, what we may say, he does his silly utmost to prevent our reading and seeing the one thing, the one sort of discussion we find--quite naturally and properly--supremely interesting. So we don't adolescence; we blunder up to sex. Dare--dare to look--and he may dirt you for ever! The girls are terror-stricken to silence by his significant whiskers, by the bleary something in his eyes."

Suddenly Ewart, with an almost Jack-in-the-box effect, sat up.

"He's about us everywhere, Ponderevo," he said, very solemnly. "Sometimes--sometimes I think he is--in our blood. In MINE."

He regarded me for my opinion very earnestly, with his pipe in the corner of his mouth.

"You're the remotest cousin he ever had," I said.

I reflected. "Look here, Ewart," I asked, "how would you have things different?"

He wrinkled up his queer face, regarded the wait and made his pipe gurgle for a space, thinking deeply.

"There are complications, I admit. We've grown up under the terror of Grundy and that innocent but docile and--yes--formidable lady, his wife. I don't know how far the complications aren't a disease, a sort of bleaching under the Grundy shadow.... It is possible there are things I have still to learn about women.... Man has eaten of the Tree of Knowledge. His innocence is gone. You can't have your cake and eat it. We're in for knowledge; let's have it plain and straight. I should begin, I think, by abolishing the ideas of decency and indecency...."

"Grundy would have fits!" I injected.

"Grundy, Ponderevo, would have cold douches--publicly--if the sight was not too painful--three times a day.... But I don't think, mind you, that I should let the sexes run about together. No. The fact behind the

sexes--is sex. It's no good humbugging. It trails about--even in the best mixed company. Tugs at your ankle. The men get showing off and quarrelling--and the women. Or they're bored. I suppose the ancestral males have competed for the ancestral females ever since they were both some sort of grubby little reptile. You aren't going to alter that in a thousand years or so.... Never should you have a mixed company, never--except with only one man or only one woman. How would that be?...

"Or duets only?...

"How to manage it? Some rule of etiquette, perhaps."... He became portentously grave.

Then his long hand went out in weird gestures.

"I seem to see--I seem to see--a sort of City of Women, Ponderevo. Yes.... A walled enclosure--good stone-mason's work--a city wall, high as the walls of Rome, going about a garden. Dozens of square miles of garden--trees--fountains--arbours--lakes. Lawns on which the women play, avenues in which they gossip, boats.... Women like that sort of thing. Any woman who's been to a good eventful girls' school lives on the memory of it for the rest of her life. It's one of the pathetic things about women--the superiority of school and college--to anything they get afterwards. And this city-garden of women will have beautiful places for music, places for beautiful dresses, places for beautiful work. Everything a woman can want. Nurseries. Kindergartens. Schools. And no

man--except to do rough work, perhaps--ever comes in. The men live in a world where they can hunt and engineer, invent and mine and manufacture, sail ships, drink deep and practice the arts, and fight--"

"Yes," I said, "but--"

He stilled me with a gesture.

"I'm coming to that. The homes of the women, Ponderevo, will be set in the wall of their city; each woman will have her own particular house and home, furnished after her own heart in her own manner--with a little balcony on the outside wall. Built into the wall--and a little balcony. And there she will go and look out, when the mood takes her, and all round the city there will be a broad road and seats and great shady trees. And men will stroll up and down there when they feel the need of feminine company; when, for instance, they want to talk about their souls or their characters or any of the things that only women will stand.... The women will lean over and look at the men and smile and talk to them as they fancy. And each woman will have this; she will have a little silken ladder she can let down if she chooses--if she wants to talk closer..."

"The men would still be competing."

"There perhaps--yes. But they'd have to abide by the women's decisions."

I raised one or two difficulties, and for a while we played with this idea.

"Ewart," I said, "this is like Doll's Island.

"Suppose," I reflected, "an unsuccessful man laid siege to a balcony and wouldn't let his rival come near it?"

"Move him on," said Ewart, "by a special regulation. As one does organ-grinders. No difficulty about that. And you could forbid it--make it against the etiquette. No life is decent without etiquette.... And people obey etiquette sooner than laws..."

"H'm," I said, and was struck by an idea that is remote in the world of a young man. "How about children?" I asked; "in the City? Girls are all very well. But boys, for example--grow up."

"Ah!" said Ewart. "Yes. I forgot. They mustn't grow up inside.... They'd turn out the boys when they were seven. The father must come with a little pony and a little gun and manly wear, and take the boy away. Then one could come afterwards to one's mother's balcony.... It must be fine to have a mother. The father and the son..."

"This is all very pretty in its way," I said at last, "but it's a dream. Let's come back to reality. What I want to know is, what are you going to do in Brompton, let us say, or Walham Green NOW?"

"Oh! damn it!" he remarked, "Walham Green! What a chap you are, Ponderevo!" and he made an abrupt end to his discourse. He wouldn't even reply to my tentatives for a time.

"While I was talking just now," he remarked presently,

"I had a quite different idea."

"What?"

"For a masterpiece. A series. Like the busts of the Caesars. Only not heads, you know. We don't see the people who do things to us nowadays..."

"How will you do it, then?"

"Hands--a series of hands! The hands of the Twentieth Century. I'll do it. Some day some one will discover it--go there--see what I have done, and what is meant by it."

"See it where?"

"On the tombs. Why not? The Unknown Master of the Highgate Slope! All the little, soft feminine hands, the nervous ugly males, the hands of the flops, and the hands of the snatchers! And Grundy's loose, lean,

knuckly affair--Grundy the terror!--the little wrinkles and the thumb! Only it ought to hold all the others together--in a slightly disturbing squeeze....Like Rodin's great Hand--you know the thing!"

IV

I forget how many days intervened between that last breaking off of our engagement and Marion's surrender. But I recall now the sharpness of my emotion, the concentrated spirit of tears and laughter in my throat as I read the words of her unexpected letter--"I have thought over everything, and I was selfish...." I rushed off to Walham Green that evening to give back all she had given me, to beat her altogether at giving. She was extraordinarily gentle and generous that time, I remember, and when at last I left her, she kissed me very sweetly.

So we were married.

We were married with all the customary incongruity. I gave--perhaps after a while not altogether ungrudgingly--and what I gave, Marion took, with a manifest satisfaction. After all, I was being sensible. So that we had three livery carriages to the church (one of the pairs of horses matched) and coachmen--with improvised flavour and very shabby silk hats--bearing white favours on their whips, and my uncle intervened with splendour and insisted upon having a wedding breakfast sent in from a caterer's in Hammersmith. The table had a great display of chrysanthemums, and there was orange blossom in the significant place

and a wonderful cake. We also circulated upwards of a score of wedges of that accompanied by silver-printed cards in which Marion's name of Ramboat was stricken out by an arrow in favour of Ponderevo. We had a little rally of Marion's relations, and several friends and friends' friends from Smithie's appeared in the church and drifted vestry-ward. I produced my aunt and uncle a select group of two. The effect in that shabby little house was one of exhilarating congestion. The side-board, in which lived the table-cloth and the "Apartments" card, was used for a display of the presents, eked out by the unused balance of the silver-printed cards.

Marion wore the white raiment of a bride, white silk and satin, that did not suit her, that made her seem large and strange to me; she obtruded bows and unfamiliar contours. She went through all this strange ritual of an English wedding with a sacramental gravity that I was altogether too young and egotistical to comprehend. It was all extraordinarily central and important to her; it was no more than an offensive, complicated, and disconcerting intrusion of a world I was already beginning to criticise very bitterly, to me. What was all this fuss for? The mere indecent advertisement that I had been passionately in love with Marion! I think, however, that Marion was only very remotely aware of my smouldering exasperation at having in the end behaved "nicely." I had played--up to the extent of dressing my part; I had an admirably cut frock--coat, a new silk hat, trousers as light as I could endure them--lighter, in fact--a white waistcoat, night tie, light gloves. Marion, seeing me despondent had the unusual enterprise to whisper to

me that I looked lovely; I knew too well I didn't look myself. I looked like a special coloured supplement to Men's Wear, or The Tailor and Cutter, Full Dress For Ceremonial Occasions. I had even the disconcerting sensations of an unfamiliar collar. I felt lost--in a strange body, and when I glanced down myself for reassurance, the straight white abdomen, the alien legs confirmed that impression.

My uncle was my best man, and looked like a banker--a little banker--in flower. He wore a white rose in his buttonhole. He wasn't, I think, particularly talkative. At least I recall very little from him.

"George" he said once or twice, "this is a great occasion for you--a very great occasion." He spoke a little doubtfully.

You see I had told him nothing about Marion until about a week before the wedding; both he and my aunt had been taken altogether by surprise. They couldn't, as people say, "make it out." My aunt was intensely interested, much more than my uncle; it was then, I think, for the first time that I really saw that she cared for me. She got me alone, I remember, after I had made my announcement. "Now, George," she said, "tell me everything about her. Why didn't you tell--ME at least--before?"

I was surprised to find how difficult it was to tell her about Marion. I perplexed her.

"Then is she beautiful?" she asked at last.

"I don't know what you'll think of her," I parried. "I think--"

"Yes?"

"I think she might be the most beautiful person in the world."

"And isn't she? To you?"

"Of course," I said, nodding my head. "Yes. She IS..."

And while I don't remember anything my uncle said or did at the wedding, I do remember very distinctly certain little things, scrutiny, solicitude, a curious rare flash of intimacy in my aunt's eyes. It dawned on me that I wasn't hiding anything from her at all. She was dressed very smartly, wearing a big-plumed hat that made her neck seem longer and slenderer than ever, and when she walked up the aisle with that rolling stride of hers and her eye all on Marion, perplexed into self-forgetfulness, it wasn't somehow funny. She was, I do believe, giving my marriage more thought than I had done, she was concerned beyond measure at my black rage and Marion's blindness, she was looking with eyes that knew what loving is--for love.

In the vestry she turned away as we signed, and I verily believe she was crying, though to this day I can't say why she should have cried, and

she was near crying too when she squeezed my hand at parting--and she never said a word or looked at me, but just squeezed my hand....

If I had not been so grim in spirit, I think I should have found much of my wedding amusing. I remember a lot of ridiculous detail that still declines to be funny in my memory. The officiating clergyman had a cold, and turned his "n's" to "d's," and he made the most mechanical compliment conceivable about the bride's age when the register was signed. Every bride he had ever married had had it, one knew. And two middle-aged spinsters, cousins of Marion's and dressmakers at Barking, stand out. They wore marvellously bright and gay blouses and dim old skirts, and had an immense respect for Mr. Ramboat. They threw rice; they brought a whole bag with them and gave handfuls away to unknown little boys at the church door and so created a Lilliputian riot; and one had meant to throw a slipper. It was a very warm old silk slipper, I know, because she dropped it out of a pocket in the aisle--there was a sort of jumble in the aisle--and I picked it up for her. I don't think she actually threw it, for as we drove away from the church I saw her in a dreadful, and, it seemed to me, hopeless, struggle with her pocket; and afterwards my eye caught the missile of good fortune lying, it or its fellow, most obviously mislaid, behind the umbrella-stand in the hall....

The whole business was much more absurd, more incoherent, more human than I had anticipated, but I was far too young and serious to let the latter quality atone for its shortcomings. I am so remote from this

phase of my youth that I can look back at it all as dispassionately as one looks at a picture--at some wonderful, perfect sort of picture that is inexhaustible; but at the time these things filled me with unspeakable resentment. Now I go round it all, look into its details, generalise about its aspects. I'm interested, for example, to square it with my Bladesover theory of the British social scheme. Under stress of tradition we were all of us trying in the fermenting chaos of London to carry out the marriage ceremonies of a Bladesover tenant or one of the chubby middling sort of people in some dependent country town. There a marriage is a public function with a public significance. There the church is to a large extent the gathering-place of the community, and your going to be married a thing of importance to every one you pass on the road. It is a change of status that quite legitimately interests the whole neighbourhood. But in London there are no neighbours, nobody knows, nobody cares. An absolute stranger in an office took my notice, and our banns were proclaimed to ears that had never previously heard our names. The clergyman, even, who married us had never seen us before, and didn't in any degree intimate that he wanted to see us again.

Neighbours in London! The Ramboats did not know the names of the people on either side of them. As I waited for Marion before we started off upon our honeymoon flight, Mr. Ramboat, I remember, came and stood beside me and stared out of the window.

"There was a funeral over there yesterday," he said, by way of making conversation, and moved his head at the house opposite. "Quite a smart

affair it was with a glass 'earse...."

And our little procession of three carriages with white-favour-adorned horses and drivers, went through all the huge, noisy, indifferent traffic like a lost china image in the coal-chute of an ironclad. Nobody made way for us, nobody cared for us; the driver of an omnibus jeered; for a long time we crawled behind an unamiable dust-cart. The irrelevant clatter and tumult gave a queer flavour of indecency to this public coming together of lovers. We seemed to have obtruded ourselves shamelessly. The crowd that gathered outside the church would have gathered in the same spirit and with greater alacrity for a street accident....

At Charing Cross--we were going to Hastings--the experienced eye of the guard detected the significance of our unusual costume and he secured us a compartment.

"Well," said I, as the train moved out of the station, "That's all over!" And I turned to Marion--a little unfamiliar still, in her unfamiliar clothes--and smiled.

She regarded me gravely, timidly.

"You're not cross?" she asked.

"Cross! Why?"

"At having it all proper."

"My dear Marion!" said I, and by way of answer took and kissed her white-gloved, leather-scented hand....

I don't remember much else about the journey, an hour or so it was of undistinguished time--for we were both confused and a little fatigued and Marion had a slight headache and did not want caresses. I fell into a reverie about my aunt, and realised as if it were a new discovery, that I cared for her very greatly. I was acutely sorry I had not told her earlier of my marriage.

But you will not want to hear the history of my honeymoon. I have told all that was needed to serve my present purpose. Thus and thus it was the Will in things had its way with me. Driven by forces I did not understand, diverted altogether from the science, the curiosities and work to which I had once given myself, I fought my way through a tangle of traditions, customs, obstacles and absurdities, enraged myself, limited myself, gave myself to occupations I saw with the clearest vision were dishonourable and vain, and at last achieved the end of purblind Nature, the relentless immediacy of her desire, and held, far short of happiness, Marion weeping and reluctant in my arms.

V

Who can tell the story of the slow estrangement of two married people, the weakening of first this bond and then that of that complex contact? Least of all can one of the two participants. Even now, with an interval of fifteen years to clear it up for me, I still find a mass of impressions of Marion as confused, as discordant, as unsystematic and self-contradictory as life. I think of this thing and love her, of that and hate her--of a hundred aspects in which I can now see her with an unimpassioned sympathy. As I sit here trying to render some vision of this infinitely confused process, I recall moments of hard and fierce estrangement, moments of clouded intimacy, the passage of transition all forgotten. We talked a little language together whence were "friends," and I was "Mutney" and she was "Ming," and we kept up such an outward show that till the very end Smithie thought our household the most amiable in the world.

I cannot tell to the full how Marion thwarted me and failed in that life of intimate emotions which is the kernel of love. That life of intimate emotions is made up of little things. A beautiful face differs from an ugly one by a difference of surfaces and proportions that are sometimes almost infinitesimally small. I find myself setting down little things and little things; none of them do more than demonstrate those essential temperamental discords I have already sought to make clear. Some readers will understand--to others I shall seem no more than an unfeeling brute who couldn't make allowances.... It's easy to make allowances now; but to be young and ardent and to make allowances, to see one's married life open before one, the life that seemed in its dawn a glory, a garden of

roses, a place of deep sweet mysteries and heart throbs and wonderful silences, and to see it a vista of tolerations and baby-talk; a compromise, the least effectual thing in all one's life.

Every love romance I read seemed to mock our dull intercourse, every poem, every beautiful picture reflected upon the uneventful succession of grey hours we had together. I think our real difference was one of aesthetic sensibility.

I do still recall as the worst and most disastrous aspect of all that time, her absolute disregard of her own beauty. It's the pettiest thing to record, I know, but she could wear curl-papers in my presence. It was her idea, too, to "wear out" her old clothes and her failures at home when "no one was likely to see her"--"no one" being myself. She allowed me to accumulate a store of ungracious and slovenly memories....

All our conceptions of life differed. I remember how we differed about furniture. We spent three or four days in Tottenham Court Road, and she chose the things she fancied with an inexorable resolution,--sweeping aside my suggestions with--"Oh, YOU want such queer things." She pursued some limited, clearly seen and experienced ideal--that excluded all other possibilities. Over every mantel was a mirror that was draped, our sideboard was wonderfully good and splendid with beveled glass, we had lamps on long metal stalks and cozy corners and plants in grog-tubs. Smithie approved it all. There wasn't a place where one could sit and read in the whole house. My books went upon shelves in the dining-room

recess. And we had a piano though Marion's playing was at an elementary level.

You know, it was the cruelest luck for Marion that I, with my restlessness, my scepticism, my constantly developing ideas, had insisted on marriage with her. She had no faculty of growth or change; she had taken her mould, she had set in the limited ideas of her peculiar class. She preserved her conception of what was right in drawing-room chairs and in marriage ceremonial and in every relation of life with a simple and luminous honesty and conviction, with an immense unimaginative inflexibility--as a tailor-bird builds its nest or a beaver makes its dam.

Let me hasten over this history of disappointments and separation. I might tell of waxings and waning of love between us, but the whole was waning. Sometimes she would do things for me, make me a tie or a pair of slippers, and fill me with none the less gratitude because the things were absurd. She ran our home and our one servant with a hard, bright efficiency. She was inordinately proud of house and garden. Always, by her lights, she did her duty by me.

Presently the rapid development of Tono-Bungay began to take me into the provinces, and I would be away sometimes for a week together. This she did not like; it left her "dull," she said, but after a time she began to go to Smithie's again and to develop an independence of me. At Smithie's she was now a woman with a position; she had money to

spend. She would take Smithie to theatres and out to lunch and talk interminably of the business, and Smithie became a sort of permanent weekender with us. Also Marion got a spaniel and began to dabble with the minor arts, with poker-work and a Kodak and hyacinths in glasses. She called once on a neighbour. Her parents left Walham Green--her father severed his connection with the gas-works--and came to live in a small house I took for them near us, and they were much with us.

Odd the littleness of the things that exasperate when the fountains of life are embittered! My father-in-law was perpetually catching me in moody moments and urging me to take to gardening. He irritated me beyond measure.

"You think too much," he would say. "If you was to let in a bit with a spade, you might soon 'ave that garden of yours a Vision of Flowers. That's better than thinking, George."

Or in a torrent of exasperation, "I CARN'T think, George, why you don't get a bit of glass 'ere. This sunny corner you c'd do wonders with a bit of glass."

And in the summer time he never came in without performing a sort of conjuring trick in the hall, and taking cucumbers and tomatoes from unexpected points of his person. "All out o' MY little bit," he'd say in exemplary tones. He left a trail of vegetable produce in the most unusual places, on mantel boards, sideboards, the tops of pictures.

Heavens! how the sudden unexpected tomato could annoy me!...

It did much to widen our estrangement that Marion and my aunt failed to make friends, became, by a sort of instinct, antagonistic.

My aunt, to begin with, called rather frequently, for she was really anxious to know Marion. At first she would arrive like a whirlwind and pervade the house with an atmosphere of hello! She dressed already with that cheerfully extravagant abandon that signalised her accession to fortune, and dressed her best for these visits.

She wanted to play the mother to me, I fancy, to tell Marion occult secrets about the way I wore out my boots and how I never could think to put on thicker things in cold weather. But Marion received her with that defensive suspiciousness of the shy person, thinking only of the possible criticism of herself; and my aunt, perceiving this, became nervous and slangy...

"She says such queer things," said Marion once, discussing her. "But I suppose it's witty."

"Yes," I said; "it IS witty."

"If I said things like she does--"

The queer things my aunt said were nothing to the queer things she

didn't say. I remember her in our drawing-room one day, and how she cocked her eye--it's the only expression--at the India-rubber plant in a Doulton-ware pot which Marion had placed on the corner of the piano.

She was on the very verge of speech. Then suddenly she caught my expression, and shrank up like a cat that has been discovered looking at the milk.

Then a wicked impulse took her.

"Didn't say an old word, George," she insisted, looking me full in the eye.

I smiled. "You're a dear," I said, "not to," as Marion came lowering into the room to welcome her. But I felt extraordinarily like a traitor--to the India-rubber plant, I suppose--for all that nothing had been said...

"Your aunt makes Game of people," was Marion's verdict, and, open-mindedly: "I suppose it's all right... for her."

Several times we went to the house in Beckenham for lunch, and once or twice to dinner. My aunt did her peculiar best to be friends, but Marion was implacable. She was also, I know, intensely uncomfortable, and she adopted as her social method, an exhausting silence, replying compactly and without giving openings to anything that was said to her.

The gaps between my aunt's visits grew wider and wider.

My married existence became at last like a narrow deep groove in the broad expanse of interests in which I was living. I went about the world; I met a great number of varied personalities; I read endless books in trains as I went to and fro. I developed social relationships at my uncle's house that Marion did not share. The seeds of new ideas poured in upon me and grew in me. Those early and middle years of one's third decade are, I suppose, for a man the years of greatest mental growth. They are restless years and full of vague enterprise.

Each time I returned to Ealing, life there seemed more alien, narrow, and unattractive--and Marion less beautiful and more limited and difficult--until at last she was robbed of every particle of her magic. She gave me always a cooler welcome, I think, until she seemed entirely apathetic. I never asked myself then what heartaches she might hide or what her discontents might be.

I would come home hoping nothing, expecting nothing.

This was my fated life, and I had chosen it. I became more sensitive to the defects I had once disregarded altogether; I began to associate her sallow complexion with her temperamental insufficiency, and the heavier lines of her mouth and nostril with her moods of discontent. We drifted apart; wider and wider the gap opened. I tired of baby-talk and

stereotyped little fondlings; I tired of the latest intelligence from those wonderful workrooms, and showed it all too plainly; we hardly spoke when we were alone together. The mere unreciprocated physical residue of my passion remained--an exasperation between us.

No children came to save us. Marion had acquired at Smithie's a disgust and dread of maternity. All that was the fruition and quintessence of the "horrid" elements in life, a disgusting thing, a last indignity that overtook unwary women. I doubt indeed a little if children would have saved us; we should have differed so fatally about their upbringing.

Altogether, I remember my life with Marion as a long distress, now hard, now tender. It was in those days that I first became critical of my life and burdened with a sense of error and maladjustment. I would lie awake in the night, asking myself the purpose of things, reviewing my unsatisfying, ungainly home-life, my days spent in rascal enterprise and rubbish-selling, contrasting all I was being and doing with my adolescent ambitions, my Wimblehurst dreams. My circumstances had an air of finality, and I asked myself in vain why I had forced myself into them.

VI

The end of our intolerable situation came suddenly and unexpectedly, but in a way that I suppose was almost inevitable.

My alienated affections wandered, and I was unfaithful to Marion.

I won't pretend to extenuate the quality of my conduct. I was a young and fairly vigorous male; all my appetite for love had been roused and whetted and none of it had been satisfied by my love affair and my marriage. I had pursued an elusive gleam of beauty to the disregard of all else, and it had failed me. It had faded when I had hoped it would grow brighter. I despaired of life and was embittered. And things happened as I am telling. I don't draw any moral at all in the matter, and as for social remedies, I leave them to the social reformer. I've got to a time of life when the only theories that interest me are generalisations about realities.

To go to our inner office in Raggett Street I had to walk through a room in which the typists worked. They were the correspondence typists; our books and invoicing had long since overflowed into the premises we had had the luck to secure on either side of us. I was, I must confess, always in a faintly cloudily-emotional way aware of that collection of for the most part round-shouldered femininity, but presently one of the girls detached herself from the others and got a real hold upon my attention. I appreciated her at first as a straight little back, a neater back than any of the others; as a softly rounded neck with a smiling necklace of sham pearls; as chestnut hair very neatly done--and as a side-long glance; presently as a quickly turned face that looked for me.

My eye would seek her as I went through on business things--I dictated some letters to her and so discovered she had pretty, soft-looking hands with pink nails. Once or twice, meeting casually, we looked one another for the flash of a second in the eyes.

That was all. But it was enough in the mysterious free-masonry of sex to say essential things. We had a secret between us.

One day I came into Raggett Street at lunch time and she was alone, sitting at her desk. She glanced up as I entered, and then became very still, with a downcast face and her hands clenched on the table. I walked right by her to the door of the inner office, stopped, came back and stood over her.

We neither of us spoke for quite a perceptible time. I was trembling violently.

"Is that one of the new typewriters?" I asked at last for the sake of speaking.

She looked up at me without a word, with her face flushed and her eyes alight, and I bent down and kissed her lips. She leant back to put an arm about me, drew my face to her and kissed me again and again. I lifted her and held her in my arms. She gave a little smothered cry to feel herself so held.

Never before had I known the quality of passionate kisses.

Somebody became audible in the shop outside.

We started back from one another with flushed faces and bright and burning eyes.

"We can't talk here," I whispered with a confident intimacy. "Where do you go at five?"

"Along the Embankment to Charing Cross," she answered as intimately. "None of the others go that way..."

"About half-past five?"

"Yes, half-past five..."

The door from the shop opened, and she sat down very quickly.

"I'm glad," I said in a commonplace voice, "that these new typewriters are all right."

I went into the inner office and routed out the paysheet in order to find her name--Effie Rink. And did no work at all that afternoon. I fretted about that dingy little den like a beast in a cage.

When presently I went out, Effie was working with an extraordinary appearance of calm--and there was no look for me at all....

We met and had our talk that evening, a talk in whispers when there was none to overhear; we came to an understanding. It was strangely unlike any dream of romance I had ever entertained.

VII

I came back after a week's absence to my home again--a changed man. I had lived out my first rush of passion for Effie, had come to a contemplation of my position. I had gauged Effie's place in the scheme of things, and parted from her for a time. She was back in her place at Raggett Street after a temporary indisposition. I did not feel in any way penitent or ashamed, I know, as I opened the little cast-iron gate that kept Marion's front grader and Pampas Grass from the wandering dog. Indeed, if anything, I felt as if I had vindicated some right that had been in question. I came back to Marion with no sense of wrong-doing at all with, indeed, a new friendliness towards her. I don't know how it may be proper to feel on such occasions; that is how I felt.

I followed her in our drawing-room, standing beside the tall lamp-stand that half filled the bay as though she had just turned from watching for me at the window. There was something in her pale face that arrested me. She looked as if she had not been sleeping. She did not come forward to greet me.

"You've come home," she said.

"As I wrote to you."

She stood very still, a dusky figure against the bright window.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

"East Coast," I said easily.

She paused for a moment. "I KNOW," she said.

I stared at her. It was the most amazing moment in any life....

"By Jove!" I said at last, "I believe you do!"

"And then you come home to me!"

I walked to the hearthrug and stood quite still there regarding this new situation.

"I didn't dream," she began. "How could you do such a thing?"

It seemed a long interval before either of us spoke another word.

"Who knows about it?" I asked at last.

"Smithie's brother. They were at Cromer."

"Confound Cromer! Yes!"

"How could you bring yourself"

I felt a spasm of petulant annoyance at this unexpected catastrophe.

"I should like to wring Smithie's brother's neck," I said....

Marion spoke in dry, broken fragments of sentences. "You... I'd always thought that anyhow you couldn't deceive me... I suppose all men are horrid--about this."

"It doesn't strike me as horrid. It seems to me the most necessary consequence--and natural thing in the world."

I became aware of some one moving about in the passage, and went and shut the door of the room, then I walked back to the hearthrug and turned.

"It's rough on you," I said. "But I didn't mean you to know. You've never cared for me. I've had the devil of a time. Why should you mind?"

She sat down in a draped armchair. "I HAVE cared for you," she said.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I suppose," she said, "SHE cares for you?"

I had no answer.

"Where is she now?"

"Oh! does it matter to you?... Look here, Marion! This--this I didn't anticipate. I didn't mean this thing to smash down on you like this. But, you know, something had to happen. I'm sorry--sorry to the bottom of my heart that things have come to this between us. But indeed, I'm taken by surprise. I don't know where I am--I don't know how we got here. Things took me by surprise. I found myself alone with her one day. I kissed her. I went on. It seemed stupid to go back. And besides--why should I have gone back? Why should I? From first to last, I've hardly thought of it as touching you.... Damn!"

She scrutinised my face, and pulled at the ball-fringe of the little table beside her.

"To think of it," she said. "I don't believe I can ever touch you again."

We kept a long silence. I was only beginning to realise in the most superficial way the immense catastrophe that had happened between us. Enormous issues had rushed upon us. I felt unprepared and altogether inadequate. I was unreasonably angry. There came a rush of stupid expressions to my mind that my rising sense of the supreme importance of the moment saved me from saying. The gap of silence widened until it threatened to become the vast memorable margin of some one among a thousand trivial possibilities of speech that would vex our relations for ever.

Our little general servant tapped at the door--Marion always liked the servant to tap--and appeared.

"Tea, M'm," she said--and vanished, leaving the door open.

"I will go upstairs," said I, and stopped. "I will go upstairs" I repeated, "and put my bag in the spare room."

We remained motionless and silent for a few seconds.

"Mother is having tea with us to-day," Marion remarked at last, and dropped the worried end of ball-fringe and stood up slowly....

And so, with this immense discussion of our changed relations hanging over us, we presently had tea with the unsuspecting Mrs. Ramboat and the spaniel. Mrs. Ramboat was too well trained in her position to remark

upon our somber preoccupation. She kept a thin trickle of talk going, and told us, I remember, that Mr. Ramboat was "troubled" about his cannas.

"They don't come up and they won't come up. He's been round and had an explanation with the man who sold him the bulbs--and he's very heated and upset."

The spaniel was a great bore, begging and doing small tricks first at one and then at the other of us. Neither of us used his name. You see we had called him Miggles, and made a sort of trio in the baby-talk of Mutney and Miggles and Ming.

VIII

Then presently we resumed our monstrous, momentous dialogue. I can't now make out how long that dialogue went on. It spread itself, I know, in heavy fragments over either three days or four. I remember myself grouped with Marion, talking sitting on our bed in her room, talking standing in our dining-room, saving this thing or that. Twice we went for long walks. And we had a long evening alone together, with jaded nerves and hearts that fluctuated between a hard and dreary recognition of facts and, on my part at least, a strange unwonted tenderness; because in some extraordinary way this crisis had destroyed our mutual apathy and made us feel one another again.

It was a dialogue that had discrepant parts that fell into lumps of talk that failed to join on to their predecessors, that began again at a different level, higher or lower, that assumed new aspects in the intervals and assimilated new considerations. We discussed the fact that we two were no longer lovers; never before had we faced that. It seems a strange thing to write, but as I look back, I see clearly that those several days were the time when Marion and I were closest together, looked for the first and last time faithfully and steadfastly into each other's soul. For those days only, there were no pretences, I made no concessions to her nor she to me; we concealed nothing, exaggerated nothing. We had done with pretending. We had it out plainly and soberly with each other. Mood followed mood and got its stark expression.

Of course there was quarreling between us, bitter quarreling, and we said things to one another--long pent-up things that bruised and crushed and cut. But over it all in my memory now is an effect of deliberate confrontation, and the figure of Marion stands up, pale, melancholy, tear-stained, injured, implacable and dignified.

"You love her?" she asked once, and jerked that doubt into my mind.

I struggled with tangled ideas and emotions. "I don't know what love is. It's all sorts of things--it's made of a dozen strands twisted in a thousand ways."

"But you want her? You want her now--when you think of her?"

"Yes," I reflected. "I want her--right enough."

"And me? Where do I come in?"

"I suppose you come in here."

"Well, but what are you going to do?"

"Do!" I said with the exasperation of the situation growing upon me. "What do you want me to do?"

As I look back upon all that time--across a gulf of fifteen active years--I find I see it with an understanding judgment. I see it as if it were the business of some one else--indeed of two other people--intimately known yet judged without passion. I see now that this shock, this sudden immense disillusionment, did in real fact bring out a mind and soul in Marion; that for the first time she emerged from habits, timidities, imitations, phrases and a certain narrow will-impulse, and became a personality.

Her ruling motive at first was, I think, an indignant and outraged pride. This situation must end. She asked me categorically to give up Effie, and I, full of fresh and glowing memories, absolutely refused.

"It's too late, Marion," I said. "It can't be done like that."

"Then we can't very well go on living together," she said. "Can we?"

"Very well," I deliberated "if you must have it so."

"Well, can we?"

"Can you stay in this house? I mean--if I go away?"

"I don't know.... I don't think I could."

"Then--what do you want?"

Slowly we worked our way from point to point, until at last the word "divorce" was before us.

"If we can't live together we ought to be free," said Marion.

"I don't know anything of divorce," I said--"if you mean that. I don't know how it is done. I shall have to ask somebody--or look it up.... Perhaps, after all, it is the thing to do. We may as well face it."

We began to talk ourselves into a realisation of what our divergent futures might be. I came back on the evening of that day with my questions answered by a solicitor.

"We can't as a matter of fact," I said, "get divorced as things are. Apparently, so far as the law goes you've got to stand this sort of thing. It's silly but that is the law. However, it's easy to arrange a divorce. In addition to adultery there must be desertion or cruelty. To establish cruelty I should have to strike you, or something of that sort, before witnesses. That's impossible--but it's simple to desert you legally. I have to go away from you; that's all. I can go on sending you money--and you bring a suit, what is it?--for Restitution of Conjugal Rights. The Court orders me to return. I disobey. Then you can go on to divorce me. You get a Decree Nisi, and once more the Court tries to make me come back. If we don't make it up within six months and if you don't behave scandalously the Decree is made absolute. That's the end of the fuss. That's how one gets unmarried. It's easier, you see, to marry than unmarry."

"And then--how do I live? What becomes of me?"

"You'll have an income. They call it alimony. From a third to a half of my present income--more if you like--I don't mind--three hundred a year, say. You've got your old people to keep and you'll need all that."

"And then--then you'll be free?"

"Both of us."

"And all this life you've hated"

I looked up at her wrung and bitter face. "I haven't hated it," I lied, my voice near breaking with the pain of it all. "Have you?"

IX

The perplexing thing about life is the irresolvable complexity of reality, of things and relations alike. Nothing is simple. Every wrong done has a certain justice in it, and every good deed has dregs of evil. As for us, young still, and still without self-knowledge, resounded a hundred discordant notes in the harsh angle of that shock. We were furiously angry with each other, tender with each other, callously selfish, generously self-sacrificing.

I remember Marion saying innumerable detached things that didn't hang together one with another, that contradicted one another, that were, nevertheless, all in their places profoundly true and sincere. I see them now as so many vain experiments in her effort to apprehend the crumpled confusions of our complex moral landslide. Some I found irritating beyond measure. I answered her--sometimes quite abominably.

"Of course," she would say again and again, "my life has been a failure."

"I've besieged you for three years," I would retort "asking it not to

be. You've done as you pleased. If I've turned away at last--"

Or again she would revive all the stresses before our marriage.

"How you must hate me! I made you wait. Well now--I suppose you have your revenge."

"REVENGE!" I echoed.

Then she would try over the aspects of our new separated lives.

"I ought to earn my own living," she would insist.

"I want to be quite independent. I've always hated London. Perhaps I shall try a poultry farm and bees. You won't mind at first my being a burden. Afterwards--"

"We've settled all that," I said.

"I suppose you will hate me anyhow..."

There were times when she seemed to regard our separation with absolute complacency, when she would plan all sorts of freedoms and characteristic interests.

"I shall go out a lot with Smithie," she said.

And once she said an ugly thing that I did indeed hate her for that I cannot even now quite forgive her.

"Your aunt will rejoice at all this. She never cared for me..."

Into my memory of these pains and stresses comes the figure of Smithie, full-charged with emotion, so breathless in the presence of the horrid villain of the piece that she could make no articulate sounds. She had long tearful confidences with Marion, I know, sympathetic close clingings. There were moments when only absolute speechlessness prevented her giving me a stupendous "talking-to"--I could see it in her eye. The wrong things she would have said! And I recall, too, Mrs. Ramboat's slow awakening to something in, the air, the growing expression of solicitude in her eye, only her well-trained fear of Marion keeping her from speech.

And at last through all this welter, like a thing fated and altogether beyond our control, parting came to Marion and me.

I hardened my heart, or I could not have gone. For at the last it came to Marion that she was parting from me for ever. That overbore all other things, had turned our last hour to anguish. She forgot for a time the prospect of moving into a new house, she forgot the outrage on her proprietorship and pride. For the first time in her life she really showed strong emotions in regard to me, for the first time, perhaps,

they really came to her. She began to weep slow, reluctant tears. I came into her room, and found her asprawl on the bed, weeping.

"I didn't know," she cried. "Oh! I didn't understand!"

"I've been a fool. All my life is a wreck!

"I shall be alone!...MUTNEY! Mutney, don't leave me! Oh! Mutney! I didn't understand."

I had to harden my heart indeed, for it seemed to me at moments in those last hours together that at last, too late, the longed-for thing had happened and Marion had come alive. A new-born hunger for me lit her eyes.

"Don't leave me!" she said, "don't leave me!" She clung to me; she kissed me with tear-salt lips.

I was promised now and pledged, and I hardened my heart against this impossible dawn. Yet it seems to me that there were moments when it needed but a cry, but one word to have united us again for all our lives. Could we have united again? Would that passage have enlightened us for ever or should we have fallen back in a week or so into the old estrangement, the old temperamental opposition?

Of that there is now no telling. Our own resolve carried us on our

predestined way. We behaved more and more like separating lovers, parting inexorably, but all the preparations we had set going worked on like a machine, and we made no attempt to stop them. My trunks and boxes went to the station. I packed my bag with Marion standing before me. We were like children who had hurt each other horribly in sheer stupidity, who didn't know now how to remedy it. We belonged to each other immensely--immensely. The cab came to the little iron gate.

"Good-bye!" I said.

"Good-bye."

For a moment we held one another in each other's arms and kissed--incredibly without malice. We heard our little servant in the passage going to open the door. For the last time we pressed ourselves to one another. We were not lovers nor enemies, but two human souls in a frank community of pain. I tore myself from her.

"Go away," I said to the servant, seeing that Marion had followed me down.

I felt her standing behind me as I spoke to the cab man.

I got into the cab, resolutely not looking back, and then as it started jumped up, craned out and looked at the door.

It was wide open, but she had disappeared....

I wonder--I suppose she ran upstairs.

X

So I parted from Marion at an extremity of perturbation and regret, and went, as I had promised and arranged, to Effie, who was waiting for me in apartments near Orpington. I remember her upon the station platform, a bright, flitting figure looking along the train for me, and our walk over the fields in the twilight. I had expected an immense sense of relief where at last the stresses of separation were over, but now I found I was beyond measure wretched and perplexed, full of the profoundest persuasion of irreparable error. The dusk and somber Marion were so alike, her sorrow seemed to be all about me. I had to hold myself to my own plans, to remember that I must keep faith with Effie, with Effie who had made no terms, exacted no guarantees, but flung herself into my hands.

We went across the evening fields in silence, towards a sky of deepening gold and purple, and Effie was close beside me always, very close, glancing up ever and again at my face.

Certainly she knew I grieved for Marion, that ours was now no joyful reunion. But she showed no resentment and no jealousy. Extraordinarily, she did not compete against Marion. Never once in all our time together

did she say an adverse word of Marion....

She set herself presently to dispel the shadow that brooded over me with the same instinctive skill that some women will show with the trouble of a child. She made herself my glad and pretty slave and handmaid; she forced me at last to rejoice in her. Yet at the back of it all Marion remained, stupid and tearful and infinitely distressful, so that I was almost intolerably unhappy for her--for her and the dead body of my married love.

It is all, as I tell it now, unaccountable to me. I go back into these remote parts, these rarely visited uplands and lonely tares of memory, and it seems to me still a strange country. I had thought I might be going to some sensuous paradise with Effie, but desire which fills the universe before its satisfaction, vanishes utterly like the going of daylight--with achievement. All the facts and forms of life remain darkling and cold. It was an upland of melancholy questionings, a region from which I saw all the world at new angles and in new aspects; I had outflanked passion and romance.

I had come into a condition of vast perplexities. For the first time in my life, at least so it seems to me now in this retrospect, I looked at my existence as a whole.

Since this was nothing, what was I doing? What was I for?

I was going to and fro about Tono-Bungay--the business I had taken up to secure Marion and which held me now in spite of our intimate separation--and snatching odd week-ends and nights for Orpington, and all the while I struggled with these obstinate interrogations. I used to fall into musing in the trains, I became even a little inaccurate and forgetful about business things. I have the clearest memory of myself sitting thoughtful in the evening sunlight on a grassy hillside that looked toward Seven Oaks and commanded a wide sweep of country, and that I was thinking out my destiny. I could almost write my thought down now, I believe, as they came to me that afternoon. Effie, restless little cockney that she was, rustled and struggled in a hedgerow below, gathering flowers, discovering flowers she had never seen before. I had. I remember, a letter from Marion in my pocket. I had even made some tentatives for return, for a reconciliation; Heaven knows now how I had put it! but her cold, ill-written letter repelled me. I perceived I could never face that old inconclusive dullness of life again, that stagnant disappointment. That, anyhow, wasn't possible. But what was possible? I could see no way of honour or fine living before me at all.

"What am I to do with life?" that was the question that besieged me.

I wondered if all the world was even as I, urged to this by one motive and to that by another, creatures of chance and impulse and unmeaning traditions. Had I indeed to abide by what I had said and done and chosen? Was there nothing for me in honour but to provide for Effie, go back penitent to Marion and keep to my trade in rubbish--or find some

fresh one--and so work out the residue of my days? I didn't accept that for a moment. But what else was I to do? I wondered if my case was the case of many men, whether in former ages, too, men had been so guideless, so uncharted, so haphazard in their journey into life. In the Middle Ages, in the old Catholic days, one went to a priest, and he said with all the finality of natural law, this you are and this you must do. I wondered whether even in the Middle Ages I should have accepted that ruling without question.

I remember too very distinctly how Effie came and sat beside me on a little box: that was before the casement window of our room.

"Gloomkins," said she.

I smiled and remained head on hand, looking out of the window forgetful of her.

"Did you love your wife so well?" she whispered softly.

"Oh!" I cried, recalled again; "I don't know. I don't understand these things. Life is a thing that hurts, my dear! It hurts without logic or reason. I've blundered! I didn't understand. Anyhow--there is no need to go hurting you, is there?"

And I turned about and drew her to me, and kissed her ear....

Yes, I had a very bad time--I still recall. I suffered, I suppose, from a sort of ennui of the imagination. I found myself without an object to hold my will together. I sought. I read restlessly and discursively. I tried Ewart and got no help from him. As I regard it all now in this retrospect, it seems to me as if in those days of disgust and abandoned aims I discovered myself for the first time. Before that I had seen only the world and things in it, had sought them self-forgetful of all but my impulse. Now I found myself GROUPED with a system of appetites and satisfactions, with much work to do--and no desire, it seemed, left in me.

There were moments when I thought of suicide. At times my life appeared before me in bleak, relentless light, a series of ignorances, crude blunderings, degradation and cruelty. I had what the old theologians call a "conviction of sin." I sought salvation--not perhaps in the formula a Methodist preacher would recognise but salvation nevertheless.

Men find their salvation nowadays in many ways. Names and forms don't, I think, matter very much; the real need is something that we can hold and that holds one. I have known a man find that determining factor in a dry-plate factory, and another in writing a history of the Manor. So long as it holds one, it does not matter. Many men and women nowadays take up some concrete aspect of Socialism or social reform. But Socialism for me has always been a little bit too human, too set about with personalities and foolishness. It isn't my line. I don't like things so human. I don't think I'm blind to the fun, the surprises, the

jolly little coarsenesses and insufficiency of life, to the "humour of it," as people say, and to adventure, but that isn't the root of the matter with me. There's no humour in my blood. I'm in earnest in warp and woof. I stumble and flounder, but I know that over all these merry immediate things, there are other things that are great and serene, very high, beautiful things--the reality. I haven't got it, but it's there nevertheless. I'm a spiritual guttersnipe in love with unimaginable goddesses. I've never seen the goddesses nor ever shall--but it takes all the fun out of the mud--and at times I fear it takes all the kindliness, too.

But I'm talking of things I can't expect the reader to understand, because I don't half understand them myself. There is something links things for me, a sunset or so, a mood or so, the high air, something there was in Marion's form and colour, something I find and lose in Mantegna's pictures, something in the lines of these boats I make. (You should see X2, my last and best!)

I can't explain myself, I perceive. Perhaps it all comes to this, that I am a hard and morally limited cad with a mind beyond my merits. Naturally I resist that as a complete solution. Anyhow, I had a sense of inexorable need, of distress and insufficiency that was unendurable, and for a time this aeronautical engineering allayed it....

In the end of this particular crisis of which I tell so badly, I idealised Science. I decided that in power and knowledge lay the

salvation of my life, the secret that would fill my need; that to these things I would give myself.

I emerged at last like a man who has been diving in darkness, clutching at a new resolve for which he had groped desperately and long.

I came into the inner office suddenly one day--it must have been just before the time of Marion's suit for restitution--and sat down before my uncle.

"Look here," I said, "I'm sick of this."

"HulLO!" he answered, and put some papers aside.

"What's up, George?"

"Things are wrong."

"As how?"

"My life," I said, "it's a mess, an infinite mess."

"She's been a stupid girl, George," he said; "I partly understand. But you're quit of her now, practically, and there's just as good fish in the sea--"

"Oh! it's not that!" I cried. "That's only the part that shows. I'm sick--I'm sick of all this damned rascality."

"Eh? Eh?" said my uncle. "WHAT--rascality?"

"Oh, YOU know. I want some STUFF, man. I want something to hold on to. I shall go amok if I don't get it. I'm a different sort of beast from you. You float in all this bunkum. I feel like a man floundering in a universe of soapsuds, up and downs, east and west. I can't stand it. I must get my foot on something solid or--I don't know what."

I laughed at the consternation in his face.

"I mean it," I said. "I've been thinking it over. I've made up my mind. It's no good arguing. I shall go in for work--real work. No! this isn't work; it's only laborious cheating. But I've got an idea! It's an old idea--I thought of years ago, but it came back to me. Look here! Why should I fence about with you? I believe the time has come for flying to be possible. Real flying!"

"Flying!"

I stuck to that, and it helped me through the worst time in my life. My uncle, after some half-hearted resistance and a talk with my aunt, behaved like the father of a spoilt son. He fixed up an arrangement that gave me capital to play with, released me from too constant a solicitude

for the newer business developments--this was in what I may call the later Moggs period of our enterprises--and I went to work at once with grim intensity.

But I will tell of my soaring and flying machines in the proper place. I've been leaving the story of my uncle altogether too long. I wanted merely to tell how it was I took to this work. I took to these experiments after I had sought something that Marion in some indefinable way had seemed to promise. I toiled and forgot myself for a time, and did many things. Science too has been something of an irresponsive mistress since, though I've served her better than I served Marion. But at the time Science, with her order, her inhuman distance, yet steely certainties, saved me from despair.

Well, I have still to fly; but incidentally I have invented the lightest engines in the world.

I am trying to tell of all the things that happened to me. It's hard enough simply to get it put down in the remotest degree right. But this is a novel, not a treatise. Don't imagine that I am coming presently to any sort of solution of my difficulties. Here among my drawings and hammerings NOW, I still question unanswering problems. All my life has been at bottom, SEEKING, disbelieving always, dissatisfied always with the thing seen and the thing believed, seeking something in toil, in force, in danger, something whose name and nature I do not clearly understand, something beautiful, worshipful, enduring, mine profoundly

and fundamentally, and the utter redemption of myself; I don't know--all I can tell is that it is something I have ever failed to find.

XI

But before I finish this chapter and book altogether and go on with the great adventure of my uncle's career. I may perhaps tell what else remains to tell of Marion and Effie, and then for a time set my private life behind me.

For a time Marion and I corresponded with some regularity, writing friendly but rather uninforming letters about small business things. The clumsy process of divorce completed itself.

She left the house at Ealing and went into the country with her aunt and parents, taking a small farm near Lewes in Sussex. She put up glass, she put in heat for her father, happy man! and spoke of figs and peaches. The thing seemed to promise well throughout a spring and summer, but the Sussex winter after London was too much for the Ramboats. They got very muddy and dull; Mr. Ramboat killed a cow by improper feeding, and that disheartened them all. A twelvemonth saw the enterprise in difficulties. I had to help her out of this, and then they returned to London and she went into partnership with Smithie at Streatham, and ran a business that was intimated on the firm's stationery as "Robes." The parents and aunt were stowed away in a cottage somewhere. After that the letters became infrequent. But in one I remember a postscript that had a little stab of

our old intimacy: "Poor old Miggles is dead."

Nearly eight years slipped by. I grew up. I grew in experience, in capacity, until I was fully a man, but with many new interests, living on a larger scale in a wider world than I could have dreamt of in my Marion days. Her letters become rare and insignificant. At last came a gap of silence that made me curious. For eighteen months or more I had nothing from Marion save her quarterly receipts through the bank. Then I damned at Smithie, and wrote a card to Marion.

"Dear Marion," I said, "how goes it?"

She astonished me tremendously by telling me she had married again--"a Mr. Wachorn, a leading agent in the paper-pattern trade." But she still wrote on the Ponderevo and Smith (Robes) notepaper, from the Ponderevo and Smith address.

And that, except for a little difference of opinion about the continuance of alimony which gave me some passages of anger, and the use of my name by the firm, which also annoyed me, is the end of Marion's history for me, and she vanishes out of this story. I do not know where she is or what she is doing. I do not know whether she is alive or dead. It seems to me utterly grotesque that two people who have stood so close to one another as she and I should be so separated, but so it is between us.

Effie, too, I have parted from, though I still see her at times. Between us there was never any intention of marriage nor intimacy of soul. She had a sudden, fierce, hot-blooded passion for me and I for her, but I was not her first lover nor her last. She was in another world from Marion. She had a queer, delightful nature; I've no memory of ever seeing her sullen or malicious. She was--indeed she was magnificently--eupeptic. That, I think, was the central secret of her agreeableness, and, moreover, that she was infinitely kind-hearted. I helped her at last into an opening she coveted, and she amazed me by a sudden display of business capacity. She has now a typewriting bureau in Riffle's Inn, and she runs it with a brisk vigour and considerable success, albeit a certain plumpness has overtaken her. And she still loves her kind. She married a year or so ago a boy half her age--a wretch of a poet, a wretched poet, and given to drugs, a thing with lank fair hair always getting into his blue eyes, and limp legs. She did it, she said, because he needed nursing....

But enough of this disaster of my marriage and of my early love affairs; I have told all that is needed for my picture to explain how I came to take up aeroplane experiments and engineering science; let me get back to my essential story, to Tono-Bungay and my uncle's promotions and to the vision of the world these things have given me.