

CHAPTER THE THIRD

THE DEPARTURE

Section 1

No wise man goes out upon a novel expedition without misgivings. And between their first meeting and the appointed morning both Sir Richmond Hardy and Dr. Martineau were the prey of quite disagreeable doubts about each other, themselves, and the excursion before them. At the time of their meeting each had been convinced that he gauged the other sufficiently for the purposes of the proposed tour. Afterwards each found himself trying to recall the other with greater distinctness and able to recall nothing but queer, ominous and minatory traits. The doctor's impression of the great fuel specialist grew ever darker, leaner, taller and more impatient. Sir Richmond took on the likeness of a monster obdurate and hostile, he spread upwards until like the Djinn out of the bottle, he darkened the heavens. And he talked too much. He talked ever so much too much. Sir Richmond also thought that the doctor talked too much. In addition, he read into his imperfect memory of the doctor's face, an expression of protruded curiosity. What was all this problem of motives and inclinations that they were "going into" so gaily? He had merely consulted the doctor on a simple, straightforward need for a nervous tonic--that was what he had needed--a tonic. Instead he had engaged himself for--he scarcely knew what--an indiscreet, indelicate, and altogether undesirable experiment in confidences.

Both men were considerably reassured when at last they set eyes on each other again. Indeed each was surprised to find something almost agreeable in the appearance of the other. Dr. Martineau at once perceived that the fierceness of Sir Richmond was nothing more than the fierceness of an overwrought man, and Sir Richmond realized at a glance that the curiosity of Dr. Martineau's bearing had in it nothing personal or base; it was just the fine alertness of the scientific mind.

Sir Richmond had arrived nearly forty minutes late, and it would have been evident to a much less highly trained observer than Dr. Martineau that some dissension had arisen between the little, ladylike, cream and black Charmeuse car and its owner. There was a faint air of resentment and protest between them. As if Sir Richmond had been in some way rude to it.

The cap of the radiator was adorned with a little brass figure of a flying Mercury. Frozen in a sprightly attitude, its stiff bound and its fixed heavenward stare was highly suggestive of a forced and tactful disregard of current unpleasantness.

Nothing was said, however, to confirm or dispel this suspicion of a disagreement between the man and the car. Sir Richmond directed and assisted Dr. Martineau's man to adjust the luggage at the back, and Dr. Martineau watched the proceedings from his dignified front door. He was wearing a suit of fawn tweeds, a fawn Homburg hat and a light Burberry,

with just that effect of special preparation for a holiday which betrays the habitually busy man. Sir Richmond's brown gauntness was, he noted, greatly set off by his suit of grey. There had certainly been some sort of quarrel. Sir Richmond was explaining the straps to Dr. Martineau's butler with the coldness a man betrays when he explains the uncongenial habits of some unloved intimate. And when the moment came to start and the little engine did not immediately respond to the electric starter, he said: "Oh! COME up, you--!"

His voice sank at the last word as though it was an entirely confidential communication to the little car. And it was an extremely low and disagreeable word. So Dr. Martineau decided that it was not his business to hear it....

It was speedily apparent that Sir Richmond was an experienced and excellent driver. He took the Charmeuse out into the traffic of Baker Street and westward through brisk and busy streets and roads to Brentford and Hounslow smoothly and swiftly, making a score of unhesitating and accurate decisions without apparent thought. There was very little conversation until they were through Brentford. Near Shepherd's Bush, Sir Richmond had explained, "This is not my own particular car. That was butted into at the garage this morning and its radiator cracked. So I had to fall back on this. It's quite a good little car. In its way. My wife drives it at times. It has one or two constitutional weaknesses--incidental to the make--gear-box over the back axle for example--gets all the vibration. Whole machine rather on

the flimsy side. Still--"

He left the topic at that.

Dr. Martineau said something of no consequence about its being a very comfortable little car.

Somewhere between Brentford and Hounslow, Sir Richmond plunged into the matter between them. "I don't know how deep we are going into these psychological probings of yours," he said. "But I doubt very much if we shall get anything out of them."

"Probably not," said Dr. Martineau.

"After all, what I want is a tonic. I don't see that there is anything positively wrong with me. A certain lack of energy--"

"Lack of balance," corrected the doctor. "You are wasting energy upon internal friction."

"But isn't that inevitable? No machine is perfectly efficient. No man either. There is always a waste. Waste of the type; waste of the individual idiosyncrasy. This little car, for instance, isn't pulling as she ought to pull--she never does. She's low in her class. So with myself; there is a natural and necessary high rate of energy waste. Moods of apathy and indolence are natural to me. (Damn that omnibus! All

over the road!)"

"We don't deny the imperfection--" began the doctor.

"One has to fit oneself to one's circumstances," said Sir Richmond, opening up another line of thought.

"We don't deny the imperfection" the doctor stuck to it. "These new methods of treatment are based on the idea of imperfection. We begin with that. I began with that last Tuesday...."

Sir Richmond, too, was sticking to his argument. "A man, and for that matter the world he lives in, is a tangle of accumulations. Your psychoanalyst starts, it seems to me, with a notion of stripping down to something fundamental. The ape before was a tangle of accumulations, just as we are. So it was with his forebears. So it has always been. All life is an endless tangle of accumulations."

"Recognize it," said the doctor.

"And then?" said Sir Richmond, controversially.

"Recognize in particular your own tangle."

"Is my particular tangle very different from the general tangle? (Oh! Damn this feeble little engine!) I am a creature of undecided will,

urged on by my tangled heredity to do a score of entirely incompatible things. Mankind, all life, is that."

"But our concern is the particular score of incompatible things you are urged to do. We examine and weigh--we weigh--"

The doctor was still saying these words when a violent and ultimately disastrous struggle began between Sir Richmond and the little Charmeuse car. The doctor stopped in mid-sentence.

It was near Taplow station that the mutual exasperation of man and machine was brought to a crisis by the clumsy emergence of a laundry cart from a side road. Sir Richmond was obliged to pull up smartly and stopped his engine. It refused an immediate obedience to the electric starter. Then it picked up, raced noisily, disengaged great volumes of bluish smoke, and displayed an unaccountable indisposition to run on any gear but the lowest. Sir Richmond thought aloud, unpleasing thoughts. He addressed the little car as a person; he referred to ancient disputes and temperamental incompatibilities. His anger betrayed him a coarse, ill-bred man. The little car quickened under his reproaches. There were some moments of hope, dashed by the necessity of going dead slow behind an interloping van. Sir Richmond did not notice the outstretched arm of the driver of the van, and stalled his engine for a second time. The electric starter refused its office altogether.

For some moments Sir Richmond sat like a man of stone.

"I must wind it up," he said at last in a profound and awful voice. "I must wind it up."

"I get out, don't I?" asked the doctor, unanswered, and did so. Sir Richmond, after a grim search and the displacement and replacement of the luggage, produced a handle from the locker at the back of the car and prepared to wind.

There was a little difficulty. "Come UP!" he said, and the small engine roared out like a stage lion.

The two gentlemen resumed their seats. The car started and then by an unfortunate inadvertency Sir Richmond pulled the gear lever over from the first speed to the reverse. There was a metallic clangour beneath the two gentlemen, and the car slowed down and stopped although the engine was still throbbing wildly, and the dainty veil of blue smoke still streamed forward from the back of the car before a gentle breeze. The doctor got out almost precipitately, followed by a gaunt madman, mouthing vileness, who had only a minute or so before been a decent British citizen. He made some blind lunges at the tremulous but obdurate car, but rather as if he looked for offences and accusations than for displacements to adjust. Quivering and refusing, the little car was extraordinarily like some recalcitrant little old aristocratic lady in the hands of revolutionaries, and this made the behaviour of Sir Richmond seem even more outrageous than it would otherwise have done. He

stopped the engine, he went down on his hands and knees in the road to peer up at the gear-box, then without restoring the spark, he tried to wind up the engine again. He spun the little handle with an insane violence, faster and faster for--as it seemed to the doctor--the better part of a minute. Beads of perspiration appeared upon his brow and ran together; he bared his teeth in a snarl; his hat slipped over one eye. He groaned with rage. Then, using the starting handle as a club, he assailed the car. He smote the brazen Mercury from its foothold and sent it and a part of the radiator cap with it flying across the road. He beat at the wings of the bonnet, until they bent in under his blows. Finally, he hurled the starting-handle at the wind-screen and smashed it. The starting-handle rattled over the bonnet and fell to the ground....

The paroxysm was over. Ten seconds later this cataclysmal lunatic had reverted to sanity--a rather sheepish sanity.

He thrust his hands into his trouser pockets and turned his back on the car. He remarked in a voice of melancholy detachment: "It was a mistake to bring that coupe."

Dr. Martineau had assumed an attitude of trained observation on the side path. His hands rested on his hips and his hat was a little on one side. He was inclined to agree with Sir Richmond. "I don't know," he considered. "You wanted some such blow-off as this."

"Did I?"

"The energy you have! That car must be somebody's whipping boy."

"The devil it is!" said Sir Richmond, turning round sharply and staring at it as if he expected it to display some surprising and yet familiar features. Then he looked questioningly and suspiciously at his companion.

"These outbreaks do nothing to amend the originating grievance," said the doctor. "No. And at times they are even costly. But they certainly lift a burthen from the nervous system.... And now I suppose we have to get that little ruin to Maidenhead."

"Little ruin!" repeated Sir Richmond. "No. There's lots of life in the little beast yet."

He reflected. "She'll have to be towed." He felt in his breast pocket. "Somewhere I have the R.A.C. order paper, the Badge that will Get You Home. We shall have to hail some passing car to take it into Maidenhead."

Dr. Martineau offered and Sir Richmond took and lit a cigarette.

For a little while conversation hung fire. Then for the first time Dr. Martineau heard his patient laugh.

"Amazing savage," said Sir Richmond. "Amazing savage!"

He pointed to his handiwork. "The little car looks ruffled. Well it may."

He became grave again. "I suppose I ought to apologize."

Dr. Martineau weighed the situation. "As between doctor and patient," he said. "No."

"Oh!" said Sir Richmond, turned to a new point of view. "But where the patient ends and the host begins.... I'm really very sorry." He reverted to his original train of thought which had not concerned Dr. Martineau at all. "After all, the little car was only doing what she was made to do."

Section 2

The affair of the car effectively unsealed Sir Richmond's mind. Hitherto Dr. Martineau had perceived the possibility and danger of a defensive silence or of a still more defensive irony; but now that Sir Richmond had once given himself away, he seemed prepared to give himself away to an unlimited extent. He embarked upon an apologetic discussion of the choleric temperament.

He began as they stood waiting for the relief car from the Maidenhead garage. "You were talking of the ghosts of apes and monkeys that suddenly come out from the darkness of the subconscious...."

"You mean--when we first met at Harley Street?"

"That last apparition of mine seems to have been a gorilla at least."

The doctor became precise. "Gorillaesque. We are not descended from gorillas."

"Queer thing a fit of rage is!"

"It's one of nature's cruder expedients. Crude, but I doubt if it is fundamental. There doesn't seem to be rage in the vegetable world, and even among the animals--? No, it is not universal." He ran his mind over classes and orders. "Wasps and bees certainly seem to rage, but if one comes to think, most of the invertebrata show very few signs of it."

"I'm not so sure," said Sir Richmond. "I've never seen a snail in a towering passion or an oyster slamming its shell behind it. But these are sluggish things. Oysters sulk, which is after all a smouldering sort of rage. And take any more active invertebrate. Take a spider. Not a smashing and swearing sort of rage perhaps, but a disciplined, cold-blooded malignity. Crabs fight. A conger eel in a boat will rage dangerously."

"A vertebrate. Yes. But even among the vertebrata; who has ever seen a furious rabbit?"

"Don't the bucks fight?" questioned Sir Richmond.

Dr. Martineau admitted the point.

"I've always had these fits of passion. As far back as I can remember. I was a kicking, screaming child. I threw things. I once threw a fork at my elder brother and it stuck in his forehead, doing no serious damage--happily. There were whole days of wrath--days, as I remember them. Perhaps they were only hours.... I've never thought before what a peculiar thing all this raging is in the world. WHY do we rage? They used to say it was the devil. If it isn't the devil, then what the devil is it? After all," he went on as the doctor was about to answer his question; "as you pointed out, it isn't the lowlier things that rage. It's the HIGHER things and US."

"The devil nowadays," the doctor reflected after a pause, "so far as man is concerned, is understood to be the ancestral ape. And more particularly the old male ape."

But Sir Richmond was away on another line of thought. "Life itself, flaring out. Brooking no contradiction." He came round suddenly to the doctor's qualification. "Why male? Don't little girls smash things just

as much?"

"They don't," said Dr. Martineau. "Not nearly as much."

Sir Richmond went off at a tangent again. "I suppose you have watched any number of babies?"

"Not nearly as many as a general practitioner would do. There's a lot of rage about most of them at first, male or female."

"Queer little eddies of fury.... Recently--it happens--I've been seeing one. A spit of red wrath, clenching its fists and squalling threats at a damned disobedient universe."

The doctor was struck by an idea and glanced quickly and questioningly at his companion's profile.

"Blind driving force," said Sir Richmond, musing.

"Isn't that after all what we really are?" he asked the doctor.

"Essentially--Rage. A rage in dead matter, making it alive."

"Schopenhauer," footnoted the doctor. "Boehme."

"Plain fact," said Sir Richmond. "No Rage--no Go."

"But rage without discipline?"

"Discipline afterwards. The rage first."

"But rage against what? And FOR what?"

"Against the Universe. And for--? That's more difficult. What IS the little beast squalling itself crimson for? Ultimately? ... What is it clutching after? In the long run, what will it get?"

("Yours the car in distress what sent this?" asked an unheeded voice.)

"Of course, if you were to say 'desire'," said Dr. Martineau, "then you would be in line with the psychoanalysts. They talk of LIBIDO, meaning a sort of fundamental desire. Jung speaks of it at times almost as if it were the universal driving force."

"No," said Sir Richmond, in love with his new idea. "Not desire. Desire would have a definite direction, and that is just what this driving force hasn't. It's rage."

"Yours the car in distress what sent this?" the voice repeated. It was the voice of a mechanic in an Overland car. He was holding up the blue request for assistance that Sir Richmond had recently filled in.

The two philosophers returned to practical matters.

Section 3

For half an hour after the departure of the little Charmeuse car with Sir Richmond and Dr. Martineau, the brass Mercury lay unheeded in the dusty roadside grass. Then it caught the eye of a passing child.

He was a bright little boy of five. From the moment when he caught the gleam of brass he knew that he had made the find of his life. But his nurse was a timorous, foolish thing. "You did ought to of left it there, Masterrarry," she said.

"Findings ain't keepings nowadays, not by no manner of means, Masterrarry.

"Yew'd look silly if a policeman came along arsting people if they seen a goldennimage.

"Arst yer 'ow you come by it and look pretty straight at you."

All of which grumblings Master Harry treated with an experienced disregard. He knew definitely that he would never relinquish this bright and lovely possession again. It was the first beautiful thing he had ever possessed. He was the darling of fond and indulgent parents and his nursery was crowded with hideous rag and sawdust dolls, golliwogs, comic penguins, comic lions, comic elephants and comic policemen and every

variety of suchlike humorous idiocy and visual beastliness. This figure, solid, delicate and gracious, was a thing of a different order.

There was to be much conflict and distress, tears and wrath, before the affinity of that clean-limbed, shining figure and his small soul was recognized. But he carried his point at last. The Mercury became his inseparable darling, his symbol, his private god, the one dignified and serious thing in a little life much congested by the quaint, the burlesque, and all the smiling, dull condescensions of adult love.