

Captain Brassbound's Conversion

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This etext was produced by Eve Sobol, South Bend, Indiana, USA

CAPTAIN BRASSBOUND'S CONVERSION**BERNARD SHAW**

ACT I

On the heights overlooking the harbor of Mogador, a seaport on the west coast of Morocco, the missionary, in the coolness of the late afternoon, is following the precept of Voltaire by cultivating his garden. He is an elderly Scotchman, spiritually a little weatherbeaten, as having to navigate his creed in strange waters crowded with other craft but still a convinced son of the Free Church and the North African Mission, with a faithful brown eye, and a peaceful soul. Physically a wiry small-knit man, well tanned, clean shaven, with delicate resolute features and a twinkle of mild humor. He wears the sun helmet and pagri, the neutral-tinted spectacles, and the white canvas Spanish sand shoes of the modern Scotch missionary: but instead of a cheap tourist's suit from Glasgow, a grey flannel shirt with white collar, a green sailor knot tie with a cheap pin in it, he wears a suit of clean white linen, acceptable in color, if not in cut, to the Moorish mind.

The view from the garden includes much Atlantic Ocean and a long stretch of sandy coast to the south, swept by the north east trade wind, and scantily nourishing a few stunted pepper trees, mangy palms, and tamarisks. The prospect ends, as far as the land is concerned, in little hills that come nearly to the sea: rudiments, these, of the Atlas Mountains. The missionary, having had daily opportunities of looking at this seascape for thirty years or so, pays no heed to it, being absorbed in trimming a huge red geranium bush, to English eyes unnaturally big, which, with a dusty smilax or two, is the sole product of his pet flower-bed. He is sitting to his work on a Moorish stool. In the middle of the garden there is a pleasant seat in the shade of a tamarisk tree. The house is in the south west corner of the garden, and the geranium bush in the north east corner.

At the garden-door of the house there appears presently a man who is clearly no barbarian, being in fact a less agreeable product peculiar to modern commercial civilization. His frame and flesh are those of an ill-nourished lad of seventeen; but his age is inscrutable: only the absence of any sign of grey in his mud colored hair suggests that he is at all events probably under forty, without prejudice to the possibility of his being under twenty. A Londoner would recognize him at once as an extreme but hardy specimen of the abortion produced by nature in a city slum. His utterance, affectedly pumped and hearty, and naturally vulgar and nasal, is ready and fluent: nature, a Board School education, and some kerbstone practice having made him a bit of an orator. His dialect, apart from its base nasal delivery, is not unlike that of smart London society in its tendency to replace diphthongs by vowels (sometimes rather prettily) and to shuffle all the traditional vowel pronunciations. He pronounces ow as ah, and i as aw, using the ordinary ow for o, i for a, a for u, and e for a, with this reservation, that when any vowel is followed by an r he signifies its presence, not by pronouncing the r, which he never does under these circumstances, but by prolonging and modifying the

vowel, sometimes even to the extreme degree of pronouncing it properly. As to his yol for l (a compendious delivery of the provincial eh-al), and other metropolitan refinements, amazing to all but cockneys, they cannot be indicated, save in the above imperfect manner, without the aid of a phonetic alphabet. He is dressed in somebody else's very second best as a coast-guardsman, and gives himself the airs of a stage tar with sufficient success to pass as a possible fish porter of bad character in casual employment during busy times at Billingsgate. His manner shows an earnest disposition to ingratiate himself with the missionary, probably for some dishonest purpose.

THE MAN. Awtenoon, Mr. Renkin. (The missionary sits up quickly, and turns, resigning himself dutifully to the interruption.) Yr honor's eolth.

RANKIN (reservedly). Good afternoon, Mr. Drinkwotter.

DRINKWATER. You're not best pleased to be hinterrupted in yr bit o gawdnin bow the lawk o me, gavner.

RANKIN. A missionary knows nothing of leks of that soart, or of disleks either, Mr. Drinkwotter. What can I do for ye?

DRINKWATER (heartily). Nathink, gavner. Awve brort noos fer yer.

RANKIN. Well, sit ye doon.

DRINKWATER. Aw thank yr honor. (He sits down on the seat under the tree and composes himself for conversation.) Hever ear o Judge Ellam?

RANKIN. Sir Howrrd Hallam?

DRINKWATER. Thet's im-enginest jadge in Hingland! --awlus gives the ket wen it's robbry with voylence, bless is awt. Aw sy nathink agin im: awm all fer lor mawseolf, AW em.

RANKIN. Well?

DRINKWATER. Hever ear of is sist-in-lor: Lidy Sisly Winefleet?

RANKIN. Do ye mean the celebrated Leddy--the traveller?

DRINKWATER. Yuss: should think aw doo. Walked acrost Harfricar with nathink but a little dawg, and wrowt abaht it in the Dily Mile (the Daily Mail, a popular London newspaper), she did.

RANKIN. Is she Sir Howrrd Hallam's sister-in-law?

DRINKWATER. Deeceased wawfe's sister: yuss: thet's wot SHE is.

RANKIN. Well, what about them?

DRINKWATER. Wot abaht them! Waw, they're EAH. Lannid aht of a steam yacht in Mogador awber not twenty minnits agow. Gorn to the British corns'l's. E'll send em orn to you: e ynt got naowheres to put em. Sor em awr (hire) a Harab an two Krooboys to kerry their laggige. Thort awd cam an teoll yer.

RANKIN. Thank you. It's verra kind of you, Mr. Drinkwotter.

DRINKWATER. Down't mention it, gavner. Lor bless yer, wawn't it you as converted me? Wot was aw wen

aw cam eah but a pore lorst sinner? Down't aw ow y'a turn fer thet? Besawds, gavner, this Lidy Sisly Winefleet mawt wor't to tike a walk crost Morocker--a rawd inter the mahntns or sech lawk. Weoll, as you knaow, gavner, thet cawn't be done eah withaht a hescort.

RANKIN. It's impoossible: th' would oall b' murrdered. Morocco is not lek the rest of Africa.

DRINKWATER. No, gavner: these eah Moors ez their religion; an it mikes em dinegerous. Hever convert a Moor, gavner?

RANKIN (with a rueful smile). No.

DRINKWATER (solemnly). Nor never will, gavner.

RANKIN. I have been at work here for twenty-five years, Mr. Drinkwotter; and you are my first and only convert.

DRINKWATER. Down't seem naow good, do it, gavner?

RANKIN. I don't say that. I hope I have done some good. They come to me for medicine when they are ill; and they call me the Christian who is not a thief. THAT is something.

DRINKWATER. Their mawnds kennot rawse to Christiennity lawk hahrs ken, gavner: thet's ah it is. Weoll, ez haw was syin, if a hescort is wornted, there's maw friend and commawnder Kepn Brarsbahnd of the schooner Thenksgivin, an is crew, incloodin mawseolf, will see the lidy an Jadge Ellam through henny little excursion in reason. Yr honor mawt mention it.

RANKIN. I will certainly not propose anything so dangerous as an excursion.

DRINKWATER (virtuously). Naow, gavner, nor would I awst you to. (Shaking his head.) Naow, naow: it IS dinegerous. But hall the more call for a hescort if they should ev it hin their mawnds to gow.

RANKIN. I hope they won't.

DRINKWATER. An sow aw do too, gavner.

RANKIN (pondering). 'Tis strange that they should come to Mogador, of all places; and to my house! I once met Sir Howrrd Hallam, years ago.

DRINKWATER (amazed). Naow! didger? Think o thet, gavner! Waw, sow aw did too. But it were a misunnerstedin, thet wors. Lef the court withaht a stine on maw kerrickter, aw did.

RANKIN (with some indignation). I hope you don't think I met Sir Howrrd in that way.

DRINKWATER. Mawt yeppn to the honestest, best meanin pusson, aw do assure yer, gavner.

RANKIN. I would have you to know that I met him privately, Mr. Drinkwotter. His brother was a dear friend of mine. Years ago. He went out to the West Indies.

DRINKWATER. The Wust Hindies! Jist acrost there, tather sawd thet howcean (pointing seaward)! Dear me! We cams hin with vennyty, an we deepawts in dawkness. Down't we, gavner?

RANKIN (pricking up his ears). Eh? Have you been reading that little book I gave you?

DRINKWATER. Aw hev, et odd tawms. Very camfitn, gavner. (He rises, apprehensive lest further catechism should find him unprepared.) Awll sy good awtenoon, gavner: you're busy hexpectin o Sr Ahrd an Lidy Sisly, ynt yer? (About to go.)

RANKIN (stopping him). No, stop: we're oalways ready for travellers here. I have something else to say--a question to ask you.

DRINKWATR (with a misgiving, which he masks by exaggerating his hearty sailor manner). An weollcome, yr honor.

RANKIN. Who is this Captain Brassbound?

DRINKWATER (guiltily). Kepn Brarsbahnd! E's-weoll, e's maw Kepn, gavner.

RANKIN. Yes. Well?

DRINKWATER (feebly). Kepn of the schooner Thenksgivin, gavner.

RANKIN (searchingly). Have ye ever haird of a bad character in these seas called Black Paquito?

DRINKWATER (with a sudden radiance of complete enlightenment). Aoh, nar aw tikes yer wiv me, yr honor. Nah sammun es bin a teolln you thet Kepn Brarsbahnd an Bleck Pakeetow is hawdentically the sime pussn. Ynt thet sow?

RANKIN. That is so. (Drinkwater slaps his knee triumphantly. The missionary proceeds determinedly) And the someone was a verra honest, straightforward man, as far as I could judge.

DRINKWATER (embracing the implication). Course a wors, gavner: Ev aw said a word agin him? Ev aw nah?

RANKIN. But is Captain Brassbound Black Paquito then?

DRINKWATER. Waw, it's the nime is blessed mather give im at er knee, bless is little awt! Ther ynt naow awm in it. She ware a Wust Hinjin--howver there agin, yer see (pointing seaward)-- leastwaws, naow she worn't: she were a Brazilian, aw think; an Pakeetow's Brazilian for a bloomin little perrit--awskin yr pawdn for the word. (Sentimentally) Lawk as a Hinglish lidy mawt call er little boy Birdie.

RANKIN (not quite convinced). But why BLACK Paquito?

DRINKWATER (artlessly). Waw, the bird in its netral stite bein green, an e evin bleck air, y' knaow--

RANKIN (cutting him short). I see. And now I will put ye another question. WHAT is Captain Brassbound, or Paquito, or whatever he calls himself?

DRINKWATER (officiously). Brarsbahnd, gavner. Awlus calls isseolf Brarsbahnd.

RANKIN. Well. Brassbound, then. What is he?

DRINKWATER (fervently). You awsk me wot e is, gavner?

RANKIN (firmly). I do.

DRINKWATER (with rising enthusiasm). An shll aw teoll yer wot e is, yr honor?

RANKIN (not at all impressed). If ye will be so good, Mr. Drinkwotter.

DRINKWATER (with overwhelming conviction). Then awll teoll you, gavner, wot he is. Ee's a Paffick Genlmm: thet's wot e is.

RANKIN (gravely). Mr. Drinkwotter: pairfection is an attribute, not of West Coast captains, but of thr Maaker. And there are gentlemen and gentlemen in the world, espacially in these latitudes. Which sort of gentleman is he?

DRINKWATER. Hinglish genlmm, gavner. Hinglish speakin; Hinglish fawther; West Hinjin plawnter; Hinglish true blue breed. (Reflectively) Tech o brahn from the mather, preps, she bein Brazilian.

RANKIN. Now on your faith as a Christian, Felix Drinkwotter, is Captain Brassbound a slaver or not?

DRINKWATER (surprised into his natural cockney pertness). Naow e ynt.

RANKIN. Are ye SURE?

DRINKWATER. Waw, a sliver is abaht the wanne thing in the wy of a genlmm o fortn thet e YNT.

RANKIN. I've haird that expression "gentleman of fortune" before, Mr. Drinkwotter. It means pirate. Do ye know that?

DRINKWATER. Bless y'r awt, y' cawnt be a pawrit naradys. Waw, the aw seas is wuss pleest nor Piccadilly Suckus. If aw was to do orn thet there Hetlentic Howcean the things aw did as a bwoy in the Worterleoo Rowd, awd ev maw air cat afore aw could turn maw ed. Pawrit be blaowed!--awskink yr pawdn, gavner. Nah, jest to shaow you ah little thet there striteforard man y' mide mention on knaowed wot e was atorkin abaht: oo would you spowse was the marster to wich Kepn Brarsbahnd served apprentice, as yr mawt sy?

RANKIN. I don't know.

DRINKWATER. Gawdn, gavner, Gawdn. Gawdn o Kawtoom--stetcher stends in Trifawlgr Square to this dy. Trined Bleck Pakeetow in smawshin hap the slive riders, e did. Promist Gawdn e wouldn't never smaggle slives nor gin, an (with suppressed aggravation) WOWN'T, gavner, not if we gows dahn on ahr bloomin bended knees to im to do it.

RANKIN (drily). And DO ye go down on your bended knees to him to do it?

DRINKWATER (somewhat abashed). Some of huz is hanconverted men, gavner; an they sy: You smaggles wanne thing, Kepn; waw not hanather?

RANKIN. We've come to it at last. I thought so. Captain Brassbound is a smuggler.

DRINKWATER. Weoll, waw not? Waw not, gavner? Ahrs is a Free Tride nition. It gows agin us as Hinglishmen to see these bloomin furriners settin ap their Castoms Ahses and spheres o hinfluence and sich lawk hall owver Arfricar. Daown't Harfricar belong as much to huz as to them? thet's wot we sy. Ennywys, there ynt naow awm in ahr business. All we daz is hescott, tourist HOR commercial. Cook's hexcursions to the Hatlas Mahntns: thet's hall it is. Waw, it's spreadin civlawzytion, it is. Ynt it nah?

RANKIN. You think Captain Brassbound's crew sufficiently equipped for that, do you?

DRINKWATER. Hee-quipped! Haw should think sow. Lawtnin rawfles, twelve shots in the meggezine! Oo's to storp us?

RANKIN. The most dangerous chieftain in these parts, the Sheikh Sidi el Assif, has a new American machine pistol which fires ten bullets without loadin; and his rifle has sixteen shots in the magazine.

DRINKWATER (indignantly). Yuss; an the people that sells sich things into the ends o' them eathen bleck niggers calls theirseolves Christians! It's a crool shime, sow it is.

RANKIN. If a man has the heart to pull the trigger, it matters little what color his hand is, Mr. Drinkwotter. Have ye anything else to say to me this afternoon?

DRINKWATER (rising). Nathink, gavner, cept to wishyer the bust o yolth, and a many cornverts. Awtenoon, gavner.

RANKIN. Good afternoon to ye, Mr. Drinkwotter.

As Drinkwater turns to go, a Moorish porter comes from the house with two Krooboys.

THE PORTER (at the door, addressing Rankin). Bikouros (Moroccan for Epicurus, a general Moorish name for the missionaries, who are supposed by the Moors to have chosen their calling through a love of luxurious idleness): I have brought to your house a Christian dog and his woman.

DRINKWATER. There's eathen menners fer yer! Calls Sr Ahrd Ellam an Lidy Winefleet a Christian dorg and is woman! If ee ed you in the dorck et the Centl Crimnal, you'd fawnd aht oo was the dorg and oo was is marster, pretty quick, you would.

RANKIN. Have you broat their boxes?

THE PORTER. By Allah, two camel loads!

RANKIN. Have you been paid?

THE PORTER. Only one miserable dollar, Bikouros. I have brought them to your house. They will pay you. Give me something for bringing gold to your door.

DRINKWATER. Yah! You oughter bin bawn a Christian, you ought. You knaow too mach.

RANKIN. You have broat onnly trouble and expense to my door, Hassan; and you know it. Have I ever charged your wife and children for my medicines?

HASSAN (philosophically). It is always permitted by the Prophet to ask, Bikouros. (He goes cheerfully into the house with the Krooboys.)

DRINKWATER. Jist thort eed trah it orn, a did. Hooman nitre is the sime everywhere. Them eathens is jast lawk you an' me, gavner.

A lady and gentleman, both English, come into the garden. The gentleman, more than elderly, is facing old age on compulsion, not resignedly. He is clean shaven, and has a brainy rectangular forehead, a resolute nose with strongly governed nostrils, and a tightly fastened down mouth which has evidently shut in much temper and anger in its time. He has a habit of deliberately assumed authority and dignity, but is trying to take life more genially and easily in his character of tourist, which is further borne out by his white hat and summery

racecourse attire.

The lady is between thirty and forty, tall, very goodlooking, sympathetic, intelligent, tender and humorous, dressed with cunning simplicity not as a businesslike, tailor made, gaitered tourist, but as if she lived at the next cottage and had dropped in for tea in blouse and flowered straw hat. A woman of great vitality and humanity, who begins a casual acquaintance at the point usually attained by English people after thirty years acquaintance when they are capable of reaching it at all. She pounces genially on Drinkwater, who is smirking at her, hat in hand, with an air of hearty welcome. The gentleman, on the other hand, comes down the side of the garden next the house, instinctively maintaining a distance between himself and the others.

THE LADY (to Drinkwater). How dye do? Are you the missionary?

DRINKWATER (modestly). Naow, lidy, aw will not deceive you, thow the mistike his but netral. Awm wanne of the missionary's good works, lidy--is first cornvert, a umble British seaman-- countrymen o yours, lidy, and of is lawdship's. This eah is Mr. Renkin, the bust worker in the wust cowst vawnyawd. (Introducing the judge) Mr. Renkin: is lawdship Sr Ahrd Ellam. (He withdraws discreetly into the house.)

SIR HOWARD (to Rankin). I am sorry to intrude on you, Mr. Rankin; but in the absence of a hotel there seems to be no alternative.

LADY CICELY (beaming on him). Besides, we would so much RATHER stay with you, if you will have us, Mr. Rankin.

SIR HOWARD (introducing her). My sister-in-law, Lady Cicely Waynflete, Mr. Rankin.

RANKIN. I am glad to be of service to your leddyship. You will be wishing to have some tea after your journey, I'm thinking.

LADY CICELY. Thoughtful man that you are, Mr. Rankin! But we've had some already on board the yacht. And I've arranged everything with your servants; so you must go on gardening just as if we were not here.

SIR HOWARD. I am sorry to have to warn you, Mr. Rankin, that Lady Cicely, from travelling in Africa, has acquired a habit of walking into people's houses and behaving as if she were in her own.

LADY CICELY. But, my dear Howard, I assure you the natives like it.

RANKIN (gallantly). So do I.

LADY CICELY (delighted). Oh, that is so nice of you, Mr. Rankin. This is a delicious country! And the people seem so good! They have such nice faces! We had such a handsome Moor to carry our luggage up! And two perfect pets of Krooboyes! Did you notice their faces, Howard?

SIR HOWARD. I did; and I can confidently say, after a long experience of faces of the worst type looking at me from the dock, that I have never seen so entirely villainous a trio as that Moor and the two Krooboyes, to whom you gave five dollars when they would have been perfectly satisfied with one.

RANKIN (throwing up his hands). Five dollars! 'Tis easy to see you are not Scotch, my leddy.

LADY CICELY. Oh, poor things, they must want it more than we do; and you know, Howard, that Mahometans never spend money in drink.

RANKIN. Excuse me a moment, my leddy. I have a word in season to say to that same Moor. (He goes into

the house.)

LADY CICELY (walking about the garden, looking at the view and at the flowers). I think this is a perfectly heavenly place.

Drinkwater returns from the house with a chair.

DRINKWATER (placing the chair for Sir Howard). Awskink yr pawdn for the libbety, Sr Ahrd.

SIR HOWARD (looking at him). I have seen you before somewhere.

DRINKWATER. You ev, Sr Ahrd. But aw do assure yer it were hall a mistike.

SIR HOWARD. As usual. (He sits down.) Wrongfully convicted, of course.

DRINKWATER (with sly delight). Naow, gavner. (Half whispering, with an ineffable grin) Wroongfully hacquittid!

SIR HOWARD. Indeed! That's the first case of the kind I have ever met.

DRINKWATER. Lawd, Sr Ahrd, wot jagginses them juryemen was! You an me knaowed it too, didn't we?

SIR HOWARD. I daresay we did. I am sorry to say I forget the exact nature of the difficulty you were in. Can you refresh my memory?

DRINKWATER. Owny the aw sperrits o youth, y' lawdship. Worterleoo Rowd kice. Wot they calls Ooliganism.

SIR HOWARD. Oh! You were a Hooligan, were you?

LADY CICELY (puzzled). A Hooligan!

DRINKWATER (deprecatingly). Nime giv huz pore thortless leds baw a gent on the Dily Chronicle, lidy. (Rankin returns. Drinkwater immediately withdraws, stopping the missionary for a moment near the threshold to say, touching his forelock) Awill eng abaht within ile, gavner, hin kice aw should be wornted. (He goes into the house with soft steps.)

Lady Cicely sits down on the bench under the tamarisk. Rankin takes his stool from the flowerbed and sits down on her left, Sir Howard being on her right.

LADY CICELY. What a pleasant face your sailor friend has, Mr. Rankin! He has been so frank and truthful with us. You know I don't think anybody can pay me a greater compliment than to be quite sincere with me at first sight. It's the perfection of natural good manners.

SIR HOWARD. You must not suppose, Mr. Rankin, that my sister-in-law talks nonsense on purpose. She will continue to believe in your friend until he steals her watch; and even then she will find excuses for him.

RANKIN (drily changing the subject). And how have ye been, Sir Howrrd, since our last meeting that morning nigh forty year ago down at the docks in London?

SIR HOWARD (greatly surprised, pulling himself together) Our last meeting! Mr. Rankin: have I been unfortunate enough to forget an old acquaintance?

RANKIN. Well, perhaps hardly an acquaintance, Sir Howrrd. But I was a close friend of your brother Miles: and when he sailed for Brazil I was one of the little party that saw him off. You were one of the party also, if I'm not mistaken. I took particular notice of you because you were Miles's brother and I had never seen ye before. But ye had no call to take notice of me.

SIR HOWARD (reflecting). Yes: there was a young friend of my brother's who might well be you. But the name, as I recollect it, was Leslie.

RANKIN. That was me, sir. My name is Leslie Rankin; and your brother and I were always Miles and Leslie to one another.

SIR HOWARD (pluming himself a little). Ah! that explains it. I can trust my memory still, Mr. Rankin; though some people do complain that I am growing old.

RANKIN. And where may Miles be now, Sir Howard?

SIR HOWARD (abruptly). Don't you know that he is dead?

RANKIN (much shocked). Never haird of it. Dear, dear: I shall never see him again; and I can scarcely bring his face to mind after all these years. (With moistening eyes, which at once touch Lady Cicely's sympathy) I'm right sorry--right sorry.

SIR HOWARD (decorously subduing his voice). Yes: he did not live long: indeed, he never came back to England. It must be nearly thirty years ago now that he died in the West Indies on his property there.

RANKIN (surprised). His proaperty! Miles with a proaperty!

SIR HOWARD. Yes: he became a planter, and did well out there, Mr. Rankin. The history of that property is a very curious and interesting one--at least it is so to a lawyer like myself.

RANKIN. I should be glad to hear it for Miles's sake, though I am no lawyer, Sir Howrrd.

LADY CICELY. I never knew you had a brother, Howard.

SIR HOWARD (not pleased by this remark). Perhaps because you never asked me. (Turning more blandly to Rankin) I will tell you the story, Mr. Rankin. When Miles died, he left an estate in one of the West Indian islands. It was in charge of an agent who was a sharpish fellow, with all his wits about him. Now, sir, that man did a thing which probably could hardly be done with impunity even here in Morocco, under the most barbarous of surviving civilizations. He quite simply took the estate for himself and kept it.

RANKIN. But how about the law?

SIR HOWARD. The law, sir, in that island, consisted practically of the Attorney General and the Solicitor General; and these gentlemen were both retained by the agent. Consequently there was no solicitor in the island to take up the case against him.

RANKIN. Is such a thing possible to-day in the British Empire?

SIR HOWARD (calmly). Oh, quite. Quite.

LADY CICELY. But could not a firstrate solicitor have been sent out from London?

SIR HOWARD. No doubt, by paying him enough to compensate him for giving up his London practice: that is, rather more than there was any reasonable likelihood of the estate proving worth.

RANKIN. Then the estate was lost?

SIR HOWARD. Not permanently. It is in my hands at present.

RANKIN. Then how did ye get it back?

SIR HOWARD (with crafty enjoyment of his own cunning). By hoisting the rogue with his own petard. I had to leave matters as they were for many years; for I had my own position in the world to make. But at last I made it. In the course of a holiday trip to the West Indies, I found that this dishonest agent had left the island, and placed the estate in the hands of an agent of his own, whom he was foolish enough to pay very badly. I put the case before that agent; and he decided to treat the estate as my property. The robber now found himself in exactly the same position he had formerly forced me into. Nobody in the island would act against me, least of all the Attorney and Solicitor General, who appreciated my influence at the Colonial Office. And so I got the estate back. "The mills of the gods grind slowly," Mr. Rankin; "but they grind exceeding small."

LADY CICELY. Now I suppose if I'd done such a clever thing in England, you'd have sent me to prison.

SIR HOWARD. Probably, unless you had taken care to keep outside the law against conspiracy. Whenever you wish to do anything against the law, Cicely, always consult a good solicitor first.

LADY CICELY. So I do. But suppose your agent takes it into his head to give the estate back to his wicked old employer!

SIR HOWARD. I heartily wish he would.

RANKIN (openeyed). You wish he WOULD!!

SIR HOWARD. Yes. A few years ago the collapse of the West Indian sugar industry converted the income of the estate into an annual loss of about 150 pounds a year. If I can't sell it soon, I shall simply abandon it--unless you, Mr. Rankin, would like to take it as a present.

RANKIN (laughing). I thank your lordship: we have estates enough of that sort in Scotland. You're setting with your back to the sun, Leddy Ceecily, and losing something worth looking at. See there. (He rises and points seaward, where the rapid twilight of the latitude has begun.)

LADY CICELY (getting up to look and uttering a cry of admiration). Oh, how lovely!

SIR HOWARD (also rising). What are those hills over there to the southeast?

RANKIN. They are the outposts, so to speak, of the Atlas Mountains.

LADY CICELY. The Atlas Mountains! Where Shelley's witch lived! We'll make an excursion to them to-morrow, Howard.

RANKIN. That's impossissible, my leddy. The natives are verra dangerous.

LADY CICELY. Why? Has any explorer been shooting them?

RANKIN. No. But every man of them believes he will go to heaven if he kills an unbeliever.

LADY CICELY. Bless you, dear Mr. Rankin, the people in England believe that they will go to heaven if they give all their property to the poor. But they don't do it. I'm not a bit afraid of that.

RANKIN. But they are not accustomed to see women going about unveiled.

LADY CICELY. I always get on best with people when they can see my face.

SIR HOWARD. Cicely: you are talking great nonsense and you know it. These people have no laws to restrain them, which means, in plain English, that they are habitual thieves and murderers.

RANKIN. Nay, nay: not exactly that,

LADY CICELY (indignantly). Of course not. You always think, Howard, that nothing prevents people killing each other but the fear of your hanging them for it. But what nonsense that is! And how wicked! If these people weren't here for some good purpose, they wouldn't have been made, would they, Mr. Rankin?

RANKIN. That is a point, certainly, Leddy Ceecily.

SIR HOWARD. Oh, if you are going to talk theology--

LADY CICELY. Well, why not? theology is as respectable as law, I should think. Besides, I'm only talking commonsense. Why do people get killed by savages? Because instead of being polite to them, and saying Howdyedo? like me, people aim pistols at them. I've been among savages--cannibals and all sorts. Everybody said they'd kill me. But when I met them, I said Howdyedo? and they were quite nice. The kings always wanted to marry me.

SIR HOWARD. That does not seem to me to make you any safer here, Cicely. You shall certainly not stir a step beyond the protection of the consul, if I can help it, without a strong escort.

LADY CICELY. I don't want an escort.

SIR HOWARD. I do. And I suppose you will expect me to accompany you.

RANKIN. 'Tis not safe, Leddy Ceecily. Really and truly, 'tis not safe. The tribes are verra fierce; and there are cities here that no Christian has ever set foot in. If you go without being well protected, the first chief you meet well seize you and send you back again to prevent his followers murdering you.

LADY CICELY. Oh, how nice of him, Mr. Rankin!

RANKIN. He would not do it for your sake, Leddy Ceecily, but for his own. The Sultan would get into trouble with England if you were killed; and the Sultan would kill the chief to pacify the English government.

LADY CICELY. But I always go everywhere. I KNOW the people here won't touch me. They have such nice faces and such pretty scenery.

SIR HOWARD (to Rankin, sitting down again resignedly). You can imagine how much use there is in talking to a woman who admires the faces of the ruffians who infest these ports, Mr. Rankin. Can anything be done in the way of an escort?

RANKIN. There is a certain Captain Brassbound here who trades along the coast, and occasionally escorts parties of merchants on journeys into the interior. I understand that he served under Gordon in the Soudan.

SIR HOWARD. That sounds promising. But I should like to know a little more about him before I trust myself in his hands.

RANKIN. I quite agree with you, Sir Howrrd. I'll send Felix Drinkwotter for him. (He claps his hands. An Arab boy appears at the house door.) Muley: is sailor man here? (Muley nods.) Tell sailor man bring captain. (Muley nods and goes.)

SIR HOWARD. Who is Drinkwater?

RANKIN. His agent, or mate: I don't rightly know which.

LADY CICELY. Oh, if he has a mate named Felix Drinkwater, it must be quite a respectable crew. It is such a nice name.

RANKIN. You saw him here just now. He is a convert of mine.

LADY CICELY (delighted). That nice truthful sailor!

SIR HOWARD (horrified). What! The Hooligan!

RANKIN (puzzled). Hooligan? No, my lord: he is an Englishman.

SIR HOWARD. My dear Mr. Rankin, this man was tried before me on a charge of street ruffianism.

RANKIN. So he told me. He was badly broat up, I am afraid. But he is now a converted man.

LADY CICELY. Of course he is. His telling you so frankly proves it. You know, really, Howard, all those poor people whom you try are more sinned against than sinning. If you would only talk to them in a friendly way instead of passing cruel sentences on them, you would find them quite nice to you. (Indignantly) I won't have this poor man trampled on merely because his mother brought him up as a Hooligan. I am sure nobody could be nicer than he was when he spoke to us.

SIR HOWARD. In short, we are to have an escort of Hooligans commanded by a filibuster. Very well, very well. You will most likely admire all their faces; and I have no doubt at all that they will admire yours.

Drinkwater comes from the house with an Italian dressed in a much worn suit of blue serge, a dilapidated Alpine hat, and boots laced with scraps of twine. He remains near the door, whilst Drinkwater comes forward between Sir Howard and Lady Cicely.

DRINKWATER. Yr honor's servant. (To the Italian) Mawtzow: is lawdship Sr Ahrd Ellam. (Marzo touches his hat.) Er Lidyship Lidy Winefleet. (Marzo touches his hat.) Hawtellian shipmite, lidy. Hahr chef.

LADY CICELY (nodding affably to Marzo). Howdyedo? I love Italy. What part of it were you born in?

DRINKWATER. Worn't bawn in Hitly at all, lidy. Bawn in Etnn Gawdn (Hatton Garden). Hawcce barrer an street pianner Hawtellian, lidy: thet's wot e is. Kepn Brarsbahnd's respects to yr honors; an e awites yr commawnds.

RANKIN. Shall we go indoors to see him?

SIR HOWARD. I think we had better have a look at him by daylight.

RANKIN. Then we must lose no time: the dark is soon down in this latitude. (To Drinkwater) Will ye ask him to step out here to us, Mr. Drinkwotter?

DRINKWATER. Rawt you aw, gavner. (He goes officiously into the house.)

Lady Cicely and Rankin sit down as before to receive the Captain. The light is by this time waning rapidly, the darkness creeping west into the orange crimson.

LADY CICELY (whispering). Don't you feel rather creepy, Mr. Rankin? I wonder what he'll be like.

RANKIN. I misdoubt me he will not answer, your leddyship.

There is a scuffling noise in the house; and Drinkwater shoots out through the doorway across the garden with every appearance of having been violently kicked. Marzo immediately hurries down the garden on Sir Howard's right out of the neighborhood of the doorway.

DRINKWATER (trying to put a cheerful air on much mortification and bodily anguish). Narsty step to thet ere door tripped me hap, it did. (Raising his voice and narrowly escaping a squeak of pain) Kepn Brarsbahnd. (He gets as far from the house as possible, on Rankin's left. Rankin rises to receive his guest.)

An olive complexioned man with dark southern eyes and hair comes from the house. Age about 36. Handsome features, but joyless; dark eyebrows drawn towards one another; mouth set grimly; nostrils large and strained: a face set to one tragic purpose. A man of few words, fewer gestures, and much significance. On the whole, interesting, and even attractive, but not friendly. He stands for a moment, saturnine in the ruddy light, to see who is present, looking in a singular and rather deadly way at Sir Howard; then with some surprise and uneasiness at Lady Cicely. Finally he comes down into the middle of the garden, and confronts Rankin, who has been glaring at him in consternation from the moment of his entrance, and continues to do so in so marked a way that the glow in Brassbound's eyes deepens as he begins to take offence.

BRASSBOUND. Well, sir, have you stared your fill at me?

RANKIN (recovering himself with a start). I ask your pardon for my bad manners, Captain Brassbound. Ye are extraordinair lek an auld college friend of mine, whose face I said not ten minutes gone that I could no longer bring to mind. It was as if he had come from the grave to remind me of it.

BRASSBOUND. Why have you sent for me?

RANKIN. We have a matter of business with ye, Captain.

BRASSBOUND. Who are "we"?

RANKIN. This is Sir Howrrd Hallam, who will be well known to ye as one of Her Majesty's judges.

BRASSBOUND (turning the singular look again on Sir Howard). The friend of the widow! the protector of the fatherless!

SIR HOWARD (startled). I did not know I was so favorably spoken of in these parts, Captain Brassbound. We want an escort for a trip into the mountains.

BRASSBOUND (ignoring this announcement). Who is the lady?

RANKIN. Lady Ceecily Waynflete, his lordship's sister-in-law.

LADY CICELY. Howdyedo, Captain Brassbound? (He bows gravely.)

SIR HOWARD (a little impatient of these questions, which strike him as somewhat impertinent). Let us come to business, if you please. We are thinking of making a short excursion to see the country about here. Can you provide us with an escort of respectable, trustworthy men?

BRASSBOUND. No.

DRINKWATER (in strong remonstrance). Nah, nah, nah! Nah look eah, Kepn, y'knaow--

BRASSBOUND (between his teeth). Hold your tongue.

DRINKWATER (abjectly). Yuss, Kepn.

RANKIN. I understood it was your business to provide escorts, Captain Brassbound.

BRASSBOUND. You were rightly informed. That IS my business.

LADY CICELY. Then why won't you do it for us?

BRASSBOUND. You are not content with an escort. You want respectable, trustworthy men. You should have brought a division of London policemen with you. My men are neither respectable nor trustworthy.

DRINKWATER (unable to contain himself). Nah, nah, look eah, Kepn. If you want to be moddist, be moddist on your aown accahnt, nort on mawn.

BRASSBOUND. You see what my men are like. That rascal (indicating Marzo) would cut a throat for a dollar if he had courage enough.

MARZO. I not understand. I no spik Englis.

BRASSBOUND. This thing (pointing to Drinkwater) is the greatest liar, thief, drunkard, and rascalion on the west coast.

DRINKWATER (affecting an ironic indifference). Gow orn, Gow orn. Sr Ahrd ez erd witnesses to maw kerrickter afoah. E knaows ah mech to believe of em.

LADY CICELY. Captain Brassbound: I have heard all that before about the blacks; and I found them very nice people when they were properly treated.

DRINKWATER (chuckling: the Italian is also grinning). Nah, Kepn, nah! Owp yr prahd o y'seolf nah.

BRASSBOUND. I quite understand the proper treatment for him, madam. If he opens his mouth again without my leave, I will break every bone in his skin.

LADY CICELY (in her most sunnily matter-of-fact way). Does Captain Brassbound always treat you like this, Mr. Drinkwater?

Drinkwater hesitates, and looks apprehensively at the Captain.

BRASSBOUND. Answer, you dog, when the lady orders you. (To Lady Cicely) Do not address him as Mr. Drinkwater, madam: he is accustomed to be called Brandyfaced Jack.

DRINKWATER (indignantly). Eah, aw sy! nah look eah, Kepn: maw nime is Drinkworter. You awsk em et Sin Jorn's in the Worterleoo Rowd. Orn maw grenfawther's tombstown, it is.

BRASSBOUND. It will be on your own tombstone, presently, if you cannot hold your tongue. (Turning to the others) Let us understand one another, if you please. An escort here, or anywhere where there are no regular disciplined forces, is what its captain makes it. If I undertake this business, I shall be your escort. I may require a dozen men, just as I may require a dozen horses. Some of the horses will be vicious; so will all the men. If either horse or man tries any of his viciousness on me, so much the worse for him; but it will make no difference to you. I will order my men to behave themselves before the lady; and they shall obey their orders. But the lady will please understand that I take my own way with them and suffer no interference.

LADY CICELY. Captain Brassbound: I don't want an escort at all. It will simply get us all into danger; and I shall have the trouble of getting it out again. That's what escorts always do. But since Sir Howard prefers an escort, I think you had better stay at home and let me take charge of it. I know your men will get on perfectly well if they're properly treated.

DRINKWATER (with enthusiasm). Feed aht o yr and, lidy, we would.

BRASSBOUND (with sardonic assent). Good. I agree. (To Drinkwater) You shall go without me.

DRINKWATER. (terrified). Eah! Wot are you a syin orn? We cawn't gow withaht yer. (To Lady Cicely) Naow, lidy: it wouldn't be for yr hown good. Yer cawn't hexpect a lot o poor honeddikited men lawk huz to ran ahrseolvs into dineger withaht naow Kepn to teoll us wot to do. Naow, lidy: hoonawted we stend: deevawdid we fall.

LADY CICELY. Oh, if you prefer your captain, have him by all means. Do you LIKE to be treated as he treats you?

DAINKWATER (with a smile of vanity). Weoll, lidy: y cawn't deenaw that e's a Paffick Genlmn. Bit hawbitrairy, preps; but hin a genlmn you looks for sich. It tikes a hawbitrairy wanne to knock aht them eathen Shikes, aw teoll yer.

BRASSBOUND. That's enough. Go.

DRINKWATER. Weoll, aw was hownly a teolln the lidy thet-- (A threatening movement from Brassbound cuts him short. He flies for his life into the house, followed by the Italian.)

BRASSBOUND. Your ladyship sees. These men serve me by their own free choice. If they are dissatisfied, they go. If I am dissatisfied, they go. They take care that I am not dissatisfied.

SIR HOWARD (who has listened with approval and growing confidence). Captain Brassbound: you are the man I want. If your terms are at all reasonable, I will accept your services if we decide to make an excursion. You do not object, Cicely, I hope.

LADY CICELY. Oh no. After all, those men must really like you, Captain Brassbound. I feel sure you have a kind heart. You have such nice eyes.

SIR HOWARD (scandalized). My DEAR Cicely: you really must restrain your expressions of confidence in people's eyes and faces. (To Brassbound) Now, about terms, Captain?

BRASSBOUND. Where do you propose to go?

SIR HOWARD. I hardly know. Where CAN we go, Mr. Rankin?

RANKIN. Take my advice, Sir Howrrd. Don't go far.

BRASSBOUND. I can take you to Meskala, from which you can see the Atlas Mountains. From Meskala I can take you to an ancient castle in the hills, where you can put up as long as you please. The customary charge is half a dollar a man per day and his food. I charge double.

SIR HOWARD. I suppose you answer for your men being sturdy fellows, who will stand to their guns if necessary.

BRASSBOUND. I can answer for their being more afraid of me than of the Moors.

LADY CICELY. That doesn't matter in the least, Howard. The important thing, Captain Brassbound, is: first, that we should have as few men as possible, because men give such a lot of trouble travelling. And then, they must have good lungs and not be always catching cold. Above all, their clothes must be of good wearing material. Otherwise I shall be nursing and stitching and mending all the way; and it will be trouble enough, I assure you, to keep them washed and fed without that.

BRASSBOUND (haughtily). My men, madam, are not children in the nursery.

LADY CICELY (with unanswerable conviction). Captain Brassbound: all men are children in the nursery. I see that you don't notice things. That poor Italian had only one proper bootlace: the other was a bit of string. And I am sure from Mr. Drinkwater's complexion that he ought to have some medicine.

BRASSBOUND (outwardly determined not to be trifled with: inwardly puzzled and rather daunted). Madam: if you want an escort, I can provide you with an escort. If you want a Sunday School treat, I can NOT provide it.

LADY CICELY (with sweet melancholy). Ah, don't you wish you could, Captain? Oh, if I could only show you my children from Waynflete Sunday School! The darlings would love this place, with all the camels and black men. I'm sure you would enjoy having them here, Captain Brassbound; and it would be such an education for your men! (Brassbound stares at her with drying lips.)

SIR HOWARD. Cicely: when you have quite done talking nonsense to Captain Brassbound, we can proceed to make some definite arrangement with him.

LADY CICELY. But it's arranged already. We'll start at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, if you please, Captain. Never mind about the Italian: I have a big box of clothes with me for my brother in Rome; and there are some bootlaces in it. Now go home to bed and don't fuss yourself. All you have to do is to bring your men round; and I'll see to the rest. Men are always so nervous about moving. Goodnight. (She offers him her hand. Surprised, he pulls off his cap for the first time. Some scruple prevents him from taking her hand at once. He hesitates; then turns to Sir Howard and addresses him with warning earnestness.)

BRASSBOUND. Sir Howard Hallam: I advise you not to attempt this expedition.

SIR HOWARD. Indeed! Why?

BRASSBOUND. You are safe here. I warn you, in those hills there is a justice that is not the justice of your courts in England. If you have wronged a man, you may meet that man there. If you have wronged a woman, you may meet her son there. The justice of those hills is the justice of vengeance.

SIR HOWARD (faintly amused). You are superstitious, Captain. Most sailors are, I notice. However, I have complete confidence in your escort.

BRASSBOUND (almost threateningly). Take care. The avenger may be one of the escort.

SIR HOWARD. I have already met the only member of your escort who might have borne a grudge against me, Captain; and he was acquitted.

BRASSBOUND. You are fated to come, then?

SIR HOWARD (smiling). It seems so.

BRASSBOUND. On your head be it! (To Lady Cicely, accepting her hand at last) Goodnight.

He goes. It is by this time starry night.

ACT II

Midday. A room in a Moorish castle. A divan seat runs round the dilapidated adobe walls, which are partly painted, partly faced with white tiles patterned in green and yellow. The ceiling is made up of little squares, painted in bright colors, with gilded edges, and ornamented with gilt knobs. On the cement floor are mattings, sheepskins, and leathern cushions with geometrical patterns on them. There is a tiny Moorish table in the middle; and at it a huge saddle, with saddle cloths of various colors, showing that the room is used by foreigners accustomed to chairs. Anyone sitting at the table in this seat would have the chief entrance, a large horseshoe arch, on his left, and another saddle seat between him and the arch; whilst, if susceptible to draughts, he would probably catch cold from a little Moorish door in the wall behind him to his right.

Two or three of Brassbound's men, overcome by the midday heat, sprawl supine on the floor, with their reefer coats under their heads, their knees uplifted, and their calves laid comfortably on the divan. Those who wear shirts have them open at the throat for greater coolness. Some have jerseys. All wear boots and belts, and have guns ready to their hands. One of them, lying with his head against the second saddle seat, wears what was once a fashionable white English yachting suit. He is evidently a pleasantly worthless young English gentleman gone to the bad, but retaining sufficient self-respect to shave carefully and brush his hair, which is wearing thin, and does not seem to have been luxuriant even in its best days.

The silence is broken only by the snores of the young gentleman, whose mouth has fallen open, until a few distant shots half waken him. He shuts his mouth convulsively, and opens his eyes sleepily. A door is violently kicked outside; and the voice of Drinkwater is heard raising urgent alarm.

DRINKWATER. Wot ow! Wike ap there, will yr. Wike ap. (He rushes in through the horseshoe arch, hot and excited, and runs round, kicking the sleepers) Nah then. Git ap. Git ap, will yr, Kiddy Redbrook. (He gives the young gentleman a rude shove.)

REDBOOK (sitting up). Stow that, will you. What's amiss?

DRINKWATER (disgusted). Wot's amiss! Didn't eah naow fawrin, I spowse.

REDBROOK. No.

DRINKWATER (sneering). Naow. Thort it sifer nort, didn't yr?