CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

THE GIANT CHILDREN.

I.

For a time at least the spreading circle of residual consequences about the Experimental Farm must pass out of the focus of our narrative--how for a long time a power of bigness, in fungus and toadstool, in grass and weed, radiated from that charred but not absolutely obliterated centre. Nor can we tell here at any length how these mournful spinsters, the two surviving hens, made a wonder of and a show, spent their remaining years in eggless celebrity. The reader who is hungry for fuller details in these matters is referred to the newspapers of the period--to the voluminous, indiscriminate files of the modern Recording Angel. Our business lies with Mr. Bensington at the focus of the disturbance.

He had come back to London to find himself a quite terribly famous man. In a night the whole world had changed with respect to him. Everybody understood. Cousin Jane, it seemed, knew all about it; the people in the streets knew all about it; the newspapers all and more. To meet Cousin Jane was terrible, of course, but when it was over not so terrible after all. The good woman had limits even to her power over facts; it was clear that she had communed with herself and accepted the Food as

something in the nature of things.

She took the line of huffy dutifulness. She disapproved highly, it was evident, but she did not prohibit. The flight of Bensington, as she must have considered it, may have shaken her, and her worst was to treat him with bitter persistence for a cold he had not caught and fatigue he had long since forgotten, and to buy him a new sort of hygienic all-wool combination underwear that was apt to get involved and turned partially inside out and partially not, and as difficult to get into for an absent-minded man, as--Society. And so for a space, and as far as this convenience left him leisure, he still continued to participate in the development of this new element in human history, the Food of the Gods.

The public mind, following its own mysterious laws of selection, had chosen him as the one and only responsible Inventor and Promoter of this new wonder; it would hear nothing of Redwood, and without a protest it allowed Cossar to follow his natural impulse into a terribly prolific obscurity. Before he was aware of the drift of these things, Mr. Bensington was, so to speak, stark and dissected upon the hoardings. His baldness, his curious general pinkness, and his golden spectacles had become a national possession. Resolute young men with large expensive-looking cameras and a general air of complete authorisation took possession of the flat for brief but fruitful periods, let off flash lights in it that filled it for days with dense, intolerable vapour, and retired to fill the pages of the syndicated magazines with their admirable photographs of Mr. Bensington complete and at home in

his second-best jacket and his slashed shoes. Other resolute-mannered persons of various ages and sexes dropped in and told him things about Boomfood--it was Punch first called the stuff "Boomfood"--and afterwards reproduced what they had said as his own original contribution to the Interview. The thing became quite an obsession with Broadbeam, the Popular Humourist. He scented another confounded thing he could not understand, and he fretted dreadfully in his efforts to "laugh the thing down." One saw him in clubs, a great clumsy presence with the evidences of his midnight oil burning manifest upon his large unwholesome face, explaining to every one he could buttonhole: "These Scientific chaps, you know, haven't a Sense of Humour, you know. That's what it is. This Science--kills it." His jests at Bensington became malignant libels....

An enterprising press-cutting agency sent Bensington a long article about himself from a sixpenny weekly, entitled "A New Terror," and offered to supply one hundred such disturbances for a guinea, and two extremely charming young ladies, totally unknown to him, called, and, to the speechless indignation of Cousin Jane, had tea with him and afterwards sent him their birthday books for his signature. He was speedily quite hardened to seeing his name associated with the most incongruous ideas in the public press, and to discover in the reviews articles written about Boomfood and himself in a tone of the utmost intimacy by people he had never heard of. And whatever delusions he may have cherished in the days of his obscurity about the pleasantness of Fame were dispelled utterly and for ever.

At first--except for Broadbeam--the tone of the public mind was quite free from any touch of hostility. It did not seem to occur to the public mind as anything but a mere playful supposition that any more Herakleophorbia was going to escape again. And it did not seem to occur to the public mind that the growing little band of babies now being fed on the food would presently be growing more "up" than most of us ever grow. The sort of thing that pleased the public mind was caricatures of eminent politicians after a course of Boom-feeding, uses of the idea on hoardings, and such edifying exhibitions as the dead wasps that had escaped the fire and the remaining hens.

Beyond that the public did not care to look, until very strenuous efforts were made to turn its eyes to the remoter consequences, and even then for a while its enthusiasm for action was partial. "There's always somethin' New," said the public--a public so glutted with novelty that it would hear of the earth being split as one splits an apple without surprise, and, "I wonder what they'll do next."

But there were one or two people outside the public, as it were, who did already take that further glance, and some it seems were frightened by what they saw there. There was young Caterham, for example, cousin of the Earl of Pewterstone, and one of the most promising of English politicians, who, taking the risk of being thought a faddist, wrote a long article in the Nineteenth Century and After to suggest its total suppression. And--in certain of his moods, there was Bensington.

"They don't seem to realise--" he said to Cossar.

"No, they don't."

"And do we? Sometimes, when I think of what it means--This poor child of Redwood's--And, of course, your three... Forty feet high, perhaps!
After all, ought we to go on with it?"

"Go on with it!" cried Cossar, convulsed with inelegant astonishment and pitching his note higher than ever. "Of course you'll go on with it!
What d'you think you were made for? Just to loaf about between meal-times?

"Serious consequences," he screamed, "of course! Enormous. Obviously. Ob-viously. Why, man, it's the only chance you'll ever get of a serious consequence! And you want to shirk it!" For a moment his indignation was speechless, "It's downright Wicked!" he said at last, and repeated explosively, "Wicked!"

But Bensington worked in his laboratory now with more emotion than zest. He couldn't, tell whether he wanted serious consequences to his life or not; he was a man of quiet tastes. It was a marvellous discovery, of course, quite marvellous--but--He had already become the proprietor of several acres of scorched, discredited property near Hickleybrow, at a price of nearly £90 an acre, and at times he was disposed to think this

as serious a consequence of speculative chemistry as any unambitious man, could wish. Of course he was Famous--terribly Famous. More than satisfying, altogether more than satisfying, was the Fame he had attained.

But the habit of Research was strong in him....

And at moments, rare moments in the laboratory chiefly, he would find something else than habit and Cossar's arguments to urge him to his work. This little spectacled man, poised perhaps with his slashed shoes wrapped about the legs of his high stool and his hand upon the tweezer of his balance weights, would have again a flash of that adolescent vision, would have a momentary perception of the eternal unfolding of the seed that had been sown in his brain, would see as it were in the sky, behind the grotesque shapes and accidents of the present, the coming world of giants and all the mighty things the future has in store--vague and splendid, like some glittering palace seen suddenly in the passing of a sunbeam far away.... And presently it would be with him as though that distant splendour had never shone upon his brain, and he would perceive nothing ahead but sinister shadows, vast declivities and darknesses, inhospitable immensities, cold, wild, and terrible things.

II.

Amidst the complex and confused happenings, the impacts from the great

outer world that constituted Mr. Bensington's fame, a shining and active figure presently became conspicuous--became almost, as it were, a leader and marshal of these externalities in Mr. Bensington's eyes. This was Dr. Winkles, that convincing young practitioner, who has already appeared in this story as the means whereby Redwood was able to convey the Food to his son. Even before the great outbreak, it was evident that the mysterious powders Redwood had given him had awakened this gentleman's interest immensely, and so soon as the first wasps came he was putting two and two together.

He was the sort of doctor that is in manners, in morals, in methods and appearance, most succinctly and finally expressed by the word "rising." He was large and fair, with a hard, alert, superficial, aluminium-coloured eye, and hair like chalk mud, even-featured and muscular about the clean-shaven mouth, erect in figure and energetic in movement, quick and spinning on the heel, and he wore long frock coats, black silk ties and plain gold studs and chains and his silk hats had a special shape and brim that made him look wiser and better than anybody. He looked as young or old as anybody grown up. And after that first wonderful outbreak he took to Bensington and Redwood and the Food of the Gods with such a convincing air of proprietorship, that at times, in spite of the testimony of the Press to the contrary, Bensington was disposed to regard him as the original inventor of the whole affair.

"These accidents," said Winkles, when Bensington hinted at the dangers of further escapes, "are nothing. Nothing. The discovery is everything.

Properly developed, suitably handled, sanely controlled, we have--we have something very portentous indeed in this food of ours.... We must keep our eye on it ... We mustn't let it out of control again, and--we mustn't let it rest."

He certainly did not mean to do that. He was at Bensington's now almost every day. Bensington, glancing from the window, would see the faultless equipage come spanking up Sloane Street and after an incredibly brief interval Winkles would enter the room with a light, strong motion, and pervade it, and protrude some newspaper and supply information and make remarks.

"Well," he would say, rubbing his hands, "how are we getting on?" and so pass to the current discussion about it.

"Do you see," he would say, for example, "that Caterham has been talking about our stuff at the Church Association?"

"Dear me!" said Bensington, "that's a cousin of the Prime Minister, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Winkles, "a very able young man--very able. Quite wrong-headed; you know, violently reactionary--but thoroughly able. And he's evidently disposed to make capital out of this stuff of ours. Takes a very emphatic line. Talks of our proposal to use it in the elementary schools---"

"Our proposal to use it in the elementary schools!"

"I said something about that the other day--quite in passing--little affair at a Polytechnic. Trying to make it clear the stuff was really highly beneficial. Not in the slightest degree dangerous, in spite of those first little accidents. Which cannot possibly occur again.... You know it would be rather good stuff--But he's taken it up."

"What did you say?"

"Mere obvious nothings. But as you see---! Takes it up with perfect gravity. Treats the thing as an attack. Says there is already a sufficient waste of public money in elementary schools without this. Tells the old stories about piano lessons again--you know. No one; he says, wishes to prevent the children of the lower classes obtaining an education suited to their condition, but to give them a food of this sort will be to destroy their sense of proportion utterly. Expands the topic. What Good will it do, he asks, to make poor people six-and-thirty feet high? He really believes, you know, that they will be thirty-six feet high."

"So they would be," said Bensington, "if you gave them our food at all regularly. But nobody said anything---"

"I said something."

"But, my dear Winkles--!"

"They'll be Bigger, of course," interrupted Winkles, with an air of knowing all about it, and discouraging the crude ideas of Bensington. "Bigger indisputably. But listen to what he says! Will it make them happier? That's his point. Curious, isn't it? Will it make them better? Will they be more respectful to properly constituted authority? Is it fair to the children themselves?? Curious how anxious his sort are for justice--so far as any future arrangements go. Even nowadays, he says, the cost, of feeding and clothing children is more than many of their parents can contrive, and if this sort of thing is to be permitted--! Eh?

"You see he makes my mere passing suggestion into a positive proposal. And then he calculates how much a pair of breeches for a growing lad of twenty feet high or so will cost. Just as though he really believed--Ten pounds, he reckons, for the merest decency. Curious this Caterham! So concrete! The honest, and struggling ratepayer will have to contribute to that, he says. He says we have to consider the Rights of the Parent. It's all here. Two columns. Every Parent has a right to have, his children brought up in his own Size....

"Then comes the question of school accommodation, cost of enlarged desks and forms for our already too greatly burthened National Schools. And to get what?--a proletariat of hungry giants. Winds up with a very serious

passage, says even if this wild suggestion--mere passing fancy of mine, you know, and misinterpreted at that--this wild suggestion about the schools comes to nothing, that doesn't end the matter. This is a strange food, so strange as to seem to him almost wicked. It has been scattered recklessly--so he says--and it may be scattered again. Once you've taken it, it's poison unless you go on with it. 'So it is,' said Bensington.
And in short he proposes the formation of a National Society for the Preservation of the Proper Proportions of Things. Odd? Eh? People are hanging on to the idea like anything."

"But what do they propose to do?"

Winkles shrugged his shoulders and threw out his hands. "Form a Society," he said, "and fuss. They want to make it illegal to manufacture this Herakleophorbia--or at any rate to circulate the knowledge of it. I've written about a bit to show that Caterham's idea of the stuff is very much exaggerated--very much exaggerated indeed, but that doesn't seem to check it. Curious how people are turning against it. And the National Temperance Association, by-the-bye, has founded a branch for Temperance in Growth."

"Mm," said Bensington and stroked his nose.

"After all that has happened there's bound to be this uproar. On the face of it the thing's--startling."

Winkles walked about the room for a time, hesitated, and departed.

It became evident there was something at the back of his mind, some aspect of crucial importance to him, that he waited to display. One day, when Redwood and Bensington were at the flat together he gave them a glimpse of this something in reserve.

"How's it all going?" he said; rubbing his hands together.

"We're getting together a sort of report."

"For the Royal Society?"

"Yes."

"Hm," said. Winkles, very profoundly, and walked to the hearth-rug. "Hm. But--Here's the point. Ought you?"

"Ought we--what?"

"Ought you to publish?"

"We're not in the Middle Ages," said Redwood.

"I know."

"As Cossar says, swapping wisdom--that's the true scientific method."

"In most cases, certainly. But--This is exceptional."

"We shall put the whole thing before the Royal Society in the proper way," said Redwood.

Winkles returned to that on a later occasion.

"It's in many ways an Exceptional discovery."

"That doesn't matter," said Redwood.

"It's the sort of knowledge that could easily be subject to grave abuse--grave dangers, as Caterham puts it."

Redwood said nothing.

"Even carelessness, you know--"

"If we were to form a committee of trustworthy people to control the manufacture of Boomfood--Herakleophorbia, I should say--we might--"

He paused, and Redwood, with a certain private discomfort, pretended that he did not see any sort of interrogation....

Outside the apartments of Redwood and Bensington, Winkle, in spite of the incompleteness of his instructions, became a leading authority upon Boomfood. He wrote letters defending its use; he made notes and articles explaining its possibilities; he jumped up irrelevantly at the meetings of the scientific and medical associations to talk about it; he identified himself with it. He published a pamphlet called "The Truth about Boomfood," in which he minimised the whole of the Hickleybrow affair almost to nothing. He said that it was absurd to say Boomfood would make people thirty-seven feet high. That was "obviously exaggerated." It would make them Bigger, of course, but that was all....

Within that intimate circle of two it was chiefly evident that Winkles was extremely anxious to help in the making of Herakleophorbia, help in correcting any proofs there might be of any paper there might be in preparation upon the subject--do anything indeed that might lead up to his participation in the details of the making of Herakleophorbia. He was continually telling them both that he felt it was a Big Thing, that it had big possibilities. If only they were--"safeguarded in some way." And at last one day he asked outright to be told just how it was made.

"I've been thinking over what you said," said Redwood.

"Well?" said Winkles brightly.

"It's the sort of knowledge that could easily be subject to grave abuse," said Redwood.

"But I don't see how that applies," said Winkles.

"It does," said Redwood.

Winkles thought it over for a day or so. Then he came to Redwood and said that he doubted if he ought to give powders about which he knew nothing to Redwood's little boy; it seemed to him it was uncommonly like taking responsibility in the dark. That made Redwood thoughtful.

"You've seen that the Society for the Total Suppression of Boomfood claims to have several thousand members," said Winkles, changing the subject. "They've drafted a Bill," said Winkles. "They've got young Caterham to take it up--readily enough. They're in earnest. They're forming local committees to influence candidates. They want to make it penal to prepare and store Herakleophorbia without special license, and felony--matter of imprisonment without option--to administer Boomfood--that's what they call it, you know--to any person under one-and-twenty. But there's collateral societies, you know. All sorts of people. The Society for the Preservation of Ancient Statures is going to have Mr. Frederic Harrison on the council, they say. You know he's written an essay about it; says it is vulgar, and entirely inharmonious with that Revelation of Humanity that is found in the teachings of Comte. It is the sort of thing the Eighteenth Century couldn't have produced even in its worst moments. The idea of the Food never entered the head of Comte--which shows how wicked it really is. No one, he says,

who really understood Comte...."

"But you don't mean to say--" said Redwood, alarmed out of his disdain for Winkles.

"They'll not do all that," said Winkles. "But public opinion is public opinion, and votes are votes. Everybody can see you are up to a disturbing thing. And the human instinct is all against disturbance, you know. Nobody seems to believe Caterham's idea of people thirty-seven feet high, who won't be able to get inside a church, or a meeting-house, or any social or human institution. But for all that they're not so easy in their minds about it. They see there's something--something more than a common discovery--"

"There is," said Redwood, "in every discovery."

"Anyhow, they're getting--restive. Caterham keeps harping on what may happen if it gets loose again. I say over and over again, it won't, and it can't. But--there it is!"

And he bounced about the room for a little while as if he meant to reopen the topic of the secret, and then thought better of it and went.

The two scientific men looked at one another. For a space only their eyes spoke.

"If the worst comes to the worst," said Redwood at last, in a strenuously calm voice, "I shall give the Food to my little Teddy with my own hands."

III.

It was only a few days after this that Redwood opened his paper to find that the Prime Minister had promised a Royal Commission on Boomfood. This sent him, newspaper in hand, round to Bensington's flat.

"Winkles, I believe, is making mischief for the stuff. He plays into the hands of Caterham. He keeps on talking about it, and what it is going to do, and alarming people. If he goes on, I really believe he'll hamper our inquiries. Even as it is--with this trouble about my little boy--"

Bensington wished Winkles wouldn't.

"Do you notice how he has dropped into the way of calling it Boomfood?"

"I don't like that name," said Bensington, with a glance over his glasses.

"It is just so exactly what it is--to Winkles."

"Why does he keep on about it? It isn't his!"

"It's something called Booming," said Redwood. "I don't understand. If it isn't his, everybody is getting to think it is. Not that that matters."

"In the event of this ignorant, this ridiculous agitation becoming--Serious," began Bensington.

"My little boy can't get on without the stuff," said Redwood. "I don't see how I can help myself now. If the worst comes to the worst--"

A slight bouncing noise proclaimed the presence of Winkles. He became visible in the middle of the room rubbing his hands together.

"I wish you'd knock," said Bensington, looking vicious over the gold rims.

Winkles was apologetic. Then he turned to Redwood. "I'm glad to find you here," he began; "the fact is--"

"Have you seen about this Royal Commission?" interrupted Redwood.

"Yes," said Winkles, thrown out. "Yes."

"What do you think of it?"

"Excellent thing," said Winkles. "Bound to stop most of this clamour. Ventilate the whole affair. Shut up Caterham. But that's not what I came round for, Redwood. The fact is--"

"I don't like this Royal Commission," said Bensington.

"I can assure you it will be all right. I may say--I don't think it's a breach of confidence--that very possibly I may have a place on the Commission--"

"Oom," said Redwood, looking into the fire.

"I can put the whole thing right. I can make it perfectly clear, first, that the stuff is controllable, and, secondly, that nothing short of a miracle is needed before anything like that catastrophe at Hickleybrow can possibly happen again. That is just what is wanted, an authoritative assurance. Of course, I could speak with more confidence if I knew--But that's quite by the way. And just at present there's something else, another little matter, upon which I'm wanting to consult you. Ahem. The fact is--Well--I happen to be in a slight difficulty, and you can help me out."

Redwood raised his eyebrows, and was secretly glad.

"The matter is--highly confidential."

"Go on," said Redwood. "Don't worry about that."

"I have recently been entrusted with a child--the child of--of an Exalted Personage."

Winkles coughed.

"You're getting on," said Redwood.

"I must confess it's largely your powders--and the reputation of my success with your little boy--There is, I cannot disguise, a strong feeling against its use. And yet I find that among the more intelligent--One must go quietly in these things, you know--little by little. Still, in the case of Her Serene High--I mean this new little patient of mine. As a matter of fact--the suggestion came from the parent. Or I should never--"

He struck Redwood as being embarrassed.

"I thought you had a doubt of the advisability of using these powders," said Redwood.

"Merely a passing doubt."

"You don't propose to discontinue--"

"In the case of your little boy? Certainly not!"

"So far as I can see, it would be murder."

"I wouldn't do it for the world."

"You shall have the powders," said Redwood.

"I suppose you couldn't--"

"No fear," said Redwood. "There isn't a recipe. It's no good, Winkles, if you'll pardon my frankness. I'll make you the powders myself."

"Just as well, perhaps," said Winkles, after a momentary hard stare at Redwood--"just as well." And then: "I can assure you I really don't mind in the least."

IV.

When Winkles had gone Bensington came and stood on the hearth-rug and looked down at Redwood.

"Her Serene Highness!" he remarked.

"Her Serene Highness!" said Redwood.

"It's the Princess of Weser Dreiburg!"

"No further than a third cousin."

"Redwood," said Bensington; "it's a curious thing to say, I know, but--do you think Winkles understands?"

"What?"

"Just what it is we have made.

"Does he really understand," said Bensington, dropping his voice and keeping his eye doorward, "that in the Family--the Family of his new patient--"

"Go on," said Redwood.

"Who have always been if anything a little under--under--"

"The Average?"

"Yes. And so very tactfully undistinguished in any way, he is going to produce a royal personage--an outsize royal personage--of that size. You know, Redwood, I'm not sure whether there is not something almost--treasonable ..."

He transferred his eyes from the door to Redwood.

Redwood flung a momentary gesture--index finger erect--at the fire. "By Jove!" he said, "he doesn't know!"

"That man," said Redwood, "doesn't know anything. That was his most exasperating quality as a student. Nothing. He passed all his examinations, he had all his facts--and he had just as much knowledge--as a rotating bookshelf containing the Times Encyclopedia. And he doesn't know anything now. He's Winkles, and incapable of really assimilating anything not immediately and directly related to his superficial self. He is utterly void of imagination and, as a consequence, incapable of knowledge. No one could possibly pass so many examinations and be so well dressed, so well done, and so successful as a doctor without that precise incapacity. That's it. And in spite of all he's seen and heard and been told, there he is--he has no idea whatever of what he has set going. He has got a Boom on, he's working it well on Boomfood, and some one has let him in to this new Royal Baby--and that's Boomier than ever! And the fact that Weser Dreiburg will presently have to face the gigantic problem of a thirty-odd-foot Princess not only hasn't entered his head, but couldn't--it couldn't!"

"There'll be a fearful row," said Bensington.

"In a year or so."

"So soon as they really see she is going on growing."

"Unless after their fashion--they hush it up."

"It's a lot to hush up."

"Rather!"

"I wonder what they'll do?"

"They never do anything--Royal tact."

"They're bound to do something."

"Perhaps she will."

"O Lord! Yes."

"They'll suppress her. Such things have been known."

Redwood burst into desperate laughter. "The redundant royalty--the bouncing babe in the Iron Mask!" he said. "They'll have to put her in the tallest tower of the old Weser Dreiburg castle and make holes in the ceilings as she grows from floor to floor! Well, I'm in the very same pickle. And Cossar and his three boys. And--Well, well."

"There'll be a fearful row," Bensington repeated, not joining in the laughter. "A fearful row."

"I suppose," he argued, "you've really thought it out thoroughly, Redwood. You're quite sure it wouldn't be wiser to warn Winkles, wean your little boy gradually, and--and rely upon the Theoretical Triumph?"

"I wish to goodness you'd spend half an hour in my nursery when the Food's a little late," said Redwood, with a note of exasperation in his voice; "then you wouldn't talk like that, Bensington. Besides--Fancy warning Winkles... No! The tide of this thing has caught us unawares, and whether we're frightened or whether we're not--we've got to swim!"

"I suppose we have," said Bensington, staring at his toes. "Yes. We've got to swim. And your boy will have to swim, and Cossar's boys--he's given it to all three of them. Nothing partial about Cossar--all or nothing! And Her Serene Highness. And everything. We are going on making the Food. Cossar also. We're only just in the dawn of the beginning, Redwood. It's evident all sorts of things are to follow. Monstrous great things. But I can't imagine them, Redwood. Except--"

He scanned his finger nails. He looked up at Redwood with eyes bland through his glasses.

"I've half a mind," he adventured, "that Caterham is right. At times.

It's going to destroy the Proportions of Things. It's going to dislocate--What isn't it going to dislocate?"

"Whatever it dislocates," said Redwood, "my little boy must have the Food."

They heard some one falling rapidly upstairs. Then Cossar put his head into the fiat. "Hullo!" he said at their expressions, and entering, "Well?"

They told him about the Princess.

"Difficult question!" he remarked. "Not a bit of it. She'll grow. Your boy'll grow. All the others you give it to 'll grow. Everything. Like anything. What's difficult about that? That's all right. A child could tell you that. Where's the bother?"

They tried to make it clear to him.

"Not go on with it!" he shrieked. "But--! You can't help yourselves now. It's what you're for. It's what Winkles is for. It's all right. Often wondered what Winkles was for. Now it's obvious. What's the trouble?

"Disturbance? Obviously. Upset things? Upset everything. Finally--upset every human concern. Plain as a pikestaff. They're going

to try and stop it, but they're too late. It's their way to be too late. You go on and start as much of it as you can. Thank God He has a use for you!"

"But the conflict!" said Bensington, "the stress! I don't know if you have imagined--"

"You ought to have been some sort of little vegetable, Bensington," said Cossar--"that's what you ought to have been. Something growing over a rockery. Here you are, fearfully and wonderfully made, and all you think you're made for is just to sit about and take your vittles. D'you think this world was made for old women to mop about in? Well, anyhow, you can't help yourselves now--you've got to go on."

"I suppose we must," said Redwood. "Slowly--"

"No!" said Cossar, in a huge shout. "No! Make as much as you can and as soon as you can. Spread it about!"

He was inspired to a stroke of wit. He parodied one of Redwood's curves with a vast upward sweep of his arm.

"Redwood!" he said, to point the allusion, "make it SO!"

V.

There is, it seems, an upward limit to the pride of maternity, and this in the case of Mrs. Redwood was reached when her offspring completed his sixth month of terrestrial existence, broke down his high-class bassinet-perambulator, and was brought home, bawling, in the milk-truck. Young Redwood at that time weighed fifty-nine and a half pounds, measured forty-eight inches in height, and gripped about sixty pounds. He was carried upstairs to the nursery by the cook and housemaid. After that, discovery was only a question of days. One afternoon Redwood came home from his laboratory to find his unfortunate wife deep in the fascinating pages of The Mighty Atom, and at the sight of him she put the book aside and ran violently forward and burst into tears on his shoulder.

"Tell me what you have done to him," she wailed. "Tell me what you have done." Redwood took her hand and led her to the sofa, while he tried to think of a satisfactory line of defence.

"It's all right, my dear," he said; "it's all right. You're only a little overwrought. It's that cheap perambulator. I've arranged for a bath-chair man to come round with something stouter to-morrow--"

Mrs. Redwood looked at him tearfully over the top of her handkerchief.

"A baby in a bath-chair?" she sobbed.

"Well, why not?"

"It's like a cripple."

"It's like a young giant, my dear, and you've no cause to be ashamed of him."

"You've done something to him, Dandy," she said. "I can see it in your face."

"Well, it hasn't stopped his growth, anyhow," said Redwood heartlessly.

"I knew," said Mrs. Redwood, and clenched her pocket-handkerchief ball fashion in one hand. She looked at him with a sudden change to severity. "What have you done to our child, Dandy?"

"What's wrong with him?"

"He's so big. He's a monster."

"Nonsense. He's as straight and clean a baby as ever a woman had. What's wrong with him?"

"Look at his size."

"That's all right. Look at the puny little brutes about us! He's the

finest baby--"

"He's too fine," said Mrs. Redwood.

"It won't go on," said Redwood reassuringly; "it's just a start he's taken."

But he knew perfectly well it would go on. And it did. By the time this baby was twelve months old he tottered just one inch under five feet high and scaled eight stone three; he was as big in fact as a St. Peter's in Vaticano cherub, and his affectionate clutch at the hair and features of visitors became the talk of West Kensington. They had an invalid's chair to carry him up and down to his nursery, and his special nurse, a muscular young person just out of training, used to take him for his airings in a Panhard 8 h.p. hill-climbing perambulator specially made to meet his requirement. It was lucky in every way that Redwood had his expert witness connection in addition to his professorship.

When one got over the shock of little Redwood's enormous size, he was, I am told by people who used to see him almost daily teufteufing slowly about Hyde Park, a singularly bright and pretty baby. He rarely cried or needed a comforter. Commonly he clutched a big rattle, and sometimes he went along hailing the bus-drivers and policemen along the road outside the railings as "Dadda!" and "Babba!" in a sociable, democratic way.

"There goes that there great Boomfood baby," the bus-driver used to say.

"Looks 'ealthy," the forward passenger would remark.

"Bottle fed," the bus-driver would explain. "They say it 'olds a gallon and 'ad to be specially made for 'im."

"Very 'ealthy child any'ow," the forward passenger would conclude.

When Mrs. Redwood realized that his growth was indeed going on indefinitely and logically--and this she really did for the first time when the motor-perambulator arrived--she gave way to a passion of grief. She declared she never wished to enter her nursery again, wished she was dead, wished the child was dead, wished everybody was dead, wished she had never married Redwood, wished no one ever married anybody, Ajaxed a little, and retired to her own room, where she lived almost exclusively on chicken broth for three days. When Redwood came to remonstrate with her, she banged pillows about and wept and tangled her hair.

"He's all right," said Redwood. "He's all the better for being big. You wouldn't like him smaller than other people's children."

"I want him to be like other children, neither smaller nor bigger. I wanted him to be a nice little boy, just as Georgina Phyllis is a nice little girl, and I wanted to bring him up nicely in a nice way, and here he is"--and the unfortunate woman's voice broke--"wearing number four grown-up shoes and being wheeled about by--booboo!--Petroleum!

"I can never love him," she wailed, "never! He's too much for me! I can never be a mother to him, such as I meant to be!"

But at last, they contrived to get her into the nursery, and there was Edward Monson Redwood ("Pantagruel" was only a later nickname) swinging in a specially strengthened rocking-chair and smiling and talking "goo" and "wow." And the heart of Mrs. Redwood warmed again to her child, and she went and held him in her arms and wept.

"They've done something to you," she sobbed, "and you'll grow and grow, dear; but whatever I can do to bring you up nice I'll do for you, whatever your father may say."

And Redwood, who had helped to bring her to the door, went down the passage much relieved. (Eh! but it's a base job this being a man--with women as they are!)

VI.

Before the year was out there were, in addition to Redwood's pioneer vehicle, quite a number of motor-perambulators to be seen in the west of London. I am told there were as many as eleven; but the most careful inquiries yield trustworthy evidence of only six within the Metropolitan area at that time. It would seem the stuff acted differently upon

different types of constitution. At first Herakleophorbia was not adapted to injection, and there can be no doubt that quite a considerable proportion of human beings are incapable of absorbing this substance in the normal course of digestion. It was given, for example, to Winkles' youngest boy; but he seems to have been as incapable of growth as, if Redwood was right, his father was incapable of knowledge. Others again, according to the Society for the Total Suppression of Boomfood, became in some inexplicable way corrupted by it, and perished at the onset of infantile disorders. The Cossar boys took to it with amazing avidity.

Of course a thing of this kind never comes with absolute simplicity of application into the life of man; growth in particular is a complex thing, and all generalisations must needs be a little inaccurate. But the general law of the Food would seem to be this, that when it could be taken into the system in any way it stimulated it in very nearly the same degree in all cases. It increased the amount of growth from six to seven times, and it did not go beyond that, whatever amount of the Food in excess was taken. Excess of Herakleophorbia indeed beyond the necessary minimum led, it was found, to morbid disturbances of nutrition, to cancer and tumours, ossifications, and the like. And once growth upon the large scale had begun, it was soon evident that it could only continue upon that scale, and that the continuous administration of Herakleophorbia in small but sufficient doses was imperative.

If it was discontinued while growth was still going on, there was first

a vague restlessness and distress, then a period of voracity--as in the case of the young rats at Hankey--and then the growing creature had a sort of exaggerated anaemia and sickened and died. Plants suffered in a similar way. This, however, applied only to the growth period. So soon as adolescence was attained--in plants this was represented by the formation of the first flower-buds--the need and appetite for Herakleophorbia diminished, and so soon as the plant or animal was fully adult, it became altogether independent of any further supply of the food. It was, as it were, completely established on the new scale. It was so completely established on the new scale that, as the thistles about Hickleybrow and the grass of the down side already demonstrated, its seed produced giant offspring after its kind.

And presently little Redwood, pioneer of the new race, first child of all who ate the food, was crawling about his nursery, smashing furniture, biting like a horse, pinching like a vice, and bawling gigantic baby talk at his "Nanny" and "Mammy" and the rather scared and awe-stricken "Daddy," who had set this mischief going.

The child was born with good intentions. "Padda be good, be good," he used to say as the breakables flew before him. "Padda" was his rendering of Pantagruel, the nickname Redwood imposed on him. And Cossar, disregarding certain Ancient Lights that presently led to trouble, did, after a conflict with the local building regulations, get building on a vacant piece of ground adjacent to Redwood's home, a comfortable well-lit playroom, schoolroom, and nursery for their four

boys--sixty feet square about this room was, and forty feet high.

Redwood fell in love with that great nursery as he and Cossar built it, and his interest in curves faded, as he had never dreamt it could fade, before the pressing needs of his son. "There is much," he said, "in fitting a nursery. Much.

"The walls, the things in it, they will all speak to this new mind of ours, a little more, a little less eloquently, and teach it, or fail to teach it a thousand things."

"Obviously," said Cossar, reaching hastily for his hat.

They worked together harmoniously, but Redwood supplied most of the educational theory required ...

They had the walls and woodwork painted with a cheerful vigour; for the most part a slightly warmed white prevailed, but there were bands of bright clean colour to enforce the simple lines of construction. "Clean colours we must have," said Redwood, and in one place had a neat horizontal band of squares, in which crimson and purple, orange and lemon, blues and greens, in many hues and many shades, did themselves honour. These squares the giant children should arrange and rearrange to their pleasure. "Decorations must follow," said Redwood; "let them first get the range of all the tints, and then this may go away. There is no reason why one should bias them in favour of any particular colour or

design."

Then, "The place must be full of interest," said Redwood. "Interest is food for a child, and blankness torture and starvation. He must have pictures galore." There were no pictures hung about the room for any permanent service, however, but blank frames were provided into which new pictures would come and pass thence into a portfolio so soon as their fresh interest had passed. There was one window that looked down the length of a street, and in addition, for an added interest, Redwood had contrived above the roof of the nursery a camera obscura that watched the Kensington High Street and not a little of the Gardens.

In one corner that most worthy implement, an Abacus, four feet square, a specially strengthened piece of ironmongery with rounded corners, awaited the young giants' incipient computations. There were few woolly lambs and such-like idols, but instead Cossar, without explanation, had brought one day in three four-wheelers a great number of toys (all just too big for the coming children to swallow) that could be piled up, arranged in rows, rolled about, bitten, made to flap and rattle, smacked together, felt over, pulled out, opened, closed, and mauled and experimented with to an interminable extent. There were many bricks of wood in diverse colours, oblong and cuboid, bricks of polished china, bricks of transparent glass and bricks of india-rubber; there were slabs and slates; there were cones, truncated cones, and cylinders; there were oblate and prolate spheroids, balls of varied substances, solid and hollow, many boxes of diverse size and shape, with hinged lids and screw

lids and fitting lids, and one or two to catch and lock; there were bands of elastic and leather, and a number of rough and sturdy little objects of a size together that could stand up steadily and suggest the shape of a man. "Give 'em these," said Cossar. "One at a time."

These things Redwood arranged in a locker in one corner. Along one side of the room, at a convenient height for a six-or eight-foot child, there was a blackboard, on which the youngsters might flourish in white and coloured chalk, and near by a sort of drawing block, from which sheet after sheet might be torn, and on which they could draw in charcoal, and a little desk there was, furnished with great carpenter's pencils of varying hardness and a copious supply of paper, on which the boys might first scribble and then draw more neatly. And moreover Redwood gave orders, so far ahead did his imagination go, for specially large tubes of liquid paint and boxes of pastels against the time when they should be needed. He laid in a cask or so of plasticine and modelling clay. "At first he and his tutor shall model together," he said, "and when he is more skilful he shall copy casts and perhaps animals. And that reminds me, I must also have made for him a box of tools!

"Then books. I shall have to look out a lot of books to put in his way, and they'll have to be big type. Now what sort of books will he need? There is his imagination to be fed. That, after all, is the crown of every education. The crown--as sound habits of mind and conduct are the throne. No imagination at all is brutality; a base imagination is lust and cowardice; but a noble imagination is God walking the earth again.

He must dream too of a dainty fairy-land and of all the quaint little things of life, in due time. But he must feed chiefly on the splendid real; he shall have stories of travel through all the world, travels and adventures and how the world was won; he shall have stories of beasts, great books splendidly and clearly done of animals and birds and plants and creeping things, great books about the deeps of the sky and the mystery of the sea; he shall have histories and maps of all the empires the world has seen, pictures and stories of all the tribes and habits and customs of men. And he must have books and pictures to quicken his sense of beauty, subtle Japanese pictures to make him love the subtler beauties of bird and tendril and falling flower, and western pictures too, pictures of gracious men and women, sweet groupings, and broad views of land and sea. He shall have books on the building of houses and palaces; he shall plan rooms and invent cities--

"I think I must give him a little theatre.

"Then there is music!"

Redwood thought that over, and decided that his son might best begin with a very pure-sounding harmonicon of one octave, to which afterwards there could be an extension. "He shall play with this first, sing to it and give names to the notes," said Redwood, "and afterwards--?"

He stared up at the window-sill overhead and measured the size of the room with his eye.

"They'll have to build his piano in here," he said. "Bring it in in pieces."

He hovered about amidst his preparations, a pensive, dark, little figure. If you could have seen him there he would have looked to you like a ten-inch man amidst common nursery things. A great rug--indeed it was a Turkey carpet--four hundred square feet of it, upon which young Redwood was soon to crawl--stretched to the grill-guarded electric radiator that was to warm the whole place. A man from Cossar's hung amidst scaffolding overhead, fixing the great frame that was to hold the transitory pictures. A blotting-paper book for plant specimens as big as a house door leant against the wall, and from it projected a gigantic stalk, a leaf edge or so and one flower of chickweed, all of that gigantic size that was soon to make Urshot famous throughout the botanical world ...

A sort of incredulity came to Redwood as he stood among these things.

"If it really is going on--" said Redwood, staring up at the remote ceiling.

From far away came a sound like the bellowing of a Mafficking bull, almost as if in answer.

"It's going on all right," said Redwood. "Evidently."

There followed resounding blows upon a table, followed by a vast crowing shout, "Gooloo! Boozoo! Bzz ..."

"The best thing I can do," said Redwood, following out some divergent line of thought, "is to teach him myself."

That beating became more insistent. For a moment it seemed to Redwood that it caught the rhythm of an engine's throbbing--the engine he could have imagined of some great train of events that bore down upon him. Then a descendant flight of sharper beats broke up that effect, and were repeated.

"Come in," he cried, perceiving that some one rapped, and the door that was big enough for a cathedral opened slowly a little way. The new winch ceased to creak, and Bensington appeared in the crack, gleaming benevolently under his protruded baldness and over his glasses.

"I've ventured round to see," he whispered in a confidentially furtive manner.

"Come in," said Redwood, and he did, shutting the door behind him.

He walked forward, hands behind his back, advanced a few steps, and peered up with a bird-like movement at the dimensions about him. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Every time I come in," he said, with a subdued note in his voice, "it strikes me as--'Big.'"

"Yes," said Redwood, surveying it all again also, as if in an endeavour to keep hold of the visible impression. "Yes. They're going to be big too, you know."

"I know," said Bensington, with a note that was nearly awe. "Very big."

They looked at one another, almost, as it were, apprehensively.

"Very big indeed," said Bensington, stroking the bridge of his nose, and with one eye that watched Redwood doubtfully for a confirmatory expression. "All of them, you know--fearfully big. I don't seem able to imagine--even with this--just how big they're all going to be."