BOOK III.

THE HARVEST OF THE FOOD.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

THE ALTERED WORLD.

I.

Change played in its new fashion with the world for twenty years. To most men the new things came little by little and day by day, remarkably enough, but not so abruptly as to overwhelm. But to one man at least the full accumulation of those two decades of the Food's work was to be revealed suddenly and amazingly in one day. For our purpose it is convenient to take him for that one day and to tell something of the things he saw. This man was a convict, a prisoner for life--his crime is no concern of ours--whom the law saw fit to pardon after twenty years. One summer morning this poor wretch, who had left the world a young man

of three-and-twenty, found himself thrust out again from the grey simplicity of toil and discipline, that had become his life, into a dazzling freedom. They had put unaccustomed clothes upon him; his hair had been growing for some weeks, and he had parted it now for some days, and there he stood, in a sort of shabby and clumsy newness of body and mind, blinking with his eyes and blinking indeed with his soul, outside again, trying to realise one incredible thing, that after all he was again for a little while in the world of life, and for all other incredible things, totally unprepared. He was so fortunate as to have a brother who cared enough for their distant common memories to come and meet him and clasp his hand--a brother he had left a little lad, and who was now a bearded prosperous man--whose very eyes were unfamiliar. And together he and this stranger from his kindred came down into the town of Dover, saying little to one another and feeling many things.

They sat for a space in a public-house, the one answering the questions of the other about this person and that, reviving queer old points of view, brushing aside endless new aspects and new perspectives, and then it was time to go to the station and take the London train. Their names and the personal things they had to talk of do not matter to our story, but only the changes and all the strangeness that this poor returning soul found in the once familiar world.

In Dover itself he remarked little except the goodness of beer from pewter--never before had there been such a draught of beer, and it brought tears of gratitude to his eyes. "Beer's as good as ever," said

he, believing it infinitely better....

It was only as the train rattled them past Folkestone that he could look out beyond his more immediate emotions, to see what had happened to the world. He peered out of the window. "It's sunny," he said for the twelfth time. "I couldn't ha' had better weather." And then for the first time it dawned upon him that there were novel disproportions in the world. "Lord sakes," he cried, sitting up and looking animated for the first time, "but them's mortal great thissels growing out there on the bank by that broom. If so be they be thissels? Or 'ave I been forgetting?" But they were thistles, and what he took for tall bushes of broom was the new grass, and amidst these things a company of British soldiers--red-coated as ever--was skirmishing in accordance with the directions of the drill book that had been partially revised after the Boer War. Then whack! into a tunnel, and then into Sandling Junction, which was now embedded and dark--its lamps were all alight--in a great thicket of rhododendron that had crept out of some adjacent gardens and grown enormously up the valley. There was a train of trucks on the Sandgate siding piled high with rhododendron logs, and here it was the returning citizen heard first of Boomfood.

As they sped out into a country again that seemed absolutely unchanged, the two brothers were hard at their explanations. The one was full of eager, dull questions; the other had never thought, had never troubled to see the thing as a single fact, and he was allusive and difficult to follow. "It's this here Boomfood stuff," he said, touching his bottom

rock of knowledge. "Don't you know? 'Aven't they told you--any of 'em? Boomfood! You know--Boomfood. What all the election's about. Scientific sort of stuff. 'Asn't no one ever told you?"

He thought prison had made his brother a fearful duffer not to know that.

They made wide shots at each other by way of question and answer. Between these scraps of talk were intervals of window-gazing. At first the man's interest in things was vague and general. His imagination had been busy with what old so-and-so would say, how so-and-so would look, how he would say to all and sundry certain things that would present his "putting away" in a mitigated light. This Boomfood came in at first as it were a thing in an odd paragraph of the newspapers, then as a source of intellectual difficulty with his brother. But it came to him presently that Boomfood was persistently coming in upon any topic he began.

In those days the world was a patchwork of transition, so that this great new fact came to him in a series of shocks of contrast. The process of change had not been uniform; it had spread from one centre of distribution here and another centre there. The country was in patches: great areas where the Food was still to come, and areas where it was already in the soil and in the air, sporadic and contagious. It was a bold new motif creeping in among ancient and venerable airs.

The contrast was very vivid indeed along the line from Dover to London at that time. For a space they traversed just such a country-side as he had known since his childhood, the small oblongs of field, hedge-lined, of a size for pigmy horses to plough, the little roads three cart-widths wide, the elms and oaks and poplars dotting these fields about, little thickets of willow beside the streams; ricks of hay no higher than a giant's knees, dolls' cottages with diamond panes, brickfields, and straggling village streets, the larger houses of the petty great, flower-grown railway banks, garden-set stations, and all the little things of the vanished nineteenth century still holding out against Immensity. Here and there would be a patch of wind-sown, wind-tattered giant thistle defying the axe; here and there a ten-foot puff-ball or the ashen stems of some burnt-out patch of monster grass; but that was all there was to hint at the coming of the Food.

For a couple of score of miles there was nothing else to foreshadow in any way the strange bigness of the wheat and of the weeds that were hidden from him not a dozen miles from his route just over the hills in the Cheasing Eyebright valley. And then presently the traces of the Food would begin. The first striking thing was the great new viaduct at Tonbridge, where the swamp of the choked Medway (due to a giant variety of Chara) began in those days. Then again the little country, and then, as the petty multitudinous immensity of London spread out under its haze, the traces of man's fight to keep out greatness became abundant and incessant.

In that south-eastern region of London at that time, and all about where Cossar and his children lived, the Food had become mysteriously insurgent at a hundred points; the little life went on amidst daily portents that only the deliberation of their increase, the slow parallel growth of usage to their presence, had robbed of their warning. But this returning citizen peered out to see for the first time the facts of the Food strange and predominant, scarred and blackened areas, big unsightly defences and preparations, barracks and arsenals that this subtle, persistent influence had forced into the life of men.

Here, on an ampler scale, the experience of the first Experimental Farm had been repeated time and again. It had been in the inferior and accidental things of life--under foot and in waste places, irregularly and irrelevantly--that the coming of a new force and new issues had first declared itself. There were great evil-smelling yards and enclosures where some invincible jungle of weed furnished fuel for gigantic machinery (little cockneys came to stare at its clangorous oiliness and tip the men a sixpence); there were roads and tracks for big motors and vehicles--roads made of the interwoven fibres of hypertrophied hemp; there were towers containing steam sirens that could yell at once and warn the world against any new insurgence of vermin, or, what was queerer, venerable church towers conspicuously fitted with a mechanical scream. There were little red-painted refuge huts and garrison shelters, each with its 300-yard rifle range, where the riflemen practised daily with soft-nosed ammunition at targets in the shape of monstrous rats.

Six times since the day of the Skinners there had been outbreaks of giant rats--each time from the south-west London sewers, and now they were as much an accepted fact there as tigers in the delta by Calcutta....

The man's brother had bought a paper in a heedless sort of way at Sandling, and at last this chanced to catch the eye of the released man. He opened the unfamiliar sheets--they seemed to him to be smaller, more numerous, and different in type from the papers of the times before--and he found himself confronted with innumerable pictures about things so strange as to be uninteresting, and with tall columns of printed matter whose headings, for the most part, were as unmeaning as though they had been written in a foreign tongue--"Great Speech by Mr. Caterham"; "The Boomfood Laws."

"Who's this here Caterham?" he asked, in an attempt to make conversation.

"He's all right," said his brother.

"Ah! Sort of politician, eh?"

"Goin' to turn out the Government. Jolly well time he did."

"Ah!" He reflected. "I suppose all the lot I used to

know--Chamberlain, Rosebery--all that lot--What?"

His brother had grasped his wrist and pointed out of the window.

"That's the Cossars!" The eyes of the released prisoner followed the finger's direction and saw--

"My Gawd!" he cried, for the first time really overcome with amazement. The paper dropped into final forgottenness between his feet. Through the trees he could see very distinctly, standing in an easy attitude, the legs wide apart and the hand grasping a ball as if about to throw it, a gigantic human figure a good forty feet high. The figure glittered in the sunlight, clad in a suit of woven white metal and belted with a broad belt of steel. For a moment it focussed all attention, and then the eye was wrested to another more distant Giant who stood prepared to catch, and it became apparent that the whole area of that great bay in the hills just north of Sevenoaks had been scarred to gigantic ends.

A hugely banked entrenchment overhung the chalk pit, in which stood the house, a monstrous squat Egyptian shape that Cossar had built for his sons when the Giant Nursery had served its turn, and behind was a great dark shed that might have covered a cathedral, in which a spluttering incandescence came and went, and from out of which came a Titanic hammering to beat upon the ear. Then the attention leapt back to the giant as the great ball of iron-bound timber soared up out of his hand.

The two men stood up and stared. The ball seemed as big as a cask.

"Caught!" cried the man from prison, as a tree blotted out the thrower.

The train looked on these things only for the fraction of a minute and then passed behind trees into the Chislehurst tunnel. "My Gawd!" said the man from prison again, as the darkness closed about them. "Why! that chap was as 'igh as a 'ouse."

"That's them young Cossars," said his brother, jerking his head allusively--"what all this trouble's about...."

They emerged again to discover more siren-surmounted towers, more red huts, and then the clustering villas of the outer suburbs. The art of bill-sticking had lost nothing in the interval, and from countless tall hoardings, from house ends, from palings, and a hundred such points of vantage came the polychromatic appeals of the great Boomfood election. "Caterham," "Boomfood," and "Jack the Giant-killer" again and again and again, and monstrous caricatures and distortions--a hundred varieties of misrepresentations of those great and shining figures they had passed so nearly only a few minutes before....

II.

It had been the purpose of the younger brother to do a very magnificent

thing, to celebrate this return to life by a dinner at some restaurant of indisputable quality, a dinner that should be followed by all that glittering succession of impressions the Music Halls of those days were so capable of giving. It was a worthy plan to wipe off the more superficial stains of the prison house by this display of free indulgence; but so far as the second item went the plan was changed. The dinner stood, but there was a desire already more powerful than the appetite for shows, already more efficient in turning the man's mind away from his grim prepossession with his past than any theatre could be, and that was an enormous curiosity and perplexity about this Boomfood and these Boom children--this new portentous giantry that seemed to dominate the world. "I 'aven't the 'ang of 'em," he said. "They disturve me."

His brother had that fineness of mind that can even set aside a contemplated hospitality. "It's your evening, dear old boy," he said. "We'll try to get into the mass meeting at the People's Palace."

And at last the man from prison had the luck to find himself wedged into a packed multitude and staring from afar at a little brightly lit platform under an organ and a gallery. The organist had been playing something that had set boots tramping as the people swarmed in; but that was over now.

Hardly had the man from prison settled into place and done his quarrel with an importunate stranger who elbowed, before Caterham came. He

walked out of a shadow towards the middle of the platform, the most insignificant little pigmy, away there in the distance, a little black figure with a pink dab for a face,--in profile one saw his quite distinctive aquiline nose--a little figure that trailed after it most inexplicably--a cheer. A cheer it was that began away there and grew and spread. A little spluttering of voices about the platform at first that suddenly leapt up into a flame of sound and swept athwart the whole mass of humanity within the building and without. How they cheered! Hooray! Hooray!

No one in all those myriads cheered like the man from prison. The tears poured down his face, and he only stopped cheering at last because the thing had choked him. You must have been in prison as long as he before you can understand, or even begin to understand, what it means to a man to let his lungs go in a crowd. (But for all that he did not even pretend to himself that he knew what all this emotion was about.) Hooray! O God!--Hoo-ray!

And then a sort of silence. Caterham had subsided to a conspicuous patience, and subordinate and inaudible persons were saying and doing formal and insignificant things. It was like hearing voices through the noise of leaves in spring. "Wawawawa---" What did it matter? People in the audience talked to one another. "Wawawawawa---" the thing went on. Would that grey-headed duffer never have done? Interrupting? Of course they were interrupting. "Wa, wa, wa, wa---" But shall we hear Caterham any better?

Meanwhile at any rate there was Caterham to stare at, and one could stand and study the distant prospect of the great man's features. He was easy to draw was this man, and already the world had him to study at leisure on lamp chimneys and children's plates, on Anti-Boomfood medals and Anti-Boomfood flags, on the selvedges of Caterham silks and cottons and in the linings of Good Old English Caterham hats. He pervades all the caricature of that time. One sees him as a sailor standing to an old-fashioned gun, a port-fire labelled "New Boomfood Laws" in his hand; while in the sea wallows that huge, ugly, threatening monster, "Boomfood;" or he is cap-a-pie in armour, St. George's cross on shield and helm, and a cowardly titanic Caliban sitting amidst desecrations at the mouth of a horrid cave declines his gauntlet of the "New Boomfood Regulations;" or he comes flying down as Perseus and rescues a chained and beautiful Andromeda (labelled distinctly about her belt as "Civilisation") from a wallowing waste of sea monster bearing upon its various necks and claws "Irreligion," "Trampling Egotism," "Mechanism," "Monstrosity," and the like. But it was as "Jack the Giant-killer" that the popular imagination considered Caterham most correctly cast, and it was in the vein of a Jack the Giant-killer poster that the man from prison, enlarged that distant miniature.

The "Wawawawa" came abruptly to an end.

He's done. He's sitting down. Yes! No! Yes! It's Caterham! "Caterham!" "Caterham!" And then came the cheers.

It takes a multitude to make such a stillness as followed that disorder of cheering. A man alone in a wilderness;--it's stillness of a sort no doubt, but he hears himself breathe, he hears himself move, he hears all sorts of things. Here the voice of Caterham was the one single thing heard, a thing very bright and clear, like a little light burning in a black velvet recess. Hear indeed! One heard him as though he spoke at one's elbow.

It was stupendously effective to the man from prison, that gesticulating little figure in a halo of light, in a halo of rich and swaying sounds; behind it, partially effaced as it were, sat its supporters on the platform, and in the foreground was a wide perspective of innumerable backs and profiles, a vast multitudinous attention. That little figure seemed to have absorbed the substance from them all.

Caterham spoke of our ancient institutions. "Earearear," roared the crowd. "Ear! ear!" said the man from prison. He spoke of our ancient spirit of order and justice. "Earearear!" roared the crowd. "Ear! Ear!" cried the man from prison, deeply moved. He spoke of the wisdom of our forefathers, of the slow growth of venerable institutions, of moral and social traditions, that fitted our English national characteristics as the skin fits the hand. "Ear! Ear!" groaned the man from prison, with tears of excitement on his cheeks. And now all these things were to go into the melting pot. Yes, into the melting pot! Because three men in London twenty years ago had seen fit to mix something indescribable in a

bottle, all the order and sanctity of things--Cries of "No! No!"--Well, if it was not to be so, they must exert themselves, they must say good-bye to hesitation--Here there came a gust of cheering. They must say good-bye to hesitation and half measures.

"We have heard, gentlemen," cried Caterham, "of nettles that become giant nettles. At first they are no more than other nettles--little plants that a firm hand may grasp and wrench away; but if you leave them--if you leave them, they grow with such a power of poisonous expansion that at last you must needs have axe and rope, you must needs have danger to life and limb, you must needs have toil and distress--men may be killed in their felling, men may be killed in their felling---"

There came a stir and interruption, and then the man from prison heard Caterham's voice again, ringing clear and strong: "Learn about Boomfood from Boomfood itself and--" He paused--"Grasp your nettle before it is too late!"

He stopped and stood wiping his lips. "A crystal," cried some one, "a crystal," and then came that same strange swift growth to thunderous tumult, until the whole world seemed cheering....

The man from prison came out of the hall at last, marvellously stirred, and with that in his face that marks those who have seen a vision. He knew, every one knew; his ideas were no longer vague. He had come back to a world in crisis, to the immediate decision of a stupendous issue.

He must play his part in the great conflict like a man--like a free, responsible man. The antagonism presented itself as a picture. On the one hand those easy gigantic mail-clad figures of the morning--one saw them now in a different light--on the other this little black-clad gesticulating creature under the limelight, that pigmy thing with its ordered flow of melodious persuasion, its little, marvellously penetrating voice, John Caterham--"Jack the Giant-killer." They must all unite to "grasp the nettle" before it was "too late."

III.

The tallest and strongest and most regarded of all the children of the Food were the three sons of Cossar. The mile or so of land near Sevenoaks in which their boyhood passed became so trenched, so dug out and twisted about, so covered with sheds and huge working models and all the play of their developing powers, it was like no other place on earth. And long since it had become too little for the things they sought to do. The eldest son was a mighty schemer of wheeled engines; he had made himself a sort of giant bicycle that no road in the world had room for, no bridge could bear. There it stood, a great thing of wheels and engines, capable of two hundred and fifty miles an hour, useless save that now and then he would mount it and fling himself backwards and forwards across that cumbered work-yard. He had meant to go around the little world with it; he had made it with that intention, while he was still no more than a dreaming boy. Now its spokes were rusted deep

red like wounds, wherever the enamel had been chipped away.

"You must make a road for it first, Sonnie," Cossar had said, "before you can do that."

So one morning about dawn the young giant and his brothers had set to work to make a road about the world. They seem to have had an inkling of opposition impending, and they had worked with remarkable vigour. The world had discovered them soon enough, driving that road as straight as a flight of a bullet towards the English Channel, already some miles of it levelled and made and stamped hard. They had been stopped before midday by a vast crowd of excited people, owners of land, land agents, local authorities, lawyers, policemen, soldiers even.

"We're making a road," the biggest boy had explained.

"Make a road by all means," said the leading lawyer on the ground, "but please respect the rights of other people. You have already infringed the private rights of twenty-seven private proprietors; let alone the special privileges and property of an urban district board, nine parish councils, a county council, two gasworks, and a railway company...."

"Goodney!" said the elder boy Cossar.

"You will have to stop it."

"But don't you want a nice straight road in the place of all these rotten rutty little lanes?"

"I won't say it wouldn't be advantageous, but--"

"It isn't to be done," said the eldest Cossar boy, picking up his tools.

"Not in this way," said the lawyer, "certainly."

"How is it to be done?"

The leading lawyer's answer had been complicated and vague.

Cossar had come down to see the mischief his children had done, and reproved them severely and laughed enormously and seemed to be extremely happy over the affair. "You boys must wait a bit," he shouted up to them, "before you can do things like that."

"The lawyer told us we must begin by preparing a scheme, and getting special powers and all sorts of rot. Said it would take us years."

"We'll have a scheme before long, little boy," cried Cossar, hands to his mouth as he shouted, "never fear. For a bit you'd better play about and make models of the things you want to do."

They did as he told them like obedient sons.

But for all that the Cossar lads brooded a little.

"It's all very well," said the second to the first, "but I don't always want just to play about and plan, I want to do something real, you know. We didn't come into this world so strong as we are, just to play about in this messy little bit of ground, you know, and take little walks and keep out of the towns"--for by that time they were forbidden all boroughs and urban districts, "Doing nothing's just wicked. Can't we find out something the little people want done and do it for them--just for the fun of doing it?

"Lots of them haven't houses fit to live in," said the second boy, "Let's go and build 'em a house close up to London, that will hold heaps and heaps of them and be ever so comfortable and nice, and let's make 'em a nice little road to where they all go and do business--nice straight little road, and make it all as nice as nice. We'll make it all so clean and pretty that they won't any of them be able to live grubby and beastly like most of them do now. Water enough for them to wash with, we'll have--you know they're so dirty now that nine out of ten of their houses haven't even baths in them, the filthy little skunks! You know, the ones that have baths spit insults at the ones that haven't, instead of helping them to get them--and call 'em the Great Unwashed---You know. We'll alter all that. And we'll make electricity light and cook and clean up for them, and all. Fancy! They make their women--women who are going to be mothers--crawl about and scrub floors!

"We could make it all beautifully. We could bank up a valley in that range of hills over there and make a nice reservoir, and we could make a big place here to generate our electricity and have it all simply lovely. Couldn't we, brother? And then perhaps they'd let us do some other things."

"Yes," said the elder brother, "we could do it very nice for them."

"Then let's," said the second brother.

"I don't mind," said the elder brother, and looked about for a handy tool.

And that led to another dreadful bother.

Agitated multitudes were at them in no time, telling them for a thousand reasons to stop, telling them to stop for no reason at all--babbling, confused, and varied multitudes. The place they were building was too high--it couldn't possibly be safe. It was ugly; it interfered with the letting of proper-sized houses in the neighbourhood; it ruined the tone of the neighbourhood; it was unneighbourly; it was contrary to the Local Building Regulations; it infringed the right of the local authority to muddle about with a minute expensive electric supply of its own; it interfered with the concerns of the local water company.

Local Government Board clerks roused themselves to judicial obstruction. The little lawyer turned up again to represent about a dozen threatened interests; local landowners appeared in opposition; people with mysterious claims claimed to be bought off at exorbitant rates; the Trades Unions of all the building trades lifted up collective voices; and a ring of dealers in all sorts of building material became a bar. Extraordinary associations of people with prophetic visions of aesthetic horrors rallied to protect the scenery of the place where they would build the great house, of the valley where they would bank up the water. These last people were absolutely the worst asses of the lot, the Cossar boys considered. That beautiful house of the Cossar boys was just like a walking-stick thrust into a wasps' nest, in no time.

"I never did!" said the elder boy.

"We can't go on," said the second brother.

"Rotten little beasts they are," said the third of the brothers; "we can't do anything!"

"Even when it's for their own comfort. Such a nice place we'd have made for them too."

"They seem to spend their silly little lives getting in each other's way," said the eldest boy, "Rights and laws and regulations and rascalities; it's like a game of spellicans.... Well, anyhow, they'll

have to live in their grubby, dirty, silly little houses for a bit longer. It's very evident we can't go on with this."

And the Cossar children left that great house unfinished, a mere hole of foundations and the beginning of a wall, and sulked back to their big enclosure. After a time the hole was filled with water and with stagnation and weeds, and vermin, and the Food, either dropped there by the sons of Cossar or blowing thither as dust, set growth going in its usual fashion. Water voles came out over the country and did infinite havoc, and one day a farmer caught his pigs drinking there, and instantly and with great presence of mind--for he knew: of the great hog of Oakham--slew them all. And from that deep pool it was the mosquitoes came, quite terrible mosquitoes, whose only virtue was that the sons of Cossar, after being bitten for a little, could stand the thing no longer, but chose a moonlight night when law and order were abed and drained the water clean away into the river by Brook.

But they left the big weeds and the big water voles and all sorts of big undesirable things still living and breeding on the site they had chosen--the site on which the fair great house of the little people might have towered to heaven ...

IV.

That had been in the boyhood of the Sons, but now they were nearly men,

And the chains had been tightening upon them and tightening with every year of growth. Each year they grew, and the Food spread and great things multiplied, each year the stress and tension rose. The Food had been at first for the great mass of mankind a distant marvel, and now It was coming home to every threshold, and threatening, pressing against and distorting the whole order of life. It blocked this, it overturned that; it changed natural products, and by changing natural products it stopped employments and threw men out of work by the hundred thousands; it swept over boundaries and turned the world of trade into a world of cataclysms: no wonder mankind hated it.

And since it is easier to hate animate than inanimate things, animals more than plants, and one's fellow-men more completely than any animals, the fear and trouble engendered by giant nettles and six-foot grass blades, awful insects and tiger-like vermin, grew all into one great power of detestation that aimed itself with a simple directness at that scattered band of great human beings, the Children of the Food. That hatred had become the central force in political affairs. The old party lines had been traversed and effaced altogether under the insistence of these newer issues, and the conflict lay now with the party of the temporisers, who were for putting little political men to control and regulate the Food, and the party of reaction for whom Caterharn spoke, speaking always with a more sinister ambiguity, crystallising his intention first in one threatening phrase and then another, now that men must "prune the bramble growths," now that they must find a "cure for elephantiasis," and at last upon the eve of the election that they must

"Grasp the nettle."

One day the three sons of Cossar, who were now no longer boys but men, sat among the masses of their futile work and talked together after their fashion of all these things. They had been working all day at one of a series of great and complicated trenches their father had bid them make, and now it was sunset, and they sat in the little garden space before the great house and looked at the world and rested, until the little servants within should say their food was ready.

You must figure these mighty forms, forty feet high the least of them was, reclining on a patch of turf that would have seemed a stubble of reeds to a common man. One sat up and chipped earth from his huge boots with an iron girder he grasped in his hand; the second rested on his elbow; the third whittled a pine tree into shape and made a smell of resin in the air. They were clothed not in cloth but in under-garments of woven rope and outer clothes of felted aluminium wire; they were shod with timber and iron, and the links and buttons and belts of their clothing were all of plated steel. The great single-storeyed house they lived in, Egyptian in its massiveness, half built of monstrous blocks of chalk and half excavated from the living rock of the hill, had a front a full hundred feet in height, and beyond, the chimneys and wheels, the cranes and covers of their work sheds rose marvellously against the sky. Through a circular window in the house there was visible a spout from which some white-hot metal dripped and dripped in measured drops into a receptacle out of sight. The place was enclosed and rudely fortified by

monstrous banks of earth, backed with steel both over the crests of the Downs above and across the dip of the valley. It needed something of common size to mark the nature of the scale. The train that came rattling from Sevenoaks athwart their vision, and presently plunged into the tunnel out of their sight, looked by contrast with them like some small-sized automatic toy.

"They have made all the woods this side of Ightham out of bounds," said one, "and moved the board that was out by Knockholt two miles and more this way."

"It is the least they could do," said the youngest, after a pause. "They are trying to take the wind out of Caterham's sails."

"It's not enough for that, and--it is almost too much for us," said the third.

"They are cutting us off from Brother Redwood. Last time I went to him the red notices had crept a mile in, either way. The road to him along the Downs is no more than a narrow lane."

The speaker thought. "What has come to our brother Redwood?"

"Why?" said the eldest brother.

The speaker hacked a bough from his pine. "He was like--as though he

wasn't awake. He didn't seem to listen to what I had to say. And he said something of--love."

The youngest tapped his girder on the edge of his iron sole and laughed. "Brother Redwood," he said, "has dreams."

Neither spoke for a space. Then the eldest brother said, "This cooping up and cooping up grows more than I can bear. At last, I believe, they will draw a line round our boots and tell us to live on that."

The middle brother swept aside a heap of pine boughs with one hand and shifted his attitude. "What they do now is nothing to what they will do when Caterham has power."

"If he gets power," said the youngest brother, smiting the ground with his girder.

"As he will," said the eldest, staring at his feet.

The middle brother ceased his lopping, and his eye went to the great banks that sheltered them about. "Then, brothers," he said, "our youth will be over, and, as Father Redwood said to us long ago, we must quit ourselves like men."

"Yes," said the eldest brother; "but what exactly does that mean? Just what does it mean--when that day of trouble comes?"

He too glanced at those rude vast suggestions of entrenchment about them, looking not so much at them as through them and over the hills to the innumerable multitudes beyond. Something of the same sort came into all their minds--a vision of little people coming out to war, in a flood, the little people, inexhaustible, incessant, malignant....

"They are little," said the youngest brother; "but they have numbers beyond counting, like the sands of the sea."

"They have arms--they have weapons even, that our brothers in Sunderland have made."

"Besides, Brothers, except for vermin, except for little accidents with evil things, what have we seen of killing?"

"I know," said the eldest brother. "For all that--we are what we are. When the day of trouble comes we must do the thing we have to do."

He closed his knife with a snap--the blade was the length of a man--and used his new pine staff to help himself rise. He stood up and turned towards the squat grey immensity of the house. The crimson of the sunset caught him as he rose, caught the mail and clasps about his neck and the woven metal of his arms, and to the eyes of his brother it seemed as though he was suddenly suffused with blood ...

As the young giant rose a little black figure became visible to him
against that western incandescence on the top of the embankment that
towered above the summit of the down. The black limbs waved in ungainly
gestures. Something in the fling of the limbs suggested haste to the
young giant's mind. He waved his pine mast in reply, filled the whole
valley with his vast Hullo! threw a "Something's up" to his brothers,
and set off in twenty-foot strides to meet and help his father.

V.

It chanced too that a young man who was not a giant was delivering his
soul about these sons of Cossar just at that same time. He had come over
the hills beyond Sevenoaks, he and his friend, and he it was did the
talking. In the hedge as they came along they had heard a pitiful
squealing, and had intervened to rescue three nestling tits from the
attack of a couple of giant ants. That adventure it was had set him
talking.

"Reactionary!" he was saying, as they came within sight of the Cossar
encampment. "Who wouldn't be reactionary? Look at that square of ground,
that space of God's earth that was once sweet and fair, torn,
desecrated, disembowelled! Those sheds! That great wind-wheel! That
monstrous wheeled machine! Those dykes! Look at those three monsters
squatting there, plotting some ugly devilment or other! Look--look at
all the land!"

His friend glanced at his face. "You have been listening to Caterham," he said.

"Using my eyes. Looking a little into the peace and order of the past we leave behind. This foul Food is the last shape of the Devil, still set as ever upon the ruin of our world. Think what the world must have been before our days, what it was still when our mothers bore us, and see it now! Think how these slopes once smiled under the golden harvest, how the hedges, full of sweet little flowers, parted the modest portion of this man from that, how the ruddy farmhouses dotted the land, and the voice of the church bells from yonder tower stilled the whole world each Sabbath into Sabbath prayer. And now, every year, still more and more of monstrous weeds, of monstrous vermin, and these giants growing all about us, straddling over us, blundering against all that is subtle and sacred in our world. Why here--Look!"

He pointed, and his friend's eyes followed the line of his white finger.

"One of their footmarks. See! It has smashed itself three feet deep and more, a pitfall for horse and rider, a trap to the unwary. There is a briar rose smashed to death; there is grass uprooted and a teazle crushed aside, a farmer's drain pipe snapped and the edge of the pathway broken down. Destruction! So they are doing all over the world, all over the order and decency the world of men has made. Trampling on all things. Reaction! What else?"

"But--reaction. What do you hope to do?"

"Stop it!" cried the young man from Oxford. "Before it is too late."

"But---"

"It's not impossible," cried the young man from Oxford, with a jump in his voice. "We want the firm hand; we want the subtle plan, the resolute mind. We have been mealy-mouthed and weak-handed; we have trifled and temporised and the Food has grown and grown. Yet even now--"

He stopped for a moment. "This is the echo of Caterham," said his friend.

"Even now. Even now there is hope--abundant hope, if only we make sure of what we want and what we mean to destroy. The mass of people are with us, much more with us than they were a few years ago; the law is with us, the constitution and order of society, the spirit of the established religions, the customs and habits of mankind are with us--and against the Food. Why should we temporise? Why should we lie? We hate it, we don't want it; why then should we have it? Do you mean to just grizzle and obstruct passively and do nothing--till the sands are out?"

He stopped short and turned about. "Look at that grove of nettles there. In the midst of them are homes--deserted--where once clean families of

simple men played out their honest lives!

"And there!" he swung round to where the young Cossars muttered to one another of their wrongs.

"Look at them! And I know their father, a brute, a sort of brute beast with an intolerant loud voice, a creature who has ran amuck in our all too merciful world for the last thirty years and more. An engineer! To him all that we hold dear and sacred is nothing. Nothing! The splendid traditions of our race and land, the noble institutions, the venerable order, the broad slow march from precedent to precedent that has made our English people great and this sunny island free--it is all an idle tale, told and done with. Some claptrap about the Future is worth all these sacred things.... The sort of man who would run a tramway over his mother's grave if he thought that was the cheapest line the tramway could take.... And you think to temporise, to make some scheme of compromise, that will enable you to live in your way while that--that machinery--lives in its. I tell you it is hopeless--hopeless. As well make treaties with a tiger! They want things monstrous--we want them sane and sweet. It is one thing or the other."

"But what can you do?"

"Much! All! Stop the Food! They are still scattered, these giants; still immature and disunited. Chain them, gag them, muzzle them. At any cost stop them. It is their world or ours! Stop the Food. Shut up these men

who make it. Do anything to stop Cossar! You don't seem to remember--one generation--only one generation needs holding down, and then--Then we could level those mounds there, fill up their footsteps, take the ugly sirens from our church towers, smash all our elephant guns, and turn our faces again to the old order, the ripe old civilisation for which the soul of man is fitted."

"It's a mighty effort."

"For a mighty end. And if we don't? Don't you see the prospect before us clear as day? Everywhere the giants will increase and multiply; everywhere they will make and scatter the Food. The grass will grow gigantic in our fields, the weeds in our hedges, the vermin in the thickets, the rats in the drains. More and more and more. This is only a beginning. The insect world will rise on us, the plant world, the very fishes in the sea, will swamp and drown our ships. Tremendous growths will obscure and hide our houses, smother our churches, smash and destroy all the order of our cities, and we shall become no more than a feeble vermin under the heels of the new race. Mankind will be swamped and drowned in things of its own begetting! And all for nothing! Size! Mere size! Enlargement and da capo. Already we go picking our way among the first beginnings of the coming time. And all we do is to say 'How inconvenient!' To grumble and do nothing. No!"

He raised his hand.

"Let them do the thing they have to do! So also will I. I am for Reaction--unstinted and fearless Reaction. Unless you mean to take this Food also, what else is there to do in all the world? We have trifled in the middle ways too long. You! Trifling in the middle ways is your habit, your circle of existence, your space and time. So, not I! I am against the Food, with all my strength and purpose against the Food."

He turned on his companion's grunt of dissent. "Where are you?"

"It's a complicated business---"

"Oh!--Driftwood!" said the young man from Oxford, very bitterly, with a fling of all his limbs. "The middle way is nothingness. It is one thing or the other. Eat or destroy. Eat or destroy! What else is there to do?"