

## BOOK THE THIRD

### THE GREAT DAYS OF TONO-BUNGAY

#### CHAPTER THE FIRST

##### THE HARDINGHAM HOTEL, AND HOW WE BECAME BIG PEOPLE

I

But now that I resume the main line of my story it may be well to describe the personal appearance of my uncle as I remember him during those magnificent years that followed his passage from trade to finance. The little man plumped up very considerably during the creation of the Tono-Bungay property, but with the increasing excitements that followed that first flotation came dyspepsia and a certain flabbiness and falling away. His abdomen--if the reader will pardon my taking his features in the order of their value--had at first a nice full roundness, but afterwards it lost tone without, however, losing size. He always went as though he was proud of it and would make as much of it as possible. To the last his movements remained quick and sudden, his short firm legs, as he walked, seemed to twinkle rather than display the scissors-stride of common humanity, and he never seemed to have knees, but instead, a

dispersed flexibility of limb.

There was, I seem to remember, a secular intensification of his features; his nose developed character, became aggressive, stuck out at the world more and more; the obliquity of his mouth, I think, increased. From the face that returns to my memory projects a long cigar that is sometimes cocked jauntily up from the higher corner, that sometimes droops from the lower;--it was as eloquent as a dog's tail, and he removed it only for the more emphatic modes of speech. He assumed a broad black ribbon for his glasses, and wore them more and more askew as time went on. His hair seemed to stiffen with success, but towards the climax it thinned greatly over the crown, and he brushed it hard back over his ears where, however, it stuck out fiercely. It always stuck out fiercely over his forehead, up and forward.

He adopted an urban style of dressing with the onset of Tono-Bungay and rarely abandoned it. He preferred silk hats with ample rich brims, often a trifle large for him by modern ideas, and he wore them at various angles to his axis; his taste in trouserings was towards fairly emphatic stripes and his trouser cut was neat; he liked his frock-coat long and full, although that seemed to shorten him. He displayed a number of valuable rings, and I remember one upon his left little finger with a large red stone bearing Gnostic symbols. "Clever chaps, those Gnostics, George," he told me. "Means a lot. Lucky!" He never had any but a black mohair watch-chain. In the country he affected grey and a large grey cloth top-hat, except when motoring; then he would have a brown

deer-stalker cap and a fur suit of esquimaux cut with a sort of boot-end to the trousers. Of an evening he would wear white waistcoats and plain gold studs. He hated diamonds. "Flashy," he said they were. "Might as well wear--an income tax-receipt. All very well for Park Lane. Unsold stock. Not my style. Sober financier, George."

So much for his visible presence. For a time it was very familiar to the world, for at the crest of the boom he allowed quite a number of photographs and at least one pencil sketch to be published in the sixpenny papers.

His voice declined during those years from his early tenor to a flat rich quality of sound that my knowledge of music is inadequate to describe. His *Zzz*-ing inrush of air became less frequent as he ripened, but returned in moments of excitement. Throughout his career, in spite of his increasing and at last astounding opulence, his more intimate habits remained as simple as they had been at Wimblehurst. He would never avail himself of the services of a valet; at the very climax of his greatness his trousers were folded by a housemaid and his shoulders brushed as he left his house or hotel. He became wary about breakfast as life advanced, and at one time talked much of Dr. Haig and uric acid. But for other meals he remained reasonably omnivorous. He was something of a gastronome, and would eat anything he particularly liked in an audible manner, and perspire upon his forehead. He was a studiously moderate drinker--except when the spirit of some public banquet or some great occasion caught him and bore him beyond his wariness--there

he would, as it were, drink inadvertently and become flushed and talkative--about everything but his business projects.

To make the portrait complete one wants to convey an effect of sudden, quick bursts of movement like the jumps of a Chinese-cracker to indicate that his pose whatever it is, has been preceded and will be followed by a rush. If I were painting him, I should certainly give him for a background that distressed, uneasy sky that was popular in the eighteenth century, and at a convenient distance a throbbing motor-car, very big and contemporary, a secretary hurrying with papers, and an alert chauffeur.

Such was the figure that created and directed the great property of Tono-Bungay, and from the successful reconstruction of that company passed on to a slow crescendo of magnificent creations and promotions until the whole world of investors marveled. I have already I think, mentioned how, long before we offered Tono Bungay to the public, we took over the English agency of certain American specialties. To this was presently added our exploitation of Moggs' Domestic Soap, and so he took up the Domestic Convenience Campaign that, coupled with his equatorial rotundity and a certain resolute convexity in his bearings won my uncle his Napoleonic title.

II

It illustrates the romantic element in modern commerce that my uncle

met young Moggs at a city dinner--I think it was the Bottle-makers' Company--when both were some way advanced beyond the initial sobriety of the occasion. This was the grandson of the original Moggs, and a very typical instance of an educated, cultivated, degenerate plutocrat. His people had taken him about in his youth as the Ruskins took their John and fostered a passion for history in him, and the actual management of the Moggs' industry had devolved upon a cousin and a junior partner.

Mr. Moggs, being of a studious and refined disposition, had just decided--after a careful search for a congenial subject in which he would not be constantly reminded of soap--to devote himself to the History of the Thebaid, when this cousin died suddenly and precipitated responsibilities upon him. In the frankness of conviviality, Moggs bewailed the uncongenial task thus thrust into his hands, and my uncle offered to lighten his burden by a partnership then and there. They even got to terms--extremely muzzy terms, but terms nevertheless.

Each gentleman wrote the name and address of the other on his cuff, and they separated in a mood of brotherly carelessness, and next morning neither seems to have thought to rescue his shirt from the wash until it was too late. My uncle made a painful struggle--it was one of my business mornings--to recall name and particulars.

"He was an aquarium-faced, long, blond sort of chap, George, with glasses and a genteel accent," he said.

I was puzzled. "Aquarium-faced?"

"You know how they look at you. His stuff was soap, I'm pretty nearly certain. And he had a name--And the thing was the straightest Bit-of-All-right you ever. I was clear enough to spot that..."

We went out at last with knitted brows, and wandered up into Finsbury seeking a good, well-stocked looking grocer. We called first on a chemist for a pick-me-up for my uncle, and then we found the shop we needed.

"I want," said my uncle, "half a pound of every sort of soap you got. Yes, I want to take them now. Wait a moment, George.... Now what sort of soap d'you call THAT?"

At the third repetition of that question the young man said, "Moggs' Domestic."

"Right," said my uncle. "You needn't guess again. Come along, George, let's go to a telephone and get on to Moggs. Oh--the order? Certainly. I confirm it. Send it all--send it all to the Bishop of London; he'll have some good use for it--(First-rate man, George, he is--charities and all that)--and put it down to me, here's a card--Ponderevo--Tono-Bungay."

Then we went on to Moggs and found him in a camel-hair dressing-jacket in a luxurious bed, drinking China tea, and got the shape of everything

but the figures fixed by lunch time.

Young Moggs enlarged my mind considerably; he was a sort of thing I hadn't met before; he seemed quite clean and well-informed and he assured me to never read newspapers nor used soap in any form at all, "Delicate skin," he said.

"No objection to our advertising you wide and free?" said my uncle.

"I draw the line at railway stations," said Moggs, "south-coast cliffs, theatre programmes, books by me and poetry generally--scenery--oh!--and the Mercure de France."

"We'll get along," said my uncle.

"So long as you don't annoy me," said Moggs, lighting a cigarette, "you can make me as rich as you like."

We certainly made him no poorer. His was the first firm that was advertised by a circumstantial history; we even got to illustrated magazine articles telling of the quaint past of Moggs. We concocted Moggsiana. Trusting to our partner's preoccupation with the uncommercial aspects of life, we gave graceful history--of Moggs the First, Moggs the Second, Moggs the Third, and Moggs the Fourth. You must, unless you are very young, remember some of them and our admirable block of a Georgian shop window. My uncle brought early nineteenth-century memoirs, soaked

himself in the style, and devised stories about old Moggs the First and the Duke of Wellington, George the Third and the soap dealer ("almost certainly old Moggs"). Very soon we had added to the original Moggs' Primrose several varieties of scented and superfatted, a "special nurseries used in the household of the Duke of Kent and for the old Queen in Infancy," a plate powder, "the Paragon," and a knife powder. We roped in a good little second-rate black-lead firm, and carried their origins back into the mists of antiquity. It was my uncle's own unaided idea that we should associate that commodity with the Black Prince. He became industriously curious about the past of black-lead. I remember his button-holing the president of the Pepys Society.

"I say, is there any black-lead in Pepys? You know--black-lead--for grates! OR DOES HE PASS IT OVER AS A MATTER OF COURSE?"

He became in those days the terror of eminent historians. "Don't want your drum and trumpet history--no fear," he used to say. "Don't want to know who was who's mistress, and why so-and-so devastated such a province; that's bound to be all lies and upsy-down anyhow. Not my affair. Nobody's affair now. Chaps who did it didn't clearly know.... What I want to know is, in the Middle Ages, did they do anything for Housemaid's Knee? What did they put in their hot baths after jousting, and was the Black Prince--you know the Black Prince--was he enameled or painted, or what? I think myself, black-leaded--very likely--like pipe-clay--but DID they use blacking so early?"



So it came about that in designing and writing those Moggs' Soap Advertisements, that wrought a revolution in that department of literature, my uncle was brought to realise not only the lost history, but also the enormous field for invention and enterprise that lurked among the little articles, the dustpans and mincers, the mousetraps and carpet-sweepers that fringe the shops of the oilman and domestic ironmonger. He was recalled to one of the dreams of his youth, to his conception of the Ponderevo Patent Flat that had been in his mind so early as the days before I went to serve him at Wimblehurst. "The Home, George," he said, "wants straightening up. Silly muddle! Things that get in the way. Got to organise it."

For a time he displayed something like the zeal of a genuine social reformer in relation to these matters.

"We've got to bring the Home Up to Date? That's my idee, George. We got to make a civilised domestic machine out of these relics of barbarism. I'm going to hunt up inventors, make a corner in d'mestic ideas. Everything. Balls of string that won't dissolve into a tangle, and gum that won't dry into horn. See? Then after conveniences--beauty. Beauty, George! All these few things ought to be made fit to look at; it's your aunt's idea, that. Beautiful jam-pots! Get one of those new art chaps to design all the things they make ugly now. Patent carpet-sweepers by these greenwood chaps, housemaid's boxes it'll be a pleasure to fall over--rich coloured house-flannels. Zzzz. Pails, frinstance. Hang 'em up on the walls like warming-pans. All the polishes and things in such

tins--you'll want to cuddle 'em, George! See the notion? 'Sted of all the silly ugly things we got."...

We had some magnificent visions; they so affected me that when I passed ironmongers and oil-shops they seemed to me as full of promise as trees in late winter, flushed with the effort to burst into leaf and flower.... And really we did do much towards that very brightness these shops display. They were dingy things in the eighties compared to what our efforts have made them now, grey quiet displays.

Well, I don't intend to write down here the tortuous financial history of Moggs' Limited, which was our first development of Moggs and Sons; nor will I tell very much of how from that we spread ourselves with a larger and larger conception throughout the chandlery and minor ironmongery, how we became agents for this little commodity, partners in that, got a tentacle round the neck of a specialised manufacturer or so, secured a pull upon this or that supply of raw material, and so prepared the way for our second flotation, Domestic Utilities; "Do it," they reordered it in the city. And then came the reconstruction of Tono-Bungay, and then "Household services" and the Boom!

That sort of development is not to be told in detail in a novel. I have, indeed, told much of it elsewhere. It is to be found set out at length, painfully at length, in my uncle's examination and mine in the bankruptcy proceedings, and in my own various statements after his death. Some people know everything in that story, some know it all

too well, most do not want the details, it is the story of a man of imagination among figures, and unless you are prepared to collate columns of pounds, shillings and pence, compare dates and check additions, you will find it very unmeaning and perplexing. And after all, you wouldn't find the early figures so much wrong as STRAINED. In the matter of Moggs and Do Ut, as in the first Tono-Bungay promotion and in its reconstruction, we left the court by city standards without a stain on our characters. The great amalgamation of Household Services was my uncle's first really big-scale enterprise and his first display of bolder methods: for this we bought back Do Ut, Moggs (going strong with a seven per cent. dividend) and acquired Skinnerton's polishes, the Riffleshaw properties and the Runcorn's mincer and coffee-mill business. To that Amalgamation I was really not a party; I left it to my uncle because I was then beginning to get keen upon the soaring experiments I had taken on from the results then to hand of Lilienthal, Pilcher and the Wright brothers. I was developing a glider into a flyer. I meant to apply power to this glider as soon as I could work out one or two residual problems affecting the longitudinal stability. I knew that I had a sufficiently light motor in my own modification of Bridger's light turbine, but I knew too that until I had cured my aeroplane of a tendency demanding constant alertness from me, a tendency to jerk up its nose at unexpected moments and slide back upon me, the application of an engine would be little short of suicide.

But that I will tell about later. The point I was coming to was that I did not realise until after the crash how recklessly my uncle had kept

his promise of paying a dividend of over eight per cent. on the ordinary shares of that hugely over-capitalised enterprise, Household Services.

I drifted out of business affairs into my research much more than either I or my uncle had contemplated. Finance was much less to my taste than the organisation of the Tono-Bungay factory. In the new field of enterprise there was a great deal of bluffing and gambling, of taking chances and concealing material facts--and these are hateful things to the scientific type of mind. It wasn't fear I felt so much as an uneasy inaccuracy. I didn't realise dangers, I simply disliked the sloppy, relaxing quality of this new sort of work. I was at last constantly making excuses not to come up to him in London. The latter part of his business career recedes therefore beyond the circle of any particular life. I lived more or less with him; I talked, I advised, I helped him at times to fight his Sunday crowd at Crest Hill, but I did not follow nor guide him. From the Do Ut time onward he rushed up the financial world like a bubble in water and left me like some busy water-thing down below in the deeps.

Anyhow, he was an immense success. The public was, I think, particularly attracted by the homely familiarity of his field of work--you never lost sight of your investment they felt, with the name on the house-flannel and shaving-strop--and its allegiance was secured by the Egyptian solidity of his apparent results. Tono-Bungay, after its reconstruction, paid thirteen, Moggs seven, Domestic Utilities had been a safe-looking nine; here was Household Services with eight; on such a showing he had

merely to buy and sell Roeburn's Antiseptic fluid, Razor soaks and Bath crystals in three weeks to clear twenty thousand pounds.

I do think that as a matter of fact Roeburn's was good value at the price at which he gave it to the public, at least until it was strained by ill-conserved advertisement. It was a period of expansion and confidence; much money was seeking investment and "Industrials" were the fashion. Prices were rising all round. There remained little more for my uncle to do therefore, in his climb to the high unstable crest of Financial Greatness but, as he said, to "grasp the cosmic oyster, George, while it gaped," which, being translated, meant for him to buy respectable businesses confidently and courageously at the vendor's estimate, add thirty or forty thousand to the price and sell them again. His sole difficulty indeed was the tactful management of the load of shares that each of these transactions left upon his hands. But I thought so little of these later things that I never fully appreciated the peculiar inconveniences of that until it was too late to help him.

### III

When I think of my uncle near the days of his Great Boom and in connection with the actualities of his enterprises, I think of him as I used to see him in the suite of rooms he occupied in the Hardingham Hotel, seated at a great old oak writing-table, smoking, drinking, and incoherently busy; that was his typical financial aspect--our evenings, our mornings, our holidays, our motor-car expeditions, Lady Grove and

Crest Hill belong to an altogether different set of memories.

These rooms in the Hardingham were a string of apartments along one handsome thick-carpeted corridor. All the doors upon the corridor were locked except the first; and my uncle's bedroom, breakfast-room and private sanctum were the least accessible and served by an entrance from the adjacent passage, which he also used at times as a means of escape from importunate callers. The most eternal room was a general waiting-room and very business-like in quality; it had one or two uneasy sofas, a number of chairs, a green baize table, and a collection of the very best Moggs and Tone posters: and the plush carpets normal to the Hardingham had been replaced by a grey-green cork linoleum; Here I would always find a remarkable miscellany of people presided over by a peculiarly faithful and ferocious looking commissioner, Ropper, who guarded the door that led a step nearer my uncle. Usually there would be a parson or so, and one or two widows; hairy, eyeglassy, middle-aged gentlemen, some of them looking singularly like Edward Ponderevos who hadn't come off, a variety of young and youngish men more or less attractively dressed, some with papers protruding from their pockets, others with their papers decently concealed. And wonderful, incidental, frowsy people.

All these persons maintained a practically hopeless siege--sometimes for weeks together; they had better have stayed at home. Next came a room full of people who had some sort of appointment, and here one would find smart-looking people, brilliantly dressed, nervous women hiding behind

magazines, nonconformist divines, clergy in gaiters, real business men, these latter for the most part gentlemen in admirable morning dress who stood up and scrutinised my uncle's taste in water colours manfully and sometimes by the hour together. Young men again were here of various social origins, young Americans, treasonable clerks from other concerns, university young men, keen-looking, most of them, resolute, reserved, but on a sort of hair trigger, ready at any moment to be most voluble, most persuasive.

This room had a window, too, looking out into the hotel courtyard with its fern-set fountains and mosaic pavement, and the young men would stand against this and sometimes even mutter. One day I heard one repeating in all urgent whisper as I passed "But you don't quite see, Mr. Ponderevo, the full advantages, the FULL advantages--" I met his eye and he was embarrassed.

Then came a room with a couple of secretaries--no typewriters, because my uncle hated the clatter--and a casual person or two sitting about, projectors whose projects were being entertained. Here and in a further room nearer the private apartments, my uncle's correspondence underwent an exhaustive process of pruning and digestion before it reached him. Then the two little rooms in which my uncle talked; my magic uncle who had got the investing public--to whom all things were possible. As one came in we would find him squatting with his cigar up and an expression of dubious beatitude upon his face, while some one urged him to grow still richer by this or that.

"That'ju, George?" he used to say. "Come in. Here's a thing. Tell him--Mister--over again. Have a drink, George? No! Wise man! Liss'n."

I was always ready to listen. All sorts of financial marvels came out of the Hardingham, more particularly during my uncle's last great flurry, but they were nothing to the projects that passed in. It was the little brown and gold room he sat in usually. He had had it redecorated by Bordingly and half a dozen Sussex pictures by Webster hung about it. Latterly he wore a velveteen jacket of a golden-brown colour in this apartment that I think over-emphasised its esthetic intention, and he also added some gross Chinese bronzes.

He was, on the whole, a very happy man throughout all that wildly enterprising time. He made and, as I shall tell in its place, spent great sums of money. He was constantly in violent motion, constantly stimulated mentally and physically and rarely tired. About him was an atmosphere of immense deference much of his waking life was triumphal and all his dreams. I doubt if he had any dissatisfaction with himself at all until the crash bore him down. Things must have gone very rapidly with him.... I think he must have been very happy.

As I sit here writing about all these things, jerking down notes and throwing them aside in my attempt to give some literary form to the tale of our promotions, the marvel of it all comes to me as if it came for the first time the supreme unreason of it. At the climax of his Boom, my



uncle at the most sparing estimate must have possessed in substance and credit about two million pounds'-worth of property to set off against his vague colossal liabilities, and from first to last he must have had a controlling influence in the direction of nearly thirty millions.

This irrational muddle of a community in which we live gave him that, paid him at that rate for sitting in a room and scheming and telling it lies. For he created nothing, he invented nothing, he economised nothing. I cannot claim that a single one of the great businesses we organised added any real value to human life at all. Several like Tono-Bungay were unmitigated frauds by any honest standard, the giving of nothing coated in advertisements for money. And the things the Hardingham gave out, I repeat, were nothing to the things that came in. I think of the long procession of people who sat down before us and propounded this and that. Now it was a device for selling bread under a fancy name and so escaping the laws as to weight--this was afterwards floated as the Decorticated Health-Bread Company and bumped against the law--now it was a new scheme for still more strident advertisement, now it was a story of unsuspected deposits of minerals, now a cheap and nasty substitute for this or that common necessity, now the treachery of a too well-informed employee, anxious to become our partner. It was all put to us tentatively, persuasively. Sometimes one had a large pink blustering person trying to carry us off our feet by his pseudo-boyish frankness, now some dyspeptically yellow whisperer, now some earnest, specially dressed youth with an eye-glass and a buttonhole, now some homely-speaking, shrewd Manchester man or some Scotchman eager to be

very clear and full.

Many came in couples or trios, often in tow of an explanatory solicitor. Some were white and earnest, some flustered beyond measure at their opportunity. Some of them begged and prayed to be taken up. My uncle chose what he wanted and left the rest. He became very autocratic to these applicants.

He felt he could make them, and they felt so too. He had but to say "No!" and they faded out of existence.... He had become a sort of vortex to which wealth flowed of its own accord. His possessions increased by heaps; his shares, his leaseholds and mortgages and debentures.

Behind his first-line things he found it necessary at last, and sanctioned by all the precincts, to set up three general trading companies, the London and African Investment Company, the British Traders' Loan Company, and Business Organisations Limited. This was in the culminating time when I had least to do with affairs. I don't say that with any desire to exculpate myself; I admit I was a director of all three, and I will confess I was willfully incurious in that capacity. Each of these companies ended its financial year solvent by selling great holdings of shares to one or other of its sisters, and paying a dividend out of the proceeds. I sat at the table and agreed. That was our method of equilibrium at the iridescent climax of the bubble.

You perceive now, however, the nature of the services for which this fantastic community have him unmanageable wealth and power and real respect. It was all a monstrous payment for courageous fiction, a gratuity in return for the one reality of human life--illusion. We gave them a feeling of hope and profit; we sent a tidal wave of water and confidence into their stranded affairs. "We mint Faith, George," said my uncle one day. "That's what we do. And by Jove we got to keep minting! We been making human confidence ever since I drove the first cork of Tono-Bungay."

"Coining" would have been a better word than minting! And yet, you know, in a sense he was right. Civilisation is possible only through confidence, so that we can bank our money and go unarmed about the streets. The bank reserve or a policeman keeping order in a jostling multitude of people, are only slightly less impudent bluffs than my uncle's prospectuses. They couldn't for a moment "make good" if the quarter of what they guarantee was demanded of them. The whole of this modern mercantile investing civilisation is indeed such stuff as dreams are made of. A mass of people swelters and toils, great railway systems grow, cities arise to the skies and spread wide and far, mines are opened, factories hum, foundries roar, ships plough the seas, countries are settled; about this busy striving world the rich owners go, controlling all, enjoying all, confident and creating the confidence that draws us all together into a reluctant, nearly unconscious brotherhood. I wonder and plan my engines. The flags flutter, the crowds cheer, the legislatures meet. Yet it seems to me indeed at times that

all this present commercial civilisation is no more than my poor uncle's career writ large, a swelling, thinning bubble of assurances; that its arithmetic is just as unsound, its dividends as ill-advised, its ultimate aim as vague and forgotten; that it all drifts on perhaps to some tremendous parallel to his individual disaster...

Well, so it was we Boomed, and for four years and a half we lived a life of mingled substance and moonshine. Until our particular unsoundness overtook us we went about in the most magnificent of motor-cars upon tangible high roads, made ourselves conspicuous and stately in splendid houses, ate sumptuously and had a perpetual stream of notes and money trickling into our pockets; hundreds of thousands of men and women respected us, saluted us and gave us toil and honour; I asked, and my worksheets rose, my aeroplanes swooped out of nothingness to scare the downland pe-wits; my uncle waved his hand and Lady Grove and all its associations of chivalry and ancient peace were his; waved again, and architects were busy planning the great palace he never finished at Crest Hill and an army of folkmen gathered to do his bidding, blue marble came from Canada, and timber from New Zealand; and beneath it all, you know, there was nothing but fictitious values as evanescent as rainbow gold.

#### IV

I pass the Hardingham ever and again and glance aside through the great archway at the fountain and the ferns, and think of those receding days

when I was so near the centre of our eddy of greed and enterprise. I see again my uncle's face, white and intent, and hear him discourse, hear him make consciously Napoleonic decisions, "grip" his nettles, put his "finger on the spot," "bluff," say "snap." He became particularly addicted to the last idiom. Towards the end every conceivable act took the form of saying "snap!"

The odd fish that came to us! And among others came Gordon-Nasmyth, that queer blend of romance and illegality who was destined to drag me into the most irrelevant adventure in my life the Mordet Island affair; and leave me, as they say, with blood upon my hands. It is remarkable how little it troubles my conscience and how much it stirs my imagination, that particular memory of the life I took. The story of Mordet Island has been told in a government report and told all wrong; there are still excellent reasons for leaving it wrong in places, but the liveliest appeals of discretion forbid my leaving it out altogether.

I've still the vividest memory of Gordon-Nasmyth's appearance in the inner sanctum, a lank, sunburnt person in tweeds with a yellow-brown hatchet face and one faded blue eye--the other was a closed and sunken lid--and how he told us with a stiff affectation of ease his incredible story of this great heap of quap that lay abandoned or undiscovered on the beach behind Mordet's Island among white dead mangroves and the black ooze of brackish water.

"What's quap?" said my uncle on the fourth repetition of the word.

"They call it quap, or quab, or quabb," said Gordon-Nasmyth; "but our relations weren't friendly enough to get the accent right...."

"But there the stuff is for the taking. They don't know about it. Nobody knows about it. I got down to the damned place in a canoe alone. The boys wouldn't come. I pretended to be botanising." ...

To begin with, Gordon-Nasmyth was inclined to be dramatic.

"Look here," he said when he first came in, shutting the door rather carefully behind him as he spoke, "do you two men--yes or no--want to put up six thousand--for--a clear good chance of fifteen hundred per cent. on your money in a year?"

"We're always getting chances like that," said my uncle, cocking his cigar offensively, wiping his glasses and tilting his chair back. "We stick to a safe twenty."

Gordon-Nasmyth's quick temper showed in a slight stiffening of his attitude.

"Don't you believe him," said I, getting up before he could reply.

"You're different, and I know your books. We're very glad you've come to us. Confound it, uncle! Its Gordon-Nasmyth! Sit down. What is it? Minerals?"

"Quap," said Gordon-Nasmyth, fixing his eye on me, "in heaps."

"In heaps," said my uncle softly, with his glasses very oblique.

"You're only fit for the grocery," said Gordon-Nasmyth scornfully, sitting down and helping himself to one of my uncle's cigars. "I'm sorry I came. But, still, now I'm here.... And first as to quap; quap, sir, is the most radio-active stuff in the world. That's quap! It's a festering mass of earths and heavy metals, polonium, radium, ythorium, thorium, carium, and new things, too. There's a stuff called Xk--provisionally. There they are, mucked up together in a sort of rotting sand. What it is, how it got made, I don't know. It's like as if some young creator had been playing about there. There it lies in two heaps, one small, one great, and the world for miles about it is blasted and scorched and dead. You can have it for the getting. You've got to take it--that's all!"

"That sounds all right," said I. "Have you samples?"

"Well--should I? You can have anything--up to two ounces."

"Where is it?"...

His blue eye smiled at me and scrutinised me. He smoked and was fragmentary for a time, fending off my questions; then his story began

to piece itself together. He conjured up a vision of this strange forgotten kink in the world's littoral, of the long meandering channels that spread and divaricate and spend their burden of mud and silt within the thunderbelt of Atlantic surf, of the dense tangled vegetation that creeps into the shimmering water with root and sucker. He gave a sense of heat and a perpetual reek of vegetable decay, and told how at last comes a break among these things, an arena fringed with bone-white dead trees, a sight of the hard-blue sea line beyond the dazzling surf and a wide desolation of dirty shingle and mud, bleached and scarred.... A little way off among charred dead weeds stands the abandoned station,--abandoned because every man who stayed two months at that station stayed to die, eaten up mysteriously like a leper with its dismantled sheds and its decaying pier of wormrotten and oblique piles and planks, still insecurely possible.

And in the midst, two clumsy heaps shaped like the backs of hogs, one small, one great, sticking out under a rib of rock that cuts the space across,--quap!

"There it is," said Gordon-Nasmyth, "worth three pounds an ounce, if it's worth a penny; two great heaps of it, rotten stuff and soft, ready to shovel and wheel, and you may get it by the ton!"

"How did it get there?"

"God knows! ... There it is--for the taking! In a country where you



mustn't trade. In a country where the company waits for good kind men to find it riches and then take 'em away from 'em. There you have it--derelict."

"Can't you do any sort of deal?"

"They're too damned stupid. You've got to go and take it. That's all."

"They might catch you."

"They might, of course. But they're not great at catching."

We went into the particulars of that difficulty. "They wouldn't catch me, because I'd sink first. Give me a yacht," said Gordon-Nasmyth; "that's all I need."

"But if you get caught," said my uncle.

I am inclined to think Gordon-Nasmyth imagined we would give him a cheque for six thousand pounds on the strength of his talk. It was very good talk, but we didn't do that. I stipulated for samples of his stuff for analysis, and he consented--reluctantly.

I think, on the whole, he would rather I didn't examine samples. He made a motion pocketwards, that gave us an invincible persuasion that he had a sample upon him, and that at the last instant he decided not to

produce it prematurely.

There was evidently a curious strain of secretiveness in him. He didn't like to give us samples, and he wouldn't indicate within three hundred miles the position of this Mordet Island of his. He had it clear in his mind that he had a secret of immense value, and he had no idea at all of just how far he ought to go with business people. And so presently, to gain time for these hesitations of his, he began to talk of other things. He talked very well. He talked of the Dutch East Indies and of the Congo, of Portuguese East Africa and Paraguay, of Malays and rich Chinese merchants, Dyaks and negroes and the spread of the Mahometan world in Africa to-day. And all this time he was trying to judge if we were good enough to trust with his adventure. Our cosy inner office became a little place, and all our business cold and lifeless exploits beside his glimpses of strange minglings of men, of slayings unavenged and curious customs, of trade where no writs run, and the dark treacheries of eastern ports and uncharted channels.

We had neither of us gone abroad except for a few vulgar raids on Paris; our world was England, are the places of origin of half the raw material of the goods we sold had seemed to us as remote as fairyland or the forest of Arden. But Gordon-Nasmyth made it so real and intimate for us that afternoon--for me, at any rate--that it seemed like something seen and forgotten and now again remembered.

And in the end he produced his sample, a little lump of muddy clay

speckled with brownish grains, in a glass bottle wrapped about with lead and flannel--red flannel it was, I remember--a hue which is, I know, popularly supposed to double all the mystical efficacies of flannel.

"Don't carry it about on you," said Gordon-Nasmyth. "It makes a sore."

I took the stuff to Thorold, and Thorold had the exquisite agony of discovering two new elements in what was then a confidential analysis. He has christened them and published since, but at the time Gordon-Nasmyth wouldn't hear for a moment of our publication of any facts at all; indeed, he flew into a violent passion and abused me mercilessly even for showing the stuff to Thorold. "I thought you were going to analyse it yourself," he said with the touching persuasion of the layman that a scientific man knows and practises at the sciences.

I made some commercial inquiries, and there seemed even then much truth in Gordon-Nasmyth's estimate of the value of the stuff. It was before the days of Capern's discovery of the value of canadum and his use of it in the Capern filament, but the cerium and thorium alone were worth the money he extracted for the gas-mantles then in vogue. There were, however, doubts. Indeed, there were numerous doubts. What were the limits of the gas-mantle trade? How much thorium, not to speak of cerium, could they take at a maximum. Suppose that quantity was high enough to justify our shipload, came doubts in another quarter. Were the heaps up to sample? Were they as big as he said? Was Gordon-Nasmyth--imaginative? And if these values held, could we after

all get the stuff? It wasn't ours. It was on forbidden ground. You see, there were doubts of every grade and class in the way of this adventure.

We went some way, nevertheless, in the discussion of his project, though I think we tried his patience. Then suddenly he vanished from London, and I saw no more of him for a year and a half.

My uncle said that was what he had expected, and when at last Gordon-Nasmyth reappeared and mentioned in an incidental way that he had been to Paraguay on private (and we guessed passionate) affairs, the business of the "quap" expedition had to be begun again at the beginning. My uncle was disposed to be altogether sceptical, but I wasn't so decided. I think I was drawn by its picturesque aspects. But we neither of us dreamt of touching it seriously until Capern's discovery.

Nasmyth's story had laid hold of my imagination like one small, intense picture of tropical sunshine hung on a wall of grey business affairs. I kept it going during Gordon-Nasmyth's intermittent appearances in England. Every now and then he and I would meet and reinforce its effect. We would lunch in London, or he would come to see my gliders at Crest Hill, and make new projects for getting at those heaps again now with me, now alone.

At times they became a sort of fairy-story with us, an imaginative exercise. And there came Capern's discovery of what he called the ideal

filament and with it an altogether less problematical quality about the business side of quap. For the ideal filament needed five per cent. of canadium, and canadium was known to the world only as a newly separated constituent of a variety of the rare mineral rutile. But to Thorold it was better known as an element in a mysterious sample brought to him by me, and to me it was known as one of the elements in quap. I told my uncle, and we jumped on to the process at once. We found that Gordon-Nasmyth, still unaware of the altered value of the stuff, and still thinking of the experimental prices of radium and the rarity value of cerium, had got hold of a cousin named Pollack, made some extraordinary transaction about his life insurance policy, and was buying a brig. We put in, put down three thousand pounds, and forthwith the life insurance transaction and the Pollack side of this finance vanished into thin air, leaving Pollack, I regret to say, in the brig and in the secret--except so far as canadium and the filament went--as residuum. We discussed earnestly whether we should charter a steamer or go on with the brig, but we decided on the brig as a less conspicuous instrument for an enterprise that was after all, to put it plainly, stealing.

But that was one of our last enterprises before our great crisis, and I will tell of it in its place.

So it was quap came into our affairs, came in as a fairy-tale and became real. More and more real it grew until at last it was real, until at last I saw with my eyes the heaps my imagination had seen for so long,

and felt between my fingers again that half-gritty, half soft texture of quap, like sanded moist-sugar mixed with clay in which there stirs something--

One must feel it to understand.

V

All sorts of things came to the Hardingham and offered themselves to my uncle. Gordon-Nasmyth stands but only because he played a part at last in the crisis of our fortunes. So much came to us that it seemed to me at times as though the whole world of human affairs was ready to prostitute itself to our real and imaginary millions. As I look back, I am still dazzled and incredulous to think of the quality of our opportunities.

We did the most extraordinary things; things that it seems absurd to me to leave to any casual man of wealth and enterprise who cares to do them. I had some amazing perceptions of just how modern thought and the supply of fact to the general mind may be controlled by money. Among other things that my uncle offered for, he tried very hard to buy the British Medical Journal and the Lancet, and run them on what he called modern lines, and when they resisted him he talked very vigorously for a time of organising a rival enterprise. That was a very magnificent idea indeed in its way; it would have given a tremendous advantage in the handling of innumerable specialties and indeed I scarcely know how

far it would not have put the medical profession in our grip. It still amazes me--I shall die amazed--that such a thing can be possible in the modern state. If my uncle failed to bring the thing off, some one else may succeed. But I doubt, even if he had got both these weeklies, whether his peculiar style would have suited them. The change of purpose would have shown. He would have found it difficult to keep up their dignity.

He certainly did not keep up the dignity of the Sacred Grove, an important critical organ which he acquired one day--by saying "snap"--for eight hundred pounds. He got it "lock, stock and barrel"--under one or other of which three aspects the editor was included. Even at that price it didn't pay. If you are a literary person you will remember the bright new cover he gave that representative organ of British intellectual culture, and how his sound business instincts jarred with the exalted pretensions of a vanishing age. One old wrapper I discovered the other day runs:--

"THE SACRED GROVE."

Weekly Magazine of Art, Philosophy, Science and  
Belles Lettres.

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HAVE YOU A NASTY TASTE IN YOUR MOUTH?

IT IS LIVER.

YOU NEED ONE TWENTY-THREE PILL.

(JUST ONE.)

NOT A DRUG BUT A LIVE AMERICAN REMEDY.

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The Stage; the Paradox of Acting.

Travel Biography, Verse, Fiction, etc.

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THE BEST PILL IN THE WORLD FOR AN IRREGULAR LIVER

I suppose it is some lingering traces of the Bladesover tradition to me



that makes this combination of letters and pills seem so incongruous, just as I suppose it is a lingering trace of Plutarch and my ineradicable boyish imagination that at bottom our State should be wise, sane and dignified, that makes me think a country which leaves its medical and literary criticism, or indeed any such vitally important criticism, entirely to private enterprise and open to the advances of any purchaser must be in a frankly hopeless condition. These are ideal conceptions of mine.

As a matter of fact, nothing would be more entirely natural and representative of the relations of learning, thought and the economic situation in the world at the present time than this cover of the Sacred Grove--the quiet conservatism of the one element embedded in the aggressive brilliance of the other; the contrasted notes of bold physiological experiment and extreme mental immobility.

## VI

There comes back, too, among these Hardingham memories, an impression of a drizzling November day, and how we looked out of the windows upon a procession of the London unemployed.

It was like looking down a well into some momentarily revealed nether world. Some thousands of needy ineffectual men had been raked together to trail their spiritless misery through the West Eire with an appeal that was also in its way a weak and insubstantial threat: "It is Work we

need, not Charity."

There they were, half-phantom through the fog, a silent, foot-dragging, interminable, grey procession. They carried wet, dirty banners, they rattled boxes for pence; these men who had not said "snap" in the right place, the men who had "snapped" too eagerly, the men who had never said "snap," the men who had never had a chance of saying "snap." A shambling, shameful stream they made, oozing along the street, the gutter waste of competitive civilisation. And we stood high out of it all, as high as if we looked godlike from another world, standing in a room beautifully lit and furnished, skillfully warmed, filled with costly things.

"There," thought I, "but for the grace of God, go George and Edward Ponderevo."

But my uncle's thoughts ran in a different channel, and he made that vision the test of a spirited but inconclusive harangue upon Tariff Reform.

## CHAPTER THE SECOND

### OUR PROGRESS FROM CAMDEN TOWN TO CREST HILL

I

So far my history of my aunt and uncle has dealt chiefly with his industrial and financial exploits. But side by side with that history of inflation from the infinitesimal to the immense is another development, the change year by year from the shabby impecuniosity of the Camden Town lodging to the lavish munificence of the Crest Hill marble staircase and my aunt's golden bed, the bed that was facsimiled from Fontainebleau. And the odd thing is that as I come to this nearer part of my story I find it much more difficult to tell than the clear little perspective memories of the earlier days. Impressions crowd upon one another and overlap one another; I was presently to fall in love again, to be seized by a passion to which I still faintly respond, a passion that still clouds my mind. I came and went between Ealing and my aunt and uncle, and presently between Effie and clubland, and then between business and a life of research that became far more continuous, infinitely more consecutive and memorable than any of these other sets of experiences. I didn't witness a regular social progress therefore; my aunt and uncle went up in the world, so far as I was concerned, as if they were displayed by an early cinematograph, with little jumps and flickers.

As I recall this side of our life, the figure of my round-eyes,

button-nosed, pink-and-white Aunt Susan tends always to the central position. We drove the car and sustained the car, she sat in it with a magnificent variety of headgear poised upon her delicate neck, and always with that faint ghost of a lisp no misspelling can render--commented on and illuminated the new aspects.

I've already sketched the little home behind the Wimblehurst chemist's shop, the lodging near the Cobden statue, and the apartments in Gower Street. Thence my aunt and uncle went into a flat in Redgauntlet Mansions. There they lived when I married. It was a compact flat, with very little for a woman to do in it In those days my aunt, I think, used to find the time heavy upon her hands, and so she took to books and reading, and after a time even to going to lectures in the afternoon. I began to find unexpected books upon her table: sociological books, travels, Shaw's plays. "Hullo!" I said, at the sight of some volume of the latter.

"I'm keeping a mind, George," she explained.

"Eh?"

"Keeping a mind. Dogs I never cared for. It's been a toss-up between setting up a mind and setting up a soul. It's jolly lucky for Him and you it's a mind. I've joined the London Library, and I'm going in for the Royal Institution and every blessed lecture that comes along next winter. You'd better look out."...

And I remember her coming in late one evening with a note-book in her hand.

"Where ya been, Susan?" said my uncle.

"Birkbeck--Physiology. I'm getting on." She sat down and took off her gloves. "You're just glass to me," she sighed, and then in a note of grave reproach: "You old PACKAGE! I had no idea! The Things you've kept from me!"

Presently they were setting; up the house at Beckenham, and my aunt intermitted her intellectual activities. The house at Beckenham was something of an enterprise for them at that time, a reasonably large place by the standards of the early years of Tono-Bungay. It was a big, rather gaunt villa, with a conservatory and a shrubbery, a tennis-lawn, a quite considerable vegetable garden, and a small disused coach-house. I had some glimpses of the excitements of its inauguration, but not many because of the estrangement between my aunt and Marion.

My aunt went into that house with considerable zest, and my uncle distinguished himself by the thoroughness with which he did the repainting and replumbing. He had all the drains up and most of the garden with them, and stood administrative on heaps--administrating whisky to the workmen. I found him there one day, most Napoleonic, on a little Elba of dirt, in an atmosphere that defies print. He also, I

remember, chose what he considered cheerful contrasts of colours for the painting of the woodwork. This exasperated my aunt extremely--she called him a "Pestilential old Splosher" with an unusual note of earnestness--and he also enraged her into novelties of abuse by giving each bedroom the name of some favourite hero--Cliff, Napoleon, Caesar, and so forth--and having it painted on the door in gilt letters on a black label. "Martin Luther" was kept for me. Only her respect for domestic discipline, she said, prevented her retaliating with "Old Pondo" on the housemaid's cupboard.

Also he went and ordered one of the completest sets of garden requisites I have ever seen--and had them all painted a hard clear blue. My aunt got herself large tins of a kindlier hued enamel and had everything secretly recoated, and this done, she found great joy in the garden and became an ardent rose grower and herbaceous borderer, leaving her Mind, indeed, to damp evenings and the winter months. When I think of her at Beckenham, I always think first of her as dressed in that blue cotton stuff she affected, with her arms in huge gauntleted gardening gloves, a trowel in one hand and a small but no doubt hardy and promising annual, limp and very young-looking and sheepish, in the other.

Beckenham, in the persons of a vicar, a doctor's wife, and a large proud lady called Hogberry, "called" on my uncle and aunt almost at once, so soon in fact as the lawn was down again, and afterwards my aunt made friends with a quiet gentlewoman next door, a propos of an overhanging cherry tree and the need of repairing the party fence. So she resumed

her place in society from which she had fallen with the disaster of Wimblehurst. She made a partially facetious study of the etiquette of her position, had cards engraved and retaliated calls. And then she received a card for one of Mrs. Hogberry's At Homes, gave an old garden party herself, participated in a bazaar and sale of work, and was really becoming quite cheerfully entangled in Beckenham society when she was suddenly taken up by the roots again by my uncle and transplanted to Chiselhurst.

"Old Trek, George," she said compactly, "Onward and Up," when I found her superintending the loading of two big furniture vans. "Go up and say good-bye to 'Martin Luther,' and then I'll see what you can do to help me."

## II

I look into the jumbled stores of the middle distance of memory, and Beckenham seems to me a quite transitory phase. But really they were there several years; through nearly all my married life, in fact, and far longer than the year and odd months we lived together at Wimblehurst. But the Wimblehurst time with them is fuller in my memory by far than the Beckenham period. There comes back to me with a quite considerable amount of detail the effect of that garden party of my aunt's and of a little social misbehaviour of which I was guilty on that occasion. It's like a scrap from another life. It's all set in what is for me a kind of cutaneous feeling, the feeling of rather ill-cut city

clothes, frock coat and grey trousers, and of a high collar and tie worn in sunshine among flowers. I have still a quite vivid memory of the little trapezoidal lawn, of the gathering, and particularly of the hats and feathers of the gathering, of the parlour-maid and the blue tea-cups, and of the magnificent presence of Mrs. Hogberry and of her clear, resonant voice. It was a voice that would have gone with a garden party on a larger scale; it went into adjacent premises; it included the gardener who was far up the vegetable patch and technically out of play. The only other men were my aunt's doctor, two of the clergy, amiable contrasted men, and Mrs. Hogberry's imperfectly grown-up son, a youth just bursting into collar. The rest were women, except for a young girl or so in a state of speechless good behaviour. Marion also was there.

Marion and I had arrived a little estranged, and I remember her as a silent presence, a shadow across all that sunlit emptiness of intercourse. We had embittered each other with one of those miserable little disputes that seemed so unavoidable between us. She had, with the help of Smithie, dressed rather elaborately for the occasion, and when she saw me prepared to accompany her in, I think it was a grey suit, she protested that silk hat and frock coat were imperative. I was recalcitrant, she quoted an illustrated paper showing a garden party with the King present, and finally I capitulated--but after my evil habit, resentfully.... Eh, dear! those old quarrels, how pitiful they were, how trivial! And how sorrowful they are to recall! I think they grow more sorrowful as I grow older, and all the small passionate reasons for our mutual anger fade and fade out of memory.



The impression that Beckenham company has left on my mind is one of a modest unreality; they were all maintaining a front of unspecified social pretension, and evading the display of the economic facts of the case. Most of the husbands were "in business" off stage, it would have been outrageous to ask what the business was--and the wives were giving their energies to produce, with the assistance of novels and the illustrated magazines, a moralised version of the afternoon life of the aristocratic class. They hadn't the intellectual or moral enterprise of the upper-class woman, they had no political interests, they had no views about anything, and consequently they were, I remember, extremely difficult to talk to. They all sat about in the summer-house and in garden-chairs, and were very hatty and ruffley and sunshady. Three ladies and the curate played croquet with a general immense gravity, broken by occasional loud cries of feigned distress from the curate.

"Oh! Whacking me about again! Augh!"

The dominant social fact that afternoon was Mrs. Hogberry; she took up a certain position commanding the croquet and went on, as my aunt said to me in an incidental aside, "like an old Roundabout." She talked of the way in which Beckenham society was getting mixed, and turned on to a touching letter she had recently received from her former nurse at Little Gossdean. Followed a loud account of Little Gossdean and how much she and her eight sisters had been looked up to there. "My poor mother was quite a little Queen there," she said. "And such NICE Common people! People say the country labourers are getting disrespectful nowadays. It

isn't so--not if they're properly treated. Here of course in Beckenham it's different. I won't call the people we get here a Poor--they're certainly not a proper Poor. They're Masses. I always tell Mr. Bugshoot they're Masses, and ought to be treated as such."...

Dim memories of Mrs. Mackridge floated through my mind as I listened to her....

I was whirled on this roundabout for a bit, and then had the fortune to fall off into a tete-a-tete with a lady whom my aunt introduced as Mrs. Mumble--but then she introduced everybody to me as Mumble that afternoon, either by way of humour or necessity.

That must have been one of my earliest essays in the art of polite conversation, and I remember that I began by criticising the local railway service, and that at the third sentence or thereabouts Mrs. Mumble said in a distinctly bright and encouraging way that she feared I was a very "frivolous" person.

I wonder now what it was I said that was "frivolous."

I don't know what happened to end that conversation, or if it had an end. I remember talking to one of the clergy for a time rather awkwardly, and being given a sort of topographical history of Beckenham, which he assured me time after time was "Quite an old place. Quite an old place." As though I had treated it as new and he meant to be very

patient but very convincing. Then we hung up in a distinct pause, and my aunt rescued me. "George," she said in a confidential undertone, "keep the pot a-boiling." And then audibly, "I say, will you both old trot about with tea a bit?"

"Only too delighted to TROT for you, Mrs. Ponderevo," said the clergyman, becoming fearfully expert and in his elements; "only too delighted."

I found we were near a rustic table, and that the housemaid was behind us in a suitable position to catch us on the rebound with the tea things.

"Trot!" repeated the clergyman to me, much amused; "excellent expression!" And I just saved him from the tray as he turned about.

We handed tea for a while....

"Give 'em cakes," said my aunt, flushed, but well in hand. "Helps 'em to talk, George. Always talk best after a little nourishment. Like throwing a bit of turf down an old geyser."

She surveyed the gathering with a predominant blue eye and helped herself to tea.

"They keep on going stiff," she said in an undertone.... "I've done my

best."

"It's been a huge success," I said encouragingly.

"That boy has had his legs crossed in that position and hasn't spoken for ten minutes. Stiffer and stiffer. Brittle. He's beginning a dry cough--always a bad sign, George.... Walk 'em about, shall I?--rub their noses with snow?"

Happily she didn't. I got myself involved with the gentlewoman from next door, a pensive, languid-looking little woman with a low voice, and fell talking; our topic, Cats and Dogs, and which it was we liked best.

"I always feel," said the pensive little woman, "that there's something about a dog--A cat hasn't got it."

"Yes," I found myself admitting with great enthusiasm, "there is something. And yet again--"

"Oh! I know there's something about a cat, too. But it isn't the same."

"Not quite the same," I admitted; "but still it's something."

"Ah! But such a different something!"

"More sinuous."

"Much more."

"Ever so much more."

"It makes all the difference, don't you think?"

"Yes," I said, "ALL."

She glanced at me gravely and sighed a long, deeply felt "Yes." A long pause.

The thing seemed to me to amount to a stale-mate. Fear came into my heart and much perplexity.

"The--er--Roses," I said. I felt like a drowning man. "Those roses--don't you think they are--very beautiful flowers?"

"Aren't they!" she agreed gently. "There seems to be something in roses--something--I don't know how to express it."

"Something," I said helpfully.

"Yes," she said, "something. Isn't there?"

"So few people see it," I said; "more's the pity!"

She sighed and said again very softly, "Yes."...

There was another long pause. I looked at her and she was thinking dreamily. The drowning sensation returned, the fear and enfeeblement. I perceived by a sort of inspiration that her tea-cup was empty.

"Let me take your cup," I said abruptly, and, that secured, made for the table by the summer-house. I had no intention then of deserting my aunt. But close at hand the big French window of the drawing-room yawned inviting and suggestive. I can feel all that temptation now, and particularly the provocation of my collar. In an instant I was lost. I would--Just for a moment!

I dashed in, put down the cup on the keys of the grand piano and fled upstairs, softly, swiftly, three steps at a time, to the sanctuary of my uncle's study, his snugery. I arrived there breathless, convinced there was no return for me. I was very glad and ashamed of myself, and desperate. By means of a penknife I contrived to break open his cabinet of cigars, drew a chair to the window, took off my coat, collar and tie, and remained smoking guiltily and rebelliously, and peeping through the blind at the assembly on the lawn until it was altogether gone....

The clergymen, I thought, were wonderful.

III

A few such pictures of those early days at Beckenham stand out, and then I find myself among the Chiselhurst memories. The Chiselhurst mansion had "grounds" rather than a mere garden, and there was a gardener's cottage and a little lodge at the gate. The ascendant movement was always far more in evidence there than at Beckenham. The velocity was increasing.

One night picks itself out as typical, as, in its way, marking an epoch. I was there, I think, about some advertisement stuff, on some sort of business anyhow, and my uncle and aunt had come back in a fly from a dinner at the Runcorns. (Even there he was nibbling at Runcorn with the idea of our great Amalgamation budding in his mind.) I got down there, I suppose, about eleven. I found the two of them sitting in the study, my aunt on a chair-arm with a whimsical pensiveness on her face, regarding my uncle, and he, much extended and very rotund, in the low arm-chair drawn up to the fender.

"Look here, George," said my uncle, after my first greetings. "I just been saying: We aren't Oh Fay!"

"Eh?"

"Not Oh Fay! Socially!"

"Old FLY, he means, George--French!"

"Oh! Didn't think of French. One never knows where to have him. What's gone wrong to-night?"

"I been thinking. It isn't any particular thing. I ate too much of that fishy stuff at first, like salt frog spawn, and was a bit confused by olives; and--well, I didn't know which wine was which. Had to say THAT each time. It puts your talk all wrong. And she wasn't in evening dress, not like the others. We can't go on in that style, George--not a proper ad."

"I'm not sure you were right," I said, "in having a fly."

"We got to do it all better," said my uncle, "we got to do it in Style. Smart business, smart men. She tries to pass it off as humorous"--my aunt pulled a grimace--"it isn't humorous! See! We're on the up-grade now, fair and square. We're going to be big. We aren't going to be laughed at as Poovenos, see!"

"Nobody laughed at you," said my aunt. "Old Bladder!"

"Nobody isn't going to laugh at me," said my uncle, glancing at his contours and suddenly sitting up.

My aunt raised her eyebrows slightly, swung her foot, and said nothing.



"We aren't keeping pace with our own progress, George. We got to. We're bumping against new people, and they set up to be gentlefolks--etiquette dinners and all the rest of it. They give themselves airs and expect us to be fish-out-of-water. We aren't going to be. They think we've no Style. Well, we give them Style for our advertisements, and we're going to give 'em Style all through.... You needn't be born to it to dance well on the wires of the Bond Street tradesmen. See?"

I handed him the cigar-box.

"Runcorn hadn't cigars like these," he said, truncating one lovingly.

"We beat him at cigars. We'll beat him all round."

My aunt and I regarded him, full of apprehensions.

"I got ideas," he said darkly to the cigar, deepening our dread.

He pocketed his cigar-cutter and spoke again.

"We got to learn all the rotten little game first. See, F'rinstance, we got to get samples of all the blessed wines there are--and learn 'em up. Stern, Smoor, Burgundy, all of 'em! She took Stern to-night--and when she tasted it first--you pulled a face, Susan, you did. I saw you. It surprised you. You bunched your nose. We got to get used to wine and not do that. We got to get used to wearing evening dress--YOU, Susan, too."

"Always have had a tendency to stick out of my clothes," said my aunt.

"However--Who cares?" She shrugged her shoulders.

I had never seen my uncle so immensely serious.

"Got to get the hang of etiquette," he went on to the fire. "Horses even. Practise everything. Dine every night in evening dress.... Get a brougham or something. Learn up golf and tennis and things. Country gentleman. Oh Fay. It isn't only freedom from Goochery."

"Eh?" I said.

"Oh!--Gawshery, if you like!"

"French, George," said my aunt. "But I'M not ol' Gooch. I made that face for fun."

"It isn't only freedom from Gawshery. We got to have Style. See! Style! Just all right and one better. That's what I call Style. We can do it, and we will."

He mumbled his cigar and smoked for a space, leaning forward and looking into the fire.

"What is it," he asked, "after all? What is it? Tips about eating; tips about drinking. Clothes. How to hold yourself, and not say jes' the

few little things they know for certain are wrong--jes' the shibboleth things."

He was silent again, and the cigar crept up from the horizontal towards the zenith as the confidence of his mouth increased.

"Learn the whole bag of tricks in six months." he said, becoming more cheerful. "Ah, Susan? Beat it out! George, you in particular ought to get hold of it. Ought to get into a good club, and all that."

"Always ready to learn!" I said. "Ever since you gave me the chance of Latin. So far we don't seem to have hit upon any Latin-speaking stratum in the population."

"We've come to French," said my aunt, "anyhow."

"It's a very useful language," said my uncle. "Put a point on things. Zzzz. As for accent, no Englishman has an accent. No Englishman pronounces French properly. Don't you tell ME. It's a Bluff.--It's all a Bluff. Life's a Bluff--practically. That's why it's so important, Susan, for us to attend to Style. Le Steel Say Lum. The Style it's the man. Whad you laughing at, Susan? George, you're not smoking. These cigars are good for the mind.... What do YOU think of it all? We got to adapt ourselves. We have--so far.... Not going to be beat by these silly things."

#### IV

"What do you think of it, George?" he insisted.

What I said I thought of it I don't now recall. Only I have very distinctly the impression of meeting for a moment my aunt's impenetrable eye. And anyhow he started in with his accustomed energy to rape the mysteries of the Costly Life, and become the calmest of its lords. On the whole, I think he did it--thoroughly. I have crowded memories, a little difficult to disentangle, of his experimental stages, his experimental proceedings. It's hard at times to say which memory comes in front of which. I recall him as presenting on the whole a series of small surprises, as being again and again, unexpectedly, a little more self-confident, a little more polished, a little richer and finer, a little more aware of the positions and values of things and men.

There was a time--it must have been very early--when I saw him deeply impressed by the splendours of the dining-room of the National Liberal Club. Heaven knows who our host was or what that particular little "feed" was about now!--all that sticks is the impression of our straggling entry, a string of six or seven guests, and my uncle looking about him at the numerous bright red-shaded tables, at the exotics in great Majolica jars, at the shining ceramic columns and pilasters, at the impressive portraits of Liberal statesmen and heroes, and all that contributes to the ensemble of that palatial spectacle. He was betrayed into a whisper to me, "This is all Right, George!" he said. That artless

comment seems almost incredible as I set it down; there came a time so speedily when not even the clubs of New York could have overawed my uncle, and when he could walk through the bowing magnificence of the Royal Grand Hotel to his chosen table in that aggressively exquisite gallery upon the river, with all the easy calm of one of earth's legitimate kings.

The two of them learnt the new game rapidly and well; they experimented abroad, they experimented at home. At Chiselhurst, with the aid of a new, very costly, but highly instructive cook, they tried over everything they heard of that roused their curiosity and had any reputation for difficulty, from asparagus to plover's eggs. They afterwards got a gardener who could wait at table--and he brought the soil home to one. Then there came a butler.

I remember my aunt's first dinner-gown very brightly, and how she stood before the fire in the drawing-room confessing once unsuspected pretty arms with all the courage she possessed, and looking over her shoulder at herself in a mirror.

"A ham," she remarked reflectively, "must feel like this. Just a necklace."...

I attempted, I think, some commonplace compliment.

My uncle appeared at the door in a white waistcoat and with his hands in

his trouser pockets; he halted and surveyed her critically.

"Couldn't tell you from a duchess, Susan," he remarked. "I'd like to have you painted, standin' at the fire like that. Sargent! You look--spirited, somehow. Lord!--I wish some of those damned tradesmen at Wimbleshurst could see you."...

They did a lot of week-ending at hotels, and sometimes I went down with them. We seemed to fall into a vast drifting crowd of social learners. I don't know whether it is due simply to my changed circumstances, but it seems to me there have been immensely disproportionate developments of the hotel-frequenting and restaurant-using population during the last twenty years. It is not only, I think, that there are crowds of people who, like we were, are in the economically ascendant phase, but whole masses of the prosperous section of the population must be altering its habits, giving up high-tea for dinner and taking to evening dress, using the week-end hotels as a practise-ground for these new social arts. A swift and systematic conversion to gentility has been going on, I am convinced, throughout the whole commercial upper-middle class since I was twenty-one. Curiously mixed was the personal quality of the people one saw in these raids. There were conscientiously refined and low-voiced people reeking with proud bashfulness; there were aggressively smart people using pet diminutives for each other loudly and seeking fresh occasions for brilliant rudeness; there were awkward husbands and wives quarrelling furtively about their manners and ill at ease under the eye of the winter; cheerfully amiable and often

discrepant couples with a disposition to inconspicuous corners, and the jolly sort, affecting an unaffected ease; plump happy ladies who laughed too loud, and gentlemen in evening dress who subsequently "got their pipes." And nobody, you knew, was anybody, however expensively they dressed and whatever rooms they took.

I look back now with a curious remoteness of spirit to those crowded dining-rooms with their dispersed tables and their inevitable red-shaded lights and the unsympathetic, unskillful waiters, and the choice of "Thig or Glear, Sir?" I've not dined in that way, in that sort of place, now for five years--it must be quite five years, so specialised and narrow is my life becoming.

My uncle's earlier motor-car phases work in with these associations, and there stands out a little bright vignette of the hall of the Magnificent, Bexhill-on-Sea, and people dressed for dinner and sitting about amidst the scarlet furniture--satin and white-enameled woodwork until the gong should gather them; and my aunt is there, very marvelously wrapped about in a dust cloak and a cage-like veil, and there are hotel porters and under-porters very alert, and an obsequious manager; and the tall young lady in black from the office is surprised into admiration, and in the middle of the picture is my uncle, making his first appearance in that Esquimaux costume I have already mentioned, a short figure, compactly immense, hugely goggled, wearing a sort of brown rubber proboscis, and surmounted by a table-land of motoring cap.

So it was we recognised our new needs as fresh invaders of the upper levels of the social system, and set ourselves quite consciously to the acquisition of Style and Savoir Faire. We became part of what is nowadays quite an important element in the confusion of our world, that multitude of economically ascendant people who are learning how to spend money. It is made up of financial people, the owners of the businesses that are eating up their competitors, inventors of new sources of wealth, such as ourselves; it includes nearly all America as one sees it on the European stage. It is a various multitude having only this in common: they are all moving, and particularly their womankind are moving, from conditions in which means were insistently finite, things were few, and customs simple, towards a limitless expenditure and the sphere of attraction of Bond Street, Fifth Avenue, and Paris. Their general effect is one of progressive revolution, of limitless rope.

They discover suddenly indulgences their moral code never foresaw and has no provision for, elaborations, ornaments, possessions beyond their wildest dreams. With an immense astonished zest they begin shopping begin a systematic adaptation to a new life crowded and brilliant with things shopped, with jewels, maids, butlers, coachmen, electric broughams, hired town and country houses. They plunge into it as one plunges into a career; as a class, they talk, think, and dream possessions. Their literature, their Press, turns all on that; immense illustrated weeklies of unsurpassed magnificence guide them in domestic



architecture, in the art of owning a garden, in the achievement of the sumptuous in motor-cars, in an elaborate sporting equipment, in the purchase and control of their estates, in travel and stupendous hotels. Once they begin to move they go far and fast. Acquisition becomes the substance of their lives. They find a world organised to gratify that passion. In a brief year or so they are connoisseurs. They join in the plunder of the eighteenth century, buy rare old books, fine old pictures, good old furniture. Their first crude conception of dazzling suites of the newly perfect is replaced almost from the outset by a jackdaw dream of accumulating costly discrepant old things.

I seem to remember my uncle taking to shopping quite suddenly. In the Beckenham days and in the early Chiselhurst days he was chiefly interested in getting money, and except for his onslaught on the Beckenham house, bothered very little about his personal surroundings and possessions. I forget now when the change came and he began to spend. Some accident must have revealed to him this new source of power, or some subtle shifting occurred in the tissues of his brain. He began to spend and "shop." So soon as he began to shop, he began to shop violently. He began buying pictures, and then, oddly enough, old clocks. For the Chiselhurst house he bought nearly a dozen grandfather clocks and three copper warming pans. After that he bought much furniture. Then he plunged into art patronage, and began to commission pictures and to make presents to churches and institutions. His buying increased with a regular acceleration. Its development was a part of the mental changes that came to him in the wild excitements of the last four years of his

ascent. Towards the climax he was a furious spender; he shopped with large unexpected purchases, he shopped like a mind seeking expression, he shopped to astonish and dismay; shopped crescendo, shopped fortissimo, con molto espressione until the magnificent smash of Crest Hill eroded his shopping for ever. Always it was he who shopped. My aunt did not shine as a purchaser. It is a curious thing, due to I know not what fine strain in her composition, that my aunt never set any great store upon possessions. She plunged through that crowded bazaar of Vanity Fair during those feverish years, spending no doubt freely and largely, but spending with detachment and a touch of humorous contempt for the things, even the "old" things, that money can buy. It came to me suddenly one afternoon just how detached she was, as I saw her going towards the Hardingham, sitting up, as she always did, rather stiffly in her electric brougham, regarding the glittering world with interested and ironically innocent blue eyes from under the brim of a hat that defied comment. "No one," I thought, "would sit so apart if she hadn't dreams--and what are her dreams?"

I'd never thought.

And I remember, too, an outburst of scornful description after she had lunched with a party of women at the Imperial Cosmic Club. She came round to my rooms on the chance of finding me there, and I gave her tea. She professed herself tired and cross, and flung herself into my chair....

"George," she cried, "the Things women are! Do I stink of money?"

"Lunching?" I asked.

She nodded.

"Plutocratic ladies?"

"Yes."

"Oriental type?"

"Oh! Like a burst hareem!... Bragging of possessions.... They feel you. They feel your clothes, George, to see if they are good!"

I soothed her as well as I could. "They ARE Good aren't they?" I said.

"It's the old pawnshop in their blood," she said, drinking tea; and then in infinite disgust, "They run their hands over your clothes--they paw you."

I had a moment of doubt whether perhaps she had not been discovered in possession of unsuspected forgeries. I don't know. After that my eyes were quickened, and I began to see for myself women running their hands over other women's furs, scrutinising their lace, even demanding to handle jewelry, appraising, envying, testing. They have a kind of

etiquette. The woman who feels says, "What beautiful sables?" "What lovely lace?" The woman felt admits proudly: "It's Real, you know," or disavows pretension modestly and hastily, "It's Rot Good." In each other's houses they peer at the pictures, handle the selvage of hangings, look at the bottoms of china....

I wonder if it IS the old pawnshop in the blood.

I doubt if Lady Drew and the Olympians did that sort of thing, but here I may be only clinging to another of my former illusions about aristocracy and the State. Perhaps always possessions have been Booty, and never anywhere has there been such a thing as house and furnishings native and natural to the women and men who made use of them....

VI

For me, at least, it marked an epoch in my uncle's career when I learnt one day that he had "shopped" Lady Grove. I realised a fresh, wide, unpreluded step. He took me by surprise with the sudden change of scale from such portable possessions as jewels and motor-cars to a stretch of countryside. The transaction was Napoleonic; he was told of the place; he said "snap"; there were no preliminary desirings or searchings. Then he came home and said what he had done. Even my aunt was for a day or so measurably awestricken by this exploit in purchase, and we both went down with him to see the house in a mood near consternation. It struck us then as a very lordly place indeed. I remember the three of

us standing on the terrace that looked westward, surveying the sky-reflecting windows of the house, and a feeling of unwarrantable intrusion comes back to me.

Lady Grove, you know, is a very beautiful house indeed, a still and gracious place, whose age-long seclusion was only effectively broken with the toot of the coming of the motor-car. An old Catholic family had died out in it, century by century, and was now altogether dead. Portions of the fabric are thirteenth century, and its last architectural revision was Tudor; within, it is for the most part dark and chilly, save for two or three favoured rooms and its tall-windowed, oak-galleried hall. Its terrace is its noblest feature; a very wide, broad lawn it is, bordered by a low stone battlement, and there is a great cedar in one corner under whose level branches one looks out across the blue distances of the Weald, blue distances that are made extraordinarily Italian in quality by virtue of the dark masses of that single tree. It is a very high terrace; southward one looks down upon the tops of wayfaring trees and spruces, and westward on a steep slope of beechwood, through which the road comes. One turns back to the still old house, and sees a grey and lichenous facade with a very finely arched entrance. It was warmed by the afternoon light and touched with the colour of a few neglected roses and a pyracanthus. It seemed to me that the most modern owner conceivable in this serene fine place was some bearded scholarly man in a black cassock, gentle-voiced and white-handed, or some very soft-robed, grey gentlewoman. And there was my uncle holding his goggles in a sealskin glove, wiping the glass with

a pocket-handkerchief, and asking my aunt if Lady Grove wasn't a "Bit of all Right."

My aunt made him no answer.

"The man who built this," I speculated, "wore armour and carried a sword."

"There's some of it inside still," said my uncle.

We went inside. An old woman with very white hair was in charge of the place and cringed rather obviously to the new master. She evidently found him a very strange and frightful apparition indeed, and was dreadfully afraid of him. But if the surviving present bowed down to us, the past did not. We stood up to the dark, long portraits of the extinguished race--one was a Holbein--and looked them in their sidelong eyes. They looked back at us. We all, I know, felt the enigmatical quality in them. Even my uncle was momentarily embarrassed, I think, by that invincibly self-complacent expression. It was just as though, after all, he had not bought them up and replaced them altogether; as though that, secretly, they knew better and could smile at him.

The spirit of the place was akin to Bladesover, but touched with something older and remoter. That armour that stood about had once served in tilt-yards, if indeed it had not served in battle, and this family had sent its blood and treasure, time after time, upon the most

romantic quest in history, to Palestine. Dreams, loyalties, place and honour, how utterly had it all evaporated, leaving, at last, the final expression of its spirit, these quaint painted smiles, these smiles of triumphant completion! It had evaporated, indeed, long before the ultimate Durgan had died, and in his old age he had cumbered the place with Early Victorian cushions and carpets and tapestry table-cloths and invalid appliances of a type even more extinct, it seemed to us, than the crusades.... Yes, it was different from Bladesover.

"Bit stuffy, George," said my uncle. "They hadn't much idea of ventilation when this was built."

One of the panelled rooms was half-filled with presses and a four-poster bed. "Might be the ghost room," said my uncle; but it did not seem to me that so retiring a family as the Durgans, so old and completely exhausted a family as the Durgans, was likely to haunt anybody. What living thing now had any concern with their honour and judgments and good and evil deeds? Ghosts and witchcraft were a later innovation--that fashion came from Scotland with the Stuarts.

Afterwards, prying for epitaphs, we found a marble crusader with a broken nose, under a battered canopy of fretted stone, outside the restricted limits of the present Duffield church, and half buried in nettles. "Ichabod," said my uncle. "Eh? We shall be like that, Susan, some day.... I'm going to clean him up a bit and put a railing to keep off the children."

"Old saved at the eleventh hour," said my aunt, quoting one of the less successful advertisements of Tono-Bungay.

But I don't think my uncle heard her.

It was by our captured crusader that the vicar found us. He came round the corner at us briskly, a little out of breath. He had an air of having been running after us since the first toot of our horn had warned the village of our presence. He was an Oxford man, clean-shaven, with a cadaverous complexion and a guardedly respectful manner, a cultivated intonation, and a general air of accommodation to the new order of things. These Oxford men are the Greeks of our plutocratic empire. He was a Tory in spirit, and what one may call an adapted Tory by stress of circumstances; that is to say, he was no longer a legitimist; he was prepared for the substitution of new lords for old. We were pill vendors he knew, and no doubt horribly vulgar in soul; but then it might have been some polygamous Indian rajah, a great strain on a good man's tact, or some Jew with an inherited expression of contempt. Anyhow, we were English, and neither Dissenters nor Socialists, and he was cheerfully prepared to do what he could to make gentlemen of both of us. He might have preferred Americans for some reasons; they are not so obviously taken from one part of the social system and dumped down in another, and they are more teachable; but in this world we cannot always be choosers. So he was very bright and pleasant with us, showed us the church, gossiped informingly about our neighbours on the countryside--Tux, the



banker; Lord Boom, the magazine and newspaper proprietor; Lord Carnaby, that great sportsman, and old Lady Osprey. And finally he took us by way of a village lane--three children bobbed convulsively with eyes of terror for my uncle--through a meticulous garden to a big, slovenly Vicarage with faded Victorian furniture and a faded Victorian wife, who gave us tea and introduced us to a confusing family dispersed among a lot of disintegrating basket chairs upon the edge of a well-used tennis lawn.

These people interested me. They were a common type, no doubt, but they were new to me. There were two lank sons who had been playing singles at tennis, red-eared youths growing black moustaches, and dressed in conscientiously untidy tweeds and unbuttoned and ungirt Norfolk jackets. There were a number of ill-nourished-looking daughters, sensible and economical in their costume, the younger still with long, brown-stockinged legs, and the eldest present--there were, we discovered, one or two hidden away--displaying a large gold cross and other aggressive ecclesiastical symbols; there were two or three fox-terriers, a retrieverish mongrel, and an old, bloody-eyed and very evil-smelling St. Bernard. There was a jackdaw. There was, moreover, an ambiguous, silent lady that my aunt subsequently decided must be a very deaf paying guest. Two or three other people had concealed themselves at our coming and left unfinished teas behind them. Rugs and cushions lay among the chairs, and two of the latter were, I noted, covered with Union Jacks.

The vicar introduced us sketchily, and the faded Victorian wife regarded my aunt with a mixture of conventional scorn and abject respect, and talked to her in a languid, persistent voice about people in the neighbourhood whom my aunt could not possibly know.

My aunt received these personalia cheerfully, with her blue eyes flitting from point to point, and coming back again and again to the pinched faces of the daughters and the cross upon the eldest's breast. Encouraged by my aunt's manner, the vicar's wife grew patronising and kindly, and made it evident that she could do much to bridge the social gulf between ourselves and the people of family about us.

I had just snatches of that conversation. "Mrs. Merridew brought him quite a lot of money. Her father, I believe, had been in the Spanish wine trade--quite a lady though. And after that he fell off his horse and cracked his brain pan and took to fishing and farming. I'm sure you'll like to know them. He's most amusing.... The daughter had a disappointment and went to China as a missionary and got mixed up in a massacre."...

"The most beautiful silks and things she brought back, you'd hardly believe!"

"Yes, they gave them to propitiate her. You see, they didn't understand the difference, and they thought that as they'd been massacring people, THEY'D be massacred. They didn't understand the difference Christianity

makes."...

"Seven bishops they've had in the family!"

"Married a Papist and was quite lost to them."...

"He failed some dreadful examination and had to go into the militia."...

"So she bit his leg as hard as ever she could and he let go."...

"Had four of his ribs amputated."...

"Caught meningitis and was carried off in a week."

"Had to have a large piece of silver tube let into his throat, and if he wants to talk he puts his finger on it. It makes him so interesting, I think. You feel he's sincere somehow. A most charming man in every way."

"Preserved them both in spirits very luckily, and there they are in his study, though of course he doesn't show them to everybody."

The silent lady, unperturbed by these apparently exciting topics, scrutinised my aunt's costume with a singular intensity, and was visibly moved when she unbuttoned her dust cloak and flung it wide. Meanwhile we men conversed, one of the more spirited daughters listened brightly, and the youths lay on the grass at our feet. My uncle offered them cigars,

but they both declined,--out of bashfulness, it seemed to me, whereas the vicar, I think, accepted out of tact. When we were not looking at them directly, these young men would kick each other furtively.

Under the influence of my uncle's cigar, the vicar's mind had soared beyond the limits of the district. "This Socialism," he said, "seems making great headway."

My uncle shook his head. "We're too individualistic in this country for that sort of nonsense," he said "Everybody's business is nobody's business. That's where they go wrong."

"They have some intelligent people in their ranks, I am told," said the vicar, "writers and so forth. Quite a distinguished playwright, my eldest daughter was telling me--I forget his name.

"Milly, dear! Oh! she's not here. Painters, too, they have. This Socialist, it seems to me, is part of the Unrest of the Age.... But, as you say, the spirit of the people is against it. In the country, at any rate. The people down here are too sturdily independent in their small way--and too sensible altogether."...

"It's a great thing for Duffield to have Lady Grove occupied again," he was saying when my wandering attention came back from some attractive casualty in his wife's discourse. "People have always looked up to the house and considering all things, old Mr. Durgan really was

extraordinarily good--extraordinarily good. You intend to give us a good deal of your time here, I hope."

"I mean to do my duty by the Parish," said my uncle.

"I'm sincerely glad to hear it--sincerely. We've missed--the house influence. An English village isn't complete--People get out of hand. Life grows dull. The young people drift away to London."

He enjoyed his cigar gingerly for a moment.

"We shall look to you to liven things up," he said, poor man!

My uncle cocked his cigar and removed it from his mouth.

"What you think the place wants?" he asked.

He did not wait for an answer. "I been thinking while you been talking--things one might do. Cricket--a good English game--sports. Build the chaps a pavilion perhaps. Then every village ought to have a miniature rifle range."

"Ye-ees," said the vicar. "Provided, of course, there isn't a constant popping."...

"Manage that all right," said my uncle. "Thing'd be a sort of long shed.

Paint it red. British colour. Then there's a Union Jack for the church and the village school. Paint the school red, too, p'raps. Not enough colour about now. Too grey. Then a maypole."

"How far our people would take up that sort of thing--" began the vicar.

"I'm all for getting that good old English spirit back again," said my uncle. "Merrymakings. Lads and lasses dancing on the village green. Harvest home. Fairings. Yule Log--all the rest of it."

"How would old Sally Glue do for a May Queen?" asked one of the sons in the slight pause that followed.

"Or Annie Glassbound?" said the other, with the huge virile guffaw of a young man whose voice has only recently broken.

"Sally Glue is eighty-five," explained the vicar, "and Annie Glassbound is well--a young lady of extremely generous proportions. And not quite right, you know. Not quite right--here." He tapped his brow.

"Generous proportions!" said the eldest son, and the guffaws were renewed.

"You see," said the vicar, "all the brisker girls go into service in or near London. The life of excitement attracts them. And no doubt the higher wages have something to do with it. And the liberty to wear

finery. And generally--freedom from restraint. So that there might be a little difficulty perhaps to find a May Queen here just at present who was really young and er--pretty.... Of course I couldn't think of any of my girls--or anything of that sort."

"We got to attract 'em back," said my uncle. "That's what I feel about it. We got to Buck-Up the country. The English country is a going concern still; just as the Established Church--if you'll excuse me saying it, is a going concern. Just as Oxford is--or Cambridge. Or any of those old, fine old things. Only it wants fresh capital, fresh ideas and fresh methods. Light railways, frinstance--scientific use of drainage. Wire fencing machinery--all that."

The vicar's face for one moment betrayed dismay. Perhaps he was thinking of his country walks amidst the hawthorns and honeysuckle.

"There's great things," said my uncle, "to be done on Mod'un lines with Village Jam and Pickles--boiled in the country."

It was the reverberation of this last sentence in my mind, I think, that sharpened my sentimental sympathy as we went through the straggling village street and across the trim green on our way back to London. It seemed that afternoon the most tranquil and idyllic collection of creeper-sheltered homes you can imagine; thatch still lingered on a whitewashed cottage or two, pyracanthus, wall-flowers, and daffodils abounded, and an unsystematic orchard or so was white with blossom

above and gay with bulbs below. I noted a row of straw beehives, beehive-shaped, beehives of the type long since condemned as inefficient by all progressive minds, and in the doctor's acre of grass a flock of two whole sheep was grazing,--no doubt he'd taken them on account. Two men and one old woman made gestures of abject vassalage, and my uncle replied with a lordly gesture of his great motoring glove....

"England's full of Bits like this," said my uncle, leaning over the front seat and looking back with great satisfaction. The black glare of his goggles rested for a time on the receding turrets of Lady Grove just peeping over the trees.

"I shall have a flagstaff, I think," he considered. "Then one could show when one is in residence. The villagers will like to know."...

I reflected. "They will" I said. "They're used to liking to know."...

My aunt had been unusually silent. Suddenly she spoke. "He says Snap," she remarked; "he buys that place. And a nice old job of Housekeeping he gives me! He sails through the village swelling like an old turkey. And who'll have to scoot the butler? Me! Who's got to forget all she ever knew and start again? Me! Who's got to trek from Chiselhurst and be a great lady? Me! ... You old Bother! Just when I was settling down and beginning to feel at home."

My uncle turned his goggles to her. "Ah! THIS time it is home, Susan....



We got there."

## VII

It seems to me now but a step from the buying of Lady Grove to the beginning of Crest Hill, from the days when the former was a stupendous achievement to the days when it was too small and dark and inconvenient altogether for a great financier's use. For me that was a period of increasing detachment from our business and the great world of London; I saw it more and more in broken glimpses, and sometimes I was working in my little pavilion above Lady Grove for a fortnight together; even when I came up it was often solely for a meeting of the aeronautical society or for one of the learned societies or to consult literature or employ searchers or some such special business. For my uncle it was a period of stupendous inflation. Each time I met him I found him more confident, more comprehensive, more consciously a factor in great affairs. Soon he was no longer an associate of merely business men; he was big enough for the attentions of greater powers.

I grew used to discovering some item of personal news about him in my evening paper, or to the sight of a full-page portrait of him in a sixpenny magazine. Usually the news was of some munificent act, some romantic piece of buying or giving or some fresh rumour of reconstruction. He saved, you will remember, the Parbury Reynolds for the country. Or at times, it would be an interview or my uncle's contribution to some symposium on the "Secret of Success," or such-like

topic. Or wonderful tales of his power of work, of his wonderful organisation to get things done, of his instant decisions and remarkable power of judging his fellow-men. They repeated his great mot: "Eight hour working day--I want eighty hours!"

He became modestly but resolutely "public." They cartooned him in Vanity Fair. One year my aunt, looking indeed a very gracious, slender lady, faced the portrait of the King in the great room at Burlington House, and the next year saw a medallion of my uncle by Ewart, looking out upon the world, proud and imperial, but on the whole a trifle too prominently convex, from the walls of the New Gallery.

I shared only intermittently in his social experiences. People knew of me, it is true, and many of them sought to make through me a sort of flank attack upon him, and there was a legend, owing, very unreasonably, partly to my growing scientific reputation and partly to an element of reserve in my manner, that I played a much larger share in planning his operations than was actually the case. This led to one or two very intimate private dinners, to my inclusion in one or two house parties and various odd offers of introductions and services that I didn't for the most part accept. Among other people who sought me in this way was Archie Garvell, now a smart, impecunious soldier of no particular distinction, who would, I think, have been quite prepared to develop any sporting instincts I possessed, and who was beautifully unaware of our former contact. He was always offering me winners; no doubt in a spirit of anticipatory exchange for some really good thing in our more

scientific and certain method of getting something for nothing....

In spite of my preoccupation with my experiments, work, I did, I find now that I come to ransack my impressions, see a great deal of the great world during those eventful years; I had a near view of the machinery by which an astounding Empire is run, rubbed shoulders and exchanged experiences with bishops and statesmen, political women and women who were not political, physicians and soldiers, artists and authors, the directors of great journals, philanthropists and all sorts of eminent, significant people. I saw the statesmen without their orders and the bishops with but a little purple silk left over from their canonicals, inhaling, not incense but cigar smoke. I could look at them all the better because, for the most part, they were not looking at me but at my uncle, and calculating consciously or unconsciously how they might use him and assimilate him to their system, the most unpremeditated, subtle, successful and aimless plutocracy that ever encumbered the destinies of mankind. Not one of them, so far as I could see, until disaster overtook him, resented his lies, his almost naked dishonesty of method, the disorderly disturbance of this trade and that, caused by his spasmodic operations. I can see them now about him, see them polite, watchful, various; his stiff compact little figure always a centre of attention, his wiry hair, his brief nose, his under-lip, electric with self-confidence. Wandering marginally through distinguished gatherings, I would catch the whispers: "That's Mr. Ponderevo!"

"The little man?"

"Yes, the little bounder with the glasses."

"They say he's made--"...

Or I would see him on some parterre of a platform beside my aunt's hurrying hat, amidst titles and costumes, "holding his end up," as he would say, subscribing heavily to obvious charities, even at times making brief convulsive speeches in some good cause before the most exalted audiences. "Mr. Chairman, your Royal Highness, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen," he would begin amidst subsiding applause and adjust those obstinate glasses and thrust back the wings of his frock-coat and rest his hands upon his hips and speak his fragment with ever and again an incidental *Zzzz*. His hands would fret about him as he spoke, fiddle his glasses, feel in his waistcoat pockets; ever and again he would rise slowly to his toes as a sentence unwound jerkily like a clockwork snake, and drop back on his heels at the end. They were the very gestures of our first encounter when he had stood before the empty fireplace in his minute draped parlour and talked of my future to my mother.

In those measurelessly long hot afternoons in the little shop at Wimblehurst he had talked and dreamt of the Romance of Modern Commerce. Here, surely, was his romance come true.

VIII

People say that my uncle lost his head at the crest of his fortunes, but if one may tell so much truth of a man one has in a manner loved, he never had very much head to lose. He was always imaginative, erratic, inconsistent, recklessly inexact, and his inundation of wealth merely gave him scope for these qualities. It is true, indeed, that towards the climax he became intensely irritable at times and impatient of contradiction, but that, I think, was rather the gnawing uneasiness of sanity than any mental disturbance. But I find it hard either to judge him or convey the full development of him to the reader. I saw too much of him; my memory is choked with disarranged moods and aspects. Now he is distended with megalomania, now he is deflated, now he is quarrelsome, now impenetrably self-satisfied, but always he is sudden, jerky, fragmentary, energetic, and--in some subtle fundamental way that I find difficult to define--absurd.

There stands out--because of the tranquil beauty of its setting perhaps--a talk we had in the veranda of the little pavilion near my worksheds behind Crest Hill in which my aeroplanes and navigable balloons were housed. It was one of many similar conversations, and I do not know why it in particular should survive its fellows. It happens so. He had come up to me after his coffee to consult me about a certain chalice which in a moment of splendour and under the importunity of a countess he had determined to give to a deserving church in the east-end. I, in a moment of even rasher generosity, had suggested Ewart as a possible artist. Ewart had produced at once an admirable sketch for the sacred vessel surrounded by a sort of wreath of Millies with open

arms and wings and had drawn fifty pounds on the strength of it. After that came a series of vexatious delays. The chalice became less and less of a commercial man's chalice, acquired more and more the elusive quality of the Holy Grail, and at last even the drawing receded.

My uncle grew restive.... "You see, George, they'll begin to want the blasted thing!"

"What blasted thing?"

"That chalice, damn it! They're beginning to ask questions. It isn't Business, George."

"It's art," I protested, "and religion."

"That's all very well. But it's not a good ad for us, George, to make a promise and not deliver the goods.... I'll have to write off your friend Ewart as a bad debt, that's what it comes to, and go to a decent firm."...

We sat outside on deck chairs in the veranda of the pavilion, smoked, drank whisky, and, the chalice disposed of, meditated. His temporary annoyance passed. It was an altogether splendid summer night, following a blazing, indolent day. Full moonlight brought out dimly the lines of the receding hills, one wave beyond another; far beyond were the pin-point lights of Leatherhead, and in the foreground the little stage

from which I used to start upon my gliders gleamed like wet steel. The season must have been high June, for down in the woods that hid the lights of the Lady Grove windows, I remember the nightingales thrilled and gurgled....

"We got here, George," said my uncle, ending a long pause. "Didn't I say?"

"Say!--when?" I asked.

"In that hole in the To'nem Court Road, eh? It's been a Straight Square Fight, and here we are!"

I nodded.

"Member me telling you--Tono-Bungay?... Well.... I'd just that afternoon thought of it!"

"I've fancied at times;" I admitted.

"It's a great world, George, nowadays, with a fair chance for every one who lays hold of things. The career ouvert to the Talons--eh? Tono-Bungay. Think of it! It's a great world and a growing world, and I'm glad we're in it--and getting a pull. We're getting big people, George. Things come to us. Eh? This Palestine thing."...

He meditated for a time and Zzzzed softly. Then he became still.

His theme was taken up by a cricket in the grass until he himself was ready to resume it. The cricket too seemed to fancy that in some scheme of its own it had got there. "Chirrrrrrup" it said; "chirrrrrrup."

"Lord, what a place that was at Wimblehurst!" he broke out. "If ever I get a day off we'll motor there, George, and run over that dog that sleeps in the High Street. Always was a dog asleep there--always. Always... I'd like to see the old shop again. I daresay old Ruck still stands between the sheep at his door, grinning with all his teeth, and Marbel, silly beggar! comes out with his white apron on and a pencil stuck behind his ear, trying to look awake... Wonder if they know it's me? I'd like 'em somehow to know it's me."

"They'll have had the International Tea Company and all sorts of people cutting them up," I said. "And that dog's been on the pavement this six years--can't sleep even there, poor dear, because of the motor-horns and its shattered nerves."

"Movin' everywhere," said my uncle. "I expect you're right.... It's a big time we're in, George. It's a big Progressive On-coming Imperial Time. This Palestine business--the daring of it.... It's, it's a Process, George. And we got our hands on it. Here we sit--with our hands on it, George. Entrusted."



"It seems quiet to--night. But if we could see and hear." He waved his cigar towards Leatherhead and London.

"There they are, millions, George. Jes' think of what they've been up to to-day--those ten millions--each one doing his own particular job. You can't grasp it. It's like old Whitman says--what is it he says? Well, anyway it's like old Whitman. Fine chap, Whitman! Fine old chap! Queer, you can't quote him. ... And these millions aren't anything. There's the millions over seas, hundreds of millions, Chinese, M'rocco, Africa generally, 'Merica.... Well, here we are, with power, with leisure, picked out--because we've been energetic, because we've seized opportunities, because we've made things hum when other people have waited for them to hum. See? Here we are--with our hands on it. Big people. Big growing people. In a sort of way,--Forces."

He paused. "It's wonderful, George," he said.

"Anglo-Saxon energy," I said softly to the night.

"That's it, George--energy. It's put things in our grip--threads, wires, stretching out and out, George, from that little office of ours, out to West Africa, out to Egypt, out to Inja, out east, west, north and south. Running the world practically. Running it faster and faster. Creative. There's that Palestine canal affair. Marvellous idee! Suppose we take that up, suppose we let ourselves in for it, us and the others, and run that water sluice from the Mediterranean into the Dead Sea Valley--think

of the difference it will make! All the desert blooming like a rose, Jericho lost for ever, all the Holy Places under water.... Very likely destroy Christianity."...

He mused for a space. "Cuttin' canals," murmured my uncle. "Making tunnels.... New countries.... New centres.... Zzzz.... Finance.... Not only Palestine.

"I wonder where we shall get before we done, George? We got a lot of big things going. We got the investing public sound and sure. I don't see why in the end we shouldn't be very big. There's difficulties but I'm equal to them. We're still a bit soft in our bones, but they'll harden all right.... I suppose, after all, I'm worth something like a million, George, cleared up and settled. If I got out of things now. It's a great time, George, a wonderful time!"...

I glanced through the twilight at his convexity and I must confess it struck me that on the whole he wasn't particularly good value.

"We got our hands on things, George, us big people. We got to hang together, George run the show. Join up with the old order like that mill-wheel of Kipling's. (Finest thing he ever wrote, George; I jes' been reading it again. Made me buy Lady Grove.) Well, we got to run the country, George. It's ours. Make it a Scientific Organised Business Enterprise. Put idees into it. 'Lectrify it. Run the Press. Run all sorts of developments. All sorts of developments. I been talking to Lord

Boom. I been talking to all sorts of people. Great things. Progress. The world on business lines. Only jes' beginning."...

He fell into a deep meditation.

He *Zzzzed* for a time and ceased.

"YES," he said at last in the tone of a man who has at last emerged with ultimate solutions to the profoundest problems.

"What?" I said after a seemly pause.

My uncle hung fire for a moment and it seemed to me the fate of nations trembled in the balance. Then he spoke as one who speaks from the very bottom of his heart--and I think it was the very bottom of his heart.

"I'd jes' like to drop into the Eastry Arms, jes' when all those beggars in the parlour are sittin' down to whist, Ruck and Marbel and all, and give 'em ten minutes of my mind, George. Straight from the shoulder. Jes' exactly what I think of them. It's a little thing, but I'd like to do it jes' once before I die."...

He rested on that for some time *Zzzz-ing*.

Then he broke out at a new place in a tone of detached criticism.

"There's Boom," he reflected.

"It's a wonderful system this old British system, George. It's staid and stable and yet it has a place for new men. We come up and take our places. It's almost expected. We take a hand. That's where our Democracy differs from America. Over there a man succeeds; all he gets is money. Here there's a system open to every one--practically.... Chaps like Boom--come from nowhere."

His voice ceased. I reflected upon the spirit of his words. Suddenly I kicked my feet in the air, rolled on my side and sat up suddenly on my deck chair with my legs down.

"You don't mean it!" I said.

"Mean what, George?"

"Subscription to the party funds. Reciprocal advantage. Have we got to that?"

"Whad you driving at, George?"

"You know. They'd never do it, man!"

"Do what?" he said feebly; and, "Why shouldn't they?"

"They'd not even go to a baronetcy. NO!.... And yet, of course, there's Boom! And Collingshead and Gorver. They've done beer, they've done snippets! After all Tono-Bungay--it's not like a turf commission agent or anything like that!... There have of course been some very gentlemanly commission agents. It isn't like a fool of a scientific man who can't make money!"

My uncle grunted; we'd differed on that issue before.

A malignant humour took possession of me. "What would they call you?" I speculated. "The vicar would like Duffield. Too much like Duffer! Difficult thing, a title." I ran my mind over various possibilities. "Why not take a leaf from a socialist tract I came upon yesterday. Chap says we're all getting delocalised. Beautiful word--delocalised! Why not be the first delocalised peer? That gives you--Tono-Bungay! There is a Bungay, you know. Lord Tono of Bungay--in bottles everywhere. Eh?"

My uncle astonished me by losing his temper.

"Damn it. George, you don't seem to see I'm serious! You're always sneering at Tono-Bungay! As though it was some sort of swindle. It was perfec'ly legitimate trade, perfec'ly legitimate. Good value and a good article.... When I come up here and tell you plans and exchange ideas--you sneer at me. You do. You don't see--it's a big thing. It's a big thing. You got to get used to new circumstances. You got to face what lies before us. You got to drop that tone."

## IX

My uncle was not altogether swallowed up in business and ambition. He kept in touch with modern thought. For example, he was, I know, greatly swayed by what he called "This Overman idee, Nietzsche--all that stuff."

He mingled those comforting suggestions of a potent and exceptional human being emancipated from the pettier limitations of integrity with the Napoleonic legend. It gave his imagination a considerable outlet. That Napoleonic legend! The real mischief of Napoleon's immensely disastrous and accidental career began only when he was dead and the romantic type of mind was free to elaborate his character. I do believe that my uncle would have made a far less egregious smash if there had been no Napoleonic legend to misguide him. He was in many ways better and infinitely kinder than his career. But when in doubt between decent conduct and a base advantage, that cult came in more and more influentially: "think of Napoleon; think what the inflexibly-wilful Napoleon would have done with such scruples as yours;" that was the rule, and the end was invariably a new step in dishonour.

My uncle was in an unsystematic way a collector of Napoleonic relics; the bigger the book about his hero the more readily he bought it; he purchased letters and tinsel and weapons that bore however remotely upon the Man of Destiny, and he even secured in Geneva, though he never brought home, an old coach in which Buonaparte might have ridden; he

crowded the quiet walls of Lady Grove with engravings and figures of him, preferring, my aunt remarked, the more convex portraits with the white vest and those statuettes with the hands behind the back which threw forward the figure. The Durgans watched him through it all, sardonically.

And he would stand after breakfast at times in the light of the window at Lady Grove, a little apart, with two fingers of one hand stuck between his waistcoat-buttons and his chin sunken, thinking,--the most preposterous little fat man in the world. It made my aunt feel, she said, "like an old Field Marshal--knocks me into a cocked hat, George!"

Perhaps this Napoleonic bias made him a little less frequent with his cigars than he would otherwise have been, but of that I cannot be sure, and it certainly caused my aunt a considerable amount of vexation after he had read Napoleon and the Fair Sex, because for a time that roused him to a sense of a side of life he had in his commercial preoccupations very largely forgotten. Suggestion plays so great a part in this field. My uncle took the next opportunity and had an "affair"!

It was not a very impassioned affair, and the exact particulars never of course reached me. It is quite by chance I know anything of it at all. One evening I was surprised to come upon my uncle in a mixture of Bohemia and smart people at an At Home in the flat of Robbert, the R.A. who painted my aunt, and he was standing a little apart in a recess, talking or rather being talked to in undertones by a plump, blond

little woman in pale blue, a Helen Scrymgeour who wrote novels and was organising a weekly magazine. I elbowed a large lady who was saying something about them, but I didn't need to hear the thing she said to perceive the relationship of the two. It hit me like a placard on a hoarding. I was amazed the whole gathering did not see it. Perhaps they did. She was wearing a remarkably fine diamond necklace, much too fine for journalism, and regarding him with that quality of questionable proprietorship, of leashed but straining intimacy, that seems inseparable from this sort of affair. It is so much more palpable than matrimony. If anything was wanted to complete my conviction it was my uncles's eyes when presently he became aware of mine, a certain embarrassment and a certain pride and defiance. And the next day he made an opportunity to praise the lady's intelligence to me concisely, lest I should miss the point of it all.

After that I heard some gossip--from a friend of the lady's. I was much too curious to do anything but listen. I had never in all my life imagined my uncle in an amorous attitude. It would appear that she called him her "God in the Car"--after the hero in a novel of Anthony Hope's. It was essential to the convention of their relations that he should go relentlessly whenever business called, and it was generally arranged that it did call. To him women were an incident, it was understood between them; Ambition was the master-passion. A great world called him and the noble hunger for Power. I have never been able to discover just how honest Mrs. Scrymgeour was in all this, but it is quite possible the immense glamour of his financial largeness prevailed



with her and that she did bring a really romantic feeling to their encounters. There must have been some extraordinary moments....

I was a good deal exercised and distressed about my aunt when I realised what was afoot. I thought it would prove a terrible humiliation to her. I suspected her of keeping up a brave front with the loss of my uncle's affections fretting at her heart, but there I simply underestimated her. She didn't hear for some time and when she did hear she was extremely angry and energetic. The sentimental situation didn't trouble her for a moment. She decided that my uncle "wanted smacking." She accentuated herself with an unexpected new hat, went and gave him an inconceivable talking-to at the Hardingham, and then came round to "blow-up" me for not telling her what was going on before....

I tried to bring her to a proper sense of the accepted values in this affair, but my aunt's originality of outlook was never so invincible. "Men don't tell on one another in affairs of passion," I protested, and such-like worldly excuses.

"Women!" she said in high indignation, "and men! It isn't women and men--it's him and me, George! Why don't you talk sense?"

"Old passion's all very well, George, in its way, and I'm the last person to be jealous. But this is old nonsense.... I'm not going to let him show off what a silly old lobster he is to other women.... I'll mark every scrap of his underclothes with red letters,

'Ponderevo-Private'--every scrap.

"Going about making love indeed,--in abdominal belts!--at his time of life!"

I cannot imagine what passed between her and my uncle. But I have no doubt that for once her customary badinage was laid aside. How they talked then I do not know, for I who knew them so well had never heard that much of intimacy between them. At any rate it was a concerned and preoccupied "God in the Car" I had to deal with in the next few days, unusually *Zzzz-y* and given to slight impatient gestures that had nothing to do with the current conversation. And it was evident that in all directions he was finding things unusually difficult to explain.

All the intimate moments in this affair were hidden from me, but in the end my aunt triumphed. He did not so much throw as jerk over Mrs. Scrymgeour, and she did not so much make a novel of it as upset a huge pailful of attenuated and adulterated female soul upon this occasion. My aunt did not appear in that, even remotely. So that it is doubtful if the lady knew the real causes of her abandonment. The Napoleonic hero was practically unmarried, and he threw over his lady as Napoleon threw over Josephine for a great alliance.

It was a triumph for my aunt, but it had its price. For some time it was evident things were strained between them. He gave up the lady, but he resented having to do so, deeply. She had meant more to his imagination

than one could have supposed. He wouldn't for a long time "come round." He became touchy and impatient and secretive towards my aunt, and she, I noted, after an amazing check or so, stopped that stream of kindly abuse that had flowed for so long and had been so great a refreshment in their lives. They were both the poorer for its cessation, both less happy. She devoted herself more and more to Lady Grove and the humours and complications of its management. The servants took to her--as they say--she god-mothered three Susans during her rule, the coachman's, the gardener's, and the Up Hill gamekeeper's. She got together a library of old household books that were in the vein of the place. She revived the still-room, and became a great artist in jellies and elder and cowslip wine.

X

And while I neglected the development of my uncle's finances--and my own, in my scientific work and my absorbing conflict with the difficulties of flying,--his schemes grew more and more expansive and hazardous, and his spending wilder and laxer. I believe that a haunting sense of the intensifying unsoundness of his position accounts largely for his increasing irritability and his increasing secretiveness with my aunt and myself during these crowning years. He dreaded, I think, having to explain, he feared our jests might pierce unwittingly to the truth. Even in the privacy of his mind he would not face the truth. He was accumulating unrealisable securities in his safes until they hung a potential avalanche over the economic world. But his buying became a

fever, and his restless desire to keep it up with himself that he was making a triumphant progress to limitless wealth gnawed deeper and deeper. A curious feature of this time with him was his buying over and over again of similar things. His ideas seemed to run in series. Within a twelve-month he bought five new motor-cars, each more swift and powerful than its predecessor, and only the repeated prompt resignation of his chief chauffeur at each moment of danger, prevented his driving them himself. He used them more and more. He developed a passion for locomotion for its own sake.

Then he began to chafe at Lady Grove, fretted by a chance jest he had overheard at a dinner. "This house, George," he said. "It's a misfit. There's no elbow-room in it; it's choked with old memories. And I can't stand all these damned Durgans!

"That chap in the corner, George. No! the other corner! The man in a cherry-coloured coat. He watched you! He'd look silly if I stuck a poker through his Gizzard!"

"He'd look," I reflected, "much as he does now. As though he was amused."

He replaced his glasses, which had fallen at his emotion, and glared at his antagonists. "What are they? What are they all, the lot of 'em? Dead as Mutton! They just stuck in the mud. They didn't even rise to the Reformation. The old out-of-date Reformation! Move with the times!--they

moved against the times.

"Just a Family of Failure,--they never even tried!

"They're jes', George, exactly what I'm not. Exactly. It isn't suitable.... All this living in the Past.

"And I want a bigger place too, George. I want air and sunlight and room to move about and more service. A house where you can get a Move on things! Zzzz. Why! it's like a discord--it jars--even to have the telephone.... There's nothing, nothing except the terrace, that's worth a Rap. It's all dark and old and dried up and full of old-fashioned things--musty old idees--fitter for a silver-fish than a modern man.... I don't know how I got here."

He broke out into a new grievance. "That damned vicar," he complained, "thinks I ought to think myself lucky to get this place! Every time I meet him I can see him think it.... One of these days, George I'll show him what a Mod'un house is like!"

And he did.

I remember the day when he declared, as Americans say, for Crest Hill. He had come up to see my new gas plant, for I was then only just beginning to experiment with auxiliary collapsible balloons, and all the time the shine of his glasses was wandering away to the open down

beyond. "Let's go back to Lady Grove over the hill," he said. "Something I want to show you. Something fine!"

It was an empty sunlit place that summer evening, sky and earth warm with sundown, and a pe-wit or so just accentuating the pleasant stillness that ends a long clear day. A beautiful peace, it was, to wreck for ever. And there was my uncle, the modern man of power, in his grey top-hat and his grey suit and his black-ribboned glasses, short, thin-legged, large-stomached, pointing and gesticulating, threatening this calm.

He began with a wave of his arm. "That's the place, George," he said. "See?"

"Eh!" I cried--for I had been thinking of remote things.

"I got it."

"Got what?"

"For a house!--a Twentieth Century house! That's the place for it!"

One of his characteristic phrases was begotten in him.

"Four-square to the winds of heaven, George!" he said. "Eh? Four-square to the winds of heaven!"

"You'll get the winds up here," I said.

"A mammoth house it ought to be, George--to suit these hills."

"Quite," I said.

"Great galleries and things--running out there and there--See? I been thinking of it, George! Looking out all this way--across the Weald. With its back to Lady Grove."

"And the morning sun in its eye."

"Like an eagle, George,--like an eagle!"

So he broached to me what speedily became the leading occupation of his culminating years, Crest Hill. But all the world has heard of that extravagant place which grew and changed its plans as it grew, and bubbled like a salted snail, and burgeoned and bulged and evermore grew. I know not what delirium of pinnacles and terraces and arcades and corridors glittered at last upon the uplands of his mind; the place, for all that its expansion was terminated abruptly by our collapse, is wonderful enough as it stands,--that empty instinctive building of a childless man. His chief architect was a young man named Westminster, whose work he had picked out in the architecture room of the Royal Academy on account of a certain grandiose courage in it, but with him

he associated from time to time a number of fellow professionals, stonemasons, sanitary engineers, painters, sculptors, scribes, metal workers, wood carvers, furniture designers, ceramic specialists, landscape gardeners, and the man who designs the arrangement and ventilation of the various new houses in the London Zoological Gardens. In addition he had his own ideas. The thing occupied his mind at all times, but it held it completely from Friday night to Monday morning. He would come down to Lady Grove on Friday night in a crowded motor-car that almost dripped architects. He didn't, however, confine himself to architects; every one was liable to an invitation to week-end and view Crest Hill, and many an eager promoter, unaware of how Napoleonically and completely my uncle had departmentalised his mind, tried to creep up to him by way of tiles and ventilators and new electric fittings. Always on Sunday mornings, unless the weather was vile, he would, so soon as breakfast and his secretaries were disposed of, visit the site with a considerable retinue, and alter and develop plans, making modifications, Zzzz-ing, giving immense new orders verbally--an unsatisfactory way, as Westminster and the contractors ultimately found.

There he stands in my memory, the symbol of this age for me, the man of luck and advertisement, the current master of the world. There he stands upon the great outward sweep of the terrace before the huge main entrance, a little figure, ridiculously disproportionate to that forty-foot arch, with the granite ball behind him--the astronomical ball, brass coopered, that represented the world, with a little adjustable tube of lenses on a gun-metal arm that focussed the sun



upon just that point of the earth on which it chanced to be shining vertically. There he stands, Napoleonicly grouped with his retinue men in tweeds and golfing-suits, a little solicitor, whose name I forget, in grey trousers and a black jacket, and Westminster in Jaeger underclothing, a floriferous tie, and peculiar brown cloth of his own.

The downland breeze flutters my uncle's coat-tails, disarranges his stiff hair, and insists on the evidence of undisciplined appetites in face and form, as he points out this or that feature in the prospect to his attentive collaborator.

Below are hundreds of feet of wheeling-planks, ditches, excavations, heaps of earth, piles of garden stone from the Wealden ridges. On either hand the walls of his irrelevant unmeaning palace rise at one time he had working in that place--disturbing the economic balance of the whole countryside by their presence--upwards of three thousand men....

So he poses for my picture amidst the raw beginnings that were never to be completed. He did the strangest things about that place, things more and more detached from any conception of financial scale, things more and more apart from sober humanity. He seemed to think himself, at last, released from any such limitations. He moved a quite considerable hill, and nearly sixty mature trees were moved with it to open his prospect eastward, moved it about two hundred feet to the south. At another time he caught a suggestion from some city restaurant and made a billiard-room roofed with plate glass beneath the waters of his

ornamental lake. He furnished one wing while its roof still awaited completion. He had a swimming bath thirty feet square next to his bedroom upstairs, and to crown it all he commenced a great wall to hold all his dominions together, free from the invasion of common men. It was a ten-foot wall, glass surmounted, and had it been completed as he intended it, it would have had a total length of nearly eleven miles. Some of it towards the last was so dishonestly built that it collapsed within a year upon its foundations, but some miles of it still stand. I never think of it now but what I think of the hundreds of eager little investors who followed his "star," whose hopes and lives, whose wives' security and children's prospects are all mixed up beyond redemption with that flaking mortar....

It is curious how many of these modern financiers of chance and bluff have ended their careers by building. It was not merely my uncle. Sooner or later they all seem to bring their luck to the test of realisation, try to make their fluid opulence coagulate out as bricks and mortar, bring moonshine into relations with a weekly wages-sheet. Then the whole fabric of confidence and imagination totters--and down they come....

When I think of that despoiled hillside, that colossal litter of bricks and mortar, and crude roads and paths, the scaffolding and sheds, the general quality of unforeseeing outrage upon the peace of nature, I am reminded of a chat I had with the vicar one bleak day after he had witnessed a glide. He talked to me of aeronautics as I stood in jersey and shorts beside my machine, fresh from alighting, and his cadaverous

face failed to conceal a peculiar desolation that possessed him.

"Almost you convince me," he said, coming up to me, "against my will....  
A marvellous invention! But it will take you a long time, sir, before  
you can emulate that perfect mechanism--the wing of a bird."

He looked at my sheds.

"You've changed the look of this valley, too," he said.

"Temporary defilements," I remarked, guessing what was in his mind.

"Of course. Things come and go. Things come and go. But--H'm. I've  
just been up over the hill to look at Mr. Edward Ponderevo's new house.  
That--that is something more permanent. A magnificent place!--in many  
ways. Imposing. I've never somehow brought myself to go that way before.  
Things are greatly advanced.... We find--the great number of strangers  
introduced into the villages about here by these operations, working-men  
chiefly, a little embarrassing. It put us out. They bring a new  
spirit into the place; betting--ideas--all sorts of queer notions.  
Our publicans like it, of course. And they come and sleep in one's  
outhouses--and make the place a little unsafe at nights. The other  
morning I couldn't sleep--a slight dyspepsia--and I looked out of  
the window. I was amazed to see people going by on bicycles. A silent  
procession. I counted ninety-seven--in the dawn. All going up to the new  
road for Crest Hill. Remarkable I thought it. And so I've been up to see

what they were doing."

"They would have been more than remarkable thirty years ago," I said.

"Yes, indeed. Things change. We think nothing of it now at all--comparatively. And that big house--"

He raised his eyebrows. "Really stupendous! Stupendous.

"All the hillside--the old turf--cut to ribbons!"

His eye searched my face. "We've grown so accustomed to look up to Lady Grove," he said, and smiled in search of sympathy. "It shifts our centre of gravity."

"Things will readjust themselves," I lied.

He snatched at the phrase. "Of course," he said.

"They'll readjust themselves--settle down again. Must. In the old way. It's bound to come right again--a comforting thought. Yes. After all, Lady Grove itself had to be built once upon a time--was--to begin with--artificial."

His eye returned to my aeroplane. He sought to dismiss his graver preoccupations. "I should think twice," he remarked, "before I trusted

myself to that concern.... But I suppose one grows accustomed to the motion."

He bade me good morning and went his way, bowed and thoughtful....

He had kept the truth from his mind a long time, but that morning it had forced its way to him with an aspect that brooked no denial that this time it was not just changes that were coming in his world, but that all his world lay open and defenceless, conquered and surrendered, doomed so far as he could see, root and branch, scale and form alike, to change.

## CHAPTER THE THIRD

### SOARING

I

For nearly all the time that my uncle was incubating and hatching Crest Hill I was busy in a little transverse valley between that great beginning and Lady Grove with more and more costly and ambitious experiments in aerial navigation. This work was indeed the main substance of my life through all the great time of the Tono-Bungay symphony.

I have told already how I came to devote myself to this system of inquiries, how in a sort of disgust with the common adventure of life I took up the dropped ends of my college studies, taking them up again with a man's resolution instead of a boy's ambition. From the first I did well at this work. It--was, I think, largely a case of special aptitude, of a peculiar irrelevant vein of faculty running through my mind. It is one of those things men seem to have by chance, that has little or nothing to do with their general merit, and which it is ridiculous to be either conceited or modest about. I did get through a very big mass of work in those years, working for a time with a concentrated fierceness that left little of such energy or capacity as I possess unused. I worked out a series of problems connected with the stability of bodies pitching in the air and the internal movements of

the wind, and I also revolutionised one leading part at last of the theory of explosive engines. These things are to be found in the Philosophical Transactions, the Mathematical Journal, and less frequently in one or two other such publications, and they needn't detain us here. Indeed, I doubt if I could write about them here. One acquires a sort of shorthand for one's notes and mind in relation to such special work. I have never taught; nor lectured, that is to say, I have never had to express my thoughts about mechanical things in ordinary everyday language, and I doubt very much if I could do so now without extreme tedium.

My work was, to begin with, very largely theoretical. I was able to attack such early necessities of verification as arose with quite little models, using a turntable to get the motion through the air, and cane, whalebone and silk as building material. But a time came when incalculable factors crept in, factors of human capacity and factors of insufficient experimental knowledge, when one must needs guess and try. Then I had to enlarge the scale of my operations, and soon I had enlarged them very greatly. I set to work almost concurrently on the balance and stability of gliders and upon the steering of inflated bags, the latter a particularly expensive branch of work. I was no doubt moved by something of the same spirit of lavish expenditure that was running away with my uncle in these developments. Presently my establishment above Lady Grove had grown to a painted wood chalet big enough to accommodate six men, and in which I would sometimes live for three weeks together; to a gasometer, to a motor-house, to three big

corrugated-roofed sheds and lock-up houses, to a stage from which to start gliders, to a workshop and so forth. A rough road was made. We brought up gas from Cheaping and electricity from Woking, which place I found also afforded a friendly workshop for larger operations than I could manage. I had the luck also to find a man who seemed my heaven-sent second-in-command--Cothope his name was. He was a self-educated-man; he had formerly been a sapper and he was one of the best and handiest working engineers alive. Without him I do not think I could have achieved half what I have done. At times he has been not so much my assistant as my collaborator, and has followed my fortunes to this day. Other men came and went as I needed them.

I do not know how far it is possible to convey to any one who has not experienced it, the peculiar interest, the peculiar satisfaction that lies in a sustained research when one is not hampered by want of money. It is a different thing from any other sort of human effort. You are free from the exasperating conflict with your fellow-creatures altogether--at least so far as the essential work goes; that for me is its peculiar merit. Scientific truth is the remotest of mistresses; she hides in strange places, she is attained by tortuous and laborious roads, but SHE IS ALWAYS THERE! Win to her and she will not fail you; she is yours and mankind's for ever. She is reality, the one reality I have found in this strange disorder of existence. She will not sulk with you nor misunderstand you nor cheat you of your reward upon some petty doubt. You cannot change her by advertisement or clamour, nor stifle her in vulgarities. Things grow under your hands when you serve her, things



that are permanent as nothing else is permanent in the whole life of man. That, I think, is the peculiar satisfaction of science and its enduring reward....

The taking up of experimental work produced a great change in my personal habits. I have told how already once in my life at Wimblehurst I had a period of discipline and continuous effort, and how, when I came to South Kensington, I became demoralised by the immense effect of London, by its innumerable imperative demands upon my attention and curiosity. And I parted with much of my personal pride when I gave up science for the development of Tono-Bungay. But my poverty kept me abstinent and my youthful romanticism kept me chaste until my married life was well under way. Then in all directions I relaxed. I did a large amount of work, but I never troubled to think whether it was my maximum nor whether the moods and indolences that came to me at times were avoidable things. With the coming of plenty I ate abundantly and foolishly, drank freely and followed my impulses more and more carelessly. I felt no reason why I should do anything else. Never at any point did I use myself to the edge of my capacity. The emotional crisis of my divorce did not produce any immediate change in these matters of personal discipline. I found some difficulty at first in concentrating my mind upon scientific work, it was so much more exacting than business, but I got over that difficulty by smoking. I became an inordinate cigar smoker; it gave me moods of profound depression, but I treated these usually by the homeopathic method,--by lighting another cigar. I didn't realise at all how loose my moral and nervous fibre had

become until I reached the practical side of my investigations and was face to face with the necessity of finding out just how it felt to use a glider and just what a man could do with one.

I got into this relaxed habit of living in spite of very real tendencies in my nature towards discipline. I've never been in love with self-indulgence. That philosophy of the loose lip and the lax paunch is one for which I've always had an instinctive distrust. I like bare things, stripped things, plain, austere and continent things, fine lines and cold colours. But in these plethoric times when there is too much coarse stuff for everybody and the struggle for life takes the form of competitive advertisement and the effort to fill your neighbour's eye, when there is no urgent demand either for personal courage, sound nerves or stark beauty, we find ourselves by accident. Always before these times the bulk of the people did not over-eat themselves, because they couldn't, whether they wanted to do so or not, and all but a very few were kept "fit" by unavoidable exercise and personal danger. Now, if only he pitch his standard low enough and keep free from pride, almost any one can achieve a sort of excess. You can go through contemporary life fudging and evading, indulging and slacking, never really hungry nor frightened nor passionately stirred, your highest moment a mere sentimental orgasm, and your first real contact with primary and elemental necessities, the sweat of your death-bed. So I think it was with my uncle; so, very nearly, it was with me.

But the glider brought me up smartly. I had to find out how these things

went down the air, and the only way to find out is to go down with one. And for a time I wouldn't face it.

There is something impersonal about a book, I suppose. At any rate I find myself able to write down here just the confession I've never been able to make to any one face to face, the frightful trouble it was to me to bring myself to do what I suppose every other coloured boy in the West Indies could do without turning a hair, and that is to fling myself off for my first soar down the wind. The first trial was bound to be the worst; it was an experiment I made with life, and the chance of death or injury was, I supposed, about equal to the chance of success. I believed that with a dawn-like lucidity. I had begun with a glider that I imagined was on the lines of the Wright brothers' aeroplane, but I could not be sure. It might turn over. I might upset it. It might burrow its nose at the end and smash itself and me. The conditions of the flight necessitated alert attention; it wasn't a thing to be done by jumping off and shutting one's eyes or getting angry or drunk to do it. One had to use one's weight to balance. And when at last I did it it was horrible--for ten seconds. For ten seconds or so, as I swept down the air flattened on my infernal framework and with the wind in my eyes, the rush of the ground beneath me filled me with sick and helpless terror; I felt as though some violent oscillatory current was throbbing in brain and back bone, and I groaned aloud. I set my teeth and groaned. It was a groan wrung out of me in spite of myself. My sensations of terror swooped to a climax. And then, you know, they ended!

Suddenly my terror was over and done with. I was soaring through the air right way up, steadily, and no mischance had happened. I felt intensely alive and my nerves were strung like a bow. I shifted a limb, swerved and shouted between fear and triumph as I recovered from the swerve and heeled the other way and steadied myself.

I thought I was going to hit a rook that was flying athwart me,--it was queer with what projectile silence that jumped upon me out of nothingness, and I yelled helplessly, "Get out of the way!" The bird doubled itself up like a partly inverted V, flapped, went up to the right abruptly and vanished from my circle of interest. Then I saw the shadow of my aeroplane keeping a fixed distance before me and very steady, and the turf as it seemed streaming out behind it. The turf!--it wasn't after all streaming so impossibly fast.

When I came gliding down to the safe spread of level green I had chosen, I was as cool and ready as a city clerk who drops off an omnibus in motion, and I had learnt much more than soaring. I tilted up her nose at the right moment, levelled again and grounded like a snowflake on a windless day. I lay flat for an instant and then knelt up and got on my feet atremble, but very satisfied with myself. Cothope was running down the hill to me. ...

But from that day I went into training, and I kept myself in training for many months. I had delayed my experiments for very nearly six weeks on various excuses because of my dread of this first flight, because of

the slackness of body and spirit that had come to me with the business life. The shame of that cowardice spurred me none the less because it was probably altogether my own secret. I felt that Cothope at any rate might suspect. Well,--he shouldn't suspect again.

It is curious that I remember that shame and self accusation and its consequences far more distinctly than I recall the weeks of vacillation before I soared. For a time I went altogether without alcohol, I stopped smoking altogether and ate very sparingly, and every day I did something that called a little upon my nerves and muscles. I soared as frequently as I could. I substituted a motor-bicycle for the London train and took my chances in the southward traffic, and I even tried what thrills were to be got upon a horse. But they put me on made horses, and I conceived a perhaps unworthy contempt for the certitudes of equestrian exercise in comparison with the adventures of mechanism. Also I walked along the high wall at the back of Lady Grove garden, and at last brought myself to stride the gap where the gate comes. If I didn't altogether get rid of a certain giddy instinct by such exercises, at least I trained my will until it didn't matter. And soon I no longer dreaded flight, but was eager to go higher into the air, and I came to esteem soaring upon a glider, that even over the deepest dip in the ground had barely forty feet of fall beneath it, a mere mockery of what flight might be. I began to dream of the keener freshness in the air high above the beechwoods, and it was rather to satisfy that desire than as any legitimate development of my proper work that presently I turned a part of my energies and the bulk of my private income to the problem of the

navigable balloon.

## II

I had gone far beyond that initial stage; I had had two smashes and a broken rib which my aunt nursed with great energy, and was getting some reputation in the aeronautic world when, suddenly, as though she had never really left it, the Honourable Beatrice Normandy, dark-eyed, and with the old disorderly wave of the hair from her brow, came back into my life. She came riding down a grass path in the thickets below Lady Grove, perched up on a huge black horse, and the old Earl of Carnaby and Archie Garvell, her half-brother, were with her. My uncle had been bothering me about the Crest Hill hot-water pipes, and we were returning by a path transverse to theirs and came out upon them suddenly. Old Carnaby was trespassing on our ground, and so he hailed us in a friendly fashion and pulled up to talk to us.

I didn't note Beatrice at all at first. I was interested in Lord Carnaby, that remarkable vestige of his own brilliant youth. I had heard of him, but never seen him. For a man of sixty-five who had sinned all the sins, so they said, and laid waste the most magnificent political debut of any man of his generation, he seemed to me to be looking remarkably fit and fresh. He was a lean little man with grey-blue eyes in his brown face, and his cracked voice was the worst thing in his effect.

"Hope you don't mind us coming this way, Ponderevo," he cried; and my uncle, who was sometimes a little too general and generous with titles, answered, "Not at all, my lord, not at all! Glad you make use of it!"

"You're building a great place over the hill," said Carnaby.

"Thought I'd make a show for once," said my uncle. "It looks big because it's spread out for the sun."

"Air and sunlight," said the earl. "You can't have too much of them. But before our time they used to build for shelter and water and the high road."

Then I discovered that the silent figure behind the earl was Beatrice.

I'd forgotten her sufficiently to think for a moment that she hadn't changed at all since she had watched me from behind the skirts of Lady Drew. She was looking at me, and her dainty brow under her broad brimmed hat--she was wearing a grey hat and loose unbuttoned coat--was knit with perplexity, trying, I suppose, to remember where she had seen me before. Her shaded eyes met mine with that mute question....

It seemed incredible to me she didn't remember.

"Well," said the earl and touched his horse.

Garvell was patting the neck of his horse, which was inclined to fidget, and disregarding me. He nodded over his shoulder and followed. His movement seemed to release a train of memories in her. She glanced suddenly at him and then back at me with a flash of recognition that warmed instantly to a faint smile. She hesitated as if to speak to me, smiled broadly and understandingly and turned to follow the others. All three broke into a canter and she did not look back. I stood for a second or so at the crossing of the lanes, watching her recede, and then became aware that my uncle was already some paces off and talking over his shoulder in the belief that I was close behind. I turned about and strode to overtake him. My mind was full of Beatrice and this surprise. I remembered her simply as a Normandy. I'd clean forgotten that Garvell was the son and she the step-daughter of our neighbour, Lady Osprey. Indeed, I'd probably forgotten at that time that we had Lady Osprey as a neighbour. There was no reason at all for remembering it. It was amazing to find her in this Surrey countryside, when I'd never thought of her as living anywhere in the world but at Bladesover Park, near forty miles and twenty years away. She was so alive--so unchanged! The same quick warm blood was in her cheeks. It seemed only yesterday that we had kissed among the bracken stems....

"Eh?" I said.

"I say he's good stuff," said my uncle. "You can say what you like against the aristocracy, George; Lord Carnaby's rattling good stuff. There's a sort of Savoir Faire, something--it's an old-fashioned phrase,



George, but a good one there's a Bong-Tong.... It's like the Oxford turf, George, you can't grow it in a year. I wonder how they do it. It's living always on a Scale, George. It's being there from the beginning."...

"She might," I said to myself, "be a picture by Romney come alive!"

"They tell all these stories about him," said my uncle, "but what do they all amount to?"

"Gods!" I said to myself; "but why have I forgotten for so long? Those queer little brows of hers, the touch of mischief in her eyes--the way she breaks into a smile!"

"I don't blame him," said my uncle. "Mostly it's imagination. That and leisure, George. When I was a young man I was kept pretty busy. So were you. Even then--!"

What puzzled me more particularly was the queer trick of my memory that had never recalled anything vital of Beatrice whatever when I met Garvell again that had, indeed, recalled nothing except a boyish antagonism and our fight. Now when my senses were full of her, it seemed incredible that I could ever have forgotten....

III

"Oh, Crikey!" said my aunt, reading a letter behind her coffee-machine.

"HERE'S a young woman, George!"

We were breakfasting together in the big window bay at Lady Grove that looks upon the iris beds; my uncle was in London.

I sounded an interrogative note and decapitated an egg.

"Who's Beatrice Normandy?" asked my aunt. "I've not heard of her before."

"She the young woman?"

"Yes. Says she knows you. I'm no hand at old etiquette, George, but her line is a bit unusual. Practically she says she's going to make her mother--"

"Eh? Step-mother, isn't it?"

"You seem to know a lot about her. She says 'mother'--Lady Osprey. They're to call on me, anyhow, next Wednesday week at four, and there's got to be you for tea."

"Eh?"

"You--for tea.

"H'm. She had rather--force of character. When I knew her before."

I became aware of my aunt's head sticking out obliquely from behind the coffee-machine and regarding me with wide blue curiosity. I met her gaze for a moment, flinched, coloured, and laughed.

"I've known her longer than I've known you," I said, and explained at length.

My aunt kept her eye on me over and round the coffee-machine as I did so. She was greatly interested, and asked several elucidatory questions.

"Why didn't you tell me the day you saw her? You've had her on your mind for a week," she said.

"It IS odd I didn't tell you," I admitted.

"You thought I'd get a Down on her," said my aunt conclusively. "That's what you thought" and opened the rest of her letters.

The two ladies came in a pony-carriage with conspicuous punctuality, and I had the unusual experience of seeing my aunt entertaining callers. We had tea upon the terrace under the cedar, but old Lady Osprey, being an embittered Protestant, had never before seen the inside of the house, and we made a sort of tour of inspection that reminded me of my first

visit to the place. In spite of my preoccupation with Beatrice, I stored a queer little memory of the contrast between the two other women; my aunt, tall, slender and awkward, in a simple blue homekeeping dress, an omnivorous reader and a very authentic wit, and the lady of pedigree, short and plump, dressed with Victorian fussiness, living at the intellectual level of palmistry and genteel fiction, pink in the face and generally flustered by a sense of my aunt's social strangeness and disposed under the circumstances to behave rather like an imitation of the more queenly moments of her own cook. The one seemed made of whalebone, the other of dough. My aunt was nervous, partly through the intrinsic difficulty of handling the lady and partly because of her passionate desire to watch Beatrice and me, and her nervousness took a common form with her, a wider clumsiness of gesture and an exacerbation of her habitual oddity of phrase which did much to deepen the pink perplexity of the lady of title. For instance, I heard my aunt admit that one of the Stuart Durgan ladies did look a bit "balmy on the crumpet"; she described the knights of the age of chivalry as "korvorting about on the off-chance of a dragon"; she explained she was "always old mucking about the garden," and instead of offering me a Garibaldi biscuit, she asked me with that faint lisp of hers, to "have some squashed flies, George." I felt convinced Lady Osprey would describe her as "a most eccentric person" on the very first opportunity;--"a most eccentric person." One could see her, as people say, "shaping" for that.

Beatrice was dressed very quietly in brown, with a simple but courageous

broad-brimmed hat, and an unexpected quality of being grown-up and responsible. She guided her step-mother through the first encounter, scrutinised my aunt, and got us all well in movement through the house, and then she turned her attention to me with a quick and half-confident smile.

"We haven't met," she said, "since--"

"It was in the Warren."

"Of course," she said, "the Warren! I remembered it all except just the name.... I was eight."

Her smiling eyes insisted on my memories being thorough. I looked up and met them squarely, a little at a loss for what I should say.

"I gave you away pretty completely," she said, meditating upon my face.

"And afterwards I gave way Archie."

She turned her face away from the others, and her voice fell ever so little.

"They gave him a licking for telling lies!" she said, as though that was a pleasant memory. "And when it was all over I went to our wigwam. You remember the wigwam?"

"Out in the West Wood?"

"Yes--and cried--for all the evil I had done you, I suppose.... I've often thought of it since."...

Lady Osprey stopped for us to overtake her. "My dear!" she said to Beatrice. "Such a beautiful gallery!" Then she stared very hard at me, puzzled in the most naked fashion to understand who I might be.

"People say the oak staircase is rather good," said my aunt, and led the way.

Lady Osprey, with her skirts gathered for the ascent to the gallery and her hand on the newel, turned and addressed a look full of meaning overflowing indeed with meanings--at her charge. The chief meaning no doubt was caution about myself, but much of it was just meaning at large. I chanced to catch the response in a mirror and detected Beatrice with her nose wrinkled into a swift and entirely diabolical grimace.

Lady Osprey became a deeper shade of pink and speechless with indignation--it was evident she disavowed all further responsibility, as she followed my aunt upstairs.

"It's dark, but there's a sort of dignity," said Beatrice very distinctly, regarding the hall with serene tranquillity, and allowing the unwilling feet on the stairs to widen their distance from us. She stood a step up, so that she looked down a little upon me and over me at

the old hall.

She turned upon me abruptly when she thought her step-mother was beyond ear-shot.

"But how did you get here?" she asked.

"Here?"

"All this." She indicated space and leisure by a wave of the hand at hall and tall windows and sunlit terrace. "Weren't you the housekeeper's son?"

"I've adventured. My uncle has become--a great financier. He used to be a little chemist about twenty miles from Bladesover. We're promoters now, amalgamators, big people on the new model."

"I understand." She regarded me with interested eyes, visibly thinking me out.

"And you recognised me?" I asked.

"After a second or so. I saw you recognised me. I couldn't place you, but I knew I knew you. Then Archie being there helped me to remember."

"I'm glad to meet again," I ventured. "I'd never forgotten you."

"One doesn't forget those childish things."

We regarded one another for a moment with a curiously easy and confident satisfaction in coming together again. I can't explain our ready zest in one another. The thing was so. We pleased each other, we had no doubt in our minds that we pleased each other. From the first we were at our ease with one another. "So picturesque, so very picturesque," came a voice from above, and then: "Bee-atrice!"

"I've a hundred things I want to know about you," she said with an easy intimacy, as we went up the winding steps....

As the four of us sat at tea together under the cedar on the terrace she asked questions about my aeronautics. My aunt helped with a word or so about my broken ribs. Lady Osprey evidently regarded flying as a most undesirable and improper topic--a blasphemous intrusion upon the angels. "It isn't flying," I explained. "We don't fly yet."

"You never will," she said compactly. "You never will."

"Well," I said, "we do what we can."

The little lady lifted a small gloved hand and indicated a height of about four feet from the ground. "Thus far," she said, "thus far--AND NO FARTHER! No!"



She became emphatically pink. "NO," she said again quite conclusively, and coughed shortly. "Thank you," she said to her ninth or tenth cake. Beatrice burst into cheerful laughter with her eye on me. I was lying on the turf, and this perhaps caused a slight confusion about the primordial curse in Lady Osprey's mind.

"Upon his belly shall he go," she said with quiet distinctness, "all the days of his life."

After which we talked no more of aeronautics.

Beatrice sat bunched together in a chair and regarded me with exactly the same scrutiny, I thought, the same adventurous aggression, that I had faced long ago at the tea-table in my mother's room. She was amazingly like that little Princess of my Bladesover memories, the wilful misbehaviours of her hair seemed the same--her voice; things one would have expected to be changed altogether. She formed her plans in the same quick way, and acted with the same irresponsible decision.

She stood up abruptly.

"What is there beyond the terrace?" she said, and found me promptly beside her.

I invented a view for her.

At the further corner from the cedar she perched herself up upon the parapet and achieved an air of comfort among the lichenous stones. "Now tell me," she said, "all about yourself. Tell me about yourself; I know such duffers of men! They all do the same things. How did you get--here? All my men WERE here. They couldn't have got here if they hadn't been here always. They wouldn't have thought it right. You've climbed."

"If it's climbing," I said.

She went off at a tangent. "It's--I don't know if you'll understand--interesting to meet you again. I've remembered you. I don't know why, but I have. I've used you as a sort of lay figure--when I've told myself stories. But you've always been rather stiff and difficult in my stories--in ready-made clothes--a Labour Member or a Bradlaugh, or something like that. You're not like that a bit. And yet you ARE!"

She looked at me. "Was it much of a fight? They make out it is."

"I don't know why."

"I was shot up here by an accident," I said. "There was no fight at all. Except to keep honest, perhaps and I made no great figure in that. I and my uncle mixed a medicine and it blew us up. No merit in that! But you've been here all the time. Tell me what you have done first."

"One thing we didn't do." She meditated for a moment.

"What?" said I.

"Produce a little half-brother for Bladesover. So it went to the  
Phillbrick gang. And they let it! And I and my step-mother--we let, too.  
And live in a little house."

She nodded her head vaguely over her shoulder and turned to me again.

"Well, suppose it was an accident. Here you are! Now you're here, what  
are you going to do? You're young. Is it to be Parliament? heard some  
men the other day talking about you. Before I knew you were you. They  
said that was what you ought to do."...

She put me through my intentions with a close and vital curiosity. It  
was just as she had tried to imagine me a soldier and place me years  
ago. She made me feel more planless and incidental than ever. "You want  
to make a flying-machine," she pursued, "and when you fly? What then?  
Would it be for fighting?"

I told her something of my experimental work. She had never heard of  
the soaring aeroplane, and was excited by the thought, and keen to hear  
about it. She had thought all the work so far had been a mere projecting  
of impossible machines. For her Pilcher and Lilienthal had died in vain.  
She did not know such men had lived in the world.

"But that's dangerous!" she said, with a note of discovery.

"Oh!--it's dangerous."

"Bee-atrice!" Lady Osprey called.

Beatrice dropped from the wall to her feet.

"Where do you do this soaring?"

"Beyond the high Barrows. East of Crest Hill and the wood."

"Do you mind people coming to see?"

"Whenever you please. Only let me know"

"I'll take my chance some day. Some day soon." She looked at me thoughtfully, smiled, and our talk was at an end.

IV

All my later work in aeronautics is associated in my memory with the quality of Beatrice, with her incidental presence, with things she said and did and things I thought of that had reference to her.

In the spring of that year I had got to a flying machine that lacked

nothing but longitudinal stability. My model flew like a bird for fifty or a hundred yards or so, and then either dived and broke its nose or, what was commoner, reared up, slid back and smashed its propeller. The rhythm of the pitching puzzled me. I felt it must obey some laws not yet quite clearly stated. I became therefore a student of theory and literature for a time; I hit upon the string of considerations that led me to what is called Pondero's Principle and my F.R.S., and I worked this out in three long papers. Meanwhile I made a lot of turn-table and glider models and started in upon an idea of combining gas-bags and gliders. Balloon work was new to me. I had made one or two ascents in the balloons of the Aero Club before I started my gasometer and the balloon shed and gave Cothope a couple of months with Sir Peter Rumchase. My uncle found part of the money for these developments; he was growing interested and competitive in this business because of Lord Boom's prize and the amount of reclame involved, and it was at his request that I named my first navigable balloon Lord Roberts Alpha.

Lord Roberts A very nearly terminated all my investigations. My idea both in this and its more successful and famous younger brother, Lord Roberts B, was to utilise the idea of a contractile balloon with a rigid flat base, a balloon shaped rather like an inverted boat that should almost support the apparatus, but not quite. The gas-bag was of the chambered sort used for these long forms, and not with an internal balloonette. The trouble was to make the thing contractile. This I sought to do by fixing a long, fine-meshed silk net over it that was fastened to be rolled up on two longitudinal rods. Practically I

contracted my sausage gas-bag by netting it down. The ends were too complex for me to describe here, but I thought them out elaborately and they were very carefully planned. Lord Roberts A was furnished with a single big screw forward, and there was a rudder aft. The engine was the first one to be, so to speak, right in the plane of the gas-bag. I lay immediately under the balloon on a sort of glider framework, far away from either engine or rudder, controlling them by wire-pulls constructed on the principle of the well-known Bowden brake of the cyclist.

But Lord Roberts A has been pretty exhaustively figured and described in various aeronautical publications. The unforeseen defect was the badness of the work in the silk netting. It tore aft as soon as I began to contract the balloon, and the last two segments immediately bulged through the hole, exactly as an inner tube will bulge through the ruptured outer cover of a pneumatic tire, and then the sharp edge of the torn net cut the oiled-silk of the distended last segment along a weak seam and burst it with a loud report.

Up to that point the whole thing had been going on extremely well. As a navigable balloon and before I contracted it, the Lord Roberts A was an unqualified success. It had run out of the shed admirably at nine or ten miles an hour or more, and although there was a gentle southwester blowing, it had gone up and turned and faced it as well as any craft of the sort I have ever seen.

I lay in my customary glider position, horizontal and face downward, and

the invisibility of all the machinery gave an extraordinary effect of independent levitation. Only by looking up, as it were, and turning my head back could I see the flat aeroplane bottom of the balloon and the rapid successive passages, swish, swish, swish of the vans of the propeller. I made a wide circle over Lady Grove and Duffield and out towards Effingham and came back quite successfully to the starting-point.

Down below in the October sunlight were my sheds and the little group that had been summoned to witness the start, their faces craned upward and most of them scrutinising my expression through field-glasses. I could see Carnaby and Beatrice on horseback, and two girls I did not know with them; Cothope and three or four workmen I employed; my aunt and Mrs. Levinstein, who was staying with her, on foot, and Dimmock, the veterinary surgeon, and one or two others. My shadow moved a little to the north of them like the shadow of a fish. At Lady Grove the servants were out on the lawn, and the Duffield school playground swarmed with children too indifferent to aeronautics to cease their playing. But in the Crest Hill direction--the place looked extraordinarily squat and ugly from above--there were knots and strings of staring workmen everywhere--not one of them working, but all agape. (But now I write it, it occurs to me that perhaps it was their dinner hour; it was certainly near twelve.) I hung for a moment or so enjoying the soar, then turned about to face a clear stretch of open down, let the engine out to full speed and set my rollers at work rolling in the net, and so tightening the gas-bags. Instantly the pace quickened with the diminished

resistance...

In that moment before the bang I think I must have been really flying. Before the net ripped, just in the instant when my balloon was at its systole, the whole apparatus was, I am convinced, heavier than air. That, however, is a claim that has been disputed, and in any case this sort of priority is a very trivial thing.

Then came a sudden retardation, instantly followed by an inexpressibly disconcerting tilt downward of the machine. That I still recall with horror. I couldn't see what was happening at all and I couldn't imagine. It was a mysterious, inexplicable dive. The thing, it seemed, without rhyme or reason, was kicking up its heels in the air. The bang followed immediately, and I perceived I was falling rapidly.

I was too much taken by surprise to think of the proper cause of the report. I don't even know what I made of it. I was obsessed, I suppose, by that perpetual dread of the modern aeronaut, a flash between engine and balloon. Yet obviously I wasn't wrapped in flames. I ought to have realised instantly it wasn't that. I did, at any rate, whatever other impressions there were, release the winding of the outer net and let the balloon expand again, and that no doubt did something to break my fall. I don't remember doing that. Indeed, all I do remember is the giddy effect upon the landscape of falling swiftly upon it down a flat spiral, the hurried rush of fields and trees and cottages on my left shoulder and the overhung feeling as if the whole apparatus was pressing down



the top of my head. I didn't stop or attempt to stop the screw. That was going on, swish, swish, swish all the time.

Cothope really knows more about the fall than I do. He describes the easterly start, the tilt, and the appearance and bursting of a sort of bladder aft. Then down I swooped, very swiftly, but not nearly so steeply as I imagined I was doing. "Fifteen or twenty degrees," said Cothope, "to be exact." From him it was that I learnt that I let the nets loose again, and so arrested my fall. He thinks I was more in control of myself than I remember.

But I do not see why I should have forgotten so excellent a resolution. His impression is that I was really steering and trying to drop into the Farthing Down beeches. "You hit the trees," he said, "and the whole affair stood on its nose among them, and then very slowly crumpled up. I saw you'd been jerked out, as I thought, and I didn't stay for more. I rushed for my bicycle."

As a matter of fact, it was purely accidental that I came down in the woods. I am reasonably certain that I had no more control then than a thing in a parcel. I remember I felt a sort of wincing, "Now it comes!" as the trees rushed up to me. If I remember that, I should remember steering. Then the propeller smashed, everything stopped with a jerk, and I was falling into a mass of yellowing leaves, and Lord Roberts A, so it seemed to me, was going back into the sky.

I felt twigs and things hit me in the face, but I didn't feel injured at the time; I clutched at things that broke, tumbled through a froth of green and yellow into a shadowy world of great bark-covered arms, and there, snatching wildly, got a grip on a fair round branch, and hung.

I became intensely alert and clear-headed. I held by that branch for a moment and then looked about me, and caught at another, and then found myself holding to a practicable fork. I swung forward to that and got a leg around it below its junction, and so was able presently to clamber down, climbing very coolly and deliberately. I dropped ten feet or so from the lowest branch and fell on my feet. "That's all right," I said, and stared up through the tree to see what I could of the deflated and crumpled remains that had once been Lord Roberts A festooned on the branches it had broken. "Gods!" I said, "what a tumble!"

I wiped something that trickled from my face and was shocked to see my hand covered with blood. I looked at myself and saw what seemed to me an astonishing quantity of blood running down my arm and shoulder. I perceived my mouth was full of blood. It's a queer moment when one realises one is hurt, and perhaps badly hurt, and has still to discover just how far one is hurt. I explored my face carefully and found unfamiliar contours on the left side. The broken end of a branch had driven right through my cheek, damaging my cheek and teeth and gums, and left a splinter of itself stuck, like an explorer's farthest-point flag, in the upper maxillary. That and a sprained wrist were all my damage. But I bled as though I had been chopped to pieces, and it

seemed to me that my face had been driven in. I can't describe just the horrible disgust I felt at that.

"This blood must be stopped, anyhow," I said, thickheadedly.

"I wonder where there's a spider's web"--an odd twist for my mind to take. But it was the only treatment that occurred to me.

I must have conceived some idea of going home unaided, because I was thirty yards from the tree before I dropped.

Then a kind of black disc appeared in the middle of the world and rushed out to the edge of things and blotted them out. I don't remember falling down. I fainted from excitement, disgust at my injury and loss of blood, and lay there until Cothope found me.

He was the first to find me, scorching as he did over the downland turf, and making a wide course to get the Carnaby plantations at their narrowest. Then presently, while he was trying to apply the methodical teachings of the St. John's Ambulance classes to a rather abnormal case, Beatrice came galloping through the trees full-tilt, with Lord Carnaby hard behind her, and she was hatless, muddy from a fall, and white as death. "And cool as a cucumber, too," said Cothope, turning it over in his mind as he told me.

("They never seem quite to have their heads, and never seem quite to

lose 'em," said Cothope, generalising about the sex.)

Also he witnessed she acted with remarkable decision. The question was whether I should be taken to the house her step-mother occupied at Bedley Corner, the Carnaby dower house, or down to Carnaby's place at Easting. Beatrice had no doubt in the matter, for she meant to nurse me. Carnaby didn't seem to want that to happen. "She WOULD have it wasn't half so far," said Cothope. "She faced us out...."

"I hate to be faced out of my opinion, so I've taken a pedometer over it since. It's exactly forty-three yards further.

"Lord Carnaby looked at her pretty straight," said Cothope, finishing the picture; "and then he give in."

V

But my story has made a jump from June to October, and during that time my relations with Beatrice and the countryside that was her setting had developed in many directions. She came and went, moving in an orbit for which I had no data, going to London and Paris, into Wales and Northampton, while her stepmother, on some independent system of her own, also vanished and recurred intermittently. At home they obeyed the rule of an inflexible old maid, Charlotte, and Beatrice exercised all the rights of proprietorship in Carnaby's extensive stables. Her interest in me was from the first undisguised. She found her way to my

worksheds and developed rapidly, in spite of the sincere discouragement of Cothope, into a keen amateur of aeronautics. She would come sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon, sometimes afoot with an Irish terrier, sometimes riding. She would come for three or four days every day, vanish for a fortnight or three weeks, return.

It was not long before I came to look for her. From the first I found her immensely interesting. To me she was a new feminine type altogether--I have made it plain, I think, how limited was my knowledge of women. But she made me not simply interested in her, but in myself. She became for me something that greatly changes a man's world. How shall I put it? She became an audience. Since I've emerged from the emotional developments of the affair I have thought it out in a hundred aspects, and it does seem to me that this way in which men and women make audiences for one another is a curiously influential force in their lives. For some it seems an audience is a vital necessity, they seek audiences as creatures seek food; others again, my uncle among them, can play to an imaginary audience. I, I think, have lived and can live without one. In my adolescence I was my own audience and my own court of honour. And to have an audience in one's mind is to play a part, to become self-conscious and dramatic. For many years I had been self-forgetful and scientific. I had lived for work and impersonal interests until I found scrutiny, applause and expectation in Beatrice's eyes. Then I began to live for the effect I imagined I made upon her, to make that very soon the principal value in my life. I played to her. I did things for the look of them. I began to dream more and more of

beautiful situations and fine poses and groupings with her and for her.

I put these things down because they puzzle me. I think I was in love with Beatrice, as being in love is usually understood; but it was quite a different state altogether from my passionate hunger for Marion, or my keen, sensuous desire for and pleasure in Effie. These were selfish, sincere things, fundamental and instinctive, as sincere as the leap of a tiger. But until matters drew to a crisis with Beatrice, there was an immense imaginative insurgence of a quite different quality. I am setting down here very gravely, and perhaps absurdly, what are no doubt elementary commonplaces for innumerable people. This love that grew up between Beatrice and myself was, I think--I put it quite tentatively and rather curiously--romantic love. That unfortunate and truncated affair of my uncle and the Scrymgeour lady was really of the same stuff, if a little different in quality. I have to admit that. The factor of audience was of primary importance in either else.

Its effect upon me was to make me in many respects adolescent again. It made me keener upon the point of honour, and anxious and eager to do high and splendid things, and in particular, brave things. So far it ennobled and upheld me. But it did also push me towards vulgar and showy things. At bottom it was disingenuous; it gave my life the quality of stage scenery, with one side to the audience, another side that wasn't meant to show, and an economy of substance. It certainly robbed my work of high patience and quality. I cut down the toil of research in my eagerness and her eagerness for fine flourishes in the air, flights that

would tell. I shirked the longer road.

And it robbed me, too, of any fine perception of absurdity.

Yet that was not everything in our relationship. The elemental thing was there also. It came in very suddenly.

It was one day in the summer, though I do not now recall without reference to my experimental memoranda whether it was in July or August. I was working with a new and more bird-like aeroplane with wing curvatures studied from Lilienthal, Pilcher and Phillips, that I thought would give a different rhythm for the pitching oscillations than anything I'd had before. I was soaring my long course from the framework on the old barrow by my sheds down to Tinker's Corner. It is a clear stretch of downland, except for two or three thickets of box and thorn to the right of my course; one transverse trough, in which there is bush and a small rabbit warren, comes in from the east. I had started, and was very intent on the peculiar long swoop with which any new arrangement flew. Then, without any sort of notice, right ahead of me appeared Beatrice, riding towards Tinker's Corner to waylay and talk to me. She looked round over her shoulder, saw me coming, touched her horse to a gallop, and then the brute bolted right into the path of my machine.

There was a queer moment of doubt whether we shouldn't all smash together. I had to make up my mind very quickly whether I would pitch-up

and drop backward at once and take my chance of falling undamaged--a poor chance it would have been--in order to avoid any risk to her, or whether I would lift against the wind and soar right over her. This latter I did. She had already got her horse in hand when I came up to her. Her woman's body lay along his neck, and she glanced up as I, with wings aspread, and every nerve in a state of tension, swept over her.

Then I had landed, and was going back to where her horse stood still and trembling.

We exchanged no greetings. She slid from her saddle into my arms, and for one instant I held her.

"Those great wings," she said, and that was all.

She lay in my arms, and I thought for a moment she had fainted.

"Very near a nasty accident," said Cothope, coming up and regarding our grouping with disfavour. He took her horse by the bridle. "Very dangerous thing coming across us like that."

Beatrice disengaged herself from me, stood for a moment trembling, and then sat down on the turf "I'll just sit down for a moment," she said.

"Oh!" she said.



She covered her face with her hands, while Cothope looked at her with an expression between suspicion and impatience.

For some moments nobody moved. Then Cothope remarked that perhaps he'd better get her water.

As for me, I was filled with a new outrageous idea, begotten I scarcely know how from this incident, with its instant contacts and swift emotions, and that was that I must make love to and possess Beatrice. I see no particular reason why that thought should have come to me in that moment, but it did. I do not believe that before then I had thought of our relations in such terms at all. Suddenly, as I remember it, the factor of passion came. She crouched there, and I stood over her, and neither of us said a word. But it was just as though something had been shouted from the sky.

Cothope had gone twenty paces perhaps when she uncovered her face. "I shan't want any water," she said. "Call him back."

## VI

After that the spirit of our relations changed. The old ease had gone. She came to me less frequently, and when she came she would have some one with her, usually old Carnaby, and he would do the bulk of the talking. All through September she was away. When we were alone together there was a curious constraint. We became clouds of inexpressible

feeling towards one another; we could think of nothing that was not too momentous for words.

Then came the smash of Lord Roberts A, and I found myself with a bandaged face in a bedroom in the Bedley Corner dower-house with Beatrice presiding over an inefficient nurse, Lady Osprey very pink and shocked in the background, and my aunt jealously intervening.

My injuries were much more showy than serious, and I could have been taken to Lady Grove next day, but Beatrice would not permit that, and kept me at Bedley Corner three clear days. In the afternoon of the second day she became extremely solicitous for the proper aeration of the nurse, packed her off for an hour in a brisk rain, and sat by me alone.

I asked her to marry me.

All the whole I must admit it was not a situation that lent itself to eloquence. I lay on my back and talked through bandages, and with some little difficulty, for my tongue and mouth had swollen. But I was feverish and in pain, and the emotional suspense I had been in so long with regard to her became now an unendurable impatience.

"Comfortable?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Shall I read to you?"

"No. I want to talk."

"You can't. I'd better talk to you."

"No," I said, "I want to talk to you."

She came and stood by my bedside and looked me in the eyes. "I don't--I don't want you to talk to me," she said. "I thought you couldn't talk."

"I get few chances--of you."

"You'd better not talk. Don't talk now. Let me chatter instead. You ought not to talk."

"It isn't much," I said.

"I'd rather you didn't."

"I'm not going to be disfigured," I said. "Only a scar."

"Oh!" she said, as if she had expected something quite different. "Did you think you'd become a sort of gargoyle?"

"L'Homme qui Rit!--I didn't know. But that's all right. Jolly flowers those are!"

"Michaelmas daisies," she said. "I'm glad you'r not disfigured, and those are perennial sunflowers. Do you know no flowers at all? When I saw you on the ground I certainly thought you were dead. You ought to have been, by all the rules of the game."

She said some other things, but I was thinking of my next move.

"Are we social equals?" I said abruptly.

She stared at me. "Queer question," she said.

"But are we?"

"H'm. Difficult to say. But why do you ask? Is the daughter of a courtesy Baron who died--of general disreputableness, I believe--before his father--? I give it up. Does it matter?"

"No. My mind is confused. I want to know if you will marry me."

She whitened and said nothing. I suddenly felt I must plead with her.

"Damn these bandages!" I said, breaking into ineffectual febrile rage.

She roused herself to her duties as nurse. "What are you doing? Why are

you trying to sit up? Sit down! Don't touch your bandages. I told you not to talk."

She stood helpless for a moment, then took me firmly by the shoulders and pushed me back upon the pillow. She gripped the wrist of the hand I had raised to my face.

"I told you not to talk," she whispered close to my face. "I asked you not to talk. Why couldn't you do as I asked you?"

"You've been avoiding me for a month," I said.

"I know. You might have known. Put your hand back--down by your side."

I obeyed. She sat on the edge of the bed. A flush had come to her cheeks, and her eyes were very bright. "I asked you," she repeated, "not to talk."

My eyes questioned her mutely.

She put her hand on my chest. Her eyes were tormented.

"How can I answer you now?" she said.

"How can I say anything now?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

She made no answer.

"Do you mean it must be 'No'?"

She nodded.

"But" I said, and my whole soul was full of accusations.

"I know," she said. "I can't explain. I can't. But it has to be 'No!' It can't be. It's utterly, finally, for ever impossible.... Keep your hands still!"

"But," I said, "when we met again--"

"I can't marry. I can't and won't."

She stood up. "Why did you talk?" she cried, "couldn't you SEE?"

She seemed to have something it was impossible to say.

She came to the table beside my bed and pulled the Michaelmas daisies away. "Why did you talk like that?" she said in a tone of infinite bitterness. "To begin like that!"

"But what is it?" I said. "Is it some circumstance--my social position?"

"Oh, DAMN your social position!" she cried.

She went and stood at the further window, staring out at the rain. For a long time we were absolutely still. The wind and rain came in little gusts upon the pane. She turned to me abruptly.

"You didn't ask me if I loved you," she said.

"Oh, if it's THAT!" said I.

"It's not that," she said. "But if you want to know--" She paused.

"I do," she said.

We stared at one another.

"I do--with all my heart, if you want to know."

"Then, why the devil--?" I asked.

She made no answer. She walked across the room to the piano and began to play, rather noisily and rapidly, with odd gusts of emphasis, the shepherd's pipe music from the last act in "Tristan and Isolde." Presently she missed a note, failed again, ran her finger heavily up the

scale, struck the piano passionately with her fist, making a feeble jar in the treble, jumped up, and went out of the room....

The nurse found me still wearing my helmet of bandages, partially dressed, and pottering round the room to find the rest of my clothes. I was in a state of exasperated hunger for Beatrice, and I was too inflamed and weakened to conceal the state of my mind. I was feebly angry because of the irritation of dressing, and particularly of the struggle to put on my trousers without being able to see my legs. I was staggering about, and once I had fallen over a chair and I had upset the jar of Michaelmas daisies.

I must have been a detestable spectacle. "I'll go back to bed," said I, "if I may have a word with Miss Beatrice. I've got something to say to her. That's why I'm dressing."

My point was conceded, but there were long delays. Whether the household had my ultimatum or whether she told Beatrice directly I do not know, and what Lady Osprey can have made of it in the former case I don't imagine.

At last Beatrice came and stood by my bedside. "Well?" she said.

"All I want to say," I said with the querulous note of a misunderstood child, "is that I can't take this as final. I want to see you and talk when I'm better, and write. I can't do anything now. I can't argue."



I was overtaken with self-pity and began to snivel, "I can't rest. You see? I can't do anything."

She sat down beside me again and spoke softly. "I promise I will talk it all over with you again. When you are well. I promise I will meet you somewhere so that we can talk. You can't talk now."

"I asked you not to talk now. All you want to know you shall know... Will that do?"

"I'd like to know"

She looked round to see the door was closed, stood up and went to it.

Then she crouched beside me and began whispering very softly and rapidly with her face close to me.

"Dear," she said, "I love you. If it will make you happy to marry me, I will marry you. I was in a mood just now--a stupid, inconsiderate mood. Of course I will marry you. You are my prince, my king. Women are such things of mood--or I would have behaved differently. We say 'No' when we mean 'Yes'--and fly into crises. So now, Yes--yes--yes. I will. I can't even kiss you. Give me your hand to kiss that. Understand, I am yours. Do you understand? I am yours just as if we had been married fifty years. Your wife--Beatrice. Is that enough? Now--now will you rest?"

"Yes," I said, "but why?"

"There are complications. There are difficulties. When you are better you will be able to--understand them. But now they don't matter. Only you know this must be secret--for a time. Absolutely secret between us. Will you promise that?"

"Yes," I said, "I understand. I wish I could kiss you."

She laid her head down beside mine for a moment and then she kissed my hand.

"I don't care what difficulties there are," I said, and I shut my eyes.

## VII

But I was only beginning to gauge the unaccountable elements in Beatrice. For a week after my return to Lady Grove I had no sign of her, and then she called with Lady Osprey and brought a huge bunch of perennial sunflowers and Michaelmas daisies, "just the old flowers there were in your room," said my aunt, with a relentless eye on me. I didn't get any talk alone with Beatrice then, and she took occasion to tell us she was going to London for some indefinite number of weeks. I couldn't even pledge her to write to me, and when she did it was a brief, enigmatical, friendly letter with not a word of the reality between us.

I wrote back a love letter--my first love letter--and she made no reply for eight days. Then came a scrawl: "I can't write letters. Wait till we can talk. Are you better?"

I think the reader would be amused if he could see the papers on my desk as I write all this, the mangled and disfigured pages, the experimental arrangements of notes, the sheets of suggestions balanced in constellations, the blottesque intellectual battlegrounds over which I have been fighting. I find this account of my relations to Beatrice quite the most difficult part of my story to write. I happen to be a very objective-minded person, I forget my moods, and this was so much an affair of moods. And even such moods and emotions as I recall are very difficult to convey. To me it is about as difficult as describing a taste or a scent.

Then the objective story is made up of little things that are difficult to set in a proper order. And love in an hysterical passion, now high, now low, now exalted, and now intensely physical. No one has ever yet dared to tell a love story completely, its alternations, its comings and goings, its debased moments, its hate. The love stories we tell, tell only the net consequence, the ruling effect....

How can I rescue from the past now the mystical quality of Beatrice; my intense longing for her; the overwhelming, irrational, formless desire? How can I explain how intimately that worship mingled with a high,

impatient resolve to make her mine, to take her by strength and courage, to do my loving in a violent heroic manner? And then the doubts, the puzzled arrest at the fact of her fluctuations, at her refusal to marry me, at the fact that even when at last she returned to Bedley Corner she seemed to evade me?

That exasperated me and perplexed me beyond measure.

I felt that it was treachery. I thought of every conceivable explanation, and the most exalted and romantic confidence in her did not simply alternate, but mingled with the basest misgivings.

And into the tangle of memories comes the figure of Carnaby, coming out slowly from the background to a position of significance, as an influence, as a predominant strand in the nets that kept us apart, as a rival. What were the forces that pulled her away from me when it was so clearly manifest she loved me? Did she think of marrying him? Had I invaded some long-planned scheme? It was evident he did not like me, that in some way I spoilt the world for him. She returned to Bedley Corner, and for some weeks she was flitting about me, and never once could I have talk with her alone. When she came to my sheds Carnaby was always with her, jealously observant. (Why the devil couldn't she send him about his business?) The days slipped by and my anger gathered.

All this mingles with the making of Lord Roberts B. I had resolved upon that one night as I lay awake at Bedley Corner; I got it planned out

before the bandages were off my face. I conceived this second navigable balloon in a grandiose manner. It was to be a second Lord Roberts A, only more so; it was to be three times as big, large enough to carry three men, and it was to be an altogether triumphant vindication of my claims upon the air. The framework was to be hollow like a bird's bones, airtight, and the air pumped in or out, and the weight of fuel I carried changed. I talked much and boasted to Cothope--whom I suspected of scepticisms about this new type--of what it would do, and it progressed--slowly. It progressed slowly because I was restless and uncertain. At times I would go away to London to snatch some chance of seeing Beatrice there, at times nothing but a day of gliding and hard and dangerous exercise would satisfy me. And now in the newspapers, in conversation, in everything about me, arose a new invader of my mental states. Something was happening to the great schemes of my uncle's affairs; people were beginning to doubt, to question. It was the first quiver of his tremendous insecurity, the first wobble of that gigantic credit top he had kept spinning so long.

There were comings and goings, November and December slipped by. I had two unsatisfactory meetings with Beatrice, meetings that had no privacy--in which we said things of the sort that need atmosphere, baldly and furtively. I wrote to her several times and she wrote back notes that I would sometimes respond to altogether, sometimes condemn as insincere evasions. "You don't understand. I can't just now explain. Be patient with me. Leave things a little while to me." She wrote.

I would talk aloud to these notes and wrangle over them in my workroom--while the plans of Lord Roberts B waited.

"You don't give me a chance!" I would say. "Why don't you let me know the secret? That's what I'm for--to settle difficulties! to tell difficulties to!"

And at last I could hold out no longer against these accumulating pressures.

I took an arrogant, outrageous line that left her no loopholes; I behaved as though we were living in a melodrama.

"You must come and talk to me," I wrote, "or I will come and take you. I want you--and the time runs away."

We met in a ride in the upper plantations. It must have been early in January, for there was snow on the ground and on the branches of the trees. We walked to and fro for an hour or more, and from the first I pitched the key high in romance and made understandings impossible. It was our worst time together. I boasted like an actor, and she, I know not why, was tired and spiritless.

Now I think over that talk in the light of all that has happened since, I can imagine how she came to me full of a human appeal I was too foolish to let her make. I don't know. I confess I have never completely

understood Beatrice. I confess I am still perplexed at many things she said and did. That afternoon, anyhow, I was impossible. I posed and scolded. I was--I said it--for "taking the Universe by the throat!"

"If it was only that," she said, but though I heard, I did not heed her.

At last she gave way to me and talked no more. Instead she looked at me--as a thing beyond her controlling, but none the less interesting--much as she had looked at me from behind the skirts of Lady Drew in the Warren when we were children together.

Once even I thought she smiled faintly.

"What are the difficulties" I cried, "there's no difficulty I will not overcome for you! Do your people think I'm no equal for you? Who says it? My dear, tell me to win a title! I'll do it in five years!..."

"Here am I just grown a man at the sight of you. I have wanted something to fight for. Let me fight for you!..."

"I'm rich without intending it. Let me mean it, give me an honourable excuse for it, and I'll put all this rotten old Warren of England at your feet!"

I said such things as that. I write them down here in all their resounding base pride. I said these empty and foolish things, and they

are part of me. Why should I still cling to pride and be ashamed? I shouted her down.

I passed from such megalomania to petty accusations.

"You think Carnaby is a better man than I?" I said.

"No!" she cried, stung to speech. "No!"

"You think we're unsubstantial. You've listened to all these rumours Boom has started because we talked of a newspaper of our own. When you are with me you know I'm a man; when you get away from me you think I'm a cheat and a cad.... There's not a word of truth in the things they say about us. I've been slack. I've left things. But we have only to exert ourselves. You do not know how wide and far we have spread our nets. Even now we have a coup--an expedition--in hand. It will put us on a footing."...

Her eyes asked mutely and asked in vain that I would cease to boast of the very qualities she admired in me.

In the night I could not sleep for thinking of that talk and the vulgar things I had said in it. I could not understand the drift my mind had taken. I was acutely disgusted. And my unwonted doubts about myself spread from a merely personal discontent to our financial position.

It was all very well to talk as I had done of wealth and power and



peerages, but what did I know nowadays of my uncle's position? Suppose in the midst of such boasting and confidence there came some turn I did not suspect, some rottenness he had concealed from me? I resolved I had been playing with aeronautics long enough; that next morning I would go to him and have things clear between us.

I caught an early train and went up to the Hardingham.

I went up to the Hardingham through a dense London fog to see how things really stood. Before I had talked to my uncle for ten minutes I felt like a man who has just awakened in a bleak, inhospitable room out of a grandiose dream.

## CHAPTER THE FOURTH

### HOW I STOLE THE HEAPS OF QUAP FROM MORDET ISLAND

I

"We got to make a fight for it," said my uncle. "We got to face the music!"

I remember that even at the sight of him I had a sense of impending calamity. He sat under the electric light with the shadow of his hair making bars down his face. He looked shrunken, and as though his skin had suddenly got loose and yellow. The decorations of the room seemed to have lost freshness, and outside the blinds were up--there was not so much fog as a dun darkness. One saw the dingy outlines of the chimneys opposite quite distinctly, and then a sky of such brown as only London can display.

"I saw a placard," I said: "'More Ponderevity.'"

"That's Boom," he said. "Boom and his damned newspapers. He's trying to fight me down. Ever since I offered to buy the Daily Decorator he's been at me. And he thinks consolidating Do Ut cut down the ads. He wants everything, damn him! He's got no sense of dealing. I'd like to bash his face!"

"Well," I said, "what's to be done?"

"Keep going," said my uncle.

"I'll smash Boom yet," he said, with sudden savagery.

"Nothing else?" I asked.

"We got to keep going. There's a scare on. Did you notice the rooms? Half the people out there this morning are reporters. And if I talk they touch it up!... They didn't used to touch things up! Now they put in character touches--insulting you. Don't know what journalism's coming to. It's all Boom's doing."

He cursed Lord Boom with considerable imaginative vigour.

"Well," said I, "what can he do?"

"Shove us up against time, George; make money tight for us. We been handling a lot of money--and he tightens us up."

"We're sound?"

"Oh, we're sound, George. Trust me for that! But all the same--There's such a lot of imagination in these things.... We're sound enough. That's not it."

He blew. "Damn Boom!" he said, and his eyes over his glasses met mine defiantly.

"We can't, I suppose, run close hauled for a bitstop expenditure?"

"Where?"

"Well,--Crest Hill"

"What!" he shouted. "Me stop Crest Hill for Boom!" He waved a fist as if to hit his inkpot, and controlled himself with difficulty. He spoke at last in a reasonable voice. "If I did," he said, "he'd kick up a fuss. It's no good, even if I wanted to. Everybody's watching the place. If I was to stop building we'd be down in a week."

He had an idea. "I wish I could do something to start a strike or something. No such luck. Treat those workmen a sight too well. No, sink or swim, Crest Hill goes on until we're under water."

I began to ask questions and irritated him instantly.

"Oh, dash these explanations, George!" he cried; "You only make things look rottener than they are. It's your way. It isn't a case of figures. We're all right--there's only one thing we got to do."

"Yes?"

"Show value, George. That's where this quap comes in; that's why I fell in so readily with what you brought to me week before last. Here we are, we got our option on the perfect filament, and all we want's canadium. Nobody knows there's more canadium in the world than will go on the edge of a sixpence except me and you. Nobody has an idee the perfect filament's more than just a bit of theorising. Fifty tons of quap and we'd turn that bit of theorising into something. We'd make the lamp trade sit on its tail and howl. We'd put Ediswan and all of 'em into a parcel without last year's trousers and a hat, and swap 'em off for a pot of geraniums. See? We'd do it through Business Organisations, and there you are! See? Capern's Patent Filament!

"The Ideal and the Real! George, we'll do it! We'll bring it off! And then we'll give such a facer to Boom, he'll think for fifty years. He's laying up for our London and African meeting. Let him. He can turn the whole paper on to us. He says the Business Organisations shares aren't worth fifty-two and we quote 'em at eighty-four. Well, here we are gettin' ready for him--loading our gun."

His pose was triumphant.

"Yes," I said, "that's all right. But I can't help thinking where should we be if we hadn't just by accident got Capern's Perfect Filament. Because, you know it was an accident--my buying up that."

He crumpled up his nose into an expression of impatient distaste at my unreasonableness.

"And after all, the meeting's in June, and you haven't begun to get the quap! After all, we've still got to load our gun."

"They start on Toosday."

"Have they got the brig?"

"They've got a brig."

"Gordon-Nasmyth!" I doubted.

"Safe as a bank," he said. "More I see of that man the more I like him. All I wish is we'd got a steamer instead of a sailing ship."

"And," I went on, "you seem to overlook what used to weigh with us a bit. This canadium side of the business and the Capern chance has rushed you off your legs. After all--it's stealing, and in its way an international outrage. They've got two gunboats on the coast."

I jumped up and went and stared out at the fog.

"And, by Jove, it's about our only chance! I didn't dream."

I turned on him. "I've been up in the air," I said.

"Heaven knows where I haven't been. And here's our only chance--and you give it to that adventurous lunatic to play in his own way--in a brig!"

"Well, you had a voice--"

"I wish I'd been in this before. We ought to have run out a steamer to Lagos or one of those West Coast places and done it from there. Fancy a brig in the channel at this time of year, if it blows southwest!"

"I dessay you'd have shoved it, George. Still you know, George.... I believe in him."

"Yes," I said. "Yes, I believe in him, too. In a way. Still--"

We took up a telegram that was lying on his desk and opened it. His face became a livid yellow. He put the flimsy paper down with a slow, reluctant movement and took off his glasses.

"George," he said, "the luck's against us."

"What?"

He grimaced with his mouth--in the queerest way at the telegram.

"That."

I took it up and read:

"Motor smash compound fracture of the leg gordon nasmyth what price  
mordet now"

For a moment neither of us spoke.

"That's all right," I said at last.

"Eh?" said my uncle.

"I'M going. I'll get that quap or bust."

II

I had a ridiculous persuasion that I was "saving the situation."

"I'm going," I said quite consciously and dramatically. I saw the whole  
affair--how shall I put it?--in American colours.

I sat down beside him. "Give me all the data you've got," I said, "and  
I'll pull this thing off."



"But nobody knows exactly where--"

"Nasmyth does, and he'll tell me."

"He's been very close," said my uncle, and regarded me.

"He'll tell me all right, now he's smashed."

He thought. "I believe he will."

"George," he said, "if you pull this thing off--Once or twice before you've stepped in--with that sort of Woosh of yours--"

He left the sentence unfinished.

"Give me that note-book," I said, "and tell me all you know. Where's the ship? Where's Pollack? And where's that telegram from? If that quap's to be got, I'll get it or bust. If you'll hold on here until I get back with it."...

And so it was I jumped into the wildest adventure of my life.

I requisitioned my uncle's best car forthwith. I went down that night to the place of despatch named on Nasmyth's telegram, Bampton S.O. Oxon, routed him out with a little trouble from that centre, made things right with him and got his explicit directions; and I was inspecting the Maud

Mary with young Pollack, his cousin and aide, the following afternoon. She was rather a shock to me and not at all in my style, a beast of a brig inured to the potato trade, and she reeked from end to end with the faint, subtle smell of raw potatoes so that it prevailed even over the temporary smell of new paint. She was a beast of a brig, all hold and dirty framework, and they had ballasted her with old iron and old rails and iron sleepers, and got a miscellaneous lot of spades and iron wheelbarrows against the loading of the quap. I thought her over with Pollack, one of those tall blond young men who smoke pipes and don't help much, and then by myself, and as a result I did my best to sweep Gravesend clean of wheeling planks, and got in as much cord and small rope as I could for lashing. I had an idea we might need to run up a jetty. In addition to much ballast she held, remotely hidden in a sort of inadvertent way a certain number of ambiguous cases which I didn't examine, but which I gathered were a provision against the need of a trade.

The captain was a most extraordinary creature, under the impression we were after copper ore; he was a Roumanian Jew, with twitching, excitable features, who had made his way to a certificate after some preliminary naval experiences in the Black Sea. The mate was an Essex man of impenetrable reserve. The crew were astoundingly ill-clad and destitute and dirty; most of them youths, unwashed, out of colliers. One, the cook was a mulatto; and one, the best-built fellow of them all, was a Breton. There was some subterfuge about our position on board--I forget the particulars now--I was called the supercargo and Pollack was the

steward. This added to the piratical flavour that insufficient funds and Gordon-Nasmyth's original genius had already given the enterprise.

Those two days of bustle at Gravesend, under dingy skies, in narrow, dirty streets, were a new experience for me. It is like nothing else in my life. I realised that I was a modern and a civilised man. I found the food filthy and the coffee horrible; the whole town stank in my nostrils, the landlord of the Good Intent on the quay had a stand-up quarrel with us before I could get even a hot bath, and the bedroom I slept in was infested by a quantity of exotic but voracious flat parasites called locally "bugs," in the walls, in the woodwork, everywhere. I fought them with insect powder, and found them comatose in the morning. I was dipping down into the dingy underworld of the contemporary state, and I liked it no better than I did my first dip into it when I stayed with my Uncle Nicodemus Frapp at the bakery at Chatham--where, by-the-by, we had to deal with cockroaches of a smaller, darker variety, and also with bugs of sorts.

Let me confess that through all this time before we started I was immensely self-conscious, and that Beatrice played the part of audience in my imagination throughout. I was, as I say, "saving the situation," and I was acutely aware of that. The evening before we sailed, instead of revising our medicine-chest as I had intended, I took the car and ran across country to Lady Grove to tell my aunt of the journey I was making, dress, and astonish Lady Osprey by an after dinner call.

The two ladies were at home and alone beside a big fire that seemed wonderfully cheerful after the winter night. I remember the effect of the little parlour in which they sat as very bright and domestic. Lady Osprey, in a costume of mauve and lace, sat on a chintz sofa and played an elaborately spread-out patience by the light of a tall shaded lamp; Beatrice, in a whiteness that showed her throat, smoked a cigarette in an armchair and read with a lamp at her elbow. The room was white-panelled and chintz-curtained. About those two bright centres of light were warm dark shadow, in which a circular mirror shone like a pool of brown water. I carried off my raid by behaving like a slave of etiquette. There were moments when I think I really made Lady Osprey believe that my call was an unavoidable necessity, that it would have been negligent of me not to call just how and when I did. But at the best those were transitory moments.

They received me with disciplined amazement. Lady Osprey was interested in my face and scrutinised the scar. Beatrice stood behind her solicitude. Our eyes met, and in hers I could see startled interrogations.

"I'm going," I said, "to the west coast of Africa."

They asked questions, but it suited my mood to be vague.

"We've interests there. It is urgent I should go. I don't know when I may return."

After that I perceived Beatrice surveyed me steadily.

The conversation was rather difficult. I embarked upon lengthy thanks for their kindness to me after my accident. I tried to understand Lady Osprey's game of patience, but it didn't appear that Lady Osprey was anxious for me to understand her patience. I came to the verge of taking my leave.

"You needn't go yet," said Beatrice, abruptly.

She walked across to the piano, took a pile of music from the cabinet near, surveyed Lady Osprey's back, and with a gesture to me dropped it all deliberately on to the floor.

"Must talk," she said, kneeling close to me as I helped her to pick it up. "Turn my pages. At the piano."

"I can't read music."

"Turn my pages."

Presently we were at the piano, and Beatrice was playing with noisy inaccuracy. She glanced over her shoulder and Lady Osprey had resumed her patience. The old lady was very pink, and appeared to be absorbed in some attempt to cheat herself without our observing it.

"Isn't West Africa a vile climate?" "Are you going to live there?" "Why are you going?"

Beatrice asked these questions in a low voice and gave me no chance to answer. Then taking a rhythm from the music before her, she said--

"At the back of the house is a garden--a door in the wall--on the lane. Understand?"

I turned over the pages without any effect on her playing.

"When?" I asked.

She dealt in chords. "I wish I COULD play this!" she said. "Midnight."

She gave her attention to the music for a time.

"You may have to wait."

"I'll wait."

She brought her playing to an end by--as school boys say--"stashing it up."

"I can't play to-night," she said, standing up and meeting my eyes. "I

wanted to give you a parting voluntary."

"Was that Wagner, Beatrice?" asked Lady Osprey looking up from her cards. "It sounded very confused."

I took my leave. I had a curious twinge of conscience as I parted from Lady Osprey. Either a first intimation of middle-age or my inexperience in romantic affairs was to blame, but I felt a very distinct objection to the prospect of invading this good lady's premises from the garden door. I motored up to the pavilion, found Cothope reading in bed, told him for the first time of West Africa, spent an hour with him in settling all the outstanding details of Lord Roberts B, and left that in his hands to finish against my return. I sent the motor back to Lady Grove, and still wearing my fur coat--for the January night was damp and bitterly cold--walked to Bedley Corner. I found the lane to the back of the Dower House without any difficulty, and was at the door in the wall with ten minutes to spare. I lit a cigar and fell to walking up and down. This queer flavour of intrigue, this nocturnal garden-door business, had taken me by surprise and changed my mental altitudes. I was startled out of my egotistical pose and thinking intently of Beatrice, of that elfin quality in her that always pleased me, that always took me by surprise, that had made her for example so instantly conceive this meeting.

She came within a minute of midnight; the door opened softly and she appeared, a short, grey figure in a motor-coat of sheepskin, bareheaded

to the cold drizzle. She flitted up to me, and her eyes were shadows in her dusky face.

"Why are you going to West Africa?" she asked at once.

"Business crisis. I have to go."

"You're not going--? You're coming back?"

"Three or four months," I said, "at most."

"Then, it's nothing to do with me?"

"Nothing," I said. "Why should it have?"

"Oh, that's all right. One never knows what people think or what people fancy." She took me by the arm, "Let's go for a walk," she said.

I looked about me at darkness and rain.

"That's all right," she laughed. "We can go along the lane and into the Old Woking Road. Do you mind? Of course you don't. My head. It doesn't matter. One never meets anybody."

"How do you know?"



"I've wandered like this before.... Of course. Did you think"--she nodded her head back at her home--"that's all?"

"No, by Jove!" I cried; "it's manifest it isn't."

She took my arm and turned me down the lane. "Night's my time," she said by my side. "There's a touch of the werewolf in my blood. One never knows in these old families.... I've wondered often.... Here we are, anyhow, alone in the world. Just darkness and cold and a sky of clouds and wet. And we--together.

"I like the wet on my face and hair, don't you? When do you sail?"

I told her to-morrow.

"Oh, well, there's no to-morrow now. You and I!" She stopped and confronted me.

"You don't say a word except to answer!"

"No," I said.

"Last time you did all the talking."

"Like a fool. Now--"

We looked at each other's two dim faces. "You're glad to be here?"

"I'm glad--I'm beginning to be--it's more than glad."

She put her hands on my shoulders and drew me down to kiss her.

"Ah!" she said, and for a moment or so we just clung to one another.

"That's all," she said, releasing herself. "What bundles of clothes we are to-night. I felt we should kiss some day again. Always. The last time was ages ago."

"Among the fern stalks."

"Among the bracken. You remember. And your lips were cold. Were mine? The same lips--after so long--after so much!... And now let's trudge through this blotted-out world together for a time. Yes, let me take your arm. Just trudge. See? Hold tight to me because I know the way--and don't talk--don't talk. Unless you want to talk.... Let me tell you things! You see, dear, the whole world is blotted out--it's dead and gone, and we're in this place. This dark wild place.... We're dead. Or all the world is dead. No! We're dead. No one can see us. We're shadows. We've got out of our positions, out of our bodies--and together. That's the good thing of it--together. But that's why the world can't see us and why we hardly see the world. Sssh! Is it all right?"

"It's all right," I said.

We stumbled along for a time in a close silence. We passed a dim-lit, rain-veiled window.

"The silly world," she said, "the silly world! It eats and sleeps. If the wet didn't patter so from the trees we'd hear it snoring. It's dreaming such stupid things--stupid judgments. It doesn't know we are passing, we two--free of it--clear of it. You and I!"

We pressed against each other reassuringly.

"I'm glad we're dead," she whispered. "I'm glad we're dead. I was tired of it, dear. I was so tired of it, dear, and so entangled."

She stopped abruptly.

We splashed through a string of puddles. I began to remember things I had meant to say.

"Look here!" I cried. "I want to help you beyond measure. You are entangled. What is the trouble? I asked you to marry me. You said you would. But there's something."

My thoughts sounded clumsy as I said them.

"Is it something about my position?... Or is it something--perhaps--about some other man?"

There was an immense assenting silence.

"You've puzzled me so. At first--I mean quite early--I thought you meant to make me marry you."

"I did."

"And then?"

"To-night," she said after a long pause, "I can't explain. No! I can't explain. I love you! But--explanations! To-night my dear, here we are in the world alone--and the world doesn't matter. Nothing matters. Here I am in the cold with you and my bed away there deserted. I'd tell you--I will tell you when things enable me to tell you, and soon enough they will. But to-night--I won't--I won't."

She left my side and went in front of me.

She turned upon me. "Look here," she said, "I insist upon your being dead. Do you understand? I'm not joking. To-night you and I are out of life. It's our time together. There may be other times, but this we won't spoil. We're--in Hades if you like. Where there's nothing to hide and nothing to tell. No bodies even. No bothers. We loved each

other--down there--and were kept apart, but now it doesn't matter. It's over.... If you won't agree to that--I will go home."

"I wanted," I began.

"I know. Oh! my dear, if you'd only understand I understand. If you'd only not care--and love me to-night."

"I do love you," I said.

"Then LOVE me," she answered, "and leave all the things that bother you. Love me! Here I am!"

"But!--"

"No!" she said.

"Well, have your way."

So she carried her point, and we wandered into the night together and Beatrice talked to me of love....

I'd never heard a woman before in all my life who could talk of love, who could lay bare and develop and touch with imagination all that mass of fine emotion every woman, it may be, hides. She had read of love, she had thought of love, a thousand sweet lyrics had sounded through her

brain and left fine fragments in her memory; she poured it out, all of it, shamelessly, skilfully, for me. I cannot give any sense of that talk, I cannot even tell how much of the delight of it was the magic of her voice, the glow of her near presence. And always we walked swathed warmly through a chilly air, along dim, interminable greasy roads--with never a soul abroad it seemed to us, never a beast in the fields.

"Why do people love each other?" I said.

"Why not?"

"But why do I love you? Why is your voice better than any voice, your face sweeter than any face?"

"And why do I love you?" she asked; "not only what is fine in you, but what isn't? Why do I love your dullness, your arrogance? For I do. To--night I love the very raindrops on the fur of your coat!"...

So we talked; and at last very wet, still glowing but a little tired, we parted at the garden door. We had been wandering for two hours in our strange irrational community of happiness, and all the world about us, and particularly Lady Osprey and her household, had been asleep--and dreaming of anything rather than Beatrice in the night and rain.

She stood in the doorway, a muffled figure with eyes that glowed.

"Come back," she whispered. "I shall wait for you."

She hesitated.

She touched the lapel of my coat. "I love you NOW," she said, and lifted her face to mine.

I held her to me and was atremble from top to toe. "O God!" I cried.

"And I must go!"

She slipped from my arms and paused, regarding me. For an instant the world seemed full of fantastic possibilities.

"Yes, GO!" she said, and vanished and slammed the door upon me, leaving me alone like a man new fallen from fairyland in the black darkness of the night.

III

That expedition to Mordet Island stands apart from all the rest of my life, detached, a piece by itself with an atmosphere of its own. It would, I suppose, make a book by itself--it has made a fairly voluminous official report--but so far as this novel of mine goes it is merely an episode, a contributory experience, and I mean to keep it at that.

Vile weather, an impatient fretting against unbearable slowness

and delay, sea--sickness, general discomfort and humiliating self--revelation are the master values of these memories.

I was sick all through the journey out. I don't know why. It was the only time I was ever sea-sick, and I have seen some pretty bad weather since I became a boat-builder. But that phantom smell of potatoes was peculiarly vile to me. Coming back on the brig we were all ill, every one of us, so soon as we got to sea, poisoned, I firmly believe, by quap. On the way out most of the others recovered in a few days, but the stuffiness below, the coarse food, the cramped dirty accommodation kept me, if not actually sea-sick, in a state of acute physical wretchedness the whole time. The ship abounded in cockroaches and more intimate vermin. I was cold all the time until after we passed Cape Verde, then I became steamily hot; I had been too preoccupied with Beatrice and my keen desire to get the Maud Mary under way at once, to consider a proper wardrobe for myself, and in particular I lacked a coat. Heavens! how I lacked that coat! And, moreover, I was cooped up with two of the worst bores in Christendom, Pollack and the captain. Pollack, after conducting his illness in a style better adapted to the capacity of an opera house than a small compartment, suddenly got insupportably well and breezy, and produced a manly pipe in which he smoked a tobacco as blond as himself, and divided his time almost equally between smoking it and trying to clean it. "There's only three things you can clean a pipe with," he used to remark with a twist of paper in hand. "The best's a feather, the second's a straw, and the third's a girl's hairpin. I never see such a ship. You can't find any of 'em. Last time I came this way



I did find hairpins anyway, and found 'em on the floor of the captain's cabin. Regular deposit. Eh?... Feelin' better?"

At which I usually swore.

"Oh, you'll be all right soon. Don't mind my puffin' a bit? Eh?"

He never tired of asking me to "have a hand at Nap. Good game. Makes you forget it, and that's half the battle."

He would sit swaying with the rolling of the ship and suck at his pipe of blond tobacco and look with an inexpressibly sage but somnolent blue eye at the captain by the hour together. "Captain's a Card," he would say over and over again as the outcome of these meditations. "He'd like to know what we're up to. He'd like to know--no end."

That did seem to be the captain's ruling idea. But he also wanted to impress me with the notion that he was a gentleman of good family and to air a number of views adverse to the English, to English literature, to the English constitution, and the like.

He had learnt the sea in the Roumanian navy, and English out of a book; he would still at times pronounce the e's at the end of "there" and "here"; he was a naturalised Englishman, and he drove me into a reluctant and uncongenial patriotism by his everlasting carping at things English. Pollack would set himself to "draw him out." Heaven

alone can tell how near I came to murder.

Fifty-three days I had outward, cooped up with these two and a shy and profoundly depressed mate who read the Bible on Sundays and spent the rest of his leisure in lethargy, three and fifty days of life cooped up in a perpetual smell, in a persistent sick hunger that turned from the sight of food, in darkness, cold and wet, in a lightly ballasted ship that rolled and pitched and swayed. And all the time the sands in the hour-glass of my uncle's fortunes were streaming out. Misery! Amidst it all I remember only one thing brightly, one morning of sunshine in the Bay of Biscay and a vision of frothing waves, sapphire green, a bird following our wake and our masts rolling about the sky. Then wind and rain close in on us again.

You must not imagine they were ordinary days, days, I mean, of an average length; they were not so much days as long damp slabs of time that stretched each one to the horizon, and much of that length was night. One paraded the staggering deck in a borrowed sou'-wester hour after hour in the chilly, windy, splashing and spitting darkness, or sat in the cabin, bored and ill, and looked at the faces of those inseparable companions by the help of a lamp that gave smell rather than light. Then one would see going up, up, up, and then sinking down, down, down, Pollack, extinct pipe in mouth, humorously observant, bringing his mind slowly to the seventy-seventh decision that the captain was a Card, while the words flowed from the latter in a nimble incessant good.

"Dis England eet is not a country aristocratic, no! Eet is a glorified

bourgeoisie! Eet is plutocratic. In England dere is no aristocracy since de Wars of Roses. In the rest of Europe east of the Latins, yes; in England, no.

"Eet is all middle-class, youra England. Everything you look at, middle-class. Respectable! Everything good--eet is, you say, shocking. Madame Grundy! Eet is all limited and computing and self-seeking. Dat is why your art is so limited, youra fiction, your philosophin, why you are all so inartistic. You want nothing but profit! What will pay! What would you?"...

He had all those violent adjuncts to speech we Western Europeans have abandoned, shruggings of the shoulders, waving of the arms, thrusting out of the face, wonderful grimaces and twiddlings of the hands under your nose until you wanted to hit them away. Day after day it went on, and I had to keep any anger to myself, to reserve myself for the time ahead when it would be necessary to see the quap was got aboard and stowed--knee deep in this man's astonishment. I knew he would make a thousand objections to all we had before us. He talked like a drugged man. It ran glibly over his tongue. And all the time one could see his seamanship fretting him, he was gnawed by responsibility, perpetually uneasy about the ship's position, perpetually imagining dangers. If a sea hit us exceptionally hard he'd be out of the cabin in an instant making an outcry of inquiries, and he was pursued by a dread of the hold, of ballast shifting, of insidious wicked leaks. As we drew near the African coast his fear of rocks and shoals became infectious.

"I do not know dis coast," he used to say. "I cama hera because Gordon-Nasmyth was coming too. Den he does not come!"

"Fortunes of war," I said, and tried to think in vain if any motive but sheer haphazard could have guided Gordon-Nasmyth in the choice of these two men. I think perhaps Gordon-Nasmyth had the artistic temperament and wanted contrasts, and also that the captain helped him to express his own malignant Anti-Britishism.

He was indeed an exceptionally inefficient captain. On the whole I was glad I had come even at the eleventh hour to see to things.

(The captain, by-the-by, did at last, out of sheer nervousness, get aground at the end of Mordet's Island, but we got off in an hour or so with a swell and a little hard work in the boat.)

I suspected the mate of his opinion of the captain long before he expressed it. He was, I say, a taciturn man, but one day speech broke through him. He had been sitting at the table with his arms folded on it, musing drearily, pipe in mouth, and the voice of the captain drifted down from above.

The mate lifted his heavy eyes to me and regarded me for a moment. Then he began to heave with the beginnings of speech. He disembarrassed himself of his pipe. I cowered with expectation. Speech was coming at

last. Before he spoke he nodded reassuringly once or twice.

"E--"

He moved his head strangely and mysteriously, but a child might have known he spoke of the captain.

"E's a foreigner."

He regarded me doubtfully for a time, and at last decided for the sake of lucidity to clench the matter.

"That's what E is--a DAGO!"

He nodded like a man who gives a last tap to a nail, and I could see he considered his remark well and truly laid. His face, though still resolute, became as tranquil and uneventful as a huge hall after a public meeting has dispersed out of it, and finally he closed and locked it with his pipe.

"Roumanian Jew, isn't he?" I said.

He nodded darkly and almost forbiddingly.

More would have been too much. The thing was said. But from that time forth I knew I could depend upon him and that he and I were friends. It

happens I never did have to depend upon him, but that does not affect our relationship.

Forward the crew lived lives very much after the fashion of ours, more crowded, more cramped and dirty, wetter, steamier, more verminous. The coarse food they had was still not so coarse but that they did not think they were living "like fighting cocks." So far as I could make out they were all nearly destitute men; hardly any of them had a proper sea outfit, and what small possessions they had were a source of mutual distrust. And as we pitched and floundered southward they gambled and fought, were brutal to one another, argued and wrangled loudly, until we protested at the uproar.

There's no romance about the sea in a small sailing ship as I saw it. The romance is in the mind of the landsman dreamer. These brigs and schooners and brigantines that still stand out from every little port are relics from an age of petty trade, as rotten and obsolescent as a Georgian house that has sunken into a slum. They are indeed just floating fragments of slum, much as icebergs are floating fragments of glacier. The civilised man who has learnt to wash, who has developed a sense of physical honour, of cleanly temperate feeding, of time, can endure them no more. They pass, and the clanking coal-wasting steamers will follow them, giving place to cleaner, finer things....

But so it was I made my voyage to Africa, and came at last into a world of steamy fogs and a hot smell of vegetable decay, and into sound and

sight of surf and distant intermittent glimpses of the coast. I lived a strange concentrated life through all that time, such a life as a creature must do that has fallen in a well. All my former ways ceased, all my old vistas became memories.

The situation I was saving was very small and distant now; I felt its urgency no more. Beatrice and Lady Grove, my uncle and the Hardingham, my soaring in the air and my habitual wide vision of swift effectual things, became as remote as if they were in some world I had left for ever....

#### IV

All these African memories stand by themselves. It was for me an expedition into the realms of undisciplined nature out of the world that is ruled by men, my first bout with that hot side of our mother that gives you the jungle--that cold side that gives you the air-eddy I was beginning to know passing well. They are memories woven upon a fabric of sunshine and heat and a constant warm smell of decay. They end in rain--such rain as I had never seen before, a vehement, a frantic downpouring of water, but our first slow passage through the channels behind Mordet's Island was in incandescent sunshine.

There we go in my memory still, a blistered dirty ship with patched sails and a battered mermaid to present Maud Mary, sounding and taking thought between high ranks of forest whose trees come out knee-deep

at last in the water. There we go with a little breeze on our quarter, Mordet Island rounded and the quap, it might be within a day of us.

Here and there strange blossoms woke the dank intensities of green with a trumpet call of colour. Things crept among the jungle and peeped and dashed back rustling into stillness. Always in the sluggishly drifting, opaque water were eddyings and stirrings; little rushes of bubbles came chuckling up light-heartedly from this or that submerged conflict and tragedy; now and again were crocodiles like a stranded fleet of logs basking in the sun. Still it was by day, a dreary stillness broken only by insect sounds and the creaking and flapping of our progress, by the calling of the soundings and the captain's confused shouts; but in the night as we lay moored to a clump of trees the darkness brought a thousand swampy things to life and out of the forest came screaming and howlings, screaming and yells that made us glad to be afloat. And once we saw between the tree stems long blazing fires. We passed two or three villages landward, and brown-black women and children came and stared at us and gesticulated, and once a man came out in a boat from a creek and hailed us in an unknown tongue; and so at last we came to a great open place, a broad lake rimmed with a desolation of mud and bleached refuse and dead trees, free from crocodiles or water birds or sight or sound of any living thing, and saw far off, even as Nasmyth had described, the ruins of the deserted station, and hard by two little heaps of buff-hued rubbish under a great rib of rock, the quap! The forest receded. The land to the right of us fell away and became barren, and far on across notch in its backbone was surf and the sea.



We took the ship in towards those heaps and the ruined jetty slowly and carefully. The captain came and talked.

"This is eet?" he said.

"Yes," said I.

"Is eet for trade we have come?"

This was ironical.

"No," said I.

"Gordon-Nasmyth would haf told me long ago what it ees for we haf come."

"I'll tell you now," I said. "We are going to lay in as close as we can to those two heaps of stuff--you see them?--under the rock. Then we are going to chuck all our ballast overboard and take those in. Then we're going home."

"May I presume to ask--is eet gold?"

"No," I said incivilly, "it isn't."

"Then what is it?"

"It's stuff--of some commercial value."

"We can't do eet," he said.

"We can," I answered reassuringly.

"We can't," he said as confidently. "I don't mean what you mean. You know so liddle--But--dis is forbidden country."

I turned on him suddenly angry and met bright excited eyes. For a minute we scrutinised one another. Then I said, "That's our risk. Trade is forbidden. But this isn't trade.... This thing's got to be done."

His eyes glittered and he shook his head....

The brig stood in slowly through the twilight toward this strange scorched and blistered stretch of beach, and the man at the wheel strained his ears to listening the low-voiced angry argument that began between myself and the captain, that was presently joined by Pollack. We moored at last within a hundred yards of our goal, and all through our dinner and far into the night we argued intermittently and fiercely with the captain about our right to load just what we pleased. "I will haf nothing to do with eet," he persisted. "I wash my hands." It seemed that night as though we argued in vain. "If it is not trade," he said, "it is prospecting and mining. That is worse. Any one who knows

anything--outside England--knows that is worse."

We argued and I lost my temper and swore at him. Pollack kept cooler and chewed his pipe watchfully with that blue eye of his upon the captain's gestures. Finally I went on deck to cool. The sky was overcast I discovered all the men were in a knot forward, staring at the faint quivering luminosity that had spread over the heaps of quap, a phosphorescence such as one sees at times on rotting wood. And about the beach east and west there were patches and streaks of something like diluted moonshine....

In the small hours I was still awake and turning over scheme after scheme in my mind whereby I might circumvent the captain's opposition. I meant to get that quap aboard if I had to kill some one to do it. Never in my life had I been so thwarted! After this intolerable voyage! There came a rap at my cabin door and then it opened and I made out a bearded face. "Come in," I said, and a black voluble figure I could just see obscurely came in to talk in my private ear and fill my cabin with its whisperings and gestures. It was the captain. He, too, had been awake and thinking things over. He had come to explain--enormously. I lay there hating him and wondering if I and Pollack could lock him in his cabin and run the ship without him. "I do not want to spoil dis expedition," emerged from a cloud of protestations, and then I was able to disentangle "a commission--shush a small commission--for special risks!" "Special risks" became frequent. I let him explain himself out. It appeared he was also demanding an apology for something I had said.

No doubt I had insulted him generously. At last came definite offers. I broke my silence and bargained.

"Pollack!" I cried and hammered the partition.

"What's up?" asked Pollack.

I stated the case concisely.

There came a silence.

"He's a Card," said Pollack. "Let's give him his commission. I don't mind."

"Eh?" I cried.

"I said he was a Card, that's all," said Pollack. "I'm coming."

He appeared in my doorway a faint white figure joined our vehement whisperings.

We had to buy the captain off; we had to promise him ten per cent. of our problematical profits. We were to give him ten per cent. on what we sold the cargo for over and above his legitimate pay, and I found in my out-bargained and disordered state small consolation in the thought that I, as the Gordon-Nasmyth expedition, was to sell the stuff to myself as

Business Organisations. And he further exasperated me by insisting on having our bargain in writing. "In the form of a letter," he insisted.

"All right," I acquiesced, "in the form of a letter. Here goes! Get a light!"

"And the apology," he said, folding up the letter.

"All right," I said; "Apology."

My hand shook with anger as I wrote, and afterwards I could not sleep for hate of him. At last I got up. I suffered, I found, from an unusual clumsiness. I struck my toe against my cabin door, and cut myself as I shaved. I found myself at last pacing the deck under the dawn in a mood of extreme exasperation. The sun rose abruptly and splashed light blindingly into my eyes and I swore at the sun. I found myself imagining fresh obstacles with the men and talking aloud in anticipatory rehearsal of the consequent row.

The malaria of the quap was already in my blood.

V

Sooner or later the ridiculous embargo that now lies upon all the coast eastward of Mordet Island will be lifted and the reality of the deposits of quap ascertained. I am sure that we were merely taking the outcrop

of a stratum of nodulated deposits that dip steeply seaward. Those heaps were merely the crumbled out contents of two irregular cavities in the rock; they are as natural as any talus or heap of that kind, and the mud along the edge of the water for miles is mixed with quap, and is radio-active and lifeless and faintly phosphorescent at night. But the reader will find the full particulars of my impression of all this in the Geological Magazine for October, 1905, and to that I must refer him. There, too, he will find my unconfirmed theories of its nature. If I am right it is something far more significant from the scientific point of view than those incidental constituents of various rare metals, pitchblende, rutile, and the like, upon which the revolutionary discoveries of the last decade are based. Those are just little molecular centres of disintegration, of that mysterious decay and rotting of those elements, elements once regarded as the most stable things in nature. But there is something--the only word that comes near it is CANCEROUS--and that is not very near, about the whole of quap, something that creeps and lives as a disease lives by destroying; an elemental stirring and disarrangement, incalculably maleficent and strange.

This is no imaginative comparison of mine. To my mind radio-activity is a real disease of matter. Moreover, it is a contagious disease. It spreads. You bring those debased and crumbling atoms near others and those too presently catch the trick of swinging themselves out of coherent existence. It is in matter exactly what the decay of our old culture is in society, a loss of traditions and distinctions and assured

reactions. When I think of these inexplicable dissolvent centres that have come into being in our globe--these quap heaps are surely by far the largest that have yet been found in the world; the rest as yet mere specks in grains and crystals--I am haunted by a grotesque fancy of the ultimate eating away and dry-rotting and dispersal of all our world. So that while man still struggles and dreams his very substance will change and crumble from beneath him. I mention this here as a queer persistent fancy. Suppose, indeed, that is to be the end of our planet; no splendid climax and finale, no towering accumulation of achievements, but just--atomic decay! I add that to the ideas of the suffocating comet, the dark body out of space, the burning out of the sun, the distorted orbit, as a new and far more possible end--as Science can see ends--to this strange by-play of matter that we call human life. I do not believe this can be the end; no human soul can believe in such an end and go on living, but to it science points as a possible thing, science and reason alike. If single human beings--if one single ricketty infant--can be born as it were by accident and die futile, why not the whole race? These are questions I have never answered, that now I never attempt to answer, but the thought of quap and its mysteries brings them back to me.

I can witness that the beach and mud for two miles or more either way was a lifeless beach--lifeless as I could have imagined no tropical mud could ever be, and all the dead branches and leaves and rotting dead fish and so forth that drifted ashore became presently shrivelled and white. Sometimes crocodiles would come up out of the water and bask, and

now and then water birds would explore the mud and rocky ribs that rose out of it, in a mood of transitory speculation. That was its utmost admiration. And the air felt at once hot and austere, dry and blistering, and altogether different the warm moist embrace that had met us at our first African landfall and to which we had grown accustomed.

I believe that the primary influence of the quap upon us was to increase the conductivity of our nerves, but that is a mere unjustifiable speculation on my part. At any rate it gave a sort of east wind effect to life. We all became irritable, clumsy, languid and disposed to be impatient with our languor. We moored the brig to the rocks with difficulty, and got aground on mud and decided to stick there and tow off when we had done--the bottom was as greasy as butter. Our efforts to fix up planks and sleepers in order to wheel the quap aboard were as ill-conceived as that sort of work can be--and that sort of work can at times be very ill-conceived. The captain had a superstitious fear of his hold: he became wildly gesticulatory and expository and incompetent at the bare thought of it. His shouts still echo in my memory, becoming as each crisis approached less and less like any known tongue.

But I cannot now write the history of those days of blundering and toil: of how Milton, one of the boys, fell from a plank to the beach, thirty feet perhaps, with his barrow and broke his arm and I believe a rib, of how I and Pollack set the limb and nursed him through the fever that followed, of how one man after another succumbed to a feverish malaria, and how I--by virtue of my scientific reputation--was obliged to play



the part of doctor and dose them with quinine, and then finding that worse than nothing, with rum and small doses of Easton's Syrup, of which there chanced to be a case of bottles aboard--Heaven and Gordon-Nasmyth know why. For three long days we lay in misery and never shipped a barrow-load. Then, when they resumed, the men's hands broke out into sores. There were no gloves available; and I tried to get them, while they shovelled and wheeled, to cover their hands with stockings or greased rags. They would not do this on account of the heat and discomfort. This attempt of mine did, however, direct their attention to the quap as the source of their illness and precipitated what in the end finished our lading, an informal strike. "We've had enough of this," they said, and they meant it. They came aft to say as much. They cowed the captain.

Through all these days the weather was variously vile, first a furnace heat under a sky of a scowling intensity of blue, then a hot fog that stuck in one's throat like wool and turned the men on the planks into colourless figures of giants, then a wild burst of thunderstorms, mad elemental uproar and rain. Through it all, against illness, heat, confusion of mind, one master impetus prevailed with me, to keep the shipping going, to maintain one motif at least, whatever else arose or ceased, the chuff of the spades, the squeaking and shriek of the barrows, the pluppa, pluppa, pluppa, as the men came trotting along the swinging high planks, and then at last, the dollop, dollop, as the stuff shot into the hold. "Another barrow-load, thank God! Another fifteen hundred, or it may be two thousand pounds, for the saving of

Ponderevo!..."

I found out many things about myself and humanity in those weeks of effort behind Mordet Island. I understand now the heart of the sweater, of the harsh employer, of the nigger-driver. I had brought these men into a danger they didn't understand, I was fiercely resolved to overcome their opposition and bend and use them for my purpose, and I hated the men. But I hated all humanity during the time that the quap was near me.

And my mind was pervaded, too, by a sense of urgency and by the fear that we should be discovered and our proceedings stopped. I wanted to get out to sea again--to be beating up northward with our plunder. I was afraid our masts showed to seaward and might betray us to some curious passer on the high sea. And one evening near the end I saw a canoe with three natives far off down the lake; I got field-glasses from the captain and scrutinised them, and I could see them staring at us. One man might have been a half-breed and was dressed in white. They watched us for some time very quietly and then paddled off into some channel in the forest shadows.

And for three nights running, so that it took a painful grip upon my inflamed imagination, I dreamt of my uncle's face, only that it was ghastly white like a clown's, and the throat was cut from ear--a long ochreous cut. "Too late," he said; "Too late!..."

## VI

A day or so after we had got to work upon the quap I found myself so sleepless and miserable that the ship became unendurable. Just before the rush of sunrise I borrowed Pollack's gun, walked down the planks, clambered over the quap heaps and prowled along the beach. I went perhaps a mile and a half that day and some distance beyond the ruins of the old station. I became interested in the desolation about me, and found when I returned that I was able to sleep for nearly an hour. It was delightful to have been alone for so long,--no captain, no Pollack, no one. Accordingly I repeated this expedition the next morning and the next until it became a custom with me. There was little for me to do once the digging and wheeling was organised, and so these prowlings of mine grew longer and longer, and presently I began to take food with me.

I pushed these walks far beyond the area desolated by the quap. On the edges of that was first a zone of stunted vegetation, then a sort of swampy jungle that was difficult to penetrate, and then the beginnings of the forest, a scene of huge tree stems and tangled creeper ropes and roots mingled with oozy mud. Here I used to loaf in a state between botanising and reverie--always very anxious to know what was up above in the sunlight--and here it was I murdered a man.

It was the most unmeaning and purposeless murder imaginable. Even as I write down its well-remembered particulars there comes again the sense of its strangeness, its pointlessness, its incompatibility with any of

the neat and definite theories people hold about life and the meaning of the world. I did this thing and I want to tell of my doing it, but why I did it and particularly why I should be held responsible for it I cannot explain.

That morning I had come upon a track in the forest, and it had occurred to me as a disagreeable idea that this was a human pathway. I didn't want to come upon any human beings. The less our expedition saw of the African population the better for its prospects. Thus far we had been singularly free from native pestering. So I turned back and was making my way over mud and roots and dead fronds and petals scattered from the green world above when abruptly I saw my victim.

I became aware of him perhaps forty feet off standing quite still and regarding me.

He wasn't by any means a pretty figure. He was very black and naked except for a dirty loin-cloth, his legs were ill-shaped and his toes spread wide and the upper edge of his cloth and a girdle of string cut his clumsy abdomen into folds. His forehead was low, his nose very flat and his lower lip swollen and purplish-red. His hair was short and fuzzy, and about his neck was a string and a little purse of skin. He carried a musket, and a powder-flask was stuck in his girdle. It was a curious confrontation. There opposed to him stood I, a little soiled, perhaps, but still a rather elaborately civilised human being, born, bred and trained in a vague tradition. In my hand was an unaccustomed

gun. And each of us was essentially a teeming, vivid brain, tensely excited by the encounter, quite unaware of the other's mental content or what to do with him.

He stepped back a pace or so, stumbled and turned to run.

"Stop," I cried; "stop, you fool!" and started to run after him, shouting such things in English. But I was no match for him over the roots and mud.

I had a preposterous idea. "He mustn't get away and tell them!"

And with that instantly I brought both feet together, raised my gun, aimed quite coolly, drew the trigger carefully and shot him neatly in the back.

I saw, and saw with a leap of pure exaltation, the smash of my bullet between his shoulder blades. "Got him," said I, dropping my gun and down he flopped and died without a groan. "By Jove!" I cried with note of surprise, "I've killed him!" I looked about me and then went forward cautiously, in a mood between curiosity and astonishment, to look at this man whose soul I had flung so unceremoniously out of our common world. I went to him, not as one goes to something one has made or done, but as one approaches something found.

He was frightfully smashed out in front; he must have died in the

instant. I stooped and raised him by his shoulder and realised that. I dropped him, and stood about and peered about me through the trees. "My word!" I said. He was the second dead human being--apart, I mean, from surgical properties and mummies and common shows of that sort--that I have ever seen. I stood over him wondering, wondering beyond measure.

A practical idea came into that confusion. Had any one heard the gun?

I reloaded.

After a time I felt securer, and gave my mind again to the dead I had killed. What must I do?

It occurred to me that perhaps I ought to bury him. At any rate, I ought to hide him. I reflected coolly, and then put my gun within easy reach and dragged him by the arm towards a place where the mud seemed soft, and thrust him in. His powder-flask slipped from his loin-cloth, and I went back to get it. Then I pressed him down with the butt of my rifle.

Afterwards this all seemed to me most horrible, but at the time it was entirely a matter-of-fact transaction. I looked round for any other visible evidence of his fate, looked round as one does when one packs one's portmanteau in an hotel bedroom.

When I got my bearings, and carefully returned towards the ship. I had the mood of grave concentration of a boy who has lapsed into poaching.

And the business only began to assume proper proportions for me as I got near the ship, to seem any other kind of thing than the killing of a bird or rabbit.

In the night, however, it took on enormous and portentous forms. "By God!" I cried suddenly, starting wide awake; "but it was murder!"

I lay after that wide awake, staring at my memories. In some odd way these visions mixed up with my dream of in my uncle in his despair. The black body which saw now damaged and partly buried, but which, nevertheless, I no longer felt was dead but acutely alive and perceiving, I mixed up with the ochreous slash under my uncle's face. I tried to dismiss this horrible obsession from my mind, but it prevailed over all my efforts.

The next day was utterly black with my sense of that ugly creature's body. I am the least superstitious of men, but it drew me. It drew me back into those thickets to the very place where I had hidden him.

Some evil and detestable beast had been at him, and he lay disinterred.

Methodically I buried his swollen and mangled carcass again, and returned to the ship for another night of dreams. Next day for all the morning I resisted the impulse to go to him, and played nap with Pollack with my secret gnawing at me, and in the evening started to go and was near benighted. I never told a soul of them of this thing I had done.

Next day I went early, and he had gone, and there were human footmarks and ugly stains round the muddy hole from which he had been dragged.

I returned to the ship, disconcerted and perplexed. That day it was the men came aft, with blistered hands and faces, and sullen eyes. When they proclaimed, through Edwards, their spokesman, "We've had enough of this, and we mean it," I answered very readily, "So have I. Let's go."

## VII

We were none too soon. People had been reconnoitring us, the telegraph had been at work, and we were not four hours at sea before we ran against the gunboat that had been sent down the coast to look for us and that would have caught us behind the island like a beast in a trap. It was a night of driving cloud that gave intermittent gleams of moonlight; the wind and sea were strong and we were rolling along through a drift of rails and mist. Suddenly the world was white with moonshine. The gunboat came out as a long dark shape wallowing on the water to the east.

She sighted the Maud Mary at once, and fired some sort of popgun to arrest us.

The mate turned to me.



"Shall I tell the captain?"

"The captain be damned" said I, and we let him sleep through two hours of chase till a rainstorm swallowed us up. Then we changed our course and sailed right across them, and by morning only her smoke was showing.

We were clear of Africa--and with the booty aboard I did not see what stood between us and home.

For the first time since I had fallen sick in the Thames my spirits rose. I was sea-sick and physically disgusted, of course, but I felt kindly in spite of my qualms. So far as I could calculate then the situation was saved. I saw myself returning triumphantly into the Thames, and nothing on earth to prevent old Capern's Perfect Filament going on the market in fortnight. I had the monopoly of electric lamps beneath my feet.

I was released from the spell of that bloodstained black body all mixed up with grey-black mud. I was going back to baths and decent food and aeronautics and Beatrice. I was going back to Beatrice and my real life again--out of this well into which I had fallen. It would have needed something more than sea-sickness and quap fever to prevent my spirits rising.

I told the captain that I agreed with him that the British were the scum of Europe, the westward drift of all the people, a disgusting rabble,

and I lost three pounds by attenuated retail to Pollack at ha'penny nap and euchre.

And then you know, as we got out into the Atlantic this side of Cape Verde, the ship began to go to pieces. I don't pretend for one moment to understand what happened. But I think Greiffenhagen's recent work on the effects of radium upon ligneous tissue does rather carry out my idea that emanations from quap have rapid rotting effect upon woody fibre.

From the first there had been a different feel about the ship, and as the big winds and waves began to strain her she commenced leaking. Soon she was leaking--not at any particular point, but everywhere. She did not spring a leak, I mean, but water came in first of all near the decaying edges of her planks, and then through them.

I firmly believe the water came through the wood. First it began to ooze, then to trickle. It was like trying to carry moist sugar in a thin paper bag. Soon we were taking in water as though we had opened a door in her bottom.

Once it began, the thing went ahead beyond all fighting. For a day or so we did our best, and I can still remember in my limbs and back the pumping--the fatigue in my arms and the memory of a clear little dribble of water that jerked as one pumped, and of knocking off and the being awakened to go on again, and of fatigue piling up upon fatigue. At last we ceased to think of anything but pumping; one became a thing of

torment enchanted, doomed to pump for ever. I still remember it as pure relief when at last Pollack came to me pipe in mouth.

"The captain says the damned thing's going down right now;" he remarked, chewing his mouthpiece. "Eh?"

"Good idea!" I said. "One can't go on pumping for ever."

And without hurry or alacrity, sullenly and wearily we got into the boats and pulled away from the Maud Mary until we were clear of her, and then we stayed resting on our oars, motionless upon a glassy sea, waiting for her to sink. We were all silent, even the captain was silent until she went down. And then he spoke quite mildly in an undertone.

"Dat is the first ship I haf ever lost.... And it was not a fair game!

It wass not a cargo any man should take. No!"

I stared at the slow eddies that circled above the departed Maud Mary, and the last chance of Business Organisations. I felt weary beyond emotion. I thought of my heroics to Beatrice and my uncle, of my prompt "I'll go," and of all the ineffectual months I had spent after this headlong decision. I was moved to laughter at myself and fate.

But the captain and the men did not laugh. The men scowled at me and rubbed their sore and blistered hands, and set themselves to row....

As all the world knows we were picked up by the Union Castle liner,  
Portland Castle.

The hairdresser aboard was a wonderful man, and he even improvised me a  
dress suit, and produced a clean shirt and warm underclothing. I had a  
hot bath, and dressed and dined and drank a bottle of Burgundy.

"Now," I said, "are there any newspapers? I want to know what's been  
happening in the world."

My steward gave me what he had, but I landed at Plymouth still largely  
ignorant of the course of events. I shook off Pollack, and left the  
captain and mate in an hotel, and the men in a Sailor's Home until I  
could send to pay them off, and I made my way to the station.

The newspapers I bought, the placards I saw, all England indeed  
resounded to my uncle's bankruptcy.