BOOK THE FOURTH

THE AFTERMATH OF TONO-BUNGAY

CHAPTER THE FIRST

THE STICK OF THE ROCKET

I

That evening I talked with my uncle in the Hardingham for the last time. The atmosphere of the place had altered quite shockingly. Instead of the crowd of importunate courtiers there were just half a dozen uninviting men, journalists waiting for an interview. Ropper the big commissionaire was still there, but now indeed he was defending my uncle from something more than time-wasting intrusions. I found the little man alone in the inner office pretending to work, but really brooding. He was looking yellow and deflated.

"Lord!" he said at the sight of me. "You're lean, George. It makes that scar of yours show up."

We regarded each other gravely for a time.

"Quap," I said, "is at the bottom of the Atlantic. There's some bills--We've got to pay the men."

"Seen the papers?"

"Read 'em all in the train."

"At bay," he said. "I been at bay for a week.... Yelping round me.... And me facing the music. I'm feelin' a bit tired."

He blew and wiped his glasses.

"My stomack isn't what it was," he explained. "One finds it--these times. How did it all happen, George? Your Marconigram--it took me in the wind a bit."

I told him concisely. He nodded to the paragraphs of my narrative and at the end he poured something from a medicine bottle into a sticky little wineglass and drank it. I became aware of the presence of drugs, of three or four small bottles before him among his disorder of papers, of a faint elusively familiar odour in the room.

"Yes," he said, wiping his lips and recorking the bottle. "You've done your best, George. The luck's been against us."

He reflected, bottle in hand. "Sometimes the luck goes with you and

sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it doesn't. And then where are you? Grass in the oven! Fight or no fight."

He asked a few questions and then his thoughts came back to his own urgent affairs. I tried to get some comprehensive account of the situation from him, but he would not give it.

"Oh, I wish I'd had you. I wish I'd had you, George. I've had a lot on my hands. You're clear headed at times."

"What has happened?"

"Oh! Boom!--infernal things."

"Yes, but--how? I'm just off the sea, remember."

"It'd worry me too much to tell you now. It's tied up in a skein."

He muttered something to himself and mused darkly, and roused himself to say--

"Besides--you'd better keep out of it. It's getting tight. Get 'em talking. Go down to Crest Hill and fly. That's YOUR affair."

For a time his manner set free queer anxieties in my brain again.

I will confess that that Mordet Island nightmare of mine returned, and as I looked at him his hand went out for the drug again. "Stomach, George," he said.

"I been fightin' on that. Every man fights on some thing--gives way somewheres--head, heart, liver--something. Zzzz. Gives way somewhere. Napoleon did at last. All through the Waterloo campaign, his stomach--it wasn't a stomach! Worse than mine, no end."

The mood of depression passed as the drug worked within him. His eyes brightened. He began to talk big. He began to dress up the situation for my eyes, to recover what he had admitted to me. He put it as a retreat from Russia. There were still the chances of Leipzig.

"It's a battle, George--a big fight. We're fighting for millions. I've still chances. There's still a card or so. I can't tell all my plans--like speaking on the stroke."

"You might," I began.

"I can't, George. It's like asking to look at some embryo. You got to wait. I know. In a sort of way, I know. But to tell it--No! You been away so long. And everything's got complicated."

My perception of disastrous entanglements deepened with the rise of his spirits. It was evident that I could only help to tie him up in whatever

net was weaving round his mind by forcing questions and explanations upon him. My thoughts flew off at another angle. "How's Aunt Susan?" said I.

I had to repeat the question. His busy whispering lips stopped for a moment, and he answered in the note of one who repeats a formula.

"She'd like to be in the battle with me. She'd like to be here in London. But there's corners I got to turn alone." His eye rested for a moment on the little bottle beside him. "And things have happened.

"You might go down now and talk to her," he said, in a directer voice. "I shall be down to-morrow night, I think."

He looked up as though he hoped that would end our talk.

"For the week-end?" I asked.

"For the week-end. Thank God for week-ends, George!"

II

My return home to Lady Grove was a very different thing from what I had anticipated when I had got out to sea with my load of quap and fancied the Perfect-Filament was safe within my grasp. As I walked through the evening light along the downs, the summer stillness seemed like the

stillness of something newly dead. There were no lurking workmen any more, no cyclists on the high road.

Cessation was manifest everywhere. There had been, I learnt from my aunt, a touching and quite voluntary demonstration when the Crest Hill work had come to an end and the men had drawn their last pay; they had cheered my uncle and hooted the contractors and Lord Boom.

I cannot now recall the manner in which my aunt and I greeted one another. I must have been very tired there, but whatever impression was made has gone out of my memory. But I recall very clearly how we sat at the little round table near the big window that gave on the terrace, and dined and talked. I remember her talking of my uncle.

She asked after him, and whether he seemed well. "I wish I could help," she said. "But I've never helped him much, never. His way of doing things was never mine. And since--since--. Since he began to get so rich, he's kept things from me. In the old days--it was different....

"There he is--I don't know what he's doing. He won't have me near him....

"More's kept from me than anyone. The very servants won't let me know. They try and stop the worst of the papers--Boom's things--from coming upstairs.... I suppose they've got him in a corner, George. Poor old Teddy! Poor old Adam and Eve we are! Ficial Receivers with flaming

swords to drive us out of our garden! I'd hoped we'd never have another Trek. Well--anyway, it won't be Crest Hill.... But it's hard on Teddy. He must be in such a mess up there. Poor old chap. I suppose we can't help him. I suppose we'd only worry him. Have some more soup George--while there is some?..."

The next day was one of those days of strong perception that stand out clear in one's memory when the common course of days is blurred. I can recall now the awakening in the large familiar room that was always kept for me, and how I lay staring at its chintz-covered chairs, its spaced fine furniture, its glimpse of the cedars without, and thought that all this had to end.

I have never been greedy for money, I have never wanted to be rich, but I felt now an immense sense of impending deprivation. I read the newspapers after breakfast--I and my aunt together--and then I walked up to see what Cothope had done in the matter of Lord Roberts B. Never before had I appreciated so acutely the ample brightness of the Lady Grove gardens, the dignity and wide peace of all about me. It was one of those warm mornings in late May that have won all the glory of summer without losing the gay delicacy of spring. The shrubbery was bright with laburnum and lilac, the beds swarmed with daffodils and narcissi and with lilies of the valley in the shade.

I went along the well-kept paths among the rhododendra and through the private gate into the woods where the bluebells and common orchid were

in profusion. Never before had I tasted so completely the fine sense of privilege and ownership. And all this has to end, I told myself, all this has to end.

Neither my uncle nor I had made any provision for disaster; all we had was in the game, and I had little doubt now of the completeness of our ruin. For the first time in my life since he had sent me that wonderful telegram of his I had to consider that common anxiety of mankind,--Employment. I had to come off my magic carpet and walk once more in the world.

And suddenly I found myself at the cross drives where I had seen Beatrice for the first time after so many years. It is strange, but so far as I can recollect I had not thought of her once since I had landed at Plymouth. No doubt she had filled the background of my mind, but I do not remember one definite, clear thought. I had been intent on my uncle and the financial collapse.

It came like a blow in the face now; all that, too, had to end!

Suddenly I was filled with the thought of her and a great longing for her. What would she do when she realised our immense disaster? What would she do? How would she take it? It filled me with astonishment to realise how little I could tell....

Should I perhaps presently happen upon her?

I went on through the plantations and out upon the downs, and thence I saw Cothope with a new glider of his own design soaring down wind to my old familiar "grounding" place. To judge by its long rhythm it was a very good glider. "Like Cothope's cheek," thought I, "to go on with the research. I wonder if he's keeping notes.... But all this will have to stop."

He was sincerely glad to see me. "It's been a rum go," he said.

He had been there without wages for a month, a man forgotten in the rush of events.

"I just stuck on and did what I could with the stuff. I got a bit of money of my own--and I said to myself, 'Well, here you are with the gear and no one to look after you. You won't get such a chance again, my boy, not in all your born days. Why not make what you can with it? '"

"How's Lord Roberts B?"

Cothope lifted his eyebrows. "I've had to refrain," he said. "But he's looking very handsome."

"Gods!" I said, "I'd like to get him up just once before we smash. You read the papers? You know we're going to smash?"

"Oh! I read the papers. It's scandalous, sir, such work as ours should depend on things like that. You and I ought to be under the State, sir, if you'll excuse me."

"Nothing to excuse," I said. "I've always been a Socialist--of a sort--in theory. Let's go and have a look at him. How is he? Deflated?"

"Just about quarter full. That last oil glaze of yours holds the gas something beautiful. He's not lost a cubic metre a week."...

Cothope returned to Socialism as we went toward the sheds.

"Glad to think you're a Socialist, sir," he said, "it's the only civilised state. I been a Socialist some years--off the Clarion. It's a rotten scramble, this world. It takes the things we make and invent and it plays the silly fool with 'em. We scientific people, we'll have to take things over and stop all this financing and advertisement and that. It's too silly. It's a noosance. Look at us!"

Lord Roberts B, even in his partially deflated condition in his shed, was a fine thing to stare up at. I stood side by side with Cothope regarding him, and it was borne in upon me more acutely than ever that all this had to end. I had a feeling just like the feeling of a boy who wants to do wrong, that I would use up the stuff while I had it before the creditors descended. I had a queer fancy, too, I remember, that if I could get into the air it would advertise my return to Beatrice.

"We'll fill her," I said concisely.

"It's all ready," said Cothope, and added as an afterthought, "unless they cut off the gas."...

I worked and interested myself with Cothope all the morning and for a time forgot my other troubles. But the thought of Beatrice flooded me slowly and steadily. It became an unintelligent sick longing to see her. I felt that I could not wait for the filling of Lord Roberts B, that I must hunt her up and see her soon. I got everything forward and lunched with Cothope, and then with the feeblest excuses left him in order to prowl down through the woods towards Bedley Corner. I became a prey to wretched hesitations and diffidence. Ought I to go near her now? I asked myself, reviewing all the social abasements of my early years. At last, about five, I called at the Dower House. I was greeted by their Charlotte--with a forbidding eye and a cold astonishment.

Both Beatrice and Lady Osprey were out.

There came into my head some prowling dream of meeting her. I went along the lane towards Woking, the lane down which we had walked five months ago in the wind and rain.

I mooned for a time in our former footsteps, then swore and turned back across the fields, and then conceived a distaste for Cothope and went

Downward. At last I found myself looking down on the huge abandoned masses of the Crest Hill house.

That gave my mind a twist into a new channel. My uncle came uppermost again. What a strange, melancholy emptiness of intention that stricken enterprise seemed in the even evening sunlight, what vulgar magnificence and crudity and utter absurdity! It was as idiotic as the pyramids. I sat down on the stile, staring at it as though I had never seen that forest of scaffold poles, that waste of walls and bricks and plaster and shaped stones, that wilderness of broken soil and wheeling tracks and dumps before. It struck me suddenly as the compactest image and sample of all that passes for Progress, of all the advertisement-inflated spending, the aimless building up and pulling down, the enterprise and promise of my age. This was our fruit, this was what he had done, I and my uncle, in the fashion of our time. We were its leaders and exponents, we were the thing it most flourishingly produced. For this futility in its end, for an epoch of such futility, the solemn scroll of history had unfolded....

"Great God!" I cried, "but is this Life?"

For this the armies drilled, for this the Law was administered and the prisons did their duty, for this the millions toiled and perished in suffering, in order that a few of us should build palaces we never finished, make billiard-rooms under ponds, run imbecile walls round irrational estates, scorch about the world in motor-cars, devise

flying-machines, play golf and a dozen such foolish games of ball, crowd into chattering dinner parties, gamble and make our lives one vast, dismal spectacle of witless waste! So it struck me then, and for a time I could think of no other interpretation. This was Life! It came to me like a revelation, a revelation at once incredible and indisputable of the abysmal folly of our being.

III

I was roused from such thoughts by the sound of footsteps behind me.

I turned half hopeful--so foolish is a lover's imagination, and stopped amazed. It was my uncle. His face was white--white as I had seen it in my dream.

"Hullo!" I said, and stared. "Why aren't you in London?"

"It's all up," he said....

"Adjudicated?"

"No!"

I stared at him for a moment, and then got off the stile.

We stood swaying and then came forward with a weak motion of his arms

like a man who cannot see distinctly, and caught at and leant upon the stile. For a moment we were absolutely still. He made a clumsy gesture towards the great futility below and choked. I discovered that his face was wet with tears, that his wet glasses blinded him. He put up his little fat hand and clawed them off clumsily, felt inefficiently for his pocket-handkerchief, and then, to my horror, as he clung to me, he began to weep aloud, this little, old worldworn swindler. It wasn't just sobbing or shedding tears, it was crying as a child cries. It was oh! terrible!

"It's cruel," he blubbered at last. "They asked me questions. They KEP' asking me questions, George."

He sought for utterance, and spluttered.

"The Bloody bullies!" he shouted. "The Bloody Bullies."

He ceased to weep. He became suddenly rapid and explanatory.

"It's not a fair game, George. They tire you out. And I'm not well. My stomach's all wrong. And I been and got a cold. I always been li'ble to cold, and this one's on my chest. And then they tell you to speak up. They bait you--and bait you, and bait you. It's torture. The strain of it. You can't remember what you said. You're bound to contradict yourself. It's like Russia, George.... It isn't fair play.... Prominent man. I've been next at dinners with that chap, Neal; I've told him

stories--and he's bitter! Sets out to ruin me. Don't ask a civil question--bellows." He broke down again. "I've been bellowed at, I been bullied, I been treated like a dog. Dirty cads they are! Dirty cads! I'd rather be a Three-Card Sharper than a barrister; I'd rather sell cat's-meat in the streets.

"They sprung things on me this morning, things I didn't expect. They rushed me! I'd got it all in my hands and then I was jumped. By Neal! Neal I've given city tips to! Neal! I've helped Neal....

"I couldn't swallow a mouthful--not in the lunch hour. I couldn't face it. It's true, George--I couldn't face it. I said I'd get a bit of air and slipped out and down to the Embankment, and there I took a boat to Richmond. Some idee. I took a rowing boat when I got there and I rowed about on the river for a bit. A lot of chaps and girls there was on the bank laughed at my shirt-sleeves and top hat. Dessay they thought it was a pleasure trip. Fat lot of pleasure! I rowed round for a bit and came in. Then I came on here. Windsor way. And there they are in London doing what they like with me.... I don't care!"

"But" I said, looking down at him, perplexed.

"It's abscondin'. They'll have a warrant."

"I don't understand," I said.

"It's all up, George--all up and over.

"And I thought I'd live in that place, George and die a lord! It's a great place, reely, an imperial--if anyone has the sense to buy it and finish it. That terrace--"

I stood thinking him over.

"Look here!" I said. "What's that about--a warrant? Are you sure they'll get a warrant? I'm sorry uncle; but what have you done?"

"Haven't I told you?"

"Yes, but they won't do very much to you for that. They'll only bring you up for the rest of your examination."

He remained silent for a time. At last he spoke--speaking with difficulty.

"It's worse than that. I've done something. They're bound to get it out. Practically they HAVE got it out."

"What?"

"Writin' things down--I done something."

For the first time in his life, I believe, he felt and looked ashamed. It filled me with remorse to see him suffer so.

"We've all done things," I said. "It's part of the game the world makes us play. If they want to arrest you--and you've got no cards in your hand--! They mustn't arrest you."

"No. That's partly why I went to Richmond. But I never thought--"

His little bloodshot eyes stared at Crest Hill.

"That chap Wittaker Wright," he said, "he had his stuff ready. I haven't. Now you got it, George. That's the sort of hole I'm in."

IV

That memory of my uncle at the gate is very clear and full. I am able to recall even the undertow of my thoughts while he was speaking. I remember my pity and affection for him in his misery growing and stirring within me, my realisation that at any risk I must help him. But then comes indistinctness again. I was beginning to act. I know I persuaded him to put himself in my hands, and began at once to plan and do. I think that when we act most we remember least, that just in the measure that the impulse of our impressions translates itself into schemes and movements, it ceases to record itself in memories. I know I resolved to get him away at once, and to use the Lord Roberts B in

effecting that. It was clear he was soon to be a hunted man, and it seemed to me already unsafe for him to try the ordinary Continental routes in his flight. I had to evolve some scheme, and evolve it rapidly, how we might drop most inconspicuously into the world across the water. My resolve to have one flight at least in my airship fitted with this like hand to glove. It seemed to me we might be able to cross over the water in the night, set our airship adrift, and turn up as pedestrian tourists in Normandy or Brittany, and so get away. That, at any rate, was my ruling idea.

I sent off Cothope with a dummy note to Woking, because I did not want to implicate him, and took my uncle to the pavilion. I went down to my aunt, and made a clean breast of the situation. She became admirably competent. We went into his dressing-room and ruthlessly broke his locks. I got a pair of brown boots, a tweed suit and a cap of his, and indeed a plausible walking outfit, and a little game bag for his pedestrian gear; and, in addition, a big motoring overcoat and a supply of rugs to add to those I had at the pavilion. I also got a flask of brandy, and she made sandwiches. I don't remember any servants appearing, and I forget where she got those sandwiches. Meanwhile we talked. Afterwards I thought with what a sure confidence we talked to each other.

"What's he done?" she said.

"D'you mind knowing?"

"No conscience left, thank God!"

"I think--forgery!"

There was just a little pause. "Can you carry this bundle?" she asked.

I lifted it.

"No woman ever has respected the law--ever," she said. "It's too silly.... The things it lets you do! And then pulls you up--like a mad nurse minding a child."

She carried some rugs for me through the shrubbery in the darkling.

"They'll think we're going mooning," she said, jerking her head at the household. "I wonder what they make of us--criminals." ... An immense droning note came as if in answer to that. It startled us both for a moment. "The dears!" she said. "It's the gong for dinner!... But I wish I could help little Teddy, George. It's awful to think of him there with hot eyes, red and dry. And I know--the sight of me makes him feel sore. Things I said, George. If I could have seen, I'd have let him have an omnibusful of Scrymgeours. I cut him up. He'd never thought I meant it before.... I'll help all I can, anyhow."

I turned at something in her voice, and got a moon light gleam of tears

upon her face.

"Could SHE have helped?" she asked abruptly.

"SHE?"

"That woman."

"My God!" I cried, "HELPED! Those--things don't help!"

"Tell me again what I ought to do," she said after a silence.

I went over the plans I had made for communicating, and the things I thought she might do. I had given her the address of a solicitor she might put some trust in.

"But you must act for yourself," I insisted.

"Roughly," I said, "it's a scramble. You must get what you can for us, and follow as you can."

She nodded.

She came right up to the pavilion and hovered for a time shyly, and then went away.

I found my uncle in my sitting-room in an arm-chair, with his feet upon the fender of the gas stove, which he had lit, and now he was feebly drunken with my whisky, and very weary in body and spirit, and inclined to be cowardly.

"I lef' my drops," he said.

He changed his clothes slowly and unwillingly. I had to bully him, I had almost to shove him to the airship and tuck him up upon its wicker flat. Single-handed I made but a clumsy start; we scraped along the roof of the shed and bent a van of the propeller, and for a time I hung underneath without his offering a hand to help me to clamber up. If it hadn't been for a sort of anchoring trolley device of Cothope's, a sort of slip anchor running on a rail, we should never have got clear at all.

V

The incidents of our flight in Lord Roberts B do not arrange themselves in any consecutive order. To think of that adventure is like dipping haphazard into an album of views. One is reminded first of this and then of that. We were both lying down on a horizontal plate of basketwork; for Lord Roberts B had none of the elegant accommodation of a balloon. I lay forward, and my uncle behind me in such a position that he could see hardly anything of our flight. We were protected from rolling over simply by netting between the steel stays. It was impossible for us to stand up at all; we had either to lie or crawl on all fours over

the basket work. Amidships were lockers made of Watson's Aulite material,--and between these it was that I had put my uncle, wrapped in rugs. I wore sealskin motoring boots and gloves, and a motoring fur coat over my tweeds, and I controlled the engine by Bowden wires and levers forward.

The early part of that night's experience was made up of warmth, of moonlit Surrey and Sussex landscape, and of a rapid and successful flight, ascending and swooping, and then ascending again southward. I could not watch the clouds because the airship overhung me; I could not see the stars nor gauge the meteorological happening, but it was fairly clear to me that a wind shifting between north and northeast was gathering strength, and after I had satisfied myself by a series of entirely successful expansions and contractions of the real air-worthiness of Lord Roberts B, I stopped the engine to save my petrol, and let the monster drift, checking its progress by the dim landscape below. My uncle lay quite still behind me, saying little and staring in front of him, and I was left to my own thoughts and sensations.

My thoughts, whatever they were, have long since faded out of memory, and my sensations have merged into one continuous memory of an countryside lying, as it seemed, under snow, with square patches of dimness, white phantoms of roads, rents and pools of velvety blackness, and lamp-jewelled houses. I remember a train boring its way like a hastening caterpillar of fire across the landscape, and how distinctly I

heard its clatter. Every town and street was buttoned with street lamps. I came quite close to the South Downs near Lewes, and all the lights were out in the houses, and the people gone to bed. We left the land a little to the east of Brighton, and by that time Brighton was well abed. and the brightly lit sea-front deserted. Then I let out the gas chamber to its fullest extent and rose. I like to be high above water.

I do not clearly know what happened in the night. I think I must have dozed, and probably my uncle slept. I remember that once or twice I heard him talking in an eager, muffled voice to himself, or to an imaginary court. But there can be no doubt the wind changed right round into the east, and that we were carried far down the Channel without any suspicion of the immense leeway we were making. I remember the kind of stupid perplexity with which I saw the dawn breaking over a grey waste of water, below, and realised that something was wrong. I was so stupid that it was only after the sunrise I really noticed the trend of the foam caps below, and perceived we were in a severe easterly gale. Even then, instead of heading southeasterly, I set the engine going, headed south, and so continued a course that must needs have either just hit Ushant, or carry us over the Bay of Biscay. I thought I was east of Cherbourg, when I was far to the west and stopped my engine in that belief, and then set it going again. I did actually sight the coast of Brittany to the southeast in the late afternoon, and that it was woke me up to the gravity of our position. I discovered it by accident in the southeast, when I was looking for it in the southwest. I turned about east and faced the wind for some time, and finding I had no chance in

its teeth, went high, where it seemed less violent, and tried to make a course southeast. It was only then that I realised what a gale I was in. I had been going westward, and perhaps even in gusts north of west, at a pace of fifty or sixty miles an hour.

Then I began what I suppose would be called a Fight against the east wind. One calls it a Fight, but it was really almost as unlike a fight as plain sewing. The wind tried to drive me westwardly, and I tried to get as much as I could eastwardly, with the wind beating and rocking us irregularly, but by no means unbearably, for about twelve hours. My hope lay in the wind abating, and our keeping in the air and eastward of Finisterre until it did, and the chief danger was the exhaustion of our petrol. It was a long and anxious and almost meditative time; we were fairly warm, and only slowly getting hungry, and except that my uncle grumbled a little and produced some philosophical reflections, and began to fuss about having a temperature, we talked very little. I was tired and sulky, and chiefly worried about the engine. I had to resist a tendency to crawl back and look at it. I did not care to risk contracting our gas chamber for fear of losing gas. Nothing was less like a fight. I know that in popular magazines, and so forth, all such occasions as this are depicted in terms of hysteria. Captains save their ships engineers complete their bridges, generals conduct their battles, in a state of dancing excitement, foaming recondite technicalities at the lips. I suppose that sort of thing works up the reader, but so far as it professes to represent reality, I am convinced it is all childish nonsense, schoolboys of fifteen, girls of eighteen, and literary men

all their lives, may have these squealing fits, but my own experience is that most exciting scenes are not exciting, and most of the urgent moments in life are met by steady-headed men.

Neither I nor my uncle spent the night in ejaculations, nor in humorous allusions, nor any of these things. We remained lumpish.

My uncle stuck in his place and grumbled about his stomach, and occasionally rambled off into expositions of his financial position and denunciations of Neal--he certainly struck out one or two good phrases for Neal--and I crawled about at rare intervals in a vague sort of way and grunted, and our basketwork creaked continually, and the wind on our quarter made a sort of ruffled flapping in the wall of the gas chamber. For all our wraps we got frightfully cold as the night wore on.

I must have dozed, and it was still dark when I realised with a start that we were nearly due south of, and a long way from, a regularly-flashing lighthouse, standing out before the glow of some great town, and then that the thing that had awakened me was the cessation of our engine, and that we were driving back to the west.

Then, indeed, for a time I felt the grim thrill of life. I crawled forward to the cords of the release valves, made my uncle crawl forward too, and let out the gas until we were falling down through the air like a clumsy glider towards the vague greyness that was land.

Something must have intervened here that I have forgotten.

I saw the lights of Bordeaux when it was quite dark, a nebulous haze against black; of that I am reasonably sure. But certainly our fall took place in the cold, uncertain light of early dawn. I am, at least, equally sure of that. And Mimizan, near where we dropped, is fifty miles from Bordeaux, whose harbour lights I must have seen.

I remember coming down at last with a curious indifference, and actually rousing myself to steer. But the actual coming to earth was exciting enough. I remember our prolonged dragging landfall, and the difficulty I had to get clear, and how a gust of wind caught Lord Roberts B as my uncle stumbled away from the ropes and litter, and dropped me heavily, and threw me on to my knees. Then came the realisation that the monster was almost consciously disentangling itself for escape, and then the light leap of its rebound. The rope slipped out of reach of my hand. I remember running knee-deep in a salt pool in hopeless pursuit of the airship.

As it dragged and rose seaward, and how only after it had escaped my uttermost effort to recapture it, did I realise that this was quite the best thing that could have happened. It drove swiftly over the sandy dunes, lifting and falling, and was hidden by a clump of windbitten trees. Then it reappeared much further off, and still receding. It soared for a time, and sank slowly, and after that I saw it no more. I suppose it fell into the sea and got wetted with salt water and heavy,

and so became deflated and sank.

It was never found, and there was never a report of anyone seeing it after it escaped from me.

VI

But if I find it hard to tell the story of our long flight through the air overseas, at least that dawn in France stands cold and clear and full. I see again almost as if I saw once more with my bodily eyes the ridges of sand rising behind ridges of sand, grey and cold and black-browed, with an insufficient grass. I feel again the clear, cold chill of dawn, and hear the distant barking of a dog. I find myself asking again, "What shall we do now?" and trying to scheme with brain tired beyond measure.

At first my uncle occupied my attention. He was shivering a good deal, and it was all I could do to resist my desire to get him into a comfortable bed at once. But I wanted to appear plausibly in this part of the world. I felt it would not do to turn up anywhere at dawn and rest, it would be altogether too conspicuous; we must rest until the day was well advanced, and then appear as road-stained pedestrians seeking a meal. I gave him most of what was left of the biscuits, emptied our flasks, and advised him to sleep, but at first it was too cold, albeit I wrapped the big fur rug around him.

I was struck now by the flushed weariness of his face, and the look of age the grey stubble on his unshaved chin gave him. He sat crumpled up, shivering and coughing, munching reluctantly, but drinking eagerly, and whimpering a little, a dreadfully pitiful figure to me. But we had to go through with it; there was no way out for us.

Presently the sun rose over the pines, and the sand grew rapidly warm. My uncle had done eating, and sat with his wrists resting on his knees, the most hopeless looking of lost souls.

"I'm ill," he said, "I'm damnably ill! I can feel it in my skin!"

Then--it was horrible to me--he cried, "I ought to be in bed; I ought to be in bed... instead of flying about," and suddenly he burst into tears.

I stood up. "Go to sleep, man!" I said, and took the rug from him, and spread it out and rolled him up in it.

"It's all very well," he protested; "I'm not young enough--"

"Lift up your head," I interrupted, and put his knapsack under it.

"They'll catch us here, just as much as in an inn," he grumbled and then lay still.

Presently, after a long time, I perceived he was asleep. His breath came

with peculiar wheezings, and every now and again he would cough. I was very stiff and tired myself, and perhaps I dozed. I don't remember. I remember only sitting, as it seemed, nigh interminably, beside him, too weary even to think in that sandy desolation.

No one came near us; no creature, not even a dog. I roused myself at last, feeling that it was vain to seek to seem other than abnormal, and with an effort that was like lifting a sky of lead, we made our way through the wearisome sand to a farmhouse. There I feigned even a more insufficient French than I possess naturally, and let it appear that we were pedestrians from Biarritz who had lost our way along the shore and got benighted.

This explained us pretty well, I thought, and we got most heartening coffee and a cart to a little roadside station. My uncle grew more and more manifestly ill with every stage of our journey. I got him to Bayonne, where he refused at first to eat, and was afterwards very sick, and then took him shivering and collapsed up a little branch line to a frontier place called Luzon Gare.

We found one homely inn with two small bedrooms, kept by a kindly Basque woman. I got him to bed, and that night shared his room, and after an hour or so of sleep he woke up in a raging fever and with a wandering mind, cursing Neal and repeating long, inaccurate lists of figures. He was manifestly a case for a doctor, and in the morning we got one in. He was a young man from Montpelier, just beginning to practise, and very

mysterious and technical and modern and unhelpful. He spoke of cold and exposure, and la grippe and pneumonia. He gave many explicit and difficult directions.... I perceived it devolved upon me to organise nursing and a sick-room. I installed a religieuse in the second bedroom of the inn, and took a room for myself in the inn of Port de Luzon, a quarter of a mile away.

VII

And now my story converges on what, in that queer corner of refuge out of the world, was destined to be my uncle's deathbed. There is a background of the Pyrenees, of blue hills and sunlit houses, of the old castle of Luzon and a noisy cascading river, and for a foreground the dim, stuffy room whose windows both the religieuse and hostess conspired to shut, with its waxed floor, its four-poster bed, its characteristically French chairs and fireplace, its champagne bottles and dirty basins and used towels and packets of Somatose on the table. And in the sickly air of the confined space in behind the curtains of the bed lay my little uncle, with an effect of being enthroned and secluded, or sat up, or writhed and tossed in his last dealings of life. One went and drew back the edge of the curtains if one wanted to speak to him or look at him.

Usually he was propped up against pillows, because so he breathed more easily. He slept hardly at all.

I have a confused memory of vigils and mornings and afternoons spent by that bedside, and how the religieuse hovered about me, and how meek and good and inefficient she was, and how horribly black were her nails. Other figures come and go, and particularly the doctor, a young man plumply rococo, in bicycling dress, with fine waxen features, a little pointed beard, and the long black frizzy hair and huge tie of a minor poet. Bright and clear-cut and irrelevant are memories of the Basque hostess of my uncle's inn and of the family of Spanish people who entertained me and prepared the most amazingly elaborate meals for me, with soup and salad and chicken and remarkable sweets. They were all very kind and sympathetic people, systematically so. And constantly, without attracting attention, I was trying to get newspapers from home.

My uncle is central to all these impressions.

I have tried to make you picture him, time after time, as the young man of the Wimblehurst chemist's shop, as the shabby assistant in Tottenham Court Road, as the adventurer of the early days of Tono-Bungay, as the confident, preposterous plutocrat. And now I have to tell of him strangely changed under the shadow of oncoming death, with his skin lax and yellow and glistening with sweat, his eyes large and glassy, his countenance unfamiliar through the growth of a beard, his nose pinched and thin. Never had he looked so small as now. And he talked to me in a whispering, strained voice of great issues, of why his life had been, and whither he was going. Poor little man! that last phase is, as it were, disconnected from all the other phases. It was as if he crawled

out from the ruins of his career, and looked about him before he died. For he had quite clear-minded states in the intervals of his delirium.

He knew he was almost certainly dying. In a way that took the burthen of his cares off his mind. There was no more Neal to face, no more flights or evasions, no punishments.

"It has been a great career, George," he said, "but I shall be glad to rest. Glad to rest!... Glad to rest."

His mind ran rather upon his career, and usually, I am glad to recall, with a note of satisfaction and approval. In his delirious phases he would most often exaggerate this self-satisfaction, and talk of his splendours. He would pluck at the sheet and stare before him, and whisper half-audible fragments of sentences.

"What is this great place, these cloud-capped towers, these any pinnacles?... Ilion. Sky-pointing.... Ilion House, the residence of one of our great merchant princes.... Terrace above terrace. Reaching to the heavens.... Kingdoms Caesar never knew.... A great poet, George. Zzzz. Kingdoms Caesar never knew.... Under entirely new management.

"Greatness....Millions... Universities.... He stands on the terrace--on the upper terrace--directing--directing--by the globe--directing--the trade."

It was hard at times to tell when his sane talk ceased and his delirium began. The secret springs of his life, the vain imaginations were revealed. I sometimes think that all the life of man sprawls abed, careless and unkempt, until it must needs clothe and wash itself and come forth seemly in act and speech for the encounter with one's fellow-men. I suspect that all things unspoken in our souls partake somewhat of the laxity of delirium and dementia. Certainly from those slimy, tormented lips above the bristling grey beard came nothing but dreams and disconnected fancies....

Sometimes he raved about Neal, threatened Neal. "What has he got invested?" he said. "Does he think he can escape me?... If I followed him up.... Ruin. Ruin.... One would think I had taken his money."

And sometimes he reverted to our airship flight. "It's too long, George, too long and too cold. I'm too old a man--too old--for this sort of thing.... You know you're not saving--you're killing me."

Towards the end it became evident our identity was discovered. I found the press, and especially Boom's section of it, had made a sort of hue and cry for us, sent special commissioners to hunt for us, and though none of these emissaries reached us until my uncle was dead, one felt the forewash of that storm of energy. The thing got into the popular French press. People became curious in their manner towards us, and a number of fresh faces appeared about the weak little struggle that went on in the closeness behind the curtains of the bed. The young doctor

insisted on consultations, and a motor-car came up from Biarritz, and suddenly odd people with questioning eyes began to poke in with inquiries and help. Though nothing was said, I could feel that we were no longer regarded as simple middle-class tourists; about me, as I went, I perceived almost as though it trailed visibly, the prestige of Finance and a criminal notoriety. Local personages of a plump and prosperous quality appeared in the inn making inquiries, the Luzon priest became helpful, people watched our window, and stared at me as I went to and fro; and then we had a raid from a little English clergyman and his amiable, capable wife in severely Anglican blacks, who swooped down upon us like virtuous but resolute vultures from the adjacent village of Saint Jean de Pollack.

The clergyman was one of those odd types that oscillate between remote country towns in England and the conduct of English Church services on mutual terms in enterprising hotels abroad, a tremulous, obstinate little being with sporadic hairs upon his face, spectacles, a red button nose, and aged black raiment. He was evidently enormously impressed by my uncle's monetary greatness, and by his own inkling of our identity, and he shone and brimmed over with tact and fussy helpfulness. He was eager to share the watching of the bedside with me, he proffered services with both hands, and as I was now getting into touch with affairs in London again, and trying to disentangle the gigantic details of the smash from the papers I had succeeded in getting from Biarritz, I accepted his offers pretty generously, and began the studies in modern finance that lay before me. I had got so out of touch with the old

traditions of religion that I overlooked the manifest possibility of his attacking my poor, sinking vestiges of an uncle with theological solicitudes. My attention was called to that, however, very speedily by a polite but urgent quarrel between himself and the Basque landlady as to the necessity of her hanging a cheap crucifix in the shadow over the bed, where it might catch my uncle's eye, where, indeed, I found it had caught his eye.

"Good Lord!" I cried; "is THAT still going on!"

That night the little clergyman watched, and in the small hours he raised a false alarm that my uncle was dying, and made an extraordinary fuss. He raised the house. I shall never forget that scene, I think, which began with a tapping at my bedroom door just after I had fallen asleep, and his voice--

"If you want to see your uncle before he goes, you must come now."

The stuffy little room was crowded when I reached it, and lit by three flickering candles. I felt I was back in the eighteenth century. There lay my poor uncle amidst indescribably tumbled bedclothes, weary of life beyond measure, weary and rambling, and the little clergyman trying to hold his hand and his attention, and repeating over and over again:

"Mr. Ponderevo, Mr. Ponderevo, it is all right. It is all right.

"Only Believe! 'Believe on me, and ye shall be saved'!"

Close at hand was the doctor with one of those cruel and idiotic injection needles modern science puts in the hands of these half-educated young men, keeping my uncle flickeringly alive for no reason whatever. The religieuse hovered sleepily in the background with an overdue and neglected dose. In addition, the landlady had not only got up herself, but roused an aged crone of a mother and a partially imbecile husband, and there was also a fattish, stolid man in grey alpaca, with an air of importance--who he was and how he got there, I don't know. I rather fancy the doctor explained him to me in French I did not understand. And they were all there, wearily nocturnal, hastily and carelessly dressed, intent upon the life that flickered and sank, making a public and curious show of its going, queer shapes of human beings lit by three uncertain candles, and every soul of them keenly and avidly resolved to be in at the death. The doctor stood, the others were all sitting on chairs the landlady had brought in and arranged for them.

And my uncle spoilt the climax, and did not die.

I replaced the little clergyman on the chair by the bedside, and he hovered about the room.

"I think," he whispered to me mysteriously, as he gave place to me, "I believe--it is well with him."

I heard him trying to render the stock phrases of Low Church piety into French for the benefit of the stolid man in grey alpaca. Then he knocked a glass off the table, and scrabbled for the fragments. From the first I doubted the theory of an immediate death. I consulted the doctor in urgent whispers. I turned round to get champagne, and nearly fell over the clergyman's legs. He was on his knees at the additional chair the Basque landlady had got on my arrival, and he was praying aloud, "Oh, Heavenly Father, have mercy on this thy Child...." I hustled him up and out of the way, and in another minute he was down at another chair praying again, and barring the path of the religieuse, who had found me the corkscrew. Something put into my head that tremendous blasphemy of Carlyle's about "the last mew of a drowning kitten." He found a third chair vacant presently; it was as if he was playing a game.

"Good Heavens!" I said, "we must clear these people out," and with a certain urgency I did.

I had a temporary lapse of memory, and forgot all my French. I drove them out mainly by gesture, and opened the window, to the universal horror. I intimated the death scene was postponed, and, as a matter of fact, my uncle did not die until the next night.

I did not let the little clergyman come near him again, and I was watchful for any sign that his mind had been troubled. But he made none. He talked once about "that parson chap."

"Didn't bother you?" I asked.

"Wanted something," he said.

I kept silence, listening keenly to his mutterings. I understood him to say, "They wanted too much." His face puckered like a child's going to cry. "You can't get a safe six per cent.," he said. I had for a moment a wild suspicion that those urgent talks had not been altogether spiritual, but that, I think, was a quite unworthy and unjust suspicion. The little clergyman was as simple and honest as the day. My uncle was simply generalising about his class.

But it may have been these talks that set loose some long dormant string of ideas in my uncle's brain, ideas the things of this world had long suppressed and hidden altogether. Near the end he suddenly became clearminded and lucid, albeit very weak, and his voice was little, but clear.

"George," he said.

"I'm here," I said, "close beside you."

"George. You have always been responsible for the science. George. You know better than I do. Is--Is it proved?"

"What proved?"

"Either way?"

"I don't understand."

"Death ends all. After so much--Such splendid beginnin's. Somewhere. Something."

I stared at him amazed. His sunken eyes were very grave.

"What do you expect?" I said in wonder.

He would not answer. "Aspirations," he whispered. He fell into a broken monologue, regardless of me. "Trailing clouds of glory," he said, and "first-rate poet, first-rate....George was always hard. Always."

For a long time there was silence.

Then he made a gesture that he wished to speak.

"Seems to me, George"

I bent my head down, and he tried to lift his hand to my shoulder. I raised him a little on his pillows, and listened.

"It seems to me, George, always--there must be something in me--that

won't die."

He looked at me as though the decision rested with me.

"I think," he said; "--something."

Then, for a moment, his mind wandered. "Just a little link," he whispered almost pleadingly, and lay quite still, but presently he was uneasy again.

"Some other world"

"Perhaps," I said. "Who knows?"

"Some other world."

"Not the same scope for enterprise," I said.

"No."

He became silent. I sat leaning down to him, and following out my own thoughts, and presently the religieuse resumed her periodic conflict with the window fastening. For a time he struggled for breath.... It seemed such nonsense that he should have to suffer so--poor silly little man!

"George," he whispered, and his weak little hand came out. "PERHAPS--"

He said no more, but I perceived from the expression of his eyes that he thought the question had been put.

"Yes, I think so;" I said stoutly.

"Aren't you sure?"

"Oh--practically sure," said I, and I think he tried to squeeze my hand. And there I sat, holding his hand tight, and trying to think what seeds of immortality could be found in all his being, what sort of ghost there was in him to wander out into the bleak immensities. Queer fancies came to me.... He lay still for a long time, save for a brief struggle or so for breath and ever and again I wiped his mouth and lips.

I fell into a pit of thought. I did not remark at first the change that was creeping over his face. He lay back on his pillow, made a faint *zzz*ing sound that ceased, and presently and quite quietly he died--greatly comforted by my assurance. I do not know when he died. His hand relaxed insensibly. Suddenly, with a start, with a shock, I found that his mouth had fallen open, and that he was dead....

VIII

It was dark night when I left his deathbed and went back to my own inn

down the straggling street of Luzon.

That return to my inn sticks in my memory also as a thing apart, as an experience apart. Within was a subdued bustle of women, a flitting of lights, and the doing of petty offices to that queer, exhausted thing that had once been my active and urgent little uncle. For me those offices were irksome and impertinent. I slammed the door, and went out into the warm, foggy drizzle of the village street lit by blurred specks of light in great voids of darkness, and never a soul abroad. That warm veil of fog produced an effect of vast seclusion. The very houses by the roadside peered through it as if from another world. The stillness of the night was marked by an occasional remote baying of dogs; all these people kept dogs because of the near neighbourhood of the frontier.

Death!

It was one of those rare seasons of relief, when for a little time one walks a little outside of and beside life. I felt as I sometimes feel after the end of a play. I saw the whole business of my uncle's life as something familiar and completed. It was done, like a play one leaves, like a book one closes. I thought of the push and the promotions, the noise of London, the crowded, various company of people through which our lives had gone, the public meetings, the excitements, the dinners and disputations, and suddenly it appeared to me that none of these things existed.

It came to me like a discovery that none of these things existed.

Before and after I have thought and called life a phantasmagoria, but never have I felt its truth as I did that night.... We had parted; we two who had kept company so long had parted. But there was, I knew, no end to him or me. He had died a dream death, and ended a dream; his pain dream was over. It seemed to me almost as though I had died, too. What did it matter, since it was unreality, all of it, the pain and desire, the beginning and the end? There was no reality except this solitary road, this quite solitary road, along which one went rather puzzled, rather tired....

Part of the fog became a big mastiff that came towards me and stopped and slunk round me, growling, barked gruffly, and shortly and presently became fog again.

My mind swayed back to the ancient beliefs and fears of our race.

My doubts and disbeliefs slipped from me like a loosely fitting garment. I wondered quite simply what dogs bayed about the path of that other walker in the darkness, what shapes, what lights, it might be, loomed about him as he went his way from our last encounter on earth--along the paths that are real, and the way that endures for ever?

IX

Last belated figure in that grouping round my uncle's deathbed is my aunt. When it was beyond all hope that my uncle could live I threw aside whatever concealment remained to us and telegraphed directly to her. But she came too late to see him living. She saw him calm and still, strangely unlike his habitual garrulous animation, an unfamiliar inflexibility.

"It isn't like him," she whispered, awed by this alien dignity.

I remember her chiefly as she talked and wept upon the bridge below the old castle. We had got rid of some amateurish reporters from Biarritz, and had walked together in the hot morning sunshine down through Port Luzon. There, for a time, we stood leaning on the parapet of the bridge and surveying the distant peeks, the rich blue masses of the Pyrenees. For a long time we said nothing, and then she began talking.

"Life's a rum Go, George!" she began. "Who would have thought, when I used to darn your stockings at old Wimblehurst, that this would be the end of the story? It seems far away now--that little shop, his and my first home. The glow of the bottles, the big coloured bottles! Do you remember how the light shone on the mahogany drawers? The little gilt letters! Ol Amjig, and Snap! I can remember it all--bright and shining--like a Dutch picture. Real! And yesterday. And here we are in a dream. You a man--and me an old woman, George. And poor little Teddy, who used to rush about and talk--making that noise he did--Oh!"

She choked, and the tears flowed unrestrained. She wept, and I was glad to see her weeping.

She stood leaning over the bridge; her tear-wet handkerchief gripped in her clenched hand.

"Just an hour in the old shop again--and him talking. Before things got done. Before they got hold of him. And fooled him.

"Men oughtn't to be so tempted with business and things....

"They didn't hurt him, George?" she asked suddenly.

For a moment I was puzzled.

"Here, I mean," she said.

"No," I lied stoutly, suppressing the memory of that foolish injection needle I had caught the young doctor using.

"I wonder, George, if they'll let him talk in Heaven...."

She faced me. "Oh! George, dear, my heart aches, and I don't know what I say and do. Give me your arm to lean on--it's good to have you, dear, and lean upon you.... Yes, I know you care for me. That's why I'm talking. We've always loved one another, and never said anything about

it, and you understand, and I understand. But my heart's torn to pieces by this, torn to rags, and things drop out I've kept in it. It's true he wasn't a husband much for me at the last. But he was my child, George, he was my child and all my children, my silly child, and life has knocked him about for me, and I've never had a say in the matter; never a say; it's puffed him up and smashed him--like an old bag--under my eyes. I was clever enough to see it, and not clever enough to prevent it, and all I could do was to jeer. I've had to make what I could of it. Like most people. Like most of us.... But it wasn't fair, George. It wasn't fair. Life and Death--great serious things--why couldn't they leave him alone, and his lies and ways? If WE could see the lightness of it--

"Why couldn't they leave him alone?" she repeated in a whisper as we went towards the inn.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

LOVE AMONG THE WRECKAGE

I

When I came back I found that my share in the escape and death of my uncle had made me for a time a notorious and even popular character. For two weeks I was kept in London "facing the music," as he would have said, and making things easy for my aunt, and I still marvel at the consideration with which the world treated me. For now it was open and manifest that I and my uncle were no more than specimens of a modern species of brigand, wasting the savings of the public out of the sheer wantonness of enterprise. I think that in a way, his death produced a reaction in my favour and my flight, of which some particulars now appeared stuck in the popular imagination. It seemed a more daring and difficult feat than it was, and I couldn't very well write to the papers to sustain my private estimate. There can be little doubt that men infinitely prefer the appearance of dash and enterprise to simple honesty. No one believed I was not an arch plotter in his financing. Yet they favoured me. I even got permission from the trustee to occupy my chalet for a fortnight while I cleared up the mass of papers, calculations, notes of work, drawings and the like, that I left in disorder when I started on that impulsive raid upon the Mordet quap heaps.

I was there alone. I got work for Cothope with the Ilchesters, for whom I now build these destroyers. They wanted him at once, and he was short of money, so I let him go and managed very philosophically by myself.

But I found it hard to fix my attention on aeronautics, I had been away from the work for a full half-year and more, a half-year crowded with intense disconcerting things. For a time my brain refused these fine problems of balance and adjustment altogether; it wanted to think about my uncle's dropping jaw, my aunt's reluctant tears, about dead negroes and pestilential swamps, about the evident realities of cruelty and pain, about life and death. Moreover, it was weary with the frightful pile of figures and documents at the Hardingham, a task to which this raid to Lady Grove was simply an interlude. And there was Beatrice.

On the second morning, as I sat out upon the veranda recalling memories and striving in vain to attend to some too succinct pencil notes of Cothope's, Beatrice rode up suddenly from behind the pavilion, and pulled rein and became still; Beatrice, a little flushed from riding and sitting on a big black horse.

I did not instantly rise. I stared at her. "YOU!" I said.

She looked at me steadily. "Me," she said

I did not trouble about any civilities. I stood up and asked point blank a question that came into my head.

"Whose horse is that?" I said.

She looked me in the eyes. "Carnaby's," she answered.

"How did you get here--this way?"

"The wall's down."

"Down? Already?"

"A great bit of it between the plantations."

"And you rode through, and got here by chance?"

"I saw you yesterday. And I rode over to see you." I had now come close to her, and stood looking up into her face.

"I'm a mere vestige," I said.

She made no answer, but remained regarding me steadfastly with a curious air of proprietorship.

"You know I'm the living survivor now of the great smash. I'm rolling and dropping down through all the scaffolding of the social system.... It's all a chance whether I roll out free at the bottom, or go down a

crack into the darkness out of sight for a year or two."

"The sun," she remarked irrelevantly, "has burnt you.... I'm getting down."

She swung herself down into my arms, and stood beside me face to face.

"Where's Cothope?" she asked.

"Gone."

Her eyes flitted to the pavilion and back to me. We stood close together, extraordinarily intimate, and extraordinarily apart.

"I've never seen this cottage of yours," she said, "and I want to."

She flung the bridle of her horse round the veranda post, and I helped her tie it.

"Did you get what you went for to Africa?" she asked.

"No," I said, "I lost my ship."

"And that lost everything?"

"Everything."

She walked before me into the living-room of the chalet, and I saw that she gripped her riding-whip very tightly in her hand. She looked about her for a moment,--and then at me.

"It's comfortable," she remarked.

Our eyes met in a conversation very different from the one upon our lips. A sombre glow surrounded us, drew us together; an unwonted shyness kept us apart. She roused herself, after an instant's pause, to examine my furniture.

"You have chintz curtains. I thought men were too feckless to have curtains without a woman. But, of course, your aunt did that! And a couch and a brass fender, and--is that a pianola? That is your desk. I thought men's desks were always untidy, and covered with dust and tobacco ash."

She flitted to my colour prints and my little case of books. Then she went to the pianola. I watched her intently.

"Does this thing play?" she said.

"What?" I asked.

"Does this thing play?"

I roused myself from my preoccupation.

"Like a musical gorilla with fingers all of one length. And a sort of soul.... It's all the world of music to me."

"What do you play?"

"Beethoven, when I want to clear up my head while I'm working. He is--how one would always like to work. Sometimes Chopin and those others, but Beethoven. Beethoven mainly. Yes."

Silence again between us. She spoke with an effort.

"Play me something." She turned from me and explored the rack of music rolls, became interested and took a piece, the first part of the Kreutzer Sonata, hesitated. "No," she said, "that!"

She gave me Brahms' Second Concerto, Op. 58, and curled up on the sofa watching me as I set myself slowly to play....

"I say," he said when I had done, "that's fine. I didn't know those things could play like that. I'm all astir..."

She came and stood over me, looking at me. "I'm going to have a concert," she said abruptly, and laughed uneasily and hovered at the

pigeon-holes. "Now--now what shall I have?" She chose more of Brahms. Then we came to the Kreutzer Sonata. It is queer how Tolstoy has loaded that with suggestions, debauched it, made it a scandalous and intimate symbol. When I had played the first part of that, she came up to the pianola and hesitated over me. I sat stiffly--waiting.

Suddenly she seized my downcast head and kissed my hair. She caught at my face between her hands and kissed my lips. I put my arms about her and we kissed together. I sprang to my feet and clasped her.

"Beatrice!" I said. "Beatrice!"

"My dear," she whispered, nearly breathless, with her arms about me. "Oh! my dear!"

II

Love, like everything else in this immense process of social disorganisation in which we live, is a thing adrift, a fruitless thing broken away from its connexions. I tell of this love affair here because of its irrelevance, because it is so remarkable that it should mean nothing, and be nothing except itself. It glows in my memory like some bright casual flower starting up amidst the debris of a catastrophe.
For nearly a fortnight we two met and made love together. Once more this mighty passion, that our aimless civilisation has fettered and maimed and sterilised and debased, gripped me and filled me with passionate

delights and solemn joys--that were all, you know, futile and purposeless. Once more I had the persuasion "This matters. Nothing else matters so much as this." We were both infinitely grave in such happiness as we had. I do not remember any laughter at all between us.

Twelve days it lasted from that encounter in my chalet until our parting.

Except at the end, they were days of supreme summer, and there was a waxing moon. We met recklessly day by day. We were so intent upon each other at first so intent upon expressing ourselves to each other, and getting at each other, that we troubled very little about the appearance of our relationship. We met almost openly.... We talked of ten thousand things, and of ourselves. We loved. We made love. There is no prose of mine that can tell of hours transfigured. The facts are nothing. Everything we touched, the meanest things, became glorious. How can I render bare tenderness and delight and mutual possession? I sit here at my desk thinking of untellable things.

I have come to know so much of love that I know now what love might be. We loved, scarred and stained; we parted--basely and inevitably, but at least I met love.

I remember as we sat in a Canadian canoe, in a reedy, bush-masked shallow we had discovered operating out of that pine-shaded Woking canal, how she fell talking of the things that happened to her before

she met me again....

She told me things, and they so joined and welded together other things that lay disconnected in my memory, that it seemed to me I had always known what she told me. And yet indeed I had not known nor suspected it, save perhaps for a luminous, transitory suspicion ever and again.

She made me see how life had shaped her. She told me of her girlhood after I had known her. "We were poor and pretending and managing. We hacked about on visits and things. I ought to have married. The chances I had weren't particularly good chances. I didn't like 'em."

She paused. "Then Carnaby came along."

I remained quite still. She spoke now with downcast eyes, and one finger just touching the water.

"One gets bored, bored beyond redemption. One does about to these huge expensive houses I suppose--the scale's immense. One makes one's self useful to the other women, and agreeable to the men. One has to dress.... One has food and exercise and leisure, It's the leisure, and the space, and the blank opportunity it seems a sin not to fill. Carnaby isn't like the other men. He's bigger.... They go about making love. Everybody's making love. I did.... And I don't do things by halves."

She stopped.

"You knew?"--she asked, looking up, quite steadily. I nodded.

"Since when?"

"Those last days.... It hasn't seemed to matter really. I was a little surprised."

She looked at me quietly. "Cothope knew," she said. "By instinct. I could feel it."

"I suppose," I began, "once, this would have mattered immensely. Now--"

"Nothing matters," she said, completing me. "I felt I had to tell you. I wanted you to understand why I didn't marry you--with both hands. I have loved you"--she paused--"have loved you ever since the day I kissed you in the bracken. Only--I forgot."

And suddenly she dropped her face upon her hands, and sobbed passionately--

"I forgot--I forgot," she cried, and became still....

I dabbled my paddle in the water. "Look here!" I said; "forget again! Here am I--a ruined man. Marry me."

She shook her head without looking up.

We were still for a long time. "Marry me!" I whispered.

She looked up, twined back a whisp of hair, and answered dispassionately--

"I wish I could. Anyhow, we have had this time. It has been a fine time--has it been--for you also? I haven't nudged you all I had to give. It's a poor gift--except for what it means and might have been. But we are near the end of it now."

"Why?" I asked. "Marry me! Why should we two--"

"You think," she said, "I could take courage and come to you and be your everyday wife--while you work and are poor?"

"Why not?" said I.

She looked at me gravely, with extended finger. "Do you really think that--of me? Haven't you seen me--all?"

I hesitated.

"Never once have I really meant marrying you," she insisted. "Never once. I fell in love with you from the first. But when you seemed a

successful man, I told myself I wouldn't. I was love-sick for you, and you were so stupid, I came near it then. But I knew I wasn't good enough. What could I have been to you? A woman with bad habits and bad associations, a woman smirched. And what could I do for you or be to you? If I wasn't good enough to be a rich man's wife, I'm certainly not good enough to be a poor one's. Forgive me for talking sense to you now, but I wanted to tell you this somehow."

She stopped at my gesture. I sat up, and the canoe rocked with my movement.

"I don't care," I said. "I want to marry you and make you my wife!"

"No," she said, "don't spoil things. That is impossible!"

"Impossible!"

"Think! I can't do my own hair! Do you mean you will get me a maid?"

"Good God!" I cried, disconcerted beyond measure, "won't you learn to do your own hair for me? Do you mean to say you can love a man--"

She flung out her hands at me. "Don't spoil it," she cried. "I have given you all I have, I have given you all I can. If I could do it, if I was good enough to do it, I would. But I am a woman spoilt and ruined, dear, and you are a ruined man. When we are making love we're

lovers--but think of the gulf between us in habits and ways of thought, in will and training, when we are not making love. Think of it--and don't think of it! Don't think of it yet. We have snatched some hours. We still may have some hours!"

She suddenly knelt forward toward me, with a glowing darkness in her eyes. "Who cares if it upsets?" she cried. "If you say another word I will kiss you. And go to the bottom clutching you.

"I'm not afraid of that. I'm not a bit afraid of that. I'll die with you. Choose a death, and I'll die with you--readily. Do listen to me! I love you. I shall always love you. It's because I love you that I won't go down to become a dirty familiar thing with you amidst the grime. I've given all I can. I've had all I can.... Tell me," and she crept nearer, "have I been like the dusk to you, like the warm dusk? Is there magic still? Listen to the ripple of water from your paddle. Look at the warm evening light in the sky. Who cares if the canoe upsets? Come nearer to me. Oh, my love! come near! So."

She drew me to her and our lips met.

III

I asked her to marry me once again.

It was our last morning together, and we had met very early, about

sunrise, knowing that we were to part. No sun shone that day. The sky was overcast, the morning chilly and lit by a clear, cold, spiritless light. A heavy dampness in the air verged close on rain. When I think of that morning, it has always the quality of greying ashes wet with rain.

Beatrice too had changed. The spring had gone out of her movement; it came to me, for the first time, that some day she might grow old. She had become one flesh with the rest of common humanity; the softness had gone from her voice and manner, the dusky magic of her presence had gone. I saw these things with perfect clearness, and they made me sorry for them and for her. But they altered my love not a whit, abated it nothing. And when we had talked awkwardly for half a dozen sentences, I came dully to my point.

"And now," I cried, "will you marry me?"

"No," she said, "I shall keep to my life here."

I asked her to marry me in a year's time. She shook her head.

"This world is a soft world," I said, "in spite of my present disasters. I know now how to do things. If I had you to work for--in a year I could be a prosperous man."

"No," she said, "I will put it brutally, I shall go back to Carnaby."

"But--!" I did not feel angry. I had no sort of jealousy, no wounded pride, no sense of injury. I had only a sense of grey desolation, of hopeless cross-purposes.

"Look here," she said. "I have been awake all night and every night. I have been thinking of this--every moment when we have not been together. I'm not answering you on an impulse. I love you. I love you. I'll say that over ten thousand times. But here we are--"

"The rest of life together," I said.

"It wouldn't be together. Now we are together. Now we have been together. We are full of memories I do not feel I can ever forget a single one."

"Nor I."

"And I want to close it and leave it at that. You see, dear, what else is there to do?"

She turned her white face to me. "All I know of love, all I have ever dreamt or learnt of love I have packed into these days for you. You think we might live together and go on loving. No! For you I will have no vain repetitions. You have had the best and all of me. Would you have us, after this, meet again in London or Paris or somewhere, scuffle to some wretched dressmaker's, meet in a cabinet particulier?"

"No," I said. "I want you to marry me. I want you to play the game of life with me as an honest woman should. Come and live with me. Be my wife and squaw. Bear me children."

I looked at her white, drawn face, and it seemed to me I might carry her yet. I spluttered for words.

"My God! Beatrice!" I cried; "but this is cowardice and folly! Are you afraid of life? You of all people! What does it matter what has been or what we were? Here we are with the world before us! Start clean and new with me. We'll fight it through! I'm not such a simple lover that I'll not tell you plainly when you go wrong, and fight our difference out with you. It's the one thing I want, the one thing I need--to have you, and more of you and more! This love-making--it's love-making. It's just a part of us, an incident--"

She shook her head and stopped me abruptly. "It's all," she said.

"All!" I protested.

"I'm wiser than you. Wiser beyond words." She turned her eyes to me and they shone with tears.

"I wouldn't have you say anything--but what you're saying," she said. "But it's nonsense, dear. You know it's nonsense as you say it."

I tried to keep up the heroic note, but she would not listen to it.

"It's no good," she cried almost petulantly. "This little world has made us what we are. Don't you see--don't you see what I am? I can make love. I can make love and be loved, prettily. Dear, don't blame me. I have given you all I have. If I had anything more--I have gone through it all over and over again--thought it out. This morning my head aches, my eyes ache.

"The light has gone out of me and I am a sick and tired woman. But I'm talking wisdom--bitter wisdom. I couldn't be any sort of helper to you, any sort of wife, any sort of mother. I'm spoilt.

"I'm spoilt by this rich idle way of living, until every habit is wrong, every taste wrong. The world is wrong. People can be ruined by wealth just as much as by poverty. Do you think I wouldn't face life with you if I could, if I wasn't absolutely certain I should be down and dragging in the first half-mile of the journey? Here I am--damned! Damned! But I won't damn you. You know what I am! You know. You are too clear and simple not to know the truth. You try to romance and hector, but you know the truth. I am a little cad--sold and done. I'm--. My dear, you think I've been misbehaving, but all these days I've been on my best behaviour.... You don't understand, because you're a man.

"A woman, when she's spoilt, is SPOILT. She's dirty in grain. She's

done."

She walked on weeping.

"You're a fool to want me," she said. "You're a fool to want me--for my sake just as much as yours. We've done all we can. It's just romancing--"

She dashed the tears from her eyes and turned upon me. "Don't you understand?" she challenged. "Don't you know?"

We faced one another in silence for a moment.

"Yes," I said, "I know."

For a long time we spoke never a word, but walked on together, slowly and sorrowfully, reluctant to turn about towards our parting. When at last we did, she broke silence again.

"I've had you," she said.

"Heaven and hell," I said, "can't alter that."

"I've wanted--" she went on. "I've talked to you in the nights and made up speeches. Now when I want to make them I'm tongue-tied. But to me it's just as if the moments we have had lasted for ever. Moods and

states come and go. To-day my light is out..."

To this day I cannot determine whether she said or whether I imagined she said "chloral." Perhaps a half-conscious diagnosis flashed it on my brain. Perhaps I am the victim of some perverse imaginative freak of memory, some hinted possibility that scratched and seared. There the word stands in my memory, as if it were written in fire.

We came to the door of Lady Osprey's garden at last, and it was beginning to drizzle.

She held out her hands and I took them.

"Yours," she said, in a weary unimpassioned voice; "all that I had--such as it was. Will you forget?"

"Never," I answered.

"Never a touch or a word of it?"

"No."

"You will," she said.

We looked at one another in silence, and her face full of fatigue and misery.

What could I do? What was there to do?

"I wish--" I said, and stopped.

"Good-bye."

IV

That should have been the last I saw of her, but, indeed, I was destined to see her once again. Two days after I was at Lady Grove, I forget altogether upon what errand, and as I walked back to the station believing her to be gone away she came upon me, and she was riding with Carnaby, just as I had seen them first. The encounter jumped upon us unprepared. She rode by, her eyes dark in her white face, and scarcely noticed me. She winced and grew stiff at the sight of me and bowed her head. But Carnaby, because he thought I was a broken and discomfited man, saluted me with an easy friendliness, and shouted some genial commonplace to me.

They passed out of sight and left me by the roadside....

And then, indeed, I tasted the ultimate bitterness of life. For the first time I felt utter futility, and was wrung by emotion that begot no action, by shame and pity beyond words. I had parted from her dully and I had seen my uncle break and die with dry eyes and a steady mind, but

this chance sight of my lost Beatrice brought me to tears. My face was wrung, and tears came pouring down my cheeks. All the magic she had for me had changed to wild sorrow. "Oh God!" I cried, "this is too much," and turned my face after her and made appealing gestures to the beech trees and cursed at fate. I wanted to do preposterous things, to pursue her, to save her, to turn life back so that she might begin again.
I wonder what would have happened had I overtaken them in pursuit, breathless with running, uttering incoherent words, weeping, expostulatory. I came near to doing that.

There was nothing in earth or heaven to respect my curses or weeping. In the midst of it a man who had been trimming the opposite hedge appeared and stared at me.

Abruptly, ridiculously, I dissembled before him and went on and caught my train....

But the pain I felt then I have felt a hundred times; it is with me as I write. It haunts this book, I see, that is what haunts this book, from end to end.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

NIGHT AND THE OPEN SEA

I

I have tried throughout all this story to tell things as they happened to me. In the beginning--the sheets are still here on the table, grimy and dogs-eared and old-looking--I said I wanted to tell MYSELF and the world in which I found myself, and I have done my best. But whether I have succeeded I cannot imagine. All this writing is grey now and dead and trite and unmeaning to me; some of it I know by heart. I am the last person to judge it.

As I turn over the big pile of manuscript before me certain things become clearer to me, and particularly the immense inconsequences of my experiences. It is, I see now that I have it all before me, a story of activity and urgency and sterility. I have called it Tono-Bungay, but I had far better have called it Waste. I have told of childless Marion, of my childless aunt, of Beatrice wasted and wasteful and futile. What hope is there for a people whose women become fruitless? I think of all the energy I have given to vain things. I think of my industrious scheming with my uncle, of Crest Hill's vast cessation, of his resonant strenuous career. Ten thousand men have envied him and wished to live as he lived. It is all one spectacle of forces running to waste, of people who use and do not replace, the story of a country hectic with a wasting aimless

fever of trade and money-making and pleasure-seeking. And now I build destroyers!

Other people may see this country in other terms; this is how I have seen it. In some early chapter in this heap I compared all our present colour and abundance to October foliage before the frosts nip down the leaves. That I still feel was a good image. Perhaps I see wrongly. It may be I see decay all about me because I am, in a sense, decay. To others it may be a scene of achievement and construction radiant with hope. I, too, have a sort of hope, but it is a remote hope, a hope that finds no promise in this Empire or in any of the great things of our time.

How they will look in history I do not know, how time and chance will prove them I cannot guess; that is how they have mirrored themselves on one contemporary mind.

II

Concurrently with writing the last chapter of this book I have been much engaged by the affairs of a new destroyer we have completed. It has been an oddly complementary alternation of occupations. Three weeks or so ago this novel had to be put aside in order that I might give all my time day and night to the fitting and finishing of the engines. Last Thursday X 2, for so we call her, was done and I took her down the Thames and went out nearly to Texel for a trial of speed.

It is curious how at times one's impressions will all fuse and run together into a sort of unity and become continuous with things that have hitherto been utterly alien and remote. That rush down the river became mysteriously connected with this book.

As I passed down the Thames I seemed in a new and parallel manner to be passing all England in review. I saw it then as I had wanted my readers to see it. The thought came to me slowly as I picked my way through the Pool; it stood out clear as I went dreaming into the night out upon the wide North Sea.

It wasn't so much thinking at the time as a sort of photographic thought that came and grew clear. X2 went ripping through the dirty oily water as scissors rip through canvas, and the front of my mind was all intent with getting her through under the bridges and in and out among the steam-boats and barges and rowing-boats and piers. I lived with my hands and eyes hard ahead. I thought nothing then of any appearances but obstacles, but for all that the back of my mind took the photographic memory of it complete and vivid....

"This," it came to me, "is England. That is what I wanted to give in my book. This!"

We started in the late afternoon. We throbbed out of our yard above Hammersmith Bridge, fussed about for a moment, and headed down stream.

We came at an easy rush down Craven Reach, past Fulham and Hurlingham, past the long stretches of muddy meadow And muddy suburb to Battersea and Chelsea, round the cape of tidy frontage that is Grosvenor Road and under Vauxhall Bridge, and Westminster opened before us. We cleared a string of coal barges and there on the left in the October sunshine stood the Parliament houses, and the flag was flying and Parliament was sitting.

I saw it at the time unseeingly; afterwards it came into my mind as the centre of the whole broad panoramic effect of that afternoon. The stiff square lace of Victorian Gothic with its Dutch clock of a tower came upon me suddenly and stared and whirled past in a slow half pirouette and became still, I know, behind me as if watching me recede. "Aren't you going to respect me, then?" it seemed to say.

Not I! There in that great pile of Victorian architecture the landlords and the lawyers, the bishops, the railway men and the magnates of commerce go to and fro--in their incurable tradition of commercialised Bladesovery, of meretricious gentry and nobility sold for riches. I have been near enough to know. The Irish and the Labour-men run about among their feet, making a fuss, effecting little, they've got no better plans that I can see. Respect it indeed! There's a certain paraphernalia of dignity, but whom does it deceive? The King comes down in a gilt coach to open the show and wears long robes and a crown; and there's a display of stout and slender legs in white stockings and stout and slender legs in black stockings and artful old gentlemen in ermine. I was reminded

of one congested afternoon I had spent with my aunt amidst a cluster of agitated women's hats in the Royal Gallery of the House of Lords and how I saw the King going to open Parliament, and the Duke of Devonshire looking like a gorgeous pedlar and terribly bored with the cap of maintenance on a tray before him hung by slings from his shoulder. A wonderful spectacle!

It is quaint, no doubt, this England--it is even dignified in places--and full of mellow associations. That does not alter the quality of the realities these robes conceal. The realities are greedy trade, base profit--seeking, bold advertisement; and kingship and chivalry, spite of this wearing of treasured robes, are as dead among it all as that crusader my uncle championed against the nettles outside the Duffield church.

I have thought much of that bright afternoon's panorama.

To run down the Thames so is to run one's hand over the pages in the book of England from end to end. One begins in Craven Reach and it is as if one were in the heart of old England. Behind us are Kew and Hampton Court with their memories of Kings and Cardinals, and one runs at first between Fulham's episcopal garden parties and Hurlingham's playground for the sporting instinct of our race. The whole effect is English. There is space, there are old trees and all the best qualities of the home-land in that upper reach. Putney, too, looks Anglican on a dwindling scale. And then for a stretch the newer developments slop

over, one misses Bladesover and there come first squalid stretches of mean homes right and left and then the dingy industrialism of the south side, and on the north bank the polite long front of nice houses, artistic, literary, administrative people's residences, that stretches from Cheyne Walk nearly to Westminster and hides a wilderness of slums. What a long slow crescendo that is, mile after mile, with the houses crowding closelier, the multiplying succession of church towers, the architectural moments, the successive bridges, until you come out into the second movement of the piece with Lambeth's old palace under your quarter and the houses of Parliament on your bow! Westminster Bridge is ahead of you then, and through it you flash, and in a moment the round-faced clock tower cranes up to peer at you again and New Scotland Yard squares at you, a fat beef-eater of a policeman disguised miraculously as a Bastille.

For a stretch you have the essential London; you have Charing Cross railway station, heart of the world, and the Embankment on the north side with its new hotels overshadowing its Georgian and Victorian architecture, and mud and great warehouses and factories, chimneys, shot towers, advertisements on the south. The northward skyline grows more intricate and pleasing, and more and more does one thank God for Wren. Somerset House is as picturesque as the civil war, one is reminded again of the original England, one feels in the fretted sky the quality of Restoration Lace.

And then comes Astor's strong box and the lawyers' Inns.

(I had a passing memory of myself there, how once I had trudged along the Embankment westward, weighing my uncle's offer of three hundred pounds a year....)

Through that central essential London reach I drove, and X2 bored her nose under the foam regardless of it all like a black hound going through reeds--on what trail even I who made her cannot tell.

And in this reach, too, one first meets the seagulls and is reminded of the sea. Blackfriars one takes--just under these two bridges and just between them is the finest bridge moment in the world--and behold, soaring up, hanging in the sky over a rude tumult of warehouses, over a jostling competition of traders, irrelevantly beautiful and altogether remote, Saint Paul's! "Of course!" one says, "Saint Paul's!" It is the very figure of whatever fineness the old Anglican culture achieved, detached, a more dignified and chastened Saint Peter's, colder, greyer, but still ornate; it has never been over thrown, never disavowed, only the tall warehouses and all the roar of traffic have forgotten it, every one has forgotten it; the steamships, the barges, go heedlessly by regardless of it, intricacies of telephone wires and poles cut blackly into its thin mysteries, and presently, when in a moment the traffic permits you and you look round for it, it has dissolved like a cloud into the grey blues of the London sky.

And then the traditional and ostensible England falls from you

altogether. The third movement begins, the last great movement in the London symphony, in which the trim scheme of the old order is altogether dwarfed and swallowed up. Comes London Bridge, and the great warehouses tower up about you, waving stupendous cranes, the gulls circle and scream in your ears, large ships lie among their lighters, and one is in the port of the world. Again and again in this book I have written of England as a feudal scheme overtaken by fatty degeneration and stupendous accidents of hypertrophy.

For the last time I must strike that note as the memory of the dear neat little sunlit ancient Tower of London lying away in a gap among the warehouses comes back to me, that little accumulation of buildings so provincially pleasant and dignified, overshadowed by the vulgarest, most typical exploit of modern England, the sham Gothic casings to the ironwork of the Tower Bridge. That Tower Bridge is the very balance and confirmation of Westminster's dull pinnacles and tower. That sham Gothic bridge; in the very gates of our mother of change, the Sea!

But after that one is in a world of accident and nature. For the third part of the panorama of London is beyond all law, order, and precedence; it is the seaport and the sea. One goes down the widening reaches through a monstrous variety of shipping, great steamers, great sailing-ships, trailing the flags of all the world, a monstrous confusion of lighters, witches' conferences of brown-sailed barges, wallowing tugs, a tumultuous crowding and jostling of cranes and spars, and wharves and stores, and assertive inscriptions. Huge vistas of dock

open right and left of one, and here and there beyond and amidst it all are church towers, little patches of indescribably old-fashioned and worn-out houses, riverside pubs and the like, vestiges of townships that were long since torn to fragments and submerged in these new growths. And amidst it all no plan appears, no intention, no comprehensive desire. That is the very key of it all. Each day one feels that the pressure of commerce and traffic grew, grew insensibly monstrous, and first this man made a wharf and that erected a crane, and then this company set to work and then that, and so they jostled together to make this unassimilable enormity of traffic. Through it we dodged and drove eager for the high seas.

I remember how I laughed aloud at the glimpse of the name of a London County Council steamboat that ran across me. Caxton it was called, and another was Pepys, and another was Shakespeare. They seemed so wildly out of place, splashing about in that confusion. One wanted to take them out and wipe them and put them back in some English gentleman's library. Everything was alive about them, flash ing, splashing, and passing, ships moving, tugs panting, hawsers taut, barges going down with men toiling at the sweeps, the water all a-swirl with the wash of shipping, scaling into millions of little wavelets, curling and frothing under the whip of the unceasing wind. Past it all we drove. And at Greenwich to the south, you know, there stands a fine stone frontage where all the victories are recorded in a Painted Hall, and beside it is the "Ship" where once upon a time those gentlemen of Westminster used to have an annual dinner--before the port of London got too much for them

altogether. The old facade of the Hospital was just warming to the sunset as we went by, and after that, right and left, the river opened, the sense of the sea increased and prevailed, reach after reach from Northfleet to the Nore.

And out you come at last with the sun behind you into the eastern sea. You speed up and tear the oily water louder and faster, siroo, siroo-swish-siroo, and the hills of Kent--over which I once fled from the Christian teachings of Nicodemus Frapp--fall away on the right hand and Essex on the left. They fall away and vanish into blue haze, and the tall slow ships behind the tugs, scarce moving ships and wallowing sturdy tugs, are all wrought of wet gold as one goes frothing by. They stand out, bound on strange missions of life and death, to the killing of men in unfamiliar lands. And now behind us is blue mystery and the phantom flash of unseen lights, and presently even these are gone, and I and my destroyer tear out to the unknown across a great grey space. We tear into the great spaces of the future and the turbines fall to talking in unfamiliar tongues. Out to the open we go, to windy freedom and trackless ways. Light after light goes down. England and the Kingdom, Britain and the Empire, the old prides and the old devotions, glide abeam, astern, sink down upon the horizon, pass--pass. The river passes--London passes, England passes...

III

This is the note I have tried to emphasise, the note that sounds clear

in my mind when I think of anything beyond the purely personal aspects of my story.

It is a note of crumbling and confusion, of change and seemingly aimless swelling, of a bubbling up and medley of futile loves and sorrows.
But through the confusion sounds another note. Through the confusion something drives, something that is at once human achievement and the most inhuman of all existing things. Something comes out of it....
How can I express the values of a thing at once so essential and so immaterial. It is something that calls upon such men as I with an irresistible appeal.

I have figured it in my last section by the symbol of my destroyer, stark and swift, irrelevant to most human interests. Sometimes I call this reality Science, sometimes I call it Truth. But it is something we draw by pain and effort ont of the heart of life, that we disentangle and make clear. Other men serve it, I know, in art, in literature, in social invention, and see it in a thousand different figures, under a hundred names. I see it always as austerity, as beauty. This thing we make clear is the heart of life. It is the one enduring thing. Men and nations, epochs and civilisation pass each making its contribution I do not know what it is, this something, except that it is supreme. It is, a something, a quality, an element, one may find now in colours, now in norms, now in sounds, now in thoughts. It emerges from life with each year one lives and feels, and generation by generation and age by age, but the how and why of it are all beyond the compass of my mind....

Yet the full sense of it was with me all that night as I drove, lonely above the rush and murmur of my engines, out upon the weltering circle of the sea.

Far out to the northeast there came the flicker of a squadron of warships waving white swords of light about the sky. I kept them hull-down, and presently they were mere summer lightning over the watery edge of the globe.... I fell into thought that was nearly formless, into doubts and dreams that have no words, and it seemed good to me to drive ahead and on and or through the windy starlight, over the long black waves.

IV

It was morning and day before I returned with the four sick and starving journalists who had got permission to come with me, up the shining river, and past the old grey Tower....

I recall the back views of those journalists very distinctly, going with a certain damp weariness of movement, along a side street away from the river. They were good men and bore me no malice, and they served me up to the public in turgid degenerate Kiplingese, as a modest button on the complacent stomach of the Empire. Though as a matter of fact, X2 isn't intended for the empire, or indeed for the hands of any European power. We offered it to our own people first, but they would have nothing to

do with me, and I have long since ceased to trouble much about such questions. I have come to see myself from the outside, my country from the outside--without illusions. We make and pass.

We are all things that make and pass striving upon a hidden mission, out to the open sea.