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HOMUNCULUS

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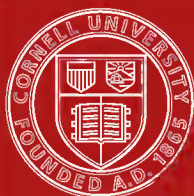
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**PETER HOMUNCULUS**



# Peter Homunculus

*A Novel*

By

Gilbert Cannan



New York

DUFFIELD AND COMPANY

1909

A748680

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*“ Nemo repente optimus fit.”*



# **PETER HOMUNCULUS**



# Peter Homunculus

## I

THE shop was the shabbiest of the cluster of its kind at the Oxford Street end of Shaftesbury Avenue; a tiny shop between a French bakery and a second-hand clothes store. Over the window was written in letters faded and worn the name "X. Cooper"; to one side of this the word "Bookseller," and to the other on a scroll the words "Libraries bought and valued." Outside the shop on a low trestle was a series of boxes containing dilapidated books, each box surmounted with a ticket proclaiming the price of its contents. In the window were prints, dirty most of them, hung in a row on a string—Louis XV. in Coronation Robes, Nell Gwyn much décolletée in her very decent fashion, David Garrick as Richard III., Kemble as Hamlet. Below these again were "Vanity Fair" caricatures on a sort of rack, attached with drawing pins. There were six of them—Mr. Gladstone, Disraeli, Lord Russell of Killowen, the Shah of Persia, Tod Sloan, and Dhuleep Singh. The Shah of Persia was purchasable for sixpence, or it might have been eightpence, for the figure was ill-made, but Mr. Gladstone's market value was two shillings, in spite of Gordon and Home Rule. These six were merely to whet the appetite, for at the end of the rack stood two enormous piles of celebrities and notorious persons.

Low in the corner of the window where it was dirtiest and half hidden by the book-boxes outside, a scrap of

paper was attached by a gelatine lozenge. On this was written "Boy Wanted" in blue pencil scrawled by a hasty or a weary hand.

An old man in an overcoat rusty with age, and for so long and so continuously worn as to cling to its owner's meagre shape, hung over the book-boxes and fingered the books, caressed those in calf with long, thin, dirty fingers, fluttered the leaves of others and occasionally with his forefinger cut the pages of a book uncut. It was a hot day, but the old man shivered and shook. Of the whole outside world he alone seemed to be alive to the existence of the little shop. Others passed it by, slouching Italians, provincials hurrying down from their hotels and boarding-houses in Bloomsbury to Piccadilly Circus, the centre of all things metropolitan; chauffeurs and mechanics and men of the motor-car industry; little sempstresses; Jews and Jewesses with black bundles of clothes on their shoulder; loafers, touts; smart women and women unfortunate; actresses; slatternly women with babies in their arms; tourists with red Baedekers in their hands, Germans, French, Americans: boys whistling, shouting, running, hopping along on one roller skate, making hideous noises with mouth organs. Tradesmen's carts, motor cars, lorries, carriages, omnibuses rolled by. Over a roof opposite a man suspended in mid-air was mending a telephone wire. Some of the passers-by stopped to look at him, a crowd, gaping, heads craned. It swelled and filled the pathway. A pale melancholy-looking boy hurrying along, pushing his way through the throng, jostled the old man absorbed in the books and sent that in his hand flying. The old man quailed and the boy tottered. He put out a hand to steady himself, then stooped and picked up

the book. He looked at it: a battered green book, Lecky's "Map of Life." He restored it to the old man, looked at the worn face for a moment and said:

"Does he tell you how to get a living?"

"How—how to live." The old man spoke in a reedy voice and had a slight stutter. "It's—it's difficult—Heuh!—I've—I've t-tried and I—know."

The old man seemed to think he had made a joke, for he shook all over and creaked, and his lips worked quickly in and out, while the skin round his eyes drew up into innumerable wrinkles. He returned to the study of the gentle philosophy of William Edward Hartpole Lecky. The boy gave a long, loud whistle. He was depressed by the enormous age of the old man. A girl in the crowd eyed him, and, as he turned his eyes up towards the man on the roof, he fell to wondering why it was possible for women to be ugly. The girl had half smiled at him, and he had seen that three of her front teeth were missing. There came a gentle touch on the arm. He was a little afraid that it was the girl, and a sort of shudder ran through him. Again the touch and he turned.

A policeman arrived on the scene and dispersed the crowd. The boy was left with the old man.

"Didn't you say you were wanting to earn a living?"

"I didn't, but I do."

"There's a boy wanted." A long yellow finger like a piece of wood indicated the notice in the window.

The boy surveyed the notice with some contempt. The shop seemed to him impossibly dirty. He read the name of its owner, however, and turned to the old man again. He was gone and the boy saw him hobbling down towards Cambridge Circus, thin and bent, one shoulder

higher than the other, his whole body twisted. In the sunlight his overcoat was vividly green.

Once more he read that a boy was wanted, and once more that the keeper of the shop called himself X. Cooper, and that libraries were bought and valued. The initial X. seemed preposterous in conjunction with Cooper, and the shop was certainly uninviting. It had a dilapidated and musty air. It was dark. The Shah of Persia was certainly the brightest spot in the window.

Again he read "Boy Wanted"—moved a little towards the door, then stopped. It was better than nothing, and there could be no harm in trying. The window was dark enough to serve as a mirror in places. Kemble as Hamlet provided the best reflection. He straightened his red bow-tie, set his straw hat right, wished that his collar was a little less frayed, the elbows of his blue coat less shiny and that his right boot were not cracked. He entered the shop.

At first he could see nothing. It was so dark. He could smell dust and a queer scent which he knew for rotting calf. Oddly he was conscious of a presence in the place, though he could see no one, even when his eyes had grown accustomed to the dim light. He coughed, but evoked no answer. He knocked against a shelf timidly, but still no answer. He was for retreating when a heavy snore came from the darkest corner behind a dwarf bookcase. He knocked again, more loudly, but made no impression. He felt rather foolish standing there, but was roused to obstinacy and would not budge.

A cat appeared and stood watching him with some interest. He bent down and held out his hand, finger and thumb together, towards the beast and said, "Pss—



Pss—Pss,” advancing towards it. It cringed from him, then fled out into the street and stood looking at him contemptuously, swinging its tail and blinking. More than ever he felt foolish and yet more roused to obstinacy. He turned his attention to the shop. There were books everywhere. On shelves up to the ceiling on all sides, crowding dwarf bookcases that jutted out from the walls, piled on the floor, on chairs, on the counter. On a desk in the corner opposite the street door stood a ledger, open, and covered with dust. There were entries in a large round hand on its pages, but none for three months past; and dust lay thick on the paper. Above it on the desk was a thick manuscript book open, and in the same condition. The boy looked at it and saw written in the same round handwriting—“An apology for the Life of Colley Cibber, written by himself, quarto, pp. ———” The entry was cut short and the writer’s pen had raced down the page in a straggling spidery line and ended in a splutter. He blew the dust from the paper and turned back to find entered the titles of books that he knew, arranged in no sort of order, without reference to subject, nationality, or date—Master Humphrey’s Clock, Molière, The Girl with the Golden Eyes, translated by Ernest Dowson, Lady Windermere’s Fan, Jorrocks and Mr. Sponge’s Sporting Tour, Old St. Paul’s, Sartor Resartus, The Daisy Chain, London Stage, Pierre Egan, Herrick’s Poems, Rabelais, Rousseau, and names of writers and books in a hideous jumble, books that he had read, and books that, from familiarity with their titles, he had considered as read. He was interested and at the same time astonished with the realisation of the extent and quantity of his reading. He had a pleasing sensation of famil-

ilarity in perusing the names of these great ones and their works. From the catalogue he turned to the books themselves and found many of the greatest—Shelley, Wordsworth, Aristophanes (in translation), Corneille and Racine, Ibsen and Shakespeare. He was thrilled by their names. He had read none of them except a little Shakespeare, absurdly annotated at school, and one or two plays of Racine. With these two he felt himself familiar. For the rest he was content that their names should give him a thrill: that seemed to be their function. Among people whom he had met in the few years of his life, since, that is, he had considered himself of an intelligent age, he admitted none to be his superiors. In the presence of these great ones whose names were household words he allowed himself the luxury of humility. He sat on the counter, dangling his long legs, and opened a volume of Shakespeare—a large quarto edition bound in green cloth and illustrated in colour by Sir John Gilbert. The book opened upon the tragedy of “Hamlet.” The boy had read the play. At school, bored with the etymology of the notes, he had one day begun to read the text, and, struck by the extraordinary resemblance between the melancholy Prince and himself had read avidly, with the result that he was punished for the complete ignorance he displayed subsequently as to the meaning of the line “unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled,” which the learned editor explained at some length. Reading the play now, he remembered with great satisfaction the compliments paid him by the examiner, a great man from one of the universities, upon his answer to the question: “*Discuss briefly the character of Hamlet. Do you consider him mad or sane?*” For a boy of fifteen, the examiner had said in his report,

the answer was very remarkable. That was a year ago. They had been proud of him that day, and they gave him the prize for literature—a copy bound in red half morocco—of the works of Felicia Hemans. He had brought it with him to London.

He sat there on the counter dangling his legs with the volume of Shakespeare open on his knees, and was lost in contemplation of himself. He forgot his surroundings, his presence in London, everything that was immediately happening to him. Not presented, like Hamlet, with any momentous problem for hugging, his imagination turned to the events of the last months, reconstructing them, seeing them vividly, photographically exact, and understanding them, seeing through them far more than at the moment of their happening. He was particularly interested in the contemplation of his father, of course in relation to himself. He remembered a time when he had worshipped his father, as a glorious and splendid being, large as a tree, and hairy, with a moustache delicious to pull. He remembered how he had wept bitterly because his mother had struck his father. She said he was drunk and had struck him. The horror of it was with the boy still, the sacrilege; he gasped, and tears gathered in his large grey eyes. His imagination raced, leaping years to the moment when the idolised father, more drunk than usual, had come in from the shop to the living-room, where his mother was laying the table for dinner. He saw it clearly. His mother had boxed his ears because he had left a toy elephant on the floor so that she stumbled over it. She laid the cloth on the table, and because there was a stain, a brown stain on it, she reversed it. She was a stout woman, and as she heaved and the cloth bellied up into the air something

in her inner garments cracked. That put her out, and as she was fidgeting with herself her husband had come into the room. The boy remembered vividly the relief of his entry, for his mother never struck him in his father's presence. She flung a taunt at the man as he stood there flushed and sniggering, leaning against the door. There was considerable heat on both sides, and in the end his father leaned across the table, smiling horribly, and said these words to his mother: "You to talk. You're any man's woman." There was some confusion in the boy's mind as to subsequent events, for it seemed in his recollection that immediately upon these words his mother died. He had never dwelt upon their meaning. He remembered being taken to see her dead, and following something to a graveyard where, because everybody was weeping, he also wept. He enjoyed weeping, and death was ever after associated in his mind with freedom, for after his mother's death his freedom was amazing. As he thought over it again, sitting there on the counter of Mr. Cooper's shop, it seemed a good theory of death, that people die to set others free. He endorsed it solemnly, was pleased with it.

He flew back to wild excursions into forests, early loves, love-tokens, baby kisses, thefts, burnings, plunderings, gorgeous lies; school and the tedium of school; books and the pride of books, new worlds revealed; the first shamed consciousness of sex, awful colloquies in dark corners with other boys; hanging on to the grating of the slaughter-house with others to watch a sheep killed: the persecution of an idiot in the town whom some imp had christened "Yellow Belly." He saw clearly the crowd of urchins racing down the main street of the little country town on market day, past the market hall

and stalls, past his father's shop, yelling after the flying idiot, "Yellow Belly, Yellow Belly. Who—stole—the baby?"

Then his father again, more mysterious after his mother's death, because less often seen; more drunk. The explosion of his father's godhead, by his coming upon him breaking open a little silver money-box, the property of his elder brother, that held forty sixpence and then burst—it never has burst, perhaps because forty sixpence were never entrusted to it. He was just beginning to enjoy again in retrospect the sensation of misery upon the discovery of the paternal theft, when the absurdity of his elder brother came upon him with such force as to produce a chuckle. Ten years older than himself, that brother, stupid at school, and a tailor now, master of his father's business. Fools all of them, brother and four sisters. Himself—another pair of shoes altogether. Clever, they said of him at the Grammar school, whither a scholarship from the board school had taken him. Clever! Much they knew about it. He saw his master again—fat, red-faced, red-moustached, bald, spectacled. He used to come in after the mid-day interval with his moustache matted with beer and food-droppings on his waistcoat, sleepy, easy to bamboozle. And the sandy-haired young man who used to try to make him learn Algebra—a thin, timid young man who, as everyone in the town knew, could not pass his intermediate examination in London, had tried four times: engaged to one of the curate's six daughters. The boy snorted contemptuously. He became indignant and waved his hands in the air, twisted his upper lip in a sneer and twitched his nose. He was thinking of how when his father died,—he didn't die, but was found dead in a ditch—his brother

had taken him away from school and insisted on his going into the shops, apprenticed to the tailoring. Two months of it were too much. A violent scene with his brother, during which all his sisters had wept, a scene of tender farewell with Elsie Atwood, the saddler's daughter, and he had come to this great flaming London, twenty pounds in his pocket, a Gladstone bag and his few books done up in newspaper, and quartered himself on an aunt—sister of his father, encountered for the first time at the funeral, in her small house where she took lodgers in a little street in Southwark. London was very big, very expensive in the matter of travelling and singularly little alive to the brilliant creature that had come new to it. The vastness of London, the cruelty of it, seized the boy, tugged at him, almost set him weeping with rage. He had sought all sorts of employment only to be rebuffed. He scorned commerce and trade. Of shops he had a horror. Shop! What tortures he had suffered at school from issuing from a shop, birth above a shop. With a jerk he realised that he was now in a shop, but quickly consoled himself with the reflection that a bookshop was hardly in the category.

He turned to Shakespeare, and lighted on the scene between Hamlet and Polonius.

Hamlet—Ay, sir; to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.

Polonius—That's very true, my lord.

Hamlet—For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a God kissing carrion,—Have you a daughter?

Polonius—I have, my lord.

Hamlet—Let her not walk i' the sun; conception is a blessing; but not as your daughter may conceive:—Friend, look to 't.

He acted the scene, a querulous quavering voice for Polonius and a voice deep as he could contrive for the Prince simulating madness. He had seen players at home, and once since his arrival in London had visited the Surrey Theatre in the Waterloo Bridge Road, where a drama with the alluring title, "Wine and Women," had presented the triumph of virtue to his devouring eyes. As Hamlet he roared, ranted and rolled his r's, made play with his eyes and swept his hands majestically through the air. A hand to his brow, he became suddenly conscious that he was observed, and, quickly turning, he saw above the dwarf bookcase in the dark corner a head that seemed to hang in air. Thick grey hair surrounded it like a cap, and two long locks hung down over the square forehead. The eyebrows were shaggy, black, one much higher than the other, as one eye was larger than the other. One eye was huge, staring, the other a little twinkling, glittering thing. Between them jutted straight from the forehead a huge nose, red and swollen at the end, under which sprouted a long straggling moustache. The mouth was hidden under this, and the chin under a stubble of white hairs, clipped with scissors, not shaven. This head wagged to and fro above the dwarf bookcase, the great eye stared and the little eye winked and the mouth emitted strange noises between a snore and a growl.

The boy, a little afraid, laid Shakespeare on the counter and slid to his feet, snatched his hat from his head and stood waiting. The head wagged faster and faster, but made no other sound than its snore and growl. The boy moved nervously from one foot to the other, and began to think of going. Suddenly an arm in a dirty blue shirt-sleeve was shot over the bookcase pointing a

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finger, and from the fierce wagging head came a surprisingly mild, soft voice. It said:

“Homunculus!”

The boy was unable to discover whether the remark called for a reply, for the word was unknown to him. A chuckle came from the head and the finger beckoned. The boy stood rooted.

“You—you wanted a boy?” he managed to say at length.

“Heuh!” said the head.

“I’ll come.”

“Name?” said the head.

“Peter Davies, sir.”

“Peter Homunculus.”

“Davies, sir.”

“Aorist of  $\tau\upsilon\pi\tau\omega$ ?”

“Ἐτυψα, sir.”

“Good. Where’s Nicaragua?”

“Central America, sir.”

“Spell Apopocatapetl.”

Peter spelled it.

“Can you write?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Read? Add?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Add forty-five and sixty-three.”

“Hundred and eight, sir.”

The head looked inquiringly round the shop.

“Seen Demophoon?”

“What, sir?”

“The cat; she was thrown into the fire when she was a kitten.”

“She ran out when I came in.”



A pause. Then:

"Do you want a boy, sir?"

"Eh?"

"Do you want a boy?"

"The notice says so."

"Will I do, sir?"

"You'll do. Ten shillings a week."

"What's the work, sir?"

"Anything you can find to do. Where d'you live?"

"Southwark, sir."

"You must live here."

"Where, sir?"

"Here, in the shop, or behind it. I do. Ain't it good' enough for you?"

The boy had an almost uncontrollable desire to giggle, but he turned it off into a sneeze.

"Got a cold?" said the head ferociously.

"No, sir."

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"Had measles? Mustn't have measles here. Babies on the top floor. You're not a Londoner by your accent."

"No, sir. Leicestershire, sir."

"I'm Warwick. Ask anyone in Warwick about the Coopers. They'll tell you. I'm the last Cooper." And the head chuckled. "When can you come?"

"To-night, sir."

"Good boy."

The arm was withdrawn and the head disappeared.

The boy shook himself, pinched his leg. Then he said:

"Sir."

There was no answer. He peered round the bookcase and saw that X. Cooper was asleep. He dared not rouse him.

He returned to the counter and sat again, dangling his legs, taking more interest in the shop. He seemed to have become a part of it and dreamed of the improvements he would make in it, the stir caused in the book world by Peter Davies, Esq., and the fortune won by the sale of books: of intimacy with great authors. He noticed then for the first time that there was a glass-panelled door leading into a parlour behind the shop with a little window let into the wall for spying upon customers just as there was in the shop at home. He supposed that the parlour would be much like that at home, and took no immediate interest in it. He was interested in the future: for him always the future was the present. Just as without the slightest difficulty he had dropped his brother and sisters at home, he was now prepared to drop the aunt with whom he had lived since his arrival in London.

The cat, Demophoon, returned to the shop, and finding him still there, decided that as part of the establishment it might be wise to conciliate him. She accordingly jumped on to the counter and rubbed herself against him, purring roundly. He stroked her, and noticed then that she had only the crumpled remnant of an ear, and that in patches her fur was thin. He had never before heard of Demophoon, his reading of Greek authors being confined to the Anabasis of Xenophon, and the fourth book of the same author's wars. He was annoyed that he had not heard of Demophoon, and repulsed the cat.

The cat leaped down. She showed no resentment, being a wise animal, fully realising that her living de-

pended upon the favour of the two-legged animals whose power seemed infinite. She retired behind the bookcase and choosing a warm corner in the small of the back of X. Cooper, curled up and went to sleep.

Peter took no further interest in her. He was pleased with himself. Already his extraordinary merits had won for him a competence of ten shillings a week and board and lodging, in the very centre of the Metropolis; no very great amount of work to do, and, if X. Cooper were always asleep, certainly much freedom. Decidedly he might have done worse.

A little pale young man entered the shop and asked the price of Mr. Gladstone.

Peter took down Mr. Gladstone, found him marked two shillings, and sold him for that price. He was for rolling him up, but the young man insisted on carrying him flat. In his eyes Mr. Gladstone seemed to have a rare value.

“You’re new here,” he said to Peter.

“Just come.”

“See you again. I often come.” With that the young man left the shop.

Peter hated him because he was well dressed, carried himself with an air of confidence, and spoke with a refined and almost mincing accent.

He discovered a till in the counter and placed the two shillings therein. It had no other coins for company.

On consulting his watch, which he had bought for ten shillings and sixpence out of his twenty pounds, Peter discovered it to be nearly half-past five, and decided at once to go down to Southwark, break the news to his aunt and bring back his Gladstone bag and his books. X. Cooper was still asleep. He left the shop quietly,

shutting the door softly behind him, so that any customer entering might waken the sleeping bookseller with the jangling of the bell. In the glass of the door a hideous Bunbury caricature mocked him. Glancing up to the left he saw that the old man had returned to the study of "The Map of Life."

He seemed to have grown older, his coat more green, and he was bent lower over the book.

Peter walked away down towards Piccadilly Circus. There was noticeably a swagger in his walk; he was more insolent and certainly more coxcombical than when he had jostled against the old man in threading through the crowd only an hour before.

Passing a boot shop near the theatres at the Piccadilly end of the avenue, he observed that a sale was announced. He entered and bought himself a pair of brown boots for eleven shillings and sixpence. When he came out he wished that he had bought black, but was too timid to go back to the gorgeous young Hebrew who had condescended to sell them to him, and pursued his way across the Circus to the Tube Railway station. He was almost run down in crossing from the island by a smart electric brougham, in which a beautiful actress was sitting. The chauffeur yelled at him. He leaped forward and turned. The actress, in alarm, had turned to look at him. She was very beautiful. Peter thought he had roused interest in her. In the station he stopped to buy an evening paper, the serial story of which he had followed with eagerness for a month. Among others he saw a picture postcard of the actress in the brougham. She was in a stage costume, and the ingenious printer had made her glitter with tinsel. Peter paid twopence and became the owner of the card. At the foot of the

picture he read her name—Miss Mary Dugdale. He placed her in his right breast pocket, and then, upon reflection that his heart was on the left side, transferred her to the left breast pocket of his jacket.

He passed into the lift, and became absorbed in the story of "The Mammon of Unrighteousness," by Alice and Ethel Stubbs, a story cunningly concocted in accordance with the prescription of the controller of a ring of such journals, passing from day to day through violent events, each instalment concluding with a seemingly irreparable catastrophe, after which the announcement in italics "To be continued to-morrow" seemed to be a concession to the unreasoning optimism and hopefulness of the human race. Peter was duly thrilled with the day's catastrophe and properly relieved that the hero and heroine were to enjoy a continued existence in spite of it. He turned, between Waterloo and the Elephant, to the other columns of the newspaper and read with languid interest their combination of banality and picturesque untruth, lies before which the inventions of Marco Polo and Sir John Mandeville were pale. Under the heading of "Plays and Players" he discovered a paragraph concerning Miss Mary Dugdale. It ran: "Miss Mary Dugdale, the charming young actress who took all London by storm two years ago, and who, rumour says, is engaged to be married to one of the richest of our gilded youth, has been chosen by Mr. Bertram Bond to play the lead in his new piece. This is this fortunate young lady's first really fat part. Keep your eye on Mary." The impertinence of the paragraphist roused Peter to fury. He let the paper fall and trampled it underfoot. A mechanic sitting next to him waited to see if he had really finished with it, then picked it up and became

absorbed in the betting news and the predictions of "Captain Spy." Peter meanwhile had remembered an anecdote of a deceased and lamented actor who, in his youth, upon witnessing a performance of Hamlet, had there and then vowed that he would some day play the *rôle* himself and would wed the lady who played Ophelia. Both ambitions had been realised, the first successfully, the second unhappily. However, Peter was unaware of this, was indeed at an age to believe, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, that marriage was inevitably a state of happiness, and had entered upon a blissful dream which was broken only by the grinding of the brakes as the train drew into the Elephant and Castle station. He descended and was conveyed in a crowded lift, still dreaming, to the street. His jaw had dropped and a vacant expression was in his eyes, the expression which had provoked one of his sisters to implore him upon a public occasion to try and look less like an idiot.

Passing the Elephant and Castle he was narrowly missed by an intoxicated man, blubbering, who lunged out from the swing doors, stood for a moment on the curb swaying, drew a revolver from his pocket and shot himself. Peter swung round on the report, saw the man crumple up and fall, and a crowd spring up, as crowds do in London, from nowhere. A nausea seized him, and a coldness. On the point of tears he ran from the scene, the vision of the man falling before him, the report ringing in his ears, to the right down Newington Causeway and the Borough High Street, under the railway bridge, through dark streets and alleys to Trinity Square and on down a grim street to the house of his aunt, Mrs. Daltry. He tugged furiously at the bell, and, the door being

opened, he plunged into the dimly lit hall, sent hats, walking-sticks, and umbrellas flying in his passage and stumbled down the dark stairs to the kitchen. There he sat on a hard Windsor chair, the parcel containing his new boots on his knees, and shivered, pale, uncanny, his lower jaw working.

His aunt was engaged in the polite art of crystoleum painting, and at first paid no attention to him. When, after five minutes, he had spoken no word, she looked up. A glance at his face and she flew to him, shook him, felt the iciness of his forehead, shook him again. Understanding nothing of his condition she instinctively put her arms round him—she was a tiny, bird-like woman—and held his head against her breast. The warmth of human contact released feeling and the boy burst into a passion of tears. She crooned over him, not much softness in her voice, dry withered woman as she was, and pressed little pecking kisses with her thin lips on his forehead.

He wailed: "The man shot himself."

"What man, dearie?"

"He—he came out of the—the public house. And, and sh—shot himself."

"Oh!"

"Yes. He was so near, and he crumpled up like—like a doll when you—you make a hole in it and let the—the sawdust out."

He was seeing it all again, feeling the shock of it. His condition seemed not to improve, and for distraction she made him eat; fetched from a cupboard cold meat, pickles, a Dutch cheese, round and red. He ate and was comforted, but though she was curious, she found him little inclined to tell her more and returned

to her painting. It was for her a relief from the monotony of attending to the domestic welfare of the two commercial gentlemen and the ascetic young priest who constituted her household. It was also a genteel occupation, not altogether without profit, for, in red or green plush frames, they sometimes found a purchaser among the newly married of the district. A childless woman, she had welcomed the advent of the queer dreamy boy, and according to her lights had been kind to him. She was irritated by his inexplicable alternations of dark misery, which was almost a stupor, and wild spirits. She had no great opinion of his ability, and when he was dismissed first from the insurance office and then from the solicitor's office in which he had successively found employment, she had begun seriously to be alarmed lest he should rest permanently on her hands. He had given fifteen of his twenty pounds into her keeping, and she had used them to pay portions of long-standing accounts with her butcher, and the little grocer at the street corner. She had suffered pangs of conscience, but had promised herself to refund the money at a time when it should be more useful to the boy. Further, she considered herself entitled to some payment for his board and lodging. He was acquiescent in all her suggestions and found himself interesting as a "delicate" boy, who had outgrown his strength. Thus she explained his unusual pallor to her lodgers. When reference was made to the odd shape of his forehead she hinted darkly at disease in infancy.

She looked up from her painting to the clock on the mantelpiece. It was half-past six, time she began to think of the curate's supper. She found the boy staring at her.



"Better?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"You're queer."

"I've got a place."

"Oh! Hope you'll keep it this time."

"It's to live in."

"Eh?"

She had a momentary panic. If he left, he might ask for the money.

"In a bookshop in Shaftesbury Avenue. Cooper's the name, and there's a cat with a crumpled ear. And I'm to get ten shillings a week and my board and lodging."

"When—when do they want you?"

"There's only one—an old man. And I'm to go to-night, I think. I don't know. He went to sleep again."

"Who did?"

"Mr. Cooper. He was asleep when I went in." He recounted the adventure, beginning with the man on the telephone wires and the old man in the green coat, omitting no detail.

"Humph," said his aunt. She was dubious. She had a horror of anything out of the ordinary, like all people whose experience has run in a narrow circle. She had not learned that nothing is irreparable. Accordingly she considered it her duty to harangue her nephew, who paid no attention to the sense of the torrent of words, hearing them only as a man dreaming in a wood hears the babbling of a mountain stream hard by. His insensibility roused her to vixenish fury, her voice rose to a scream so shrill that he could not avoid hearing these words:

"You've made your bed. You must lie on it. If you

go among these drunkards and thieves I'm done with you. There!"

She folded her arms and held them tight under her bosom, waiting for his rejoinder. He had grown accustomed to these onslaughts. He looked up at her from his plate on which he had been tracing designs with the mustard spoon, wearily and with a heavy eye, and, rising slowly to his feet, said:

"It's getting late. I must go and pack."

"You're going then?"

"Yes."

He left her and went up to the attic, which had been his apartment since his residence in the house, brought out his Gladstone bag from under the little folding bed and laid out his belongings—a brown suit, half a dozen collars, three red ties, two pairs of cuffs, a pair of red felt slippers, a cap, two night gowns, three flannel shirts, underwear, socks, hairbrush and comb, and his books—the works of Felicia Hemans, *Astronomy for Beginners*, *Pickwick Papers*, *The Tower of London*, *Hamlet* in a school edition, *Armadale*, and an abridged edition of *Don Quixote*. He stood for a moment surveying the pile, surprised to find himself owner of so much, but taking no pride in it. He had no instinct of possession, and would quite contentedly have left everything behind. He packed his bag, and leaving it in the hall on his way went down to the kitchen to say good-bye to his aunt. She received him uneasily, afraid lest he should ask for his money. However, he held out his cheek to be kissed: she rose on tiptoe and pecked at him. Without more he turned and left her. As he reached the top of the stairs conscience pricked her and she called to him. He did not hear and she made no further effort in the direction

of honesty, except to tell herself that it was perhaps better for her to keep the money until such time as he should need it. She knew for the present where he was to be found, and if he chose to leave the bookshop without communicating with her—well, that would be his fault and not hers.

She turned to the frying of a steak and onions for the curate, for whom alone among human beings she had a real tenderness. The ascetic young parson suffered agonies from her persistent attentions.

Peter returned to the shop by the same route as that by which he had come. He was very tired, and the Gladstone bag was heavy for his small strength. The shock of the suicide outside the Elephant had left him in the depths of misery. When, therefore, on arriving at the shop he found the book-boxes removed, the shutters up and the door closed, no light in the shop nor sign of life, he was very near tears, and a lump rose in his throat. No passer-by paid any attention to him. He dropped the bag on to the pavement and knocked violently at the door, kicked it, found a bell and rang furiously. All to no purpose. He rang again, and again. At length from above there came the voice of a woman.

“Hello! You there!”

Peter looked up and saw in the dim light (it was September, lamps were lit, but the light of day, not yet disappeared, made them ineffectual) the head of a young woman in curl papers in the first floor window. As far as he could see she was pretty, but she seemed to be very inefficiently clothed, for with her right hand she was holding a piece of cloth to her left shoulder. A jovial young man passing saw her and threw up a familiar greeting. She burst into a torrent of abuse, a flow of

language which Peter only remembered to have been equalled by his father in his worst moments. The young man passed on singing, "I want you for my all-time girl," and the young woman returned to Peter.

"What do you want?"

"Mr. Cooper."

"He ain't in. What d'you want him for?"

"I'm coming to live here—to work." The young woman whistled.

"The devil you are. Wait a minute and I'll let you in."

Peter waited and presently she appeared at a little door on the other side of the shop.

"This way," she said. "You can get into old Cooper's parlour, but that'll be dull for you. Better come upstairs and talk to me while I dress."

Peter accepted this adventure as he accepted everything, without surprise. She had a box of matches in one hand and lighted the way for him along the narrow passage. Just before the stairs she opened a little door to the left.

"Put your bag in there. That's old Cooper's place."

He deposited his bag inside the door, which she shut again, and they went upstairs, she in front striking matches to light the way. Turning to talk to him the flame of a match reached her thumb and burned her. She threw it down with an oath and took to sucking her thumb. She put out her other hand and took Peter's arm, guiding him to her room. Then the gas was lit and Peter stood blinking. When his eyes had grown accustomed to the light he saw that the young woman was dressed only in a light dressing gown.

"You're pretty," he said.

"Oh! Come orf it," she laughed. Then she came

running up to him, threw her arms around him and said:

“ Kiss me.”

Peter kissed her timidly. He did not like the taste of the stuff she had on her lips.

“ Now sit on the bed, dearie, and talk to me while I do my toilette.”

He sat on the bed, but, finding no topic of conversation, made no effort to talk. She did not seem to mind his silence, and while she took the curl papers out of her hair began to sing. She had a sweet voice and Peter liked to hear her. One little verse she sang over and over again, to a sad little tune:

There is a lady sweet and kind,  
Was never a face so pleased my mind,  
I did but see her passing by,  
Yet will I love her till I die.

Peter liked the tune and whistled it.

When she had coiled her black hair into a preposterous erection with a sort of knob hanging down over her forehead, she removed her dressing gown and stood looking coquettishly at him clad only in corset and pink silk petticoat. Peter found himself admiring her shoulders and wanting to touch them.

“ What are you staring at, silly?” she said.

“ Your shoulders,” he said, and she laughed.

“ You’re a funny boy, but you’ve got beautiful eyes.”

The remark gave Peter a queer little shrill. No one had ever before spoken well of his appearance. He relapsed into silence. She turned to her mirror again and began to paint her face. She did it very clumsily, and when she turned smiling again to Peter, he was appalled.

Suddenly she said:

"Shall we be friends, funny boy?"

"Yes," said Peter.

"What's your name, then?"

"Peter Davies."

"Mine's Tessa Myers. You can call me Tessa. How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"I'm nineteen. Really friends I mean. Not—not——"

Peter did not understand what not, but he agreed with her.

"He's a funny old thing, old Cooper. But he's kind. He's been real kind to me, when I was ill."

Peter found considerable comfort in the idea that old Cooper was kind. Tessa continued as she pirmed her hat, an enormous erection of plush, roses and feathers, to the fat nest of her hair.

"He's my landlord, you know. An' the people upstairs, he took 'em in when the man was out o' work—he's a printer. He's odd. A gentleman once, but—— How you do stare at me!"

Peter was not staring at her nor at anything in the room. He was visualising the scene by the Elephant and Castle, which had come back to him. He heard her voice, but not her words. Politely he smiled acquiescence.

When she was dressed, veiled and fully equipped she came and sat by him on the bed, and made him tell her about himself. He invented a romantic history—a bed-ridden mother, a father who had died before his birth, a rich uncle in Australia (he felt the banality of the invention of the rich uncle, but it was out almost before he was aware), adventures on the stage, wandering in

France and a wild flight through the Black Forest to Baden-Baden, among pine trees. It was a breathless narrative and Tessa was enthralled. She sat like a child, her eyes watching Peter's lips, her own wide apart, her hands in her lap, an attitude almost of adoration. Peter had reached his fifteenth year and was on the point of describing the arrest of a cousin for cattle-maiming when they heard blundering steps below, a door slammed, a crash and an oath. Tessa, brought suddenly back to reality, laughed.

"He's fallen over your bag," she said. "Come on."

She turned down the gas and together, she holding his arm, they crept down the dark stairs to the little door leading into the parlour. There they found the old bookseller, lighted match in hand, surveying the bag. He turned, muttering, not seeing them, and lit the gas. Tessa greeted him and pushed Peter, suddenly abashed, forward. Peter could find nothing to say, he wanted to giggle and had a tendency to turn like a shy child and hide his face in Tessa's skirts. He felt small enough, and in the dim light old Cooper loomed ogreish.

Suddenly the old man chuckled. It seemed that he had recognised Peter, for he held out a hand and gripped the boy's arm, dragging him under the light. With his other hand he pressed under Peter's chin and lifted his face for scrutiny. He looked long into his eyes and chuckled. Chuckling he ran his fingers over the bumps in Peter's forehead, which had caused one of his aunts to mutter ominously of water on the brain.

Then he said, turning to Tessa:

"There'll be a fine brew in a head like that."

He seemed delighted.

“Homunculus!” he said, holding Peter, now thoroughly alarmed, at arm’s length. “Men are ridiculous, but it is perhaps better not to know it.”

The phrase beat upon Peter’s brain, stamped itself, and he saw it written in large blue letters, winking, spelling itself out like one of the signs by the river.

“Homunculus,” said old Cooper, “we who are worn by life, crushed, hurried to death, we, about to die, salute you. We who have lost faith in everything but youth, salute you, the very type and figure of youth. We to whom the world is a speck of scum wherein the sun breeds men like maggots in a dead dog. . . .”

The curious echo in Peter shrieked “Maggots in a dead dog, being a God kissing carrion—carrion—carrion—” and in a swelling cry—“Crow!!” The old man continued:

“Homunculus! You are old as the world upon which you crawl, ant-like, burrowing in this heap which we call London; and you are young as the dawn and the dew. We salute you. Youth! The world is at your feet. Not for kicking.”

With that he gave Peter a little shove so that he staggered and sat suddenly upon a horsehair chair in which a curious spring made investigations into his anatomy. He remained gaping at the bookseller, who had turned to Tessa.

“It’s early for you yet, my girl. Stay and sup with youth. I’ll make an omelette.”

Tessa stayed and laid the table. Almost in silence they then fed upon the excellent omelette made by old Cooper by the heat of a gas ring in the hearth. They drank beer. Milk was provided for the cat, who sat on the table by the old man’s right hand. Through half-



closed lids she blinked at Peter, who occasionally caressed her timidly. For the first time in his life Peter felt himself kin with an animal. He said so and tagged —“More kin than kind,”

“From Demophoon and her mother,” said old Cooper, with his mouth full. “I thought at one time that I had learned the art of life. Sleep, eat, eat, sleep. But, being a man I learned that the pleasures of Demophoon are not for me, a unit in the social order. Being a male, I cannot make a profession of those pleasures. The art of life is still unlearned. No man has ever mastered it: Man’s chief glory.”

He drank deeply to Demophoon. Tessa, who was a little shocked by his remarks, murmured something about the time and stole away. Peter looked after her heavy-eyed. At the door she turned and blew him a kiss.

The woman gone, Peter and his employer sat in silence, eyeing each other furtively. The silence oppressed Peter and by way of making conversation he narrated the story of the suicide.

“You will observe,” said the old man, “that it was necessary for him to become drunk to accomplish it. Some are drunk with sorrow, some with passion, and some with emptiness and ache of the flesh. With sensibility alive, men are proud that they can suffer so much. . . . I came to it nearly, once. I could never be drunk enough.”

Then he told Peter the story of the great and absurd Goethe taking a knife to bed with him and, on the subject of Goethe, enlarged upon the poet’s relations with women, with special reference to Frau von Stein, who was clever enough or stupid enough to make him unhappy during ten years, before his astounding relation

with the heavy Christine von Vulpins. Lighting a pipe, the old man said:

“ It is curious how men preserve the memory of those who have refused to regard or respect their institutions. Men do not like their institutions, for they are all unjust.”

When the pipe was finished he took Peter, now more than half asleep, to a little cabin of a room that had once been a scullery behind the parlour, introduced him to his bed, and left him with strict injunctions to extinguish the light. Peter surveyed the apartment, which contained only a bed, a cracked mirror, and a crazy chest of drawers, at one corner of which three books took the place of a missing leg. He was content with it, had no anxiety because the window was shut, indeed made no attempt to open it. He arranged his belongings, his clothes in the several drawers and his books on the little iron mantelpiece. He opened the works of Felicia Hemans and read a few pious lines. He turned to the cover and read under the crest of his school the inscription:

PRIZE AWARDED TO  
PETER DAVIES.  
*Subject—English Literature.*  
*Open Prize.*  
Midsummer 1906.  
THOMAS BLOOMER,  
*Head Master.*

He felt himself a fine fellow and had a vision of himself returning some day to distribute the prizes like the sheep-faced Archdeacon, the school's especial glory, who had risen to his pinnacle through marriage with the daughter of a bishop. Everyone knew that, but Thomas

Bloomer had bowed low to the ornament of the Church. So, thought the boy, Thomas Bloomer should some day bow to Peter Davies, perhaps to Sir Peter or even Lord—Lord——. No matter, Thomas Bloomer should bow. Without being really conscious of what he was doing, Peter knelt and said his prayers. The God he created for himself during the office bore a striking resemblance to X. Cooper, booming.

Hanging his coat up, Peter felt something rustle in his pocket. It was the portrait of Miss Dugdale. He pinned it to the wall above his head. Passing into sleep he had a vision of X. Cooper, Godlike, saying:

“We, who breed maggots in a dead dog, which is a God-kissing carrion, salute thee, Lord Davies, emblem and type of youth . . .”

Mary Dugdale appeared in the dress of Elsie Atwood, the saddler's daughter, a dream—Mary, radiant.

Peter slept.

## II.

IN a few months it was for Peter as though he had never known any other mode of living. He remembered all experiences vividly, lost none of his power of visualising past scenes, and like the rest of the world took a delight in recollecting past hurts, hugging them, striving to make them as bitter as they had been at the moment of the event. Past joys it was for him, as for others, impossible to recall. He was happy and more than ever convinced that he was a fine fellow, for old Cooper adored him, as he did the old gentleman in the rusty green coat who had become intimate with them and an habitual visitor. They chuckled at Peter's jokes, repeated them to each other, reminded each other of his exploits, proclaimed him a masterpiece, a poet, and their eyes never left him when he was in the parlour or the shop with them. Neither had other creature to care for, though old Cooper loved Demophon, and the green-coated old man was attached quite sincerely to the filthy woman who for nearly thirty years had "cleaned and done for" him in his little room above the bird shop near Covent Garden market. Peter liked the unquestioning appreciation of his remarks and used to ponder witticisms and profound sayings as he worked in the shop. Occasionally he was guilty of theft.

He was always in the shop, working, early morning and late evening. He had made a wonderful difference in the aspect of the place. He began by dividing the books into the moderately clean and the dirty, without

regard to quality, subject or price, and finding that the casual loafing bibliophile liked to purchase a dirty book in a calf binding ancient in appearance, rather as a sop to conscience than from any enthusiasm, he placed such in the cheap boxes outside, raising the scale of prices in the proportion of one penny to threepence. He left the prints and the Vanity Fair cartoons in the window, for they seemed to give a tone to the place. Just inside the door, as a bait, he had always the cleanest books, and beyond them, for respectability, the works of the great. He endeavoured to continue the catalogue from the place where his predecessor's pen had sprawled and spluttered down the page—a disaster explained by old Cooper, who had discovered the dirty imp reading a lurid tale in contravention of all orders and principles; but, impotent in the face of its chaos, he bought a bulky manuscript book and began a new one in his neatest writing, adorning it with much red ink. He had the shop thoroughly cleaned and the windows polished once a week by the crone who did the rough work of the establishment. Truculent towards old Cooper, she was as wax in the hands of the boy. The old man was fitfully roused to energy by this new influence, and though he maintained to all appearances his slothfulness, he was subtle to suggest new operations to the adored boy, without letting him know that the idea was not his own. Their stock consisted of books unsalable elsewhere, bought by the hundredweight, remainders from the great booksellers, and the siftings of libraries bought by the second-hand fraternity. Old Cooper kept the buying in his own hands. With the shop clean and attractive, business grew amazingly, and the victims of the book-poring habit paid it an attention which it had never known be-

fore. Entrants to the shop became so frequent that Demophoon in despair deserted it for the parlour. Old Cooper's knowledge, wit and wisdom became known, and men of all sorts would come to the shop to exchange words with him. He was crusty with most of them. He had for so long lain aside, like the most obscurely hidden of his books, dusty and cobwebbed, that he came blinking to the light of human relations. His bewilderment was pathetic, but he steadfastly refused to wear more than one clean collar a week, and adhered to his close clipping of his beard as less trouble than shaving. To tell the truth, Peter was a little ashamed of the old man, and with the blindness of his age, often hurt him bitterly. Perhaps all the more for that old Cooper doted on Peter. They throve, and, rarely moving from the shop, Peter found his ten shillings mount to a considerable sum. At Tessa's suggestion he started an account with the Post Office Savings Bank.

His aunt he had not seen again since the night of his quitting her, and he had written an hubristic letter to his brother announcing his circumstances and his determination to sever all connection with tailordom for ever. For a short time he corresponded fervently with Elsie Atwood, but his interest in the correspondence was purely literary (he delighted in his own humour), and finding soon that he was repeating himself, he fled from the cardinal sin and ceased. From that moment his world was the shop, conceived as the fertilising ground of the germ of the greatness of Peter Davies. He read with old Cooper, three nights a week, Greek, German, and a little French. The old man taught him to recite ballads of Goethe and Schiller, and little love poems of Umland, took him through selected passages of Plato,

Euripides, and play after play of Aristophanes; roared and ranted Racine, bleating the long, heavy lines in the manner of Mounet Sully; minced the fables of La Fontaine; stuffed thoughts of Blaise Pascal into the boy's brain; swept with him through the histories and tragedies of Shakespeare, they weeping together with Cordelia, raging with Othello, both acting for all they were worth: Tom Jones they read together, Peregrine Pickle and Pickwick; Waverley and the Bride of Lammermoor. Of modern writers old Cooper would have nothing; tale-makers he abhorred, and for the socialist writers, he dismissed them as cold vain fellows, swollen with raising a cloud of dust in a cul-de-sac, unable to view the world for the dust they had made; parochial little fellows embracing the parish pumps as the centre of the world, their little intellect as the motive forces of that same world, denying instinct. The old man could not speak of them with moderation.

“Homunculus,” he said—he never addressed Peter by any other title—“Homunculus, there has never been any other faith for the social order and arrangement of the affairs of men than this same socialism. It is in the hearts of all good men. Since, however, there are men who love power and money better than all other of the prizes that this world has to offer, love them sufficiently to gain them in spite of all obstacles, in spite of their own right feeling and love, the socialist dream is slow in realisation. It is beneath all progressive measures. . . . It has taken man millions of years to develop his brain. It must take him millions of years to learn to use it properly. He is driven by hunger and love, two instincts, the instinct of defence and preservation, the instinct of creation: two instincts so inex-

trically intertwined as to be almost one and the same. (Having, perhaps foolishly—I do not know—developed this brain, men have complicated their existence, for their brain is not yet sufficiently strong to control these instincts. It will be—perhaps, who knows!—not till then I think will—to sever intellect from instinct is sheer arrogance, the work only of a vain fool.—These new men make of socialism a creed, so that their words are barren.”

Then the vain old man was guilty of a tag. He said:  
“Homo sum; nil humanum a me alienum puto?”

Peter's mind was not strong enough to grasp all the old man's philosophy, but it was presented to him frequently in various guises, so that it sank, became part of his own mind, and though his imagination could not yet grasp the world, nor his youthful egotism allow him sufficiently to lose sight of himself, he contracted early the artist's habit of looking at men and women as something remote and yet akin with himself, explicable only through himself, part of a gigantic whole, a splendid world, a world which, in spite of all waverings and all temptations to an easy cynicism, he felt desperately to be good.

Once old Cooper said to him suddenly as he was ruling lines in red ink in the catalogue:

“It is the privilege of genius to reveal the splendour of the world.”

Peter, as usual, took the words to himself, mused over them, found them good, printed and emblazoned them on a piece of white paper, which he pinned on to the wall above the several photographs (he had begun a collection) of Miss Mary Dugdale. He had seen her upon the stage in the very successful play of Mr,



Bertram Bond, and often sneaked to the theatre of an evening without giving word of his intention. She was to him ideal woman; her nose was so deliciously straight.

On one occasion, when the green-coated old man whom old Cooper called "Adam" and Peter "Sir," was supping with them, shaking and shivering in his old green coat, his fingers twitching, now pulling at his thin goat beard, now stroking his sharp beak of a nose, red-veined, they discussed London, its cruelty, its snobbery, its preposterous arrogance, its parochialism, its irresistible attraction, its romance, its life, its majesty, its corruption, its beauty, and its hideousness. Old Cooper went into the shop, first filling his mouth with bloater fried by Peter, to return with a tattered, much-read volume in his hand. Peter recognised it as that which lay always on the sofa where the old man slept in the shop. He opened it and read:

Hell is a city much like London,  
 A populous and a smoky city;  
 There are all sorts of people undone,  
 And there is little or no fun done:  
 Small justice shewn and still less pity.

There is great talk of revolution  
 And a great chance of despotism,  
 German soldiers—camps—confusion—  
 Tumults—lotteries—rage—delusion—  
 Gin—suicide—and methodism.

Peter sat listening, his mind supplying instances of each. German soldiers and lotteries puzzled him. The man of the Elephant and Castle stood for suicide, the crone who cleaned for them for gin, his aunt for methodism. Old Cooper read on:

There are mincing women mewing  
 (Like cats who amant misere)  
 Of their own virtue, and pursuing  
 Their gentler sisters to that ruin,  
 Without which—what were chastity?

Lawyers, judges—old hob-nobbers—  
 Are there—bailiffs, chancellors—  
 Bishops—great and little robbers—  
 Rhymsters—pamphleteers—stock-jobbers—  
 Men of glory in the wars.

A fine scorn came into the old man's voice as he read:

Things whose trade is, over ladies  
 To lean and flirt, and stare and simper,  
 Till all that is divine in woman  
 Grows cruel, courteous, smooth, inhuman—  
 Crucified 'twixt a smile and whimper.

Thinking, toiling, wailing, moiling,  
 Frowning, preaching—such a riot!  
 Each with never-ceasing labour.  
 Whilst he thinks he cheats his neighbour  
 Cheating his own heart of quiet. . . .

And some few—like we know who,  
 Damned—but God alone knows why—  
 To believe their minds are given  
 To make this ugly Hell a Heaven,  
 In which faith they live and die. . . .

All are damned—they breathe an air  
 Thick, infected, joy-dispelling:  
 Each preserves what seems most fair,  
 Mining like moles through mind, and there  
 Scoop palace caverns vast, where Care  
 In throned state is ever dwelling.

The book was shut and laid respectfully on the table, the old man's hand caressing its cover.

"There," he said, "that's London. It's true now."

"I think," said Adam, "that what a great man sees is always true. Great men always see the same things. The poet has the same vision as Christ."

"All the evil in the world," said Cooper; "all the evil in the world, comes from the arrogance of men, apes in clothes."

He cocked an eye at Peter to see if the remark had shot home. Seeing the boy in a dream, he continued:

"The world is what we see in it. I cannot see that we are any better than ants or bees."

"The beasts," said Adam, "die simply as they live. We complicate life and we die in terror. I am afraid of death."

Old Cooper became arrogant at that.

"I should accept death as I have accepted life—as a gift I have not asked for. . . ."

Peter was pale, wide-eyed. Thoughts too big for him were thumping in his head.

"I think," he said in a faint little voice; "I think dead things are horrible. We—we—die to set other people free."

As soon as he had said it, he knew that the thought was stale, no longer true for him, though splendid when he had first roused it. He laughed nervously, and fell to twisting a lock of hair upon his forehead. Old Cooper saw that he was moved, and silenced Adam. Awkwardly they sat. Relief came when Tessa ran in, hair down, scared. She was sobbing and her hand clutched at her neck. Peter jumped to his feet, held her for a moment, then aided her to his chair. She

clung to his hand, and he felt an odd sort of pleasure that she should.

“What is it, Tessa?”

Tessa turned to old Cooper, questioning her.

“Mrs. Beasley,” she said. “She was—was in the family way—and—and—he’s been on the drink lately, out of work again. I been paying their rent—— He struck her two days ago, and to-day it’s—she’s—it’s all wrong. . . . I been with her—it’s awful.”

She clutched Peter’s hand tight, hurt him. He shook free, seized his hat, and without a word ran out into the street. There was a dense fog, and he had difficulty in finding his way to a house in Endell Street, where he found the young man who had purchased “Mr. Gladstone,” the son and partner of a Doctor Fildes, well known in the district for his skill and charity. He had become a friend of Peter, and in that house the boy was always welcome, treated with respect, and perhaps a little too much encouraged to think himself a rare being. He had soon overcome his first dislike of the young man, with his airs of the University and carefully elaborate professional manner. Together they returned to the shop—old Adam had disappeared. Cooper was in the parlour soothing, controlling the husband, Beasley, wild, distracted with remorse, pacing fiercely to and fro, abusing himself, the world, and the God of generation who sent children to those who could least tend them. Tessa, with money of old Cooper’s, had flown to make purchases of coals, blankets, comfortable things. She had taken the four children to her room and placed them all in her great bed, brass, with a bright pink covering. They lay there huddled together, frightened, whimpering like a litter of young puppies

wanting their mother and the comfort of her milk. Young Fildes went straight upstairs and saw the woman. Her condition was terrible. He gave her morphia, and recognising his incompetence in face of this piece of twisted nature, called softly to Peter and sent him with an urgent message to his father.

While Peter was gone, and until Doctor Fildes came, Tessa and the young doctor straightened the room, cleaned it, lit a fire, moving silently, afraid a little, glad each of the other's company. There was no sleep for any of them in the house that night. Peter and old Cooper took turns with the wretched husband. Tessa was fitting to and fro, upstairs and downstairs, fetching, carrying. She showed a marvellous competence, a decision in the face of the small emergencies, difficulties and obstacles cropping up through the long night, which made the men feel ashamed a little, grateful to her.

Through the night father and son were watching over the body of the wretched woman, twisting, turning, sweating in agony. Life flickered in her, seemed at dying point, flared up dangerously, then glowed in a little spark. The dead thing taken from her, she might live again, faintly at first, timidly. . . .

That night was great for Peter. The immense happenings of it set him quivering, exhausted him. He had come really into contact with human beings, all veils torn asunder, and he entered upon real friendship. He saw old Cooper differently. Too young to understand or sympathise with the old man's attitude towards life, the result of long, bitter experience and thought almost equally bitter, yet there was in him ever after a humility in his conduct towards the generous creature which touched Cooper and gave a yet greater value to

the precious boy who had suddenly come to restore interest in last days.

Peter, like the rest of us, was nicer for being brought in contact with human suffering.

He knew, of course, that he was nicer, delighted in all the new things which he found in himself, and with his youthful sentimentality put it to the test by all sorts of faked generousities. He found himself so beautiful at this time, that in his bed at nights he would cry with pleasure in the contemplation of himself. However, he did not let it interfere with business, and after provision had been made for the Beasley family, who were shipped off to New Zealand as soon as the woman was well enough, he threw out suggestions that the shop front should be painted, and the name relettered in white on an olive-green ground. Old Cooper at first was obdurate, saw no good in it, was satisfied with trade and did not want more. Peter was so importunate, however, that consent was at length given, and the painters came.

Cooper was mysterious, went about chuckling, rubbing his hands, jingling the money in his pockets, making sudden wild onslaughts on Demophoon, and was altogether in a high state of glee. Peter was very busy with the catalogue, and also with a great literary work at which he was working in secret, and hardly noticed the eccentric behaviour of his employer. The smell of paint was peculiarly distasteful to him, and he was not well; for one day he retired to bed. Old Cooper was alarmed and fussed until Peter snapped at him.

The sickness was gone next day, Peter's seventeenth birthday, and old Cooper took the boy after breakfast into the street. His hand on Peter's shoulder, he pointed

to the name board above the window. In letters of white on a green ground Peter read:

Cooper and Davies. Booksellers  
Libraries bought and valued

Old Adam came shuffling by on his way to the British Museum, where it was his wont to spend the morning. He gave a shrill little cry of pleasure on reading the inscription, shook Peter's hand up and down, up and down, sniffed, patted his shoulder, said "Good boy, good boy," and went as fast as he could in the direction of Oxford Street.

Peter went into the shop bursting with pride. Old Cooper followed him, and Demophoon appeared from her night's wanderings, after which she had a craving for notice, as though she wished to make sure that she would be received back into a respectable household. She rubbed against Peter's legs. He stooped and picked her up. She hated it, broke loose, and fell, twisting marvellously in the air, to land on her feet. With her tail stiff in the air, bristling, she marched, treading delicately, out into the street again.

"She is not interested in your affairs, Homunculus. Why should she be? They do not visibly affect her fortunes."

Peter made a joke, too bad for reproduction. It convulsed the old man. With great solemnity he produced a large document, written in black, very black, lettering on stiff paper—a deed of partnership. He laid it on the table flat, and together they conned it, the black hair against the grey. There was really no need for such a document, but the old man, who had begun life as a barrister, had taken a delight in draft-

ing it and had had it engrossed at a legal stationer's. He was proud of it, and Peter liked the references to himself as "the said Peter Davies." It was adorned with a superabundance of legal phrases, in the manner of the old conveyancers of Lincoln's Inn, who were paid by the folio of seventy-two words, and were in consequence supreme masters of tautology. The old man was vain, almost childish about it, and hovered, clucking like an old hen, while Peter signed it.

"Cooper and Davies," he chuckled. "Cooper and Davies. An honest business if a small one; if there can be an honest business which is not the direct delving of a living from the earth. Dealers in words—words printed and bound. Words are quick and vain things, Homunculus. Sounds for communion. I think the beasts only commune by sounds in love. . . ."

Peter marked that for a fallacy, knowing something of birds and beasts. He was a little ashamed of the old man's childishness, and glad when he went upstairs to shew the deed to Tessa.

Left alone, Peter had a horrible sinking in his stomach. He felt terribly, terribly youthful. Under the new arrangement he was to receive one pound a week as a salaried partner in the firm of Cooper and Davies. It was much money, more, he thought, than he could know what to do with. It gave him no pleasure to buy things. He bought clothes when he needed them, adhering always to a suit of navy-blue serge. Already at seventeen he was careful, having a horror of poverty from the memory of the humiliations of his childhood, and knew already that the civilised human animal secure of its living has a contempt for the insecure. With that in his mind, he swelled continually the sum



which he deposited with His Majesty's Postmaster-General, and only when he needed a new suit or had some other essential purchase to make was the blue authorisation for withdrawal requested. With twenty shillings a week he felt secure, and would have been proud but for that dreadful feeling of youth. Helpless he felt, and angry. He kicked the counter and felt better, and soon work restored confidence.

By the mid-day post he received a letter of birthday greetings from his brother, tendering the olive branch. Glad to have it, he wrote a reply, narrating his new circumstances and the luck which had befallen him. The letter reminded him of his aunt, and he felt considerable compunction when he realised that he had not seen nor made any effort to see or communicate with her since he had left her house. A saying of Cooper's came back to him and he grew mournful. It was a sad saying. The old man had broken an evening of silence with it, an evening which he had spent sucking his pipe and reading his everlasting Shelley.

"Come to think of it," he said, "we cannot reform the world any more than we can change its face. We throw up heaps of stone and mud and think them better than an ant heap which is mud and straw, or a nest which is moss and twig. We can do nothing. Each of us is alone—terribly alone . . . splendidly alone.

I am the Earth,  
 Thy mother: she within whose stony veins  
 To the last fibre of the loftiest tree  
 Whose thin leaves trembled in the frozen air,  
 Joy ran, as blood within a living frame,  
 When thou didst from her bosom, like a cloud  
 Of glory, arise, a spirit of keen joy!

Each of us is that, Homunculus, at birth 'a spirit of keen joy'—and slowly we kill joy as we move to death, for we are perhaps afraid of life. . . . Fear of life!—It is in all of us. That being so, we can do nothing in this world, Homunculus, except to be kind and strive always to be kinder . . . and . . . and damn morality."

Peter remembered that, not word for word, but the sense of it. He saw the old man, moved, waving his pipe in the air, grunting out his thoughts as he found words for them, his old heavy face lit up, the great eye flashing and the little eye winking, winking until a tear was squeezed out and rolled down the hard skin of his cheek. He remembered that the tear had looked oddly out of place on the hard skin; such a large tear from such a little eye. To be kind and always strive to be kinder was a touching and a good doctrine, and thought flew to the little aunt in the dingy house in Southwark, tending her curate and painting her crystoleum pictures. With a fearful crudity the idea presented itself to Peter that she was not happy. He had not before considered her as a person with emotions and sensibilities like himself, a creature capable of grief and joy perhaps. The idea shocked him. The shock blurred his recollection of her, and he was unable to correlate the details of her life as he knew it, but out of it all came a vague and certain knowledge that she was lonely, cramped and dried. So far as he could he felt sympathy. He had felt more with the printer's wife, but that had touched him nearly, had been a wild, sudden, savage thing that had set him vibrating. This was more subtle, a collection of a thousand details which he was unable to gather. He knew, however, that he had been

at fault, admitted it, and patted himself on the back for this generous abnegation of self.

It was with a feeling almost of piety that he set out that evening, refusing all blandishments of Cooper, Tessa, and young Fildes, and suggestions of birthday jollity. Coming to ground from the burrowing of the train, he walked on the other side of the road to avoid the place of the suicide. In his hand he carried a little parcel done up in light tissue paper, containing a woollen shawl which he had bought at a shop in Shaftesbury Avenue as a present for his aunt, for he remembered that she always wore a shawl or a scarf draped round her thin shoulders, cased in their formidable armour of jet beading. He was pleased with himself, and in Newington Causeway, coming upon an old woman crouching on a doorstep, her skirts trailing their ragged edges in the mud, matches in her hand, he gave her a penny. She crooned, and, holding out a shivering hand to grasp the coin, she said:

“God bless you, young gentleman, and pave your way with gold.”

The phrase “young gentleman” delighted Peter, and he strutted until he came to the large window of a grocer’s shop, in which he saw himself reflected. The reflection pricked the bubble of his pride. He saw himself there, narrow-chested, bandy-legged, with large, large feet.

To tell the truth, our Peter was not at this time a handsome youth. He was callow, a fledgeling, as gawky and comic as a half-feathered bird. He did not realise quite how humorously ugly he was, nor was he able to find comfort in the thought that he was not alone in that condition. It was his habit to regard all his attri-

butes as peculiar to himself. The revelation of the grocer's window was crushing. It had been only since Tessa had remarked on the beauty of his eyes that he had given thought to his personal appearance, but he had given much.

His legs, obedient to his original intention, carried him along through High Street to Trinity Square and the little dingy house. Before the door his heart sank. The house was occupied, but where his aunt's brass plate had been was now only a clean patch of paint of a different colour from the rest of the door, and adorned at each corner with a hole where a screw had been. With foreboding he rang the bell, which gave forth its cracked note dismally in the tomby depths of the house. There came no answer. He rang again. There came the clanking of the door chain unfastened, the clicking of a latch drawn, and slowly the door was opened by a few inches. The ghastly light of a worn fish-flame gas jet flickering filled the crack and lighted from behind a small head, frowsy-haired, face coarse, sharp, and mouth all but toothless. Peter gaped at this apparition.

From the head came a shrill whistling sound that presently took cognisable shape in words.

"What d'ye want?"

Peter was silent.

"If yer wants money, there ain't none in the 'ouse, an' if yer wants wittles, there's none neither. If yer wants ter sell anythink, go to the 'alls o' the rich, and don't worry the pore. . . ."

The whistling sounds flew, battering over Peter. He bore up against them.

"Is Mrs. Daltry in?"

"Mrs. Watson is in, which is me. At 'ome, but not

at 'ome seein' as 'ow it's 'arf-parst nime and me reception is from four to six in the afternoon, I don't think."

Peter took off his hat to her.

"I wanted to see Mrs. Daltry."

"Never 'eard of 'er, 'less she was the lidy as lived 'ere next but one afore me, an' 'ad the bums in. She's gone."

Peter made inquiry, but could elicit no further information. The owner of the head lost interest in him and slammed the door. He waited to hear the chain restored to its place. The light struggling through the grimy fan light over the door died and the house became more than ever forbidding.

Peter felt ridiculous standing there on the muddy doorstep with the little white parcel in his hand. His good intentions had come too late. His aunt was gone, after years of struggle engulfed. To trace her seemed impossible. He thought of the curate who had lodged with her, but could not remember his name, nor had he ever known his church.

On his way back, passing the church in the Square, he stopped by the notice board by the gateway and read the name of the rector in faded gilt lettering, and the names of his two curates, one faded, and the other new and glittering. Neither had a sense of familiarity. Rev. David Barnes, the faded one—that was not he; Rev. James Reid, not he, either. The name began with a W. He made a note of the rector's address, but thought it too late to worry him that night. If his aunt were lost, she would not be more so in a day or two.

It began to rain, and Peter turned up the velvet collar of his thick navy-blue overcoat. He had been depressed, but standing in the square in the rain, the place was so

infinitely more dismal than his condition that he felt cheerful by comparison. He stood for some minutes surveying the House of God, not without respect, and found it ugly. The windows of the belfry were lit, and he saw figures moving. Tiny men they seemed at that height, hauling ropes that looked like threads; a cluster of these tiny men and thin threads swaying, throbbing. The bells rang out slowly, clumsily beating out a tune, a hymn.

Lead—kind—ly—light  
 A—mid—the—en—cir—cling—glo—om,  
 Lead—thou—me—o—on.  
 I—do—not—ask—to—see  
 The—dis—tant—scene,  
 One—step—e—nough—for—me—e—

The—night—is—dark  
 And—I—am—far—from—ho—ome—

Peter turned and fled.

He found the old match woman huddled into a doorway out of the rain. On an impulse he gave her the shawl, and stood by her while she opened the parcel. She mumbled over it, took off her rusty old cape and wrapped the warm white shawl round her shoulders, over the thin black cotton of her blouse, torn in places, wretched, ragged. It gave her warmth at once. She donned her cape and held out her hand for him to shake. He held out his; she took it and drew him down to her, while with her bleared, tired old eyes, red-rimmed, she scanned his face.

“Warm it is,” she said in a cracked voice, in which there yet lingered an infinitely pathetic note of refinement. “Warm, warm, in a cold world. Hold people

close to you, boy, hold 'em close. You'll be cold else—I was a hard woman, cold, so there was none to warm me. Hold 'em close—close—close."

She loosed his hand and fell to coughing. Tears filled Peter's eyes, and he left her. Cooper's voice rang in his ears ". . . Kind and strive always to be kinder." The old woman's hand, cold and bony, had chilled his. He blew on it. He felt glad and had a warm interest in the motley throng of men and women in the lift and in the train that took him back to the so different and glittering world round Piccadilly Circus, so different and yet so much the same. He had to pass the theatre which enshrined Miss Dugdale. In the vestibule young men in evening dress were smoking, and in the street were young men from the pit. All were loud in praises of her. Mr. Bertram Bond's play was an enormous success, and had been a triumph for the young actress. From the pit and gallery Peter had often adored her, her hair, bronze hair clustered round her head; her brave walk, swift movements, gallant; her soft, kind voice so tender and so thrilling in its lower notes; her eyes, beyond words beautiful; her nose so straight—and her mouth awry, with the little dimples that chased upon her cheek as she spoke. He was proud that others should so speak of her, his rarest possession. She was more real to him than any of the beings with whom he came in contact. He never talked of her. He stayed now under the shelter of the portico and listened to her praises. Some talked of her as Mary. The familiarity jarred.

In the theatre a bell rang. Cigarettes were cast aside, pipes knocked out, and the young men hurried away to miss no moment of the divinity.

Peter returned to the establishment of Cooper and Davies.

He found his partner, with Adam and young Fildes, waiting for his return. They rose and saluted Mr. Davies, as they insisted on calling him. A magnificent supper had been prepared. Cooper had bought a large pork pie from Bellamy's, and made a joke about the last words of Pitt, Earl of Chatham, concerning one of these same pies. Adam from his small store had brought three slices of cold ham, while Fildes had ransacked a German delicatessen store and laid on the table a wealth of sausages, honey cakes, black bread and bottles of golden lager beer of Pilsen. A little parcel contained a present from Tessa, with a message of love. She had gone out early about her business. She was in luck's way, having found a kind man who, as she said, was being real good to her. She was shortly to leave her room to take up her residence in apartments provided for her by him. Her gift was a patent safety razor, as a hint to our Peter, whom she had often teased about the fluffy down which disfigured his chin and upper lip.

Old Cooper slapped his thigh and roared with laughter.

Peter accepted all their homage and offerings as by right. He was not insolent about it, but he had always the dogged idea of being as good as the rest of the world, if not better. If, therefore, they chose to give him things, whether he wanted them or not, he was prepared to please them by acceptance. He was gloomy a little, and thoughtful. Old Cooper, ever watchful, detected it, and softened his hilarity to meet the boy's mood.

After supper, when they had drunk his health, he



narrated his experiences, though from an odd shame he omitted to mention the gift of the shawl to the old match woman. He edited the story, gave it a touch of romance, and even invented new figures. The central point of it, however, the disappearance of his aunt, stood out clearly. It was cleverly done.

“Poor woman,” said Fildes.

“Poor woman,” said Adam.

“We are all poor,” said Cooper. “Her case is not much worse than it had been for twenty years. When the fight has been long and the decline of resisting power slow, the crossing of the line is no great thing. The difference between the edge of the volcano and the crater is a matter of a few seconds dropping. The scorching has been on the edge—the simile is not good.—Homunculus. Your health. There is always something rotten in the state of Denmark, but Denmark is a small speck on one of a million worlds. . . . We cannot abolish Denmark nor its rottenness. Yes, boy, hold men and women close to you. The ragged woman knew her world. She knew herself for a manifestation of life and a small thing, not more unhappy nor more happy than the fine lady she had been. . . . We think of happiness always as a thing possessed by others. . . . Hug 'em to you, Homunculus; they are yours for the asking. Your health, Homunculus!”

To Fildes, who had just plighted his troth with a young nurse in the hospital which he visited, and was supremely happy, all this moralising and philosophy seemed absurd. All the same, he drank Peter's health again—“Mr. Davies and the firm of Cooper and Davies.”

Old Adam said “Hear——” then choked, and the

other "Hear" which he should have said was lost in a rattling in his throat. Peter patted him on the back, and Demophoon, who had been blinking contemptuously at the four making such absurd ceremony, leaped in alarm to the floor and hid in the darkest corner she could find.

Recovered, old Adam wheezed out that he must go. His departure broke up the party, for Fildes soon followed. Peter walked with him to Endell Street, what time he listened to enraptured praises of the young woman who was to become in six months' time Mrs. Douglas Fildes. Peter had seen the young woman, and found her a poor thing by the side of Miss Dugdale. Fildes thanked him for listening so kindly to his vapourings, shook him warmly by the hand, patted his shoulder; Peter wished him every happiness, and that his seed, like that of Abraham, might be unnumbered as the sands by the seashore. He expressed the wish solemnly, so solemnly as to overcome Fildes' uneasiness in the delicacy of the subject.

That night as Peter lay in his bed, musing, dreaming, dull musings and glorious flashes of castle-building, his door creaked open and old Cooper appeared shading the light of a candle with his hand. He stood over the bed, looking down at the boy. Peter pretended to be asleep, and artfully blinked his eyes and gave a little moan, as though the light had disturbed him. The old man sniffed and a hot tear fell on Peter's neck.

As he went, the light of the candle cast his shadow huge and grotesque over all the little room.

### III

THE firm of Cooper and Davies thrrove. Peter and the shop grew ever smarter; the old man changed in nothing. Peter clung to his blue serge suit and red tie, but after his promotion took more care of his appearance, shaved with Tessa's razor, making havoc with his skin at first, often a slashed ruffian; took to a new type of collar, very low linen, to reveal much of his long neck, and for the first time in his life parted his hair. Stiff hair over the forehead made a parting on either side impossible. It was parted, therefore, down the centre. He had his photograph taken and sent a copy to his brother, with whom he became on friendly terms in correspondence, but made no step to acceptance of often-repeated invitations to revisit his birth-place. A sister had once visited London by a cheap excursion for the purpose of some trade exhibition which had brought her betrothed, and Peter had met them, dined with them in some little restaurant in Old Compton Street. He disliked both. The sister had treated him as a boy and wounded his vanity. The companionship of men much older than himself had so far injuriously affected him: no great matter, a phase of youth dazzled by its own brilliance.

He had a wide acquaintance among the men of his own trade, booksellers in Charing Cross Road, pushing young men, and old fellows who bemoaned the days of Bookseller's Row in the Strand, before the old thoroughfare had been widened, Housmannised and flanked

with white, cliff-like buildings. From them, friendly disposed, he learned many devices used for generations and unknown to X. Cooper, who had entered the trade indolently, as an amateur, with no thought but to eke out a living with the least amount of trouble to himself.

The boy had two circles of friends, if a man before twenty can be said to have friends; people at all events who were kind to him, received him simply and without ceremony, and listened with interest while he talked about himself. One group was reached through young Fildes, married, and the father of an abnormally fat baby, settled in a little flat in Southampton Row, and taking more and more of his father's work. Young Mrs. Fildes was an enthusiastic amateur of music, knew certain of the small fry of the profession: had tickets sent her for their concerts, and sometimes for great affairs at Queen's Hall or Albert Hall; talked glibly of symphonies and concertos, Bach fugues, and suites of Grieg and Tchaikowsky, derided Strauss, and adored Brahms; knew the names and personal history of all the famous pianists, violinists, 'cellists, singers, conductors, composers; played herself, and gave little musical evenings in her little green drawing-room, where the pictures, excluding photographs of her baby, were all reproductions of Botticelli's work. Peter was always present at these meetings, and often she would take him to concerts when her husband, a busy person in the evening, was unable to go. A dark, vivacious little woman, with strange eyes, and dark coarse hair, brown and black like a well-coloured meerschaum pipe, she liked Peter and was kind to him. He liked her and was glad always to be with her. He told her everything, of his love-affairs, numerous, little wild flashes

(he never mentioned Miss Dugdale, still an enthroned goddess), and of his writing and literary ambitions. She praised his work. Old Cooper had damned it and advised its destruction. Peter had torn the closely written sheets at the edge, an inch, then glanced at a purple patch of which he was inordinately proud, and restored the precious child of his brain (so he thought it, unconscious of plagiarism) to his drawer. He wrote poems to Mrs. Fildes, who thought them charming and her husband cruel to laugh at them. Peter wrote four or five a week, sonnets, ballades, triolets, and sometimes, with a sinking, sent them to the offices of newspapers or magazines. One appeared in print in a journal wherein it shone like a jewel against the banality of the rest of its contents. Of the rest, some returned with the editor's compliments and thanks, others were lost for ever. Peter had fits of sickening rage, and for weeks would send nothing. Hope would spring again, and the verses be sent out like so many doves from the ark. Old Cooper steadily advised their destruction; Peter would snarl at the old man, and go off to be soothed in Southampton Row. The soothing process consisted either in playing with the baby or in music. It was a nice baby, a girl, and liked with its fat hand to clutch Peter's hair. Its blue eyes had not yet learned to see properly, and it needed a very large object to attract its attention. It liked Peter, and after intercourse with the baby the boy was almost humble.

Mrs. Fildes' music was less good for him. He liked it, but he had learned from her the phrases of an expert, but no certain knowledge. He was priggish in this, and annoyed Fildes, who blamed his wife. She, from Peter's adoration of her baby, would find no fault in him,

or, if pushed to excuse for him, would declare him young.

She had round her a strange collection of young men and women, artists, musicians, journalists, young women engaged in the British Museum procuring information for the writers of belles lettres, a few nurses and young doctors, acquaintance of the hospital, who seemed marvellously sane by comparison with the others. Peter fell violently in and out of love with all the young women, and in and out of intimacy with the young men. They were all like himself (though they knew it as little as he, and, like Peter, thought themselves at the end of all discoveries, and possessed of all cosmic secrets), floundering, finding their feet, in love with ideas and themselves, hazy, enthusiastic, sudden and thoughtless in action, in reflection disordered and illogical. They were all suspicious of one another, so that they could neither really love nor know real friendship. Peter's relation with Fildes was a more solid affair in truth than that with his wife, though he saw less and less of him.

Peter let his hair grow long, thick at the back, and brushed so as to cover just the tips of his ears. He tried also to cultivate a little moustache, but old Cooper teased him so about it that he cut it off. He was almost crying with mortification as he began to shave, but a sudden access of humour coming to him, he shaved half, and returned, after washing his face of the lather, to ask the old man which side he liked best. Old Cooper laughed till the tears ran, slapping his thigh. The glimpse of the real, dear, unaffected Peter set him rejoicing, and he told the story to old Adam that night. They were glad, and sat—Peter had gone out—telling each other stories of Peter's cleverness, how he had

said this, and done that, bought this book at such a price, and sold it at such another—a full Peter—Saga. They were happy that evening as they had not been since Peter fell into the hands of “that woman,” as they called her always. “So like Peter,” they said.

In Janet Fildes' circle was a young man, hirsute, with a wild eye, who gave Peter a copy of his execrable poems. The volume had been the round of the publishers, and, in despair, the hirsute young man had had the poems printed at his own expense and sent the volume to carefully selected celebrities and rich folk, with a request that if they liked it they would keep the book and send the author three shillings. Many volumes had returned, some had brought the desired three shillings, and some had induced vain and minor celebrities, greedy of patronage, to write letters of encouragement to the young poet. These letters he read aloud to those assembled in the little green drawing-room, setting Peter wild with envy, and he was only restrained by old Cooper from following the example with his own work. It was shown to be unworthy, and for a few hours he knew himself for an ass, and sulked in the shop, gnawing a pen and glaring at a blank sheet of foolscap on the desk before him. Under his pen a verse grew, another, and another; the pen raced, and he returned to exaltation.

Later he took it to Janet Fildes. He found her with a pasty-faced young man, for whom he conceived an immediate dislike; a young man in a green suit, cut in at the waist, slit up the back, the cuffs turned back three inches. His hair was brushed back from his forehead and plastered into a shining block, parted, a little to one side. He carried his elbows out, and stood at present with one of his thin legs bent, left hand in

pocket, the other gesticulating. It was a long, thin hand, and Peter had a presentiment that he would find it clammy.

It was.

The young man was introduced with some awe as Mr. Greenfield, the brother of Miss Mary Dugdale.

Peter was torn between dislike of the young man and respect for his reflected glory. Respect won, and though the young man was odiously patromising, scenting the under world in Peter's boots and trousers bagged at the knees, Peter thickened his skin and was the youth's open-mouthed admirer, swallowed his preposterously familiar references to the great: Bertie Bond, Charlie Vaughan, the actor, and Jamie Sugden, the theatre manager. He addressed all his remarks to Jarret and ignored Peter, who forgave him everything because he told of the experiences of his sister.

Himself the son of a small watchmaker and jeweller in a Devonshire village, he had risen to a small height on the skirts of his sister—any higher and he would turn dizzy and fall headlong. He was a journalist of sorts, but lived upon subsidies from the actress, given him with the proviso that he never came to see her unless she asked him. As her brother he enjoyed a certain *réclame* and was sought after in small circles; he was dull, but had a large fund of stage-scandal of the type which suggests but never states. Out of this store he entertained Janet, who disliked it, but was the slave of her lion-hunting instinct. She knew Greenfield for a poor sort of lion, and was ashamed that Peter should have met him; but he was in touch with glittering persons, and therefore irresistible. He promised to bring his sister to see her (he rarely left a drawing-room with-



out making such a promise), and with a curt nod to Peter, an elaborate bow over Janet's hand, he left.

Both were relieved. Peter read his poem, drank his meed of praise, and discussed with her the various journals to which it might be sent. It went out, and returned like so many others. By the side of one verse some idle person in the office had written in pencil, "Poor sloppy devil!" Either the same hand, or another more kindly, had endeavoured to erase the ribald phrase. It stood there, blastically legible—Peter's gorge rose. He showed it to old Cooper, who received it in dead silence. Later, when Peter's face looked less long, his eyes less desperate, the old man said:

"It is nothing——"

"Nothing?" said Peter, tortured by a recrudescence of feeling.

"It is nothing. That an idle fool should hurt, even through the vanity of a man, is wholesome—for it is folly to allow the hurt. And yet—I don't know——"

He sucked his pipe. It was difficult to talk to Peter, and it could be little comfort to him to know his thought—that so tiny a thing as the wounding of a man's vanity is a mighty happening. He had meant that in his cryptic utterance. The thought clothed in simple language was comfortless. He was glad in a way that Peter had been hurt, knowing that it might check him in his headlong course. Therefore, when Peter asked him, "Am I a poor sloppy devil?" he sucked furiously at his pipe until it gurgled, and then with an effort, drawing the word out of his mouth like an obstinate cork, he said:

"Yes."

Peter sat dumbfounded, dismay in person. He rubbed his hands together and then fell to twisting his little front lock of hair, so long as, when stretched, to reach down to his mouth. He hitched his shoulders. His lips trembled and his palate ached so that he could not speak. . . .

"Homunculus," said the old man, "it is a small thing—both the literary accomplishment and the hurt—small things."

He took his Shelley and read from "Queen Mab," read as he had never read before to Peter, finely thundering:

"Thus do the generations of the earth  
Go to the grave and issue from the womb,  
Surviving still the imperishable change  
That renovates the world: even as the leaves,  
Which the keen frost wind of the waning year  
Has scattered on the forest-soil, and heaped  
For many seasons there, though long they choke,  
Loading with loathsome rottenness the land,  
All germs of promise."

"That also, Homunculus, is a small thing, though in words there are few things finer done. . . . *Cacoethes scribendi*—a ready hand, and an empty head or a cold heart. But, to be arrogant, is to spoil the world. . . ."

Peter sat dumb. Demophon climbed to old Cooper's shoulder, drew her claws through the cloth of his old black coat, moved uneasily, and finally settled, purring. The old man caressed her, and, after a silence, began suddenly on a personal note, at first regarding Peter keenly, then gazing out beyond him.

"I was arrogant—I came to London over sixty years

ago, not like you, Homunculus, from a poor house, unfriended, alone, ignorant, or—ignorant in a different way. I knew nothing of misery. You know nothing of prosperity. My father was of yeoman stock in Warwickshire, my mother the sister of a nobleman. There had been passion, romance, an elopement. My mother, a child, died at my birth. I ran wild. My father, as I learned later, was a roaring fellow and took to base courses. When I was twelve, already with a knowledge of good ale and the points of a horse, a gentle lady, faded and sweet of countenance, drove to the house, and I was fetched from the stable, cleared and placed before her, an uncouth, sturdy boy. My boorish accent shocked her, I remember, and she feigned not to understand my words. . . . There was some discourse between the lady, whom I was told to call Aunt, and my father. In the end, my small belongings, linnen shirts and little pantaloons, were placed in the carriage, a great affair with a crest upon the door, and I was perched on the little seat that let down in front of her ladyship, my feet upon my valise, which rolled in the bottom of the barouche with its swaying. I lived thereafter in great houses, rich, cold places with rarely a playmate. There was stern discipline. I had a tutor . . . everything was given to me, but I longed for my father, whom I never saw again. They sent me, for my tutor testified to my brains, to a great school—I was happy there,—and to a college at Cambridge, where I was idle, and yet did well. For a career I chose the Bar, to the horror of my aunt, to whom the Army, Navy or Church were alone the professions of a gentleman. She was fond of me and met my whim, as she thought it—though she never would receive my greatest friend,

George Townsend—son, out of wedlock, of a great lawyer and a lady's maid. It was he set the law in my wild head—a brilliant creature, whom this same Shelley had set tingling in the cause of freedom. We were ardent, he and I—'Twin sisters of religion, selfishness.' We bolted the stuff, had it ill-digested: wild we were, and lived what we saw. George died young: shot like a meteor to the top, soared, fell, and died in shame. I think he never knew that arrogance had blinded him. . . ."

The old man seemed to have forgotten Peter, who sat there still, following the narrative, visualising each event. He saw the unhappy Townsend as a hero with a straight nose and auburn hair, dressed like the hair of his own great-grandfather in a miniature there had been at home. The old man continued in a voice scarcely audible:

"I soared, too, though not so high—and when I fell it was a slow descent—each fall giving time for thought, bitter. I loved, was loved, and snatched wild happiness. The man, who held my fortune, my fate, from that moment cruelly ignored me. It was as though I had never existed for him—ghastly. His eyes lighted on me, but saw me not. My voice fell upon deaf ears; my importunities were idle. I had made the woman happy, where he had failed. No forgiveness. I admitted no fault, nor she. We had known the best, and, for a space, lived vividly. I would not bow to prejudice. . . . Unwisely, for prejudice is strong, and stronger than the law. A great man, none more powerful, he cast me out, and jackals yelped at my heels. I stayed in London—again foolishly. Scandal buzzed—then died. For a time I lived among outcasts, in the between

world, then sickened of it. Hollow. I drew more and more into myself, and hid myself. Grew hideous, had evil days, vile nights—I crawled. That passed, too, as everything passes. To live, it is needful to sell something. Towns are markets. . . .”

He ceased suddenly, and seemed to become conscious again of Peter sitting there, and to remember the object with which he had set out upon his narrative. “Homunculus,” he said, “it is an old tale, and I have missed the thread. It seems a dream now. All life, I think, is a dream. Sometimes it seems that we can do nothing that does not produce evil. We can foresee nothing. Dream pleasantly, Homunculus, dream pleasantly—but run away from nothing. If life shatters dreams, it is better so. Others come. It is better so——”

Peter set his teeth.

“Am I a poor sloppy devil?” he said between them.

“You are ignorant, untouched, know nothing. Few men have more than one melody to sing. Your songs are only faint echoes of old melodies——”

“Am I a poor sloppy devil?”

“To one man at least you are—or were, when you wrote. That moment is gone. What you are now I do not know.”

“Not that,” said Peter, and he went out into the shop, where he began to work on the catalogue, which he kept up to date. He had allowed none of his vagaries to interfere with his work. In his most careful hand he had written:

“87. *Ansted* (Prof.) *Geology*, introductory, descriptive and practical, *with hundreds of wood-cuts*, 2 vols., 8vo, cloth, 3s. 6d. (pub. 30s.), 1844.

“88. *Bolton* (J.) *Geological Fragments* collected

from *Rambles among the Rocks of Furrress and Cartmel*, illustrated, 8vo, cloth, 2s. 6d., 1869.

“89. *Cotta* (Prof. B.)——” when there came a knock at the door. He ignored it for some minutes while he concluded the entry of the learned *Cotta’s* work, a fat German volume, bound in half-calf and containing “189 in den Text gedruckten Abbildungen.” He pondered over its price, and put it at half-a-crown. Then he remembered an address to which to send the catalogue of Cooper and Davies, and entered that in a book. The knock came again, this time at the side door.

Peter went out through the parlour, taking no notice of the old man, who was muttering to himself.

He opened the door to find his friend the rector of the church in Southwark waiting admittance, a little grey man who had been Peter’s good friend ever since the day when the strange boy had come to him upon the quest of his aunt. He had heard of the disaster through his curate, whom later he discovered to be a rogue who had preyed upon the poor woman, as upon others in the parish. All trace of Mrs. Daltry was gone. Her belongings had gone, been sold. The little shop where her *crystoleum* paintings were sold still contained some of her work, but the proprietress, a plump little Jewess, had neither seen nor heard of her for over a year, when inquiries were made. That was two years ago, and Peter’s aunt had made no sign of life, nor communicated either with himself or his brother in the country.

The little grey parson had a whimsical humour which was tickled by the idea of losing an aunt in London—and had invented a whole fable of the adventure, which

had done good service at dinner-parties. He had the reputation of being a delightful man, and was asked out much to great houses north of the river, being also a man of good connection. He accepted invitations, and extorted money from his hosts for his poor in Southwark. They adored him, for he worried them little with religion, and made no attempt to drive them to church. If they swore in his presence their oaths were always carefully chosen for mildness, and there were alleys, to which he could penetrate, where no policeman would trust himself alone. He was a known man and a popular.

At first tickled by Peter in search of his aunt, he had become interested, found stuff in the boy, and marked him down as a man not, if possible, to be wasted. He knew the appalling difficulties of the time, and that a thousand favouring circumstances are needed to bring a man to maturity and the fulness of his talents. There were qualities in Peter which puzzled him until he met old Cooper. The parson, David Scott, and the old bookseller became friends. Scott was old enough to have heard of Townsend, and Cooper warmed to him. It was not often that he could visit the little shop in Shaftesbury Avenue, but to-night he had come in answer to a letter of the old man.

He greeted Peter, and Peter gave him a "Good-evening, sir," conducting him to the parlour.

Peter returned to the shop and his catalogue, feeling that he was not wanted. He was in one of those fearful moments of crisis, when life seems to stop and movement cease, while the mocking mannikin which is a man's self stands pointing truth. Peter's mannikin sat cross-legged on the back of the geological researches

of the learned Cotta, and mocked. "Poor sloppy devil," rang in Peter's brain, whirling.

"Your hair's too long," shrilled the mannikin.

Peter tried to pretend that it was only because he had postponed barbering too long.

"You're like all the rest," shrilled the mannikin. "Fairly good and fairly bad—conceited, opinionated, obstinate, young."

The word "*young*" resounded, rushed like the mighty wind of the Epiphany, in Peter's head, and he felt as if the top of it were being lifted, and the mannikin tickling his brain with a straw. He strove to grapple with his catalogue, but the mocking voice sounded shriller and more shrill.

"You to write? What have you to say? A little seller of dull books. . . . Not twenty. You don't know even what it is you wish to do. Art and Beauty? Bosh! The artist is a tradesman like any other, unhappy in that he trades in a commodity which men care little whether they have or not. Sell butcher's meat or corn. Great, *you* to be great? Why should you be? You do not know even what you mean by greatness. You can't think, are muddle-headed. You haven't probed behind words. Pooh! pooh! to you—sloppy's the word. . . . You can't walk. Striding's the thing. . . . A little prig—arrogant. . . . Arrogant—blind."

Worn out, Peter let the pen drop loose in his hand; it scrawled down the page, stuck, and spluttered. Peter's head dropped on to his arms and he fell asleep, to find comfort in his dreams, where in he figured as a golden knight wrestling with a green dwarf who guarded the well of truth and kept the lid shut down upon the unhappy lady, who called to him in combat with the



voice of Mary Dugdale, or Greendale, or Dalefield, or whatever her name was. The green dwarf had the face of Miss Dugdale's brother, and his hand, clutching at Peter's throat, was clammy. . . .

In the parlour old Cooper and the Rev. David Scott were in colloquy, the subject, Peter. Since the drafting of the absurd deed of partnership for Peter's seventeenth birthday, the old man had amused himself much with legal documents, conveying all kinds of imaginary estates and properties from himself to Peter. For young Fildes he had drawn up a marriage settlement of antiquated form. It did not make much matter, as there was nothing to settle, for the small private property of the Fildes family was in the hands of the doctor of Endell Street. It amused Cooper and looked vastly important.

Now he had drawn up a last will and testament, a document in which at great length and in full detail he had left everything to Peter, small bequests of personal belongings to his circle of friends, all of them since the advent of Peter, and ten pounds to the old croke who had procured his personal discomfort for so many years. Demophoon he recommended to the care of the parson, for whom the cat had evinced an affection. From the document it appeared that Peter would be worth between seven and eight hundred pounds, not including the business. That the old fellow should have hoarded so much astonished Scott. Cooper explained that his aunt, who never admitted him to her presence after his downfall, had left him five hundred pounds. He had never troubled to set the money breeding, but it had swollen in the bank, where he left it, to twice and three times that amount. Before

Peter's arrival he had employed all accretions in the assistance of distressed families, generally to ship them off with a small lump sum, as he had sent the Beasleys, to the colonies. He now wished Scott to be his executor and Peter's guardian, for he had elected that the boy should not be given control of the capital until he was twenty-five. Scott endorsed the wisdom of the provision, consented, and took the old man's hand. He peeped into the shop through the spy-window and saw Peter asleep.

"He's asleep," he said.

"Will you ask two of the people upstairs to come down and witness my signature?"

Scott groped his way up the narrow stairs, and after search succeeded in producing a disreputable and untidy journalist, of the kind that is useless without whiskey, and a pretty young milliner. The journalist had Tessa's room, and the girl lived with her mother and younger sisters in the apartment vacated by the Beasleys. They followed the parson, awed by the importance of the ceremony in which they were called upon to share. Both belonged to a class which settles that sort of affair anyhow, avoids contact with the law, shuns it as ruinous, and most often dies intestate. Cooper scrawled his name, the journalist his. By way of airing legal knowledge, he boomed as he laid down the pen. "I deliver this as my act and deed." The girl signed, bobbed, and disappeared. The journalist waited in the hope that drink would be proffered him. He was given beer, and drank to the good health of old Cooper. He was a little afraid of Scott, and looked at him only out of the corners of his eyes. Cooper might be a gentleman, but he was a dirty one. The parson was oppressively clean. He made vain efforts in conversa-

tion. He was brought up against a blank wall of ignorance, and gave up the struggle. He invited both gentlemen to a meeting of some society of good fellows in Fleet Street. Both declined, and the journalist, having finished his liquor, retired, abashed. The will, duly signed in the presence of two witnesses as the law requires, was folded up and committed by its author to the desk in which he kept his personal treasures. Returning to his chair, to which Demophoon had leaped on the moment of his rising, he sat and, turning to his friend, he said:

“You and I, sir, know the truth of the poet of Ecclesiastes, which is the truth of all poets. It is in your religion as in mine. There should be no church militant, against other churches. The fight is against vanity.”

The parson nodded. Old Cooper filled his pipe.

“Out of the wreck and ruin of my life there is left me nothing but this boy. I recommend him to you, that you may help him to manhood. He is a rare soul, well born. I know it struggling upwards to the light. More light. Sustain him, and if he errs, as he must, be kind to him. I know you. This homunculus in bottle—he is wild. He will plunge hither and thither, drag you to despair, set you weeping with joy—if you love him as I have loved him. Give him the choice to continue here, or to shake free and stretch his wings: but keep him from too early flight—that will be your chief service to him and to me. Too early flight—I have seen a young bird fallen so, weak-wirged—reaching the nest again by little flights upwards from its mother’s back. That you must be to him. I am old and see too much. Any fall is a fall from Heaven.”

He told Scott all that he knew of Peter’s history.

The parson said: "You are the best Christian I have known."

"It is a question of simplicity. Time simplifies. A man grows mountainous with years. When sight first comes to us we see men as trees walking, then as insects; later, and best, as mountains."

Scott left him and went into the shop to wake Peter. He shook him by the shoulder to rouse him. Peter threw up his head suddenly and stared with wild eyes, tossed his hair.

"Sloppy," he murmured.

The parson shook him again.

"Oh! Oh!" said Peter, and blinked. He had recognised his awakener, but theatrical instinct in him demanded a moment's simulation. He had a desire to say, "Where am I?" but discarded it as too banal. Then he laughed at himself, stretched, yawned without putting his hand to his mouth.

"When you yawn," said the Rev. David, "you should cover your mouth."

"Oh," said Peter.

"It is considerate. I knew a great man once who spoke always with his hand in front of his mouth because his teeth were bad."

"Manners is a poor thing," said Peter.

"Manners makyth man."

Peter set his chin. It seemed rude to break his sleep thus to admonish him.

"I read in Pindar with Mr. Cooper that money makes the man."

Scott declined to argue.

"I want you to dine with us to-morrow night."

"Dine?" Peter was alert.

"Yes. My wife wants to know you."

Late dinner! Gosh. Then Peter was rueful.

"I've got no clothes."

"We don't dress."

"Thank you," said Peter, in as ordinary a voice as possible. The prospect excited him.

He had had Sunday supper with people who dined in the evening, but that was hardly the same thing, and to dine with Scott, whom he knew to be welcomed in grand houses, was like the opening of a door. Not a very wide opening, but sufficient to allow the hearing of gay sounds, soft voices of dazzling personages, the clatter of the high world as he imagined it. In truth, as old Cooper had said, Peter knew nothing of prosperity, and conceived this same high world as a place where the wicked cease from troubling, and by the magic of wealth and good breeding sorrow and conflict are banished. Peter was never, even in his worst moments, deserted by his sense of greatness in store, and every gift of life seemed a transitory thing, dead and done with almost as soon as it was in his hands. He used everything, and every day grew more adroit in extracting the good, and nearer every day to some sort of sense of proportion. His mistakes came from the clouding of his sense of humour by swollen egotism. His extraordinary self-possession brought success in business, but landed him in awful difficulties for the inner Peter.

He did not ask himself why the Rev. David Scott, for whom he entertained a warm admiration, should seek his further acquaintance. He accepted it as a natural development in a romantic career.

He shook the parson's hand and let him out by the

shop door, then applied himself to his catalogue with a fury of energy. No mannikin now. Sloppy devil indeed! Doors opened almost without knocking, and they'd be proud of him yet.

He had a moment of uneasiness, when he remembered the supercilious glances which Miss Dugdale's brother had directed upon his clothes. Room for improvement there. He took the catalogue down to item 140, then blotted it carefully, went back a few pages and crossed the scrawling line his pen had made. He closed the book and rejoined old Cooper for supper.

"Mr. Scott's invited me to dinner to-morrow night."

"Watch what forks the other people use, and don't make bread pills," was the old man's advice, and only comment. For the rest he was silent, and watched Peter so closely as to make him self-conscious and ill-at-ease. He was not sorry to go to bed.

The matter of his personal appearance still worried him, and before retiring, he made a careful study of his face in the mirror. Looking at a certain angle, he seemed to himself more than passable, even striking with his pale face and jet black hair. Perhaps the hair was too long, but with the light on his face it certainly was interesting, the shadows under the bumps of his forehead making a striking thing of it. There was a smouldering fire in the eyes, a potential fine frenzy. With his mouth and chin he was less satisfied. He would have liked his mouth to be firmly tucked in at the corners, and his chin, blue with shaving, to be like the toe of a boot; but his mouth seemed loose, however he might adjust his lips, and his chin pitifully small. Full face, his head seemed pear-shaped. He knew perfectly well what he wished to look like, and sometimes

in the mirror succeeded in approximating to it, but to-night he looked—unfledged.

The matter of his clothes was easier of adjustment. He brushed his coat, and pondering the creases in the trousers of Mr. Greenfield, he hit upon the idea of pressing his own under the mattress of his bed. He folded his best pair, butted the mattress up with his head, and thrust the trousers under it.

The experiment was not wholly a success. One leg was perfectly creased, but the other he had folded wrong, and the crease came out at the side. Peter almost wept with mortification when he put them on.

During the day he had his hair cut by a half-caste who kept a little saloon in High Street. The man had many other disreputable trades carried on under cover of the hair-dressing and tobacco business, but Peter knew nothing of these, and went there because it was odd, and there was always a collection of strange men in the place. Under the Fildes influence Peter had begun the study of what he called "types." The half-caste, moreover, was cheap, charging twopence for hair cutting and a penny for a shave. He was nothing of an artist. It gave him pleasure to cut hair, and Peter's thick crop roused him to a frenzy of cutting, brushing and oiling.

It was not a picturesque Peter who left the shop. He felt cold about the head and curiously naked. Down-at-heel actors and grubby painters used the shop, and the room behind the shop for a sort of club, some of the rottenest men in London.

Peter bought a new collar, new cuffs, and dickey of white linen to make himself smart. Arrayed in all his glory, perfect, except for the distorted crease in his

right trouser-leg he exhibited himself to old Cooper, who chuckled.

"Head like a seal," he said. Peter put his hand to his head and brought it away shiny with macassar oil. His hand reeked.

"Wash," said the old man.

"There's no time," said Peter, almost in tears.

"Walk with your hat off then. Good-bye." He waved a hand and declaimed:

"Pitch thy behaviour low, they projects high:

So shalt thou humble and magnanimous be:

Sink not in spirit: who aimeth at the sky

Shoots higher much than he that means a tree.

The parson is your friend, Homunculus. It rests with you to keep him so."

The old man had teased Peter about the creases in his trousers, and the shearing of his hair—Samson shorn, and genius dead by loss of hair. Peter, timid and anxious on the threshold of great things, was not in a mood for chaff.

"Some merr," he said, hitching his shoulders, "are independent of friendship."

"Most men," said the old man, "are unworthy of friendship."

"Ugh," said Peter, flushing, and ran out into the street. It was half-past six and dinner was not until seven. He went round to Southampton Row. Janet Fildes was practising, but admitted him. She stared at him in amazement, then burst into peals of incontrollable laughter.

"Like a—like a black—black—like a bull's eye!" she said. Then, for she was really a kind woman:



"I'm sorry, Peter, but you shouldn't do these things quite so—so suddenly."

Peter strode round to her side by the piano and brought his fist down on the treble notes. They shrieked, and she, careful of her instrument, swept him aside.

Peter stood quivering, livid.

"I'm done with you," he said.

"Don't be absurd."

"Done with you. Laugh, go on. Laugh. Say I'm a gaby. Laugh! But—wait—you'll see."

"What?"

"I—I—I . . ."

Peter collapsed—and sat holding his unhappy oiled head in his hands. Janet leaned over and touched him on the shoulder.

"Don't be hurt, Peter. We're very fond of you, and—and—you can't really laugh at a person until you understand him—or her."

"No one understands me," said Peter. "I don't understand myself."

"How should you?" said Janet.

"I'm an ass—but I'm going out to dinner."

"Where?"

"With the Rev. David Scott. He's a minister in Southwark, and you can see his name in the papers any day."

Janet was interested at once. She knew all the persons who figured in the papers, by name. She gave Peter advice as to conduct, table manners, how not to take too much of any thing, and how not to say thank you to the servants. Peter was obliged to her, and soothed by her interest in his excursion. She retied his

tie for him, pulled his coat straight, brushed him, and warned him to keep his boots out of sight as much as possible. They were the brown pair he had bought in Shaftesbury Avenue, entered upon a new life as black, and there were yet brown patches shewing through the polish. He told her of the fate of the poem, but made no mention of the cruel comment.

"They're idiots," she said. "It'll come in time. It will. They'll all come to you yet, Peter—in time. They'll come."

"Crawling," said Peter, a fire, "and—and—I'll put my foot on their necks."

He was immediately ashamed of his over-emphasis. He had once seen a young man kiss Janet's hand on leaving her. He stood now awkwardly, and kissed her hand.

"My—my——" He could not find the word.

"Mother," said Janet.

"I never had a mother," said Peter, untruthfully.

"That's what I will be," said Janet.

"Thank you," said Peter.

Both thoroughly enjoyed the sentimentality of the scene. The light was dim, and the fire in the grate cast a warm glow, the flames flickering were mirrored softly in the shining mahogany of the piano. With good dramatic instinct Peter left the situation at that, and left without a word, only pressing Janet's hand warmly. As he reached the door of the flat the strains of Schubert's serenade reached his ears. The music was appropriate. He was pleased with Janet.

He took the train that dips down at the bottom of Southampton Row into subterranean regions, passed under Kingsway, the Strand, Wellington Street, and

bursts out to the light of day again by Waterloo Bridge on the Embankment. He sat by an old gentleman neatly dressed. Remembering Cooper's injunctions—the success of the scene with Janet had soothed his resentment—he removed his hat. The old gentleman sniffed, glared, sniffed again and moved away. Peter, painfully conscious, looked down at his boots, saw on the left boot on the inner side of his ankle a round patch bright yellow by contrast with the black polish, and hastily covered it with his other foot. At the halt at the lower end of Kingsway a young woman entered the tram and sat down beside him. He felt her eyes scrutinising him: suddenly she gripped his arm.

“I'm blowed,” she said.

It was Tessa, a wonderful new Tessa, and a happy. She was quietly dressed, though she wore perhaps too many little chains round her neck, and too many rings on her fingers. Her face was not painted, but powdered perhaps a little too thickly. He most remarked the wondrous change in the expression of her eyes. The bitterness had gone out of them, the hard strain, and they looked at him all smiles and kindness.

Peter had not seen her for many months. She had been twice to see old Cooper, once to repay the money she owed him, and once again out of friendliness. Then they had lost sight of her. She was glad to see Peter, and kept tight hold of his arm.

The little neat old man, who had moved to the other side of the car, scowled at them. He thought Tessa brazen and a destroyer of young men. His lips pursed until he looked like a prim old maid.

Tessa, glancing round the car, saw him and laughed. Her laugh was so different that Peter turned to look at

her. It had been silly, loud, harsh. Now it was musical, soft, refined, and good to hear.

“Where are you going?” said Tessa.

“Where are you?”

“Camberwell, to see my sister.”

“I’m going to the Elephant. I’m going out to dinner.” He said it with an air to impress her, and succeeded. Her curiosity was roused, and she endeavoured to extract from him the name of his friends. He kept her tantalised. She returned again and again to the assault. He was invulnerable, and turned aside her questions with others concerning her mode of living.

“My luck still holds. He’s good to me—Mr. Warrington, and he don’t let me go to none of the old places. He’s a gentleman, an’ treats me better than most gentlemen treat their wives. I’ve a flat in Chelsea on the Embankment, urder the four chimneys. It’s lovely, by the river. You must come and see me. You’ll like Mr. Warrington.”

Peter promised that he would.

He told her of the queer journalist, who now had her room, and of the little milliner who lived at top.

“We don’t really need to let the place now,” he said, “but we don’t need the rooms.”

Tessa scanned his face.

“You’ve changed,” she said. “Older. But your eyes don’t change.”

Peter remembered that she had said they were beautiful eyes. He blinked at her.

The train stopped at the Elephant and Castle. He rose, shook Tessa’s hand, raised his hat and walked out, having promised to see her again. He was glad of the encounter, and to know that he had charged.

Already he was able to view the dead Peter with disfavour. That early Peter seemed dwarfish. He had learned more of Tessa's profession since those early days, had had sundry encounters with its votaries, and was always surprised when thought turned to her, to find her in his recollection so gentle and so human. In the car she had been more than ever so. He made a note of her as a possible subject of conversation at dinner.

He walked slowly, for he had a full ten minutes, in the direction of the Rectory, seeing himself at table holding the attention of host and guests, dropping a quiet remark of humour, to set a ripple moving to a roar as the sally touched home. He could think of no brilliant remark, but the effect of it was there real enough, and himself the centre. He recalled some of the witticisms which had so tickled Cooper and old Adam, but found them clumsy, not polished enough nor glittering for the present purpose. He could remember flashes from books of his reading, but away from their context they were lifeless. Cooper had said:

"The occasion makes the wit."

Peter could create in his busy head the effect of wit, but not wit itself. He had a slight consciousness of failure. He was walking hatless to air his head, and an urchin bawled:

"Fresh air fund."

Peter made a long arm, clutched the infant by his jacket, too big for him, held him and smacked his close-cropped head—then let him go.

"Garn," shrilled the snipe. "Wish I could 'ave yer nose full o' gin for thruppence."

His nose! Peter put his hand up, fingering it.

Large? Was it large? He closed an eye and squinted down at it. There seemed to be much of it certainly, but—" 'a nose full o' gin for thruppence!" He could not see nor feel its size. He walked faster, away from the tormentor, who was hurling concise insult after him. At intervals he fingered his nose, crooked his forefinger along it, to test its shape. Large? Well, there were the Duke of Wellington, Mr. Gladstone, Dickens (Thackeray, in the matter of noses, would not bear thinking on), Napoleon, and Goethe in the Weimar bust. The mask of Keats in the National Portrait gallery was encouraging. Fingering his nose, bareheaded, Peter was an odd enough sight. He came to that window, where he had seen himself on his first pilgrimage in search of his aunt, on the night of his seventeenth birthday. Walking to meet him was a more robust Peter, though still bandy-legged. He laughed to see himself, and a pretty girl eyed him with favour.

Peter at nineteen was so far odd as never to have passed through that phase of coxcombry which finds pleasure in the glances of strange women, and reaches its lowest in the courting of them. It came later, at a time when he was most strenuously occupied with what he called his career, and was never very serious.

He knew that the young woman had looked at him, and knew her also for personable, but he put her interest down to his hatlessness.

After testing his hair, to find it less greasy, dried a little, he donned his hat, loitered no more, and swung at his longest stride up to the Rectory, by two minutes later than the appointed time.

The carpeted hall hung round with pictures, coloured prints of the Arundel Society, the arms of his host's

University and College over a door, reduced Peter to a state of awe very proper for entry into Mrs. Scott's drawing-room. He surrendered his hat and overcoat to the neatly dressed maid—black gown and white apron; white cap—not without some misgiving that she would look inside the hat and perceive the lowliness of the neighbourhood in which he had bought it, and followed her up the red-carpeted stairs. He felt awkward, and as though he had grown too small for his clothes. Everything about him seemed to be slipping. His dickey gave a great crack, and his cuffs, dropping, he turned his hands in to support them, wishing that he had succumbed to the temptation to buy a pair of "sustainers" for them.

The maid threw open the door of the drawing-room, from over which a head of Velasquez seemed to leer and jeer at him. He was announced as Mr. Davies, the door shut behind him, and he was left standing there, shrinking to pea-size in his clothes. Someone came up to him, he bowed, and it seemed as if he were a tiny, tiny thing imprisoned in the blue suit of a giant, calling in a still, small voice, "Good-evening." The stifling illusion was so real that he did in fact shout, bawled in an enormous voice.

He blushed, and, seeing a hand stretched out, a thin, very white hand, whiter than any he had seen before, he lunged at it, and because his eyes were blurred with the buzzing in his head, lunged badly and brought his thumb with a crash against the thumb of the outstretched hand. A little cry:

"Oh!"

"I'm sorry," he said, then came to himself. He saw the face of a woman, a little less tall than himself, the

soft eyes pained, but laughing behind the pain, and teeth biting her lip.

"It's nothing," she said, and shook his hand.

"But——" said Peter.

"It's nothing," she said again. He saw that she touched her thumb with her other hand and winced, but in obedience to her glances he made no more of it. She led him further into the room, and presented him to her son, David, to her daughter, Mattie, a pretty pale girl of seventeen, thin, disdainful, hair tied at the back with a ribbon, mischief in her eyes, green eyes put in with a sooty finger under a wide brow. Peter was dazzled. (He and Cooper had been reading much of Balzac together, and he was in a mood, borrowed from the great writer, to adore the "jeune fille.") He was introduced to her brother and forgot Mattie. Mrs. Scott's brother was none other than Murray Wilson, the great Murray Wilson, a man so great and well-beloved as to be almost a myth, so exalted in Peter's view as to make it seem absurd that he should eat, drink, or possess any of the ordinary human attributes. He should have had the meek detachment of a god, but here he was in the flesh about to eat a dinner with Peter, breathe same air. He shook Peter's hand, and turned to teasing Mattie, who, always with an eye on the newcomer, coquetted with her uncle. She desired Peter's interest in spite of his clothes.

Peter was taken to a sofa by the fireplace and drawn into conversation by Mrs. Scott. She thawed him quickly, and had him soon talking about himself. Wilson sat observing the boy.

He had detected at once the idealist eye; interest was further roused by the lank black hair, and the



dead white pallor of the skin. In animation Peter's face was arresting. In repose, as himself most admired it, it was dull and rather stupid, from his mouth being almost perpetually open.

Mrs. Scott tried him first with music, quickly discovered his ignorance and let him talk. She liked him, and the gentle manner which appeared under the uncouthness. He had a queer bluntness which pleased her. He seemed to be incapable of thoughtless words. Everything he said, right or wrong, chance wisdom or blazing folly, came out of him with an earnestness which commanded interest and begot ideas in the hearer. She found it easy to strike sparks from him, and the game amused her. Wilson watched it, and smiled across at her from time to time.

The boy, David, scrutinised the guest, detected the yellow spots on his boots and dismissed him as an "outsider."

The parson came bustling, greeted Peter, demanded dinner immediately. They descended to the dining-room, Peter with Mrs. Scott on his arm. He offered her his left arm at first, but she took him by the right, talked briskly to cover his confusion. Mattie took her uncle's arm, and young David his father's, absurdly mimicking a lady's walk, dainty, with picking steps.

The table gleamed white and silver; warm light from the pink-shaded candles. The light softened Mattie's hard little features, and Peter could, with difficulty, take his eyes from her. Mrs. Scott was like her, too, but softer, and her grey hair made her seem more tender.

Peter sat between Mrs. Scott and her brother, opposite young David and Mattie, sitting at the corner by her father. The maid waiting upon him oppressed Peter

at first. There seemed to be a certain scorn in the way in which she offered him potatoes, that was not in her manner towards the others. He was soon at ease, however. There was an atmosphere in the place different from anything he had known before, or imagined. It confirmed almost his visions of the houses of the rich as places whence care was banished, but that in Mrs. Scott's face were marks of suffering. Sitting there, he formed a theory that it is the woman makes the atmosphere of a home, but turning to his own to apply the theory, was baffled. His father no more than his mother had made the place hideous. Thinking of his father, he glanced up the table at his host, then across at David and Mattie. Melancholy thoughts troubled him. The difference was so appalling—his own home and this. From the parlour behind the tailor's shop to that behind old Cooper's had been a stride, wide for the legs: from Cooper's again to Mrs. Fildes or the house in Endell Street; but to this——! A ripple of laughter came from the others. David had said something funny, and was looking conscious, giggling nervously. Mrs. Scott took the conversation to literary subjects. Wilson struggled against it, turned to frivolity, was resolutely pursued and finally landed. Peter was all ears. On the subject of literary success the writer declared:

“Success is merely a question of hair.” Hair! Peter was glad of his visit to the half-caste.

“The length of it?” The question was from Mrs. Scott.

“Yes,” said Wilson. “Many a talent has been ruined by an inch of hair. The truth is that a man's imagination needs its proper food. Antics kill. The intoxication of words is more dangerous to a writer than alcohol.”

Peter was several times on the point of making a remark, but fell to making bread-pills. Mrs. Scott was alive to his nervousness, and in kindness turned to him.

"You must know young writers, Mr. Davies. What do you think?"

Peter began "I—I——," looked up to find all eyes turned upon him, Mattie's mocking, lost his thought and could remember only old Cooper's instructions about bread-pills. He laid his hand over the crumbs, saw that his finger-nails were dirty, and was left foolishly stammering.

Mattie turned to David and whispered: "Isn't he like a banana?"

David exploded, and his father scowled at him. They left Peter, and the parson and his wife discussed parish affairs. Wilson teased his niece.

Peter, seeking their motive, misinterpreted, and raged inwardly. He sat miserably eating and sipping his claret, taking care to cock his little finger as he drank.

Venturing to look up, he found young David making a hideous grimace at him. He responded with one more hideous. The boy laughed and applauded, and awkwardness was dispelled.

"An extraordinary accomplishment," said Wilson.

"What?" said Mattie.

"Old English—grinning through a horse-collar. I have found it in western counties. You would be successful in such competitions."

"Do it again!" said Mattie. "I did not see it."

Peter demurred.

"Please do it again." Peter, always susceptible to voices (and he knew none more sweet than this girl's and her mother's), complied.

She clapped her hands.

"I used to do it for babies at home," said Peter.

"Are you fond of babies, then?"

"They like me," said Peter.

The response found favour, and the rest of the dinner passed happily. Murray Wilson chanced on a vein of nonsense as they ate fruit and walnuts, and Peter was roused to emulation. He told how he had shaved half his early moustache, and invented preposterous anecdotes of the sagacity of Demophon. He took the persons of the Fildes circle, and gave them a grotesque twist, unconsciously following Wilson's method, though tinging his caricature youthfully with a spice of malice.

"Oh! come, come," the Rev. David said, "not so bad as that."

"I assure you—truly," said Peter.

All the same they laughed. Success warmed Peter.

When Mrs. Scott rose to leave them he plunged for the door, bowing as Mattie and David went through. Mattie tossed her head, as he looked for a smile from her.

Wilson and Scott drew together for port and tobacco. Peter was offered a cigarette, but declined.

"Not smoke?" said Wilson. "I remember burning a hole in my pinafore with my first cigar."

Coffee was brought. Peter sipped, while they plied him with questions. Wilson had heard the story of the quest of the aunt, had used it comically, and was pleased to find how nearly the young man of his invention resembled Peter—exactly the swaggering, nervous manner, and exactly the bullet-headed insistence on equality.

He dragged from Peter the confession of literary ambition, and Peter, in the heady confidence of port

wine, recited a little poem. Wilson made allowance and was kind. Peter had amused and interested him. He knew his type intimately, was not indeed without Peter qualities himself. He was astounded by the boy's memory and knowledge of literature. He had sifted the grain from the chaff, divided real knowledge from hearsay. He nodded at his brother-in-law and smiled. Peter mistook it for derision and became taciturn.

As he rose Wilson said:

"I was twenty-nine before there appeared in my work the personal flavour which alone makes writing worth while, and is its justification. I believe good painters are like that, too."

He meant this for encouragement, but Peter was in the air. The first approaching of a great man had its painful side. He remembered a sentence in a French exercise book at school.

"It is with great men as with mountains: the nearer you approach them, the less formidable do they seem."

Wilson had been a glorious being, living on dizzy heights: a gentle eagle, but all the same an eagle. The levelling was sudden, quick, through Peter's ridiculous intelligence. It was painful, perhaps, and certainly not at all good for so hubristic a young man.

Peter stayed only a little time in the drawing-room. Half-past ten seemed the moment for departure. He had noticed on arriving in the drawing-room that Mrs. Scott had her thumb handaged. He was sorry, ashamed of his clumsiness. He shook hands with her gingerly, and bowed.

"Thank you," he said, "for a very pleasant——" He very nearly said "entertainment," jibbed at the word and dropped it into mumbling. Young David

growled at him, and Mattie gave him a glance that lifted him.

As he left the room with Mr. Scott, he heard Wilson's voice:

"An Achilles with brains. He will hurt himself."

All the same he trod the air, head high. He had been in rare company, and the air of it had a little gone to his head.

Near the Elephant a happy drunkard approached him, whistling, singing, insanely laughing. He trod delicately, his legs flew out queerly, and it seemed as though he had no weight, were floating bubble-like near the earth, floating; and how he sang! Laughter gurgled from him like water.

Crowing with delight, he lurched to Peter, caught and held him. Peter gulped down his first fear and crowed, too, and, though the man was foul, offensive even, bent to his whimsies.

They laughed and danced wildly together; when suddenly the man stopped, staring fixedly at the whiteness of Peter's collar. He stretched a trembling hand to touch it.

"Goblimey," he said, "a toff," and burst into tears.

Peter stood for some moments in consternation, then left him weeping.

His own condition was so similar, though of different origin, that he was apt to sympathise. Happiness, warm happiness. He also broke into snatches of song, and once stretching his arms, standing on tiptoe, craning to a star, he murmured: "Mattie," then gasped at the audacity of it.

Wilson's voice mocked him:

"An Achilles with brains."

He walked for miles through the streets that night—in love with himself, and Mattie, and Miss Dugdale, and Janet, and Janet's baby.

•Peter Davies! What a man! Striding with giant legs.

“In the mountains the shortest way is from summit to summit: but for that thou needest long legs.”

That night Zaruthastra was a dwarf to Peter: he strode from Mont Blanc to Caucasus, from Caucasus to Everest.

## IV

PETER returned to Shaftesbury Avenue by way of Piccadilly, the Park, Oxford Street and the dark streets of Soho. It was very late and the streets had the lull which comes when pleasure-seekers are disappeared and night-workers are not yet abroad. He was still exalted, but approbation of himself had given way to amorous self-torturing, *Hauton timorumenos*; Peter was, above all things, a self-tormentor. A moon shining over the Park, entirely from a desire to drown her other self in the mysterious Serpentine, seemed to Peter to be hanging in the sky, broad and yellow, compassionate to all else, expressly to excite the stifling emotions. He tried to get free of it by murmuring "Mattie! Mattie!" then "Mary, Mary!" then "Janet! Janet!"—all to no purpose. He still choked.

He certainly was amorous that night, but it is possible also that the large consumption of food at an unaccustomed hour had something to do with it. That explanation, if it had occurred to Peter, would have been odious. He found ethereal reasons, and broke into a lyric vein. The result in words was perilously like

Tell me where is fancy bred,  
Or in the heart, or in the head—

but the impulse was genuine; whatever its origin, the rhythm of the lyric was charming, and Peter tripped to it.

Nearing his shop, he heard a cat miaowing, and knew



the note for that of Demophoon. The cry was not amorous, but petitioning. As a rule, once she left the house of a night, she disappeared until morning. He bent down to caress her. She flattened her ears, or ear, for the crumpled ear could do no more than twitch, and rubbed herself against his leg. He stroked her, then opened the door. She bolted in so soon as he had pushed the door a few inches. Peter followed and closed the door.

He was astonished to find a light burning in the passage and young Fildes coming towards him, on tip-toe, finger on lips. Alarm seized Peter and he threw out both hands awkwardly as though to ward off a threatened rush. Fildes seized his wrists and said:

“Peter, Peter—he’s going.”

Peter opened his mouth, and tried to speak, but could only produce a sort of dry rattling in his throat.

“It’s a stroke, and at his age—they don’t live through it.”

“When?” said Peter.

“To-night about half-past eight.”

Peter tried to think of what he was doing at half-past eight—making a face at young David, perhaps: anything else would have been equally ridiculous. He gripped Fildes’ shoulder, and found pleasure in the strong grip, had a desire to send his friend spinning.

Then:

“Will he know me?” he said.

Fildes looked sharply up at him.

“No.”

“I must be with him. There is no one else.”

Without more Fildes led Peter, sobered now and humble, striding no more, to the bed-chamber,

They had found him in this room on the floor in the alley between the bed and the chest of drawers. He had been among the treasures and relics of his desk, for, when they found him, it lay open, the key in the lock, and in his hand there lay a silver necklace of pink stones, pink topaz, and tiny stars of paste, fashioned in royal France.

The Fildeses, father and son, had loosed it from his hand, restored it to the desk and locked the same.

The father had stayed, but being called away had left his son until Peter should return. There was nothing to be done: only to watch.

Peter stood by the side of the bed and looked down upon the head of his stricken friend. One side of the face, the side of the great eye, had fallen, dragging the mouth awry. The eye glared most horribly, and all the face was ashen, showing the hair of head and beard silvery white. The skin drawn tight over the brow showed it fine and noble. The body seemed to be shrunk and the hands from chubby were thin, crook-fingered and transparent almost. Peter took the right hand: it was icy cold, hard, not answering to warmth. He sat by the bedside, and twisted his fingers in the thick white hair over the ear. There seemed to be life in that and some comfort.

Two visions rose in Peter's mind—his mother lying cold, filling him with horror of dead things: and the Button-moulder at the cross-roads.

Ay. Everything's over,  
The owl smells the daylight.

Owls, bats, moths, creatures of the night, filled Peter's thoughts.

For no reason he thrust his hand under the old man's head, so that the round skull lay in the cup of his palm. He strove to lift, but the head was heavy, and he fell to wondering. Does the brain die first, cease to dream, or are the mysteries of death clear and vividly seen? He remembered the horror of the living eye in the dead head in the story of the elixir of life, and wove queer fantasies, glimpses of horror seen and fading almost as soon as seen. Without knowing that he spoke, he framed the words:

“What is death?”

He spoke softly, but the words rang in the silent room. He drew in his breath hissing. How if the brain were alive in the skull, able still to perceive sound? The idea of the brain grinding thought without power to express sickened him, and he left his question. He was startled when young Fildes from the other side said:

“I have seen so much of death. It just stops like the ticking of a watch,” and he laid his hand on the old man's heart.

“Slow,” he said. “Slow, dying away.”

“The sadness of Lear's feather,” said Peter and Fildes looked across at him, wondering what he meant. He rose quickly to his feet, fumbling in his pocket.

Peter was deadly pale, his eyes staring and his jaw had dropped. He swayed, swinging to and fro over his knees, then pitched forward in a swoon. His hand dragged from under the old man's head, drew it sideways.

Returned to consciousness, he found himself in the parlour watched over by the doctor and the old charwoman. She was in tears. Among others she had the

profession of layer-out of corpses, and had been sent for earlier in the evening.

She had performed her office, and waited upon Peter's recovery to wag her tongue. He silenced the ghoulish old woman and plunged again into the death-chamber.

Fildes was stern and ordered him to bed. Demophon followed him and lay all night upon his feet.

During the two days before the burial the cat avoided the old man's room, though it had ever been her lair. She clung to Peter, and clawed and purred about him as she had done about the old bookseller.

The shop was kept closed and she retired thither, Peter, too, and at his desk he wrote of love and death.

Coffin board,  
 Poor pale corse,  
 Grave shall hoard  
 Love's remorse.

Let me win  
 Happiness;  
 Lay me in  
 Sad cypress.

Love, the foe,  
 Aids to death,  
 Ache of woe,  
 Sting of breath.

Death the friend  
 Comes too soon;  
 Makes the end  
 Sweet atune.

He read it to Demophon, who blinked contemptuously, curled up, and went to sleep on the sofa,

Peter preserved the poem. He had changed his red tie for a black bow, with a winged collar similar to that worn by Murray Wilson at the dinner.

He wrote to his friends, and told them of the bereavement, wrote to his brother, went to Janet Fildes for sympathy, and found it. He wished to write to Tessa, but could not remember her address, or if she had given him any on their chance meeting in the car. Fildes took charge of all the business of interment, and was in all ways a good friend, even to listening patiently while Peter, who had suffered from some mis-giving concerning the immediate future, talked about himself and his prospects, and enlarged upon great thoughts concerning death.

There were no discoverable relatives to bid to the funeral, and the body of the old man was followed to its grave by Peter as chief mourner, the two Fildeses and Janet, Scott and his wife. Old Adam was sick of a fever, and knew not even that his friend was dead.

Scott returned with Peter to Shaftesbury Avenue. He came bluntly to the point.

"Mr. Cooper," he said, "gave me your welfare as a special charge."

"You?" said Peter, incredulously, for the thing seemed too dazzling for belief.

"He made a will leaving you, with the exception of certain small legacies, everything whereof he might die possessed. I am executor, and charged with you and—and the cat."

"Demophon?"

The parson nodded and drew off his black kid gloves.

"How," said Peter, "how is Mrs. Scott's—thumb?"

"It was nothing," said the parson. "Have you found the will?"

"Will?" said Peter. He had been flying off into dreams, Mrs. Scott and Mattie, and always, always, happiness like that of the evening of the dinner.

"He made his will—and signed it only the night before he died. You were in the shop asleep."

"I remember," said Peter. "It will be in his desk."

He fetched the desk from the dead man's room with the keys. It was in rose-wood chased with brass, inlaid; brass cornered: hinges and lock of brass scrolled and elaborate. A brass plate let into the lid bore the inscription:

"X. Cooper, 1859."

He laid it on the table. A little difficulty with the key and they had it open. A musty fragrance rose from among the litter of its contents. The pink topaz necklace lay atop, and broken fragments of a rose long dead. Rare stones in rings peeped out, two fingers of a glove, a chain, and all disordered. They found the will. Odd sums were left to Peter, money in the funds, the business, all property whatsoever. He was charged to be a man and to remember this:

"Vere magnum, habere fragilitatem hominis, securitatem Dei."

"It is from Bacon," said Mr. Scott to Peter puzzling, and he translated. "It is true greatness to have the frailty of a man and the security of a God."

"I'll be great," said Peter sublimely.

"How?"

"I don't know. But I'll be it."

"In all," said the parson, "I think you will have perhaps eight hundred pounds."

"There's jewels here," said Peter. "Are they mine?"

"Yes, yours."

Peter foraged in the desk and laid all out in a row. He came upon a great gold watch, from which a fob with seals dangled.

"My," he said. "He's been a man."

"Yes," said Scott. "A known man," and he sighed to look upon the little hoarded treasures that were all that were left of the old man's sad romance.

"I'll leave the shop," said Peter.

"For what?"

"Education. Mr. Cooper used to say 'Be hanged to education,' but he made me read for all that, and there's some things that others know that a man has to know if only to know them better. Isn't it so, sir?"

Peter had wild dreams of Cambridge, but Mr. Scott drew him gently down to lesser London, on the ground of economy. They argued, and Mr. Scott left Peter to think it over, with promises to do all in his power to help.

"My solicitors," he said, "will procure probate for the will—you don't have control, you know, until you are twenty-five."

That had escaped Peter. He was damped. His wings flapped for flight, but he was chained to earth. Mr. Scott could have laughed at the sudden ruefulness of Peter's face, but he forbore.

Peter timidly sent messages of greeting to Mrs. Scott and Miss—Miss Mattie. Left alone he foraged more among the old man's papers. There were old letters, legal documents, plans and pictures of an ancient house

in Warwickshire, writings, poems, prose, fragments, and an old diary, a note-book.

Peter set aside the diary and the note-book for reading. Out of the diary fluttered a scrap of paper yellow with age, worn at the corners, through at the folds. There was a faint fragrance of heliotrope from it. He held it together and deciphering the thin cramped writing where the long *s* so much resembled *f* as to be confusing, read under the date September 5, 1856:

“My dear, my dear. It is all done: you are gone and I am like to die. I could not leave this place with you; yet without you it is no better than a tomb, so cold it is. It was so in the days when we were closest, in the hours when you were gone. But then the knowledge of a certain dawn made sweet the pain of waiting through the night. The sun shines coldly now. It never shone for me but through you, as all that came to me of life could come through you alone. You know, you know, you are so tender and you know so well: there is no thought of bitterness in you, generous and big as you are, for the hurt that in my weakness I have done to you. What could I do? . . .”

There were some words illegible here, others erased, blotted out.

“Before you came to me I had been hurt, crushed to numbness. We flashed together (the words are yours) and knew great happiness. Cruelty and prejudice—you said ‘prejudice is stronger than the law’”—

The words touched Peter’s memory, and he saw again the old man telling his pitiful narrative—he seemed nearer to old Cooper now than he had ever been. Men do survive death,



“Cruelty and prejudice,” he read again, “divided us. We might have gone together out to meet life, but that I, in my folly, in the vanity of my heart, deceived myself, believed the words whispered in my ear. And—Heaven help me—judged you! I, a woman, to judge a saint among men, almost a God! Nay, we must not judge the lowliest. How much greater then was my presumption and my wickedness in judging you, the highest, best and noblest of all? That is my wrong. I am your penitent. But what is my penitence to you? I gave you all: I gave you nothing—I shall preserve your memory—or it may come to us again. Vain hope!—But I am with you: you are always my beloved, more than myself——”

The writing scrawled here and the pen had been dug deep into the paper. Words ceased and the pen had raced trailing a wavering line—then:

“How well I know you! Clara.”

The full meaning of the letter was not revealed to Peter. His imagination created a young Cooper, but not a handsome: and a Clara, dainty, elusive, bewitching; soft, adorable, like—like—like Miss Dugdale, Mary. Peter’s imagination was strong enough, but cold. It had not had its proper food of love. He gorged it later.

Rummaging again amongst the papers in the desk his hand came upon something hard and cold, a Dresden figure of Demeter, six inches high, red-sandalled, cornucopia on arm, pink and white: a Demeter absurd and sentimental, but dainty. She stood for Clara, there on the table simpering.

He came upon another letter, in Cooper’s hand, but firm, rounded, young. The letter was of earlier

date than hers—August, 1854—the paper yellower, more dilapidated. They had had two years then! Peter made the calculation, but imagined not all that the time had held for them. The letter moved him, roused wildness, and keen sorrow. He leaned forward close to Demeter and read:

“Darling, my dear. Our babies! Mon Dieu, but I dreamed of them last night. We were on our hill at sunset—sun going down behind the rolling woods touching them to gold, and the woods, our woods, blue, hazy, grey mists: the pines warm, red, glowing. The light growing softer, paler, the trees made music in their swaying, and from their crests our children floated down, singing—circled us, and danced. You came to me, close, my lips on yours; and we swayed to the rhythm of life—the trees, children, we two! lovers! Divine! Oh! my dear, my dear, it cannot be for nothing that we have this, so much. I thank you: but not you. It is something more than you that loves me, just as it is something more than I that loves you. If it were only I, I should say, should I not? Heavens! This woman whom I know to have loved before, worn by the world, tried with unhappiness, this is not my ideal of love. Where is my Juliet, my Heloise, my young Beatrice?—For of such I had ever dreamed. But, being in this, more than myself—I am you, become you, merged in this you which is greater than you, as you are merged in this me which is greater than myself; a divine possession.

“I say ‘I love you.’ That is the human formula—the simplest symbol. It is love both sacred and profane: love as the brutes know it and as the Gods know it: Love triumphant, blazing, ranging over the

world to set it quivering. The discovery of it is sweet: the first timid grasping sweet—timid because we are afraid, so much have we been hurt in our tamprings with divine things, in our clumsy searchings after this truth which has come to us now unsought—and sweet the going out to meet it in terror: but this possession, this ever-growing knowledge of it—Darling, my dear, we are ever at the beginning—You and I—Dream-children! Only in dreams ours—Then—then—What more? Only this: that I love you.”

In the margin many years later the lover had written—“Clara is dead. For a time God left the world;” and later still: “What is my love in the infinite? To men even it is less than a star.”

Peter was shocked. It was as though he had happed on the inmost life of a friend unbidden. Old Cooper had had a knack of making him feel small, but this young fiery Cooper!—There was something ridiculous about it, perhaps because Peter’s young Cooper would not wholly detach himself from the old Cooper he had known. The old man and the letter of babies and trees, and dreams shrieked absurdity, and Peter was sorry.

He folded both letters carefully and placed them in the desk. He had no taste for more, and restored everything—deeds, the lease of the house, jewels, watch, Demeter. Last of all he took the pink topaz necklace in his hand. It shone softly, a piece of loving craftsmanship. There were nine stones set in silver, each in a stud linked with a little chain. It had been a bracelet of eight studs and a clasp, three large stones, five small. In each stud were tiny winking gems that Peter took for brilliants. They were French

paste of the finest, and every stone was clasped in silver claws, backed with silver, fluted. Peter loved the soft glow of the stones, and the dull tarnished silver of the chains and studs. It was a fitting jewel for the Demeter of the German artist, fitting for the throat of the fair penitent.

Suddenly Peter had a ghastly sense of being in face of something he did not understand. He dropped the necklace into the desk, slammed it to and locked it, then carried it into his own bedroom. He was afraid, like a child of the dark. He lay shivering in his bed, shrinking into himself, desiring only smallness. Quite simply he framed his thought:

"If I am tiny. *It* will hurt me less."

The nature of *It* was not revealed to him, but he knew well that it was inevitable, lurking in the world to hurt him. He was sore afraid. And during these days when there was confusion in his affairs, nothing but consultations, palavers, arguments, and plans, and he was much alone, he lived in terror. Often he would open the desk and stand fingering the necklace. And often he began to read Cooper's letter to Clara, but, so soon as he began to read from the first words, "Darling, my dear, our babies!" its every phrase leaped from the page to confound him. Later he remembered a saying, oft repeated of old Cooper's: "There are sunbeams prisoned in the earth, striving upward to reach the sun. So all things grow. Love is growth."

There was some peace in that and comfort, but Peter went floundering in deep waters. The flow of words from his pen was dammed, and he was miserable, cross and listless: a sore trial to the friends who were busy

making plans for his future and the day when he should rise on strong wings.

He was so odious that when Mr. Scott proposed to his wife that he should live with them she put her foot down.

"My dear," she said. "No. We could not do with his moods: he would come crying to me for sympathy, or to Mattie—and then! No, he is not fit yet to live with women!"

Scott marvelled at his wife's divination. He was puzzled.

"What are we to do with him? I am proud of my charge and must hold to it."

"Give him a lodging in Bloomsbury or Notting Hill. He must fight his own battles, and discover for himself the real aspect of the world. That old man with his literary outlook has drawn a film over it for him."

"He is so sensitive. He will be hurt."

"Let him. He must be if he is to come to anything. These violent and false moods."

Wilson said: "Throw him into deep water and let him swim. He won't drown. It is the only way with puppies."

The upshot of it was that, when the good will of the business and the remaining term of the lease of the house had been sold, Peter being possessed of a thousand and fifty pounds, aged nineteen years and nine months (prodigiously old and weighted with the burden of life), neither good-looking nor ugly, though in animation striking, ill-dressed, ill-mannered and uncouth, was lodged in a house of his own choosing in Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, and entered at Kings College in the Strand where he attended lectures in Latin,

Greek, Mediæval languages, History, Political Economy and English Literature.

He was keen and zealous in his attendance. His greatest distress came from contact with boys and girls, younger than himself, who appeared to have all sorts of knowledge denied to himself. At first he was foolish enough to regret the three years in the shop, never made mention of it, was in terror of discovery: then he made the mistake of despising this knowledge, called it "Cockney lore." He swaggered among them, developed an irritating habit of literary quotation, became a standing joke and was acutely miserable, kicking peevisly. He bragged of his acquaintances, hurling Scott and Murray Wilson, Miss Dugdale's brother and the least of the long-haired in the Fildes group, at the heads of his fellow-students.

On one occasion as he was coming out of the College into the Strand, Murray Wilson shot by. Peter button-holed him and held him in ridiculous conversation that the little students might see with their own eyes. Wilson divined the inner Peter, kindly stood with him, but for months afterwards avoided meeting him, abandoning his practice of Sunday supper with the Scotts.

This produced unfortunate consequences, for it so fell out that Peter was thrown much with Mattie. David had gone to school, and both Mr. and Mrs. Scott were occupied with parish affairs, for a cycle of bad trade had brought great distress to the poor in South London as everywhere else. Capital was needed in Russia and America, and the ring of international financiers had directed it thither to the dislocation of trade in England. So the bald little man who propounded economic theory to Peter explained

the crisis. Other economists wrote letters of violent abuse to the papers, a petty war followed, Free Trade v. Fair Trade, in which Peter, with the confidence of small knowledge, joined. His letter appeared over his full name. He reproduced in it almost word for word the ideas of the bald-headed lecturer, who thereafter regarded him as his most promising pupil. Peter cut out the letter and showed it to all his friends. Mattie thought it a literary wonder, though she could make neither head nor tail of it, and was bewildered by the absurd diagram with which it was illustrated. Her father chaffed him, and comically regretted his ignorance of mathematical economics. Thick-headed Peter swallowed everything, and for a week or so dreamed seriously of abandoning his other studies and migrating to the School of Economics in Claremarket.

Fortunately another and more real success in Latin Literature, the winning of a special prize, carrying with it a bursary of thirty pounds, defeated the insane project. He devoted himself principally to that and to English Literature, took himself most seriously, and indeed lost all sense of humour with regard to them. It was a gloomy and a Werther-like Peter who paid little court to Mattie on Sunday evenings. He vapoured woefully to her, heaved great sighs, and developed a peculiar dog-like expression of the eye for her benefit. He wrought upon her, poured all his floating ideas into her mind, was teased, laughed at, petted and comforted. She was proud of his successes, and flattered that he would for her sake make changes in his dress. He had clung to the black bow tie of Murray Wilson ever after the funeral. Mattie tabooed brown boots and long hair. Peter denied himself both

these luxuries, and to the limit of his purse dressed carefully to please her. She tired of his eternal blue suits. He bought a grey and a brown.

Mrs. Scott had uneasy moments. And there was some head-wagging. She liked Peter, was anxious for his welfare, but in her eyes his welfare was not Mattie's. She knew the danger of arbitrary suppression with the girl, and forbore, though watching carefully. She knew that if there was folly in the air the girl would be unhappy: but Mattie was radiant, kind and helpful in the conduct of the house and parish affairs. There was then no cause for interference.

One Sunday Peter and Mattie were alone in the drawing-room, she playing the piano idly, Schubert and Sullivan by turn. Peter twisted the lock of hair on his forehead and said:—

“How Sullivan has stolen from Schubert!”

“Has he?” said Mattie, “I like him.”

“Play that again.” Peter approached the piano, stood in its curve, and she played the air from the “Yeoman of the Guard.”

Oh, the sighing and the suing!  
Oh, the doing and undoing,  
When a jester goes a-wooing,—  
Jester wishes he were dead.

Mattie sang softly.

“That note,” said Peter, “is like the note of Demophon, caressing.”

Mattie laughed.

“Poor Demophon,” she said. Peter looked tragic.

The cat with the crumpled ear at the quitting of the shop on its purchase by the half-caste barber,



who being incommoded by the too close attention of the police wished to extend his business to the comparatively greater respectability of the wide thoroughfare, had been conveyed in a basket to the rectory. She stayed for a day, numb, without interest even in the milk which was offered her at every turn, then had fled. They brought her back; again she fled to the shop. Once more and she was lost, engulfed like Peter's aunt in cruel London.

That is why Mattie said "Poor Demophoon."

A lamp with a pink shade stood behind her head. A bright fire was burning, the curtains were drawn, shutting out the world and bleak weather.

Perhaps the pink shade was responsible for what happened. Mattie was pretty—those green eyes: but on that night she looked prettier to Peter, older, for the first time a woman. As she played, he leaned further and further over the piano towards her, eyes on her face. She knew what she was doing, enjoyed her power. She raised her eyes once, so glad they were and soft. Peter glared. She glanced down again at her fingers, sighed—a little sigh.

Peter tugged at his hair and hitched his shoulders, then hands together he leaned forward and whispered, supplication in his voice:

"Mattie."

She broke into a tender lullaby.

"Will you—listen to me?" said Peter.

Mattie let her hands fall into her lap, and hung her head. Peter was silent for a moment, fearful lest he had hurt her. She was so very still.

He was fearful also of It. Was It leaping upon him? He wagged his head, shook himself.

He knew at the bottom that this was not it, but some hideous power drew him on to speak, to finish where he had begun. He knew that there was no need for more, that the first word had said all that need be said, but the thin slip of a girl sat there silent, expectant, dragging words out of him. They cut as they came, and he was mocked by the memory of that preposterous scene with Janet Fildes, and by the memory of Tessa's shoulders that first day, Tessa painting herself, and Tessa demanding a kiss. No help for it, he must go on.

"Mattie," he whispered again, and swept into the thing, abandoning himself to the current of it. Her bosom rose and fell. She stole a glance at him, and laid her white hand where he might reach it. He stretched to touch it. Her fingers closed on his.

"Do you remember the first night that I came here?"

Mattie nodded.

"You were unkind to me—a little, but for all that it was the first night of happiness in my life. The tenderness, the softness of this house, good mother and kind father, were things I had never known, and never dreamed of, never!—Girls I had known—You, by contrast, seemed beyond nature—and you were unkind to me."

He paused. Mattie seemed to wish to speak, but was silent—only her hand pressed his.

"We shall be friends, Mattie dear. I can help you. And you—I am so terribly alone."

A cunning devil prompted Peter to plead loneliness. The plea is irresistible, and the use of it here was damnable. Peter wanted nothing of this pale girl, so young. She wished to give to him, and he from

kindness, magnanimity, or perhaps only from sheer egoism took. More words would have plunged him in falsity, a hideous welter. He had divined this, and, taking his hand from hers, plunged his hand in his pocket and drew forth the Dresden figure of Demeter. He placed the little lady before her.

"She is the goddess of the corn," he said. "I give her to you for a symbol."

"She is pretty," said Mattie.

"Will you keep her? While we are friends, I mean. I want you to grow into the splendid woman . . ."

Mattie turned eyes mocking and tender upon him. She rose, left the piano and came round to him; she was quiet, firm, decided. She took the lapels of his coat, and turned her face up to him. He collapsed.

"You silly boy," she said. "I like your goddess, and you—I shall keep both."

She shook him fondly and left him. Bemused, Peter followed her and, as she began to play again, seized her right hand, bent low and kissed it. She twined her fingers in his hair and laughed.

"Laugh—silly," she said. "You must laugh. Peter laughs, but Mr. Davies may be solemn."

Peter was baffled. The masterful man bending to frail woman had become impossible.

"You—you," he said, helpless.

"I—I—" and she mocked again.

"What now?"

"Laugh."

"I—I can't."

"Mr. Davies then."

"No—Peter."

"Peter."

It sounded so odd to hear her say solemnly "Peter" that he gasped, then giggled,—broke at last into a laugh.

"Dear Peter," said Mattie, and placed her hands on his shoulders. "I will keep your pretty lady—until I lose you. I shall break her then."

"Never," said Peter, become the heroic lover. Mattie liked that and yielded to it. Peter was baffled. There seemed to be so much purpose in this young girl, and his conception of her character was based on the Balzacian 'jeune fille.' He knew perfectly well that this was not It, but the very baffling made the thing fascinating, and he was held in thrall as in all his follies he had never been. There was a curious warmth in his bosom; Mattie shook him. His arms went round her; she held back a moment, fell towards him, her arms from his shoulders went round his neck dragging his head down. Her breath tickled his lips curiously. His throat tightened and for the thousandth part of a second he struggled. In that time he thought that he must not kiss her, for his own sake and hers, that the law of salt forbade it, that it would be theft most dishonourable, that prejudice was ridiculous, though stronger than the law; that romance was ridiculous; that Cooper had said "For love, Homunculus, never forget that Goethe tapped out hexameters on his wife's back," that Goethe was an ass, and that Cooper had been a real lover, that a kiss more or less did not matter, that one kiss led to another. Then the thread snapped, and their lips came together.

One kiss led to another, to many. A hand on the door sent them flying, and when Mrs. Scott entered

the room Mattie was thumping out the wedding march from "Lohengrin," which Peter particularly detested, and he was sitting low in a long chair by the fire-place reading a volume of sermons. The large white bow at the back of Mattie's head was sadly crushed.

That detail did not escape Mrs. Scott, whom the long cessation in the piano-playing had brought. She had marked the increasing politeness of Mattie's demeanour towards Peter. The girl had ceased to call him "the banana," and gave him "Mr. Davies" always in reference. So much of childishness she had dropped, was soberer, mouse-quiet in the house, but of accesses of wild humour and flashing caustic wit. "Cherchez l'homme," said Wilson, and pitched on Peter, since both Mr. Scott's curates were married, plain and dull, and young men of an admirable class came rarely to the house. Like a wise woman, in her perturbation Mrs. Scott had gone, not to her husband, but to her brother. He laughed, and told her of his earliest experiments in the making of sparks.

"It is good for Peter," he said.

"But Mattie?"

"No small benefit for her, Peter is a tender and a kind soul."

"He will hurt her."

"Less than another."

"More, I think."

"She will be proud to have known him, and he must learn."

"Oh! well——"

"It is the boiling process for both."

"Eh?"

“ ‘Strange,’ said Sancho Panza. ‘Very strange happenings are in the boiling of an egg.’ ”

“There is nothing to be done.”

“I will dazzle Peter with my distinguished patronage—if you wish. It will be bad for him.”

“How bad?”

“He will swell—leave it. If there is need I can take him.”

Mrs. Scott left it at that. She had gleaned not much comfort, but her sense of proportion was restored. She could not approve of Peter. Peter or no Peter, future or no future, he was the son of a tailor, with, no doubt, hordes of impossible relations in the country whence he had sprung. Without knowing it her attitude towards him had changed. There was just a spice of resentment in her. This, while it chilled Peter, brought an ironical twist with it. He was driven more towards the girl, whose reception of him grew warmer, as that of her mother colder. Mrs. Scott detected the process, but too late. She could not forbid Peter the house without worrying her husband, who, she knew, would pooh pooh the whole matter. He was fond of Peter, and ridiculously proud of his success at King’s College. Young David had shown no signs of particular intelligence, indeed avowedly hated books, and had early discovered the profession of his choice—to be agent or steward to a nobleman of vast estates. All the pride that might have been in David was centred in Peter. Youthful complications between the boy and Mattie were food for wild laughter. Peter was of ideas healthy, if half-digested. There could be little harm in him. Mattie he knew for a person of firm character, and for seventeen, of much wisdom.

She had left school, six months, and was waiting only the decision of a moneyed aunt, interested in her, to go abroad to Leipzig, Paris or perhaps Brussels for the study of music. The choice of place rested with the said aunt, who was making inquiries into Pensions, and the quality of teaching in each place.

Mrs. Scott, therefore, had resigned herself to tolerance. None the less, when she entered the room, to find disorder in her daughter's hair, and Peter engrossed in a pious work which no one since her husband's grandfather had read, she felt a certain anger, and the protective instinct enlarged Peter to a dreadful size, a bold and reckless marauder, saw Mattie as weak, fragile, a thing easily destroyed. She had for a moment a wish to hurl injurious words at the hypocritical Peter, who, on realising her entry (he gave her a few moments in which to take in the scene) had sprung to his feet, book in hand, and murmured words of pleasure in the music of Miss Mattie. It was then that Mrs. Scott most wished to upbraid him. All that she said was:

"It is late, Mattie."

Mattie said "Oh!" rose and closed the piano. Glancing at herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece, she perceived with some vexation that her cheeks were flushed and her hair ribbon crumpled. She stood for a moment fingering the simpering Demeter.

"Mr. Davies gave me this," she said. Peter explained the circumstance of the finding of the goddess.

"Charming," said Mrs. Scott, taking the figure. "I wish I had met Mr. Cooper."

Peter was shy of talking of his former patron. He could find nothing to say but:

“He—he did not wash much.”

Cleanliness was a new virtue with Peter, learned from the Scotts. He had been brought up in the tradition of the weekly bath, and was inclined to attach too much importance to the new habit. It was with some repugnance that he thought of old Cooper's apparently invincible aversion from water.

He was uncomfortable in the presence of Mrs. Scott, glad when she, hinting at bed for Mattie, gave him the opportunity to escape. He said “Good-night” and pressed Mattie's hand warmly. Her eyes followed him to the door, he wondering why they did not see him for the ass and knave that he was, for as ass and knave he saw himself as he closed the door of the room. He blamed himself, but had no suspicion that Mattie had had anything to do with it. The thing was done, and seemed fatal, a final disposition. He felt most uneasiness from its refusal to sort with his theories of the tender passion. He struggled manfully to do his duty and to confine his thoughts, and the whirl roused in him to Mattie—Mattie—Mattie—but there crowded in on him all the young women with whom he had dallied, was dallying, and clearest of all, the vision of Mary Dugdale as he had last seen her in a new triumph, a play in which she had shown herself, according to a dramatic critic, “to possess the power of presenting the whole gamut of human emotions.” Even under the spell of her magnetism Peter had known the critic for a liar and a fool, but he had returned with fresh ardour to the adoration of this first idol, who had been dethroned by the shock of the tidings that she was married to Mr. Bertram Bond, the author who had given her her first real opportunity. Janet Fildes had



occupied him and turned his interest from drama to music, and the collection of Miss Dugdale's portraits had been destroyed. The discovery of old Cooper's romance, the fire and passion of it, had flung Peter Mary-wards, and he had even written to her (though the letter was never posted) in imitation. He ran wild, and made violent love to a girl-student who bore a fancied resemblance to the glorious Mary. Mattie was worlds apart, a creature of another kind; none of the goddess in her: the godhead of Mary, divine name, was indisputable. And now this had happened. His blood raced, his skin tingled.

All this turmoil of memory, thought, emotion and physical sensation took place in Peter during the time it took him to descend the stairs to the front-door. He took his overcoat from its peg of the mahogany hat-stand, struggled into it and was for going, with his hand on the latch, when from the landing came a soft voice calling "Peter!" He desired to flee, but he was held.

"Good-night—dear," said the voice.

He became romantic on the instant, turned and stalked so that he stood where, by craning his neck, he could see her. She blew him a kiss, smiled, and fled on tiptoe, with an anxious glance towards the drawing-room door.

He heard her ascend the stairs, then she stopped, and he heard her voice again.

"Write," she whispered.

That exasperated him. Already she had begun to make demands upon him. He did not recognise that source of exasperation, but ascribed it to his fine sense of tact injured by an advance from the girl so pal-

pable. Even then he did not consider that Mattie had had anything to do with it.

Romance made Peter conceive the female of the human race as waiting, like a female insect, for the arrival of the male. His relations with young women had all been based on that conception. The majority of them, with great subtlety and cleverness, had bowed to it and taken their Peter as they found him. One or two had laughed at him, and Peter left the Scotts' house with an uneasy feeling that at any moment Mattie also might laugh at him. Then he ground his teeth savagely, and muttered:

"I should deserve it."

He was pleased with the humility of this utterance, and repeated it. A policeman thought Peter was saluting him as he spoke aloud, and in the relief of hearing a human voice directed towards him, said "Good-night, sir." The "sir" delighted Peter, and he stayed to speak. The constable spoke first, not an illuminating remark, but an opening:

"Raw weather for the time of the year."

"February," said Peter.

"Cold for the poor out-o'-works. Ever seen 'em washin' themselves on the Embankment in the 'orse troughs? Washes an' combs their 'eads, they do."

"Poor devils," said Peter.

"We're all poor devils," said the policeman. "I know. I seen all sorts. Dooks an' beggars is much the same thing if you can see under their clothes—shiverin' all of them."

"Shivering souls," said Peter, and thought of the old woman near this spot who had given him the secret of warmth. He had forgotten it these many months.

Odd that the policeman should have recalled her! He thought perhaps the policeman might know her. He described her and asked.

"Oh! Her?" said the constable pleasantly. "She's dead."

Peter had a desire to laugh. He had discovered this desire in himself whenever he heard that any person not connected with himself had gone the way of all flesh.

"Old actress," she was. "They 'ad 'er in the papers when she died. Much good it did 'er or anyone. Let well alone, I say."

"Find it lonely standing about?"

"Well, sir, you get used to it. It's bad folks being afraid of you, and children—but you get used to it, sir." Each "sir" was a fresh delight to Peter. "It's safe, sir, and a pension, and I think a lot."

"Good-night," said Peter, and shook hands.

The policeman was important by reason of his much flesh. Peter did not know the vast wrappings of cloth under the uniform, and suspected not that even a police constable is a fraud. To him the man was immense, solid, monumental, looming in the misty air as he drew away from him.

The reality of this encounter braced Peter, but did not long hold him from self-torment, or from resolving the mystery of himself and conduct incompatible with theory all the way back to the two rooms which he now inhabited in a tall lodging-house in Gordon Square. They were tiny rooms, but the possession of a sitting-room all his own was luxury. The bedroom was an attic under the roof illuminated by one small window. It had no fireplace, but fortunately the Scotts had taught him the necessity of sleeping with the window

open, or his health must have suffered, for except the walk from his lodging to King's College he took no exercise nor air. He avoided the society of his fellow-lodgers, though he had sufficient curiosity to discover their origin, occupation, and habits, and spent all his time in working first for his Intermediate, in which, unlike the little man who had taught him Algebra with such ill-success—he passed easily, and later for his degree in Arts. The examination was difficult, covering much knowledge, more, they said, than either Oxford or Cambridge, and Peter suffered qualms as he studied the University Calendar. He slaved and won constant approbation. He was conscientious, and though Janet Fildes, anxious for his early celebrity, urged him to poetic composition, he refrained, and in course of time learned to view critically those unhappy little poems which had so signally failed to stir the journalistic world. None the less, he had no thought of other career than the literary, and in all that he wrote of answers to propounded questions, or of contributions to debate and discussion, he was fastidious in the use of words, even meticulous. He was derided much, but whatever he said was so clearly and so shingly set forward as to compel attention and sometimes keen interest. They had a Parliament, in which Peter was Leader of the Opposition, for a time, until he found that he was giving too much to it, and resigned to study. He approached his fellow-students as fools, and, therefore, made few friends. He knew perfectly well that they and he would at once part company in the future, and with sure instinct, knowing already the pain of growing out of friendship, he avoided such. Some sort of

contact he could not avoid, but so far as he could he held his fellows at arm's length. Some there were insistent, who forced their way to the inner Peter, won kindness from him, but in the end came battering against the hard wall of reserve he had erected round himself, and were hurt. Peter was always sorry for such interludes, a little sorry for the victim, but most for himself, and the waste of himself. Yet he wished for popularity. He counted the cost too dear. All that he wished of more or less intelligent society, the Fildes circle afforded him, and for tenderness there stood the Scotts.

After his Intermediate examination, he took one or two pupils by way of adding to the income sparingly doled out in monthly sums by his guardian. His money was securely invested to bring in forty pounds a year, and another sixty was advanced to him on condition of repayment out of the capital sum when it should be paid over to him on his twenty-fifth birthday. Fees at the University were paid in the same way.

Peter had read of Carlyle and Irving, and other Scotch students in Edinburgh. He took them for his model, and in Gordon Square cultivated austerity. It was not in his nature to be so, and he suffered much. He ate sparingly, smoked not at all, and often in the most evil weather denied himself a fire and sat working with his feet swathed in flannel shirts. He had made himself in early days a time table, according to which he should rise at six in the morning throughout the year, work till nine, go to the college for the day, dine at seven, think for an hour, work again until twelve, and "so to bed." The time table was pinned on the wall

of his bedroom, written neatly on a foolscap sheet which just covered one of the enormous yellow flowers of the wall-paper, but he had observed it for barely a week. On Sundays he never toiled until after the visit to the Scotts, when he sat for an hour with his books.

This Sunday, after the scene with Mattie, and the subsequent conversation with the policeman, recalling the tattered woman, the fallen actress, he was aflame. He lit the two candles, by which light he preferred to read, for it was impossible to procure a good light from the gas upon the plain deal table at which he worked, and, taking down the Heauton Timoroumenos of Terence, a Latin Dictionary, and a manuscript book, he began to translate and annotate. He forced himself to read the words:

“*Quam iniqui sunt patres in omnis adolescentis iudices!  
Qui aequos esse cement, nos jam a pueris illico nasci senes:  
Neque illarum affines esse rerum, quas fert adolescentia.  
Ex sua libidine moderantur, nunc quae est, non quae olim fuit.  
Mihi si unquam filius erit, nae ille facili cur utetur patre:  
Nam et cognoscendi et ignoscendi dubitur peccatis locus:*”——

but they danced under his eyes, the lines of printed letters coiled like serpents, and if he took his eyes from the page he saw always the image of the old match-woman, with her ragged skirt draggled in mud, sitting under the lamp-post, or again in the doorway out of the rain. There lay the clean page of the book before him. Pen in his hand, to escape from the old woman he began to write verse, but though the words came easily he knew it for doggerel, mechanical stuff out of relation with the thoughts that were in him. He covered two pages with such stuff, turned another: then almost

without knowing what he was doing he wrote for headline the words:

“Shivering Souls,”

and drew a thick line under them. He paused, then plunged into description of the adventure, inventing a little, suppressing his errand, wrote of her as a thing vomited from the depths, and laid at his feet for study. Then in sheer inspiration he strode back to the days of her greatness and described her, unconsciously taking for model Mary Dugdale, with perhaps a touch of that Clara whom old Cooper had loved so well. He wrote feverishly into the small hours, then rising, paced the room, twisting the lock of hair on his forehead. Four strides took him from one end of the room to another. For greater space he took to walking round and round, all the while observing carefully each feature of it.

He had brought some of the old prints from the shop, and these, cheaply framed, hung on the walls—“Caroline, Lady Scarsdale and her son the Honble. Jno. Curzon,” hung over the mantelpiece; Michael and the Fiend laid low were a gloomy patch on the wall above the table; Stothard’s “John Gilpin,” mounted on a rotund horse galloping past the Bell Inn over the writing-table in the recess to the left of the fireplace, and above the books in the companion recess was a plate from Turner’s *Liber Studiorum*. The single comfortable chair of the apartment, a Victorian affair upholstered in red plush, crouched into the empty fireplace, for when there was a fire Peter made the most of it. He had brought many books, for books were all that he really cared to possess, and with his newly acquired text-books on various subjects, he had enough to fill six shelves mounting to the ceiling and seeming like to obscure the Turner

plate. Of ornament or bric-a-brac, there was none. The mantelpiece contained only photographs of acquaintance and friends clustered round Murray Wilson in the centre, and old Cooper's desk lay, always locked, on the writing-table. Peter had tried to use it at first, but found it uncomfortable for work. He stopped in his pacing and handled it now for a moment, wondering what insane impulse had driven him to take the Demeter to Southwark, the goddess of plenty, to the home of the poor and wanting. He glanced down then to the manuscript, and words leaped from the written page, to send him pacing again, prose rhythms rolling in his head. He knew he must write no more, and dared not sit. Round and round the room he went, always hovering for a moment by the writing-table, then tearing himself away. Once he stopped by the curtainless window on which driving rain was now beating and looked out over the grim prospect of roofs to the red glow in the sky cast by the light of the near great thoroughfare. The roar of London was dim, and in the house there was no sound: a dismal prospect, and a sad moment sorting well with Peter's mood, exhausted as he was with his effort of writing. The melancholy of the hour—a church clock had struck two—soothed him, indeed brought him perilously near to an access of passionate weeping for all the sorrows not his own, and griefs wherein he had no share. He suffered the ghastly sensation of impotence, which is perhaps the most dreadful trial of the lonely in London; yet only a moment before he had been filled with a swaggering power and the knowledge of words rightly written. He turned again to his manuscript, sat down and read it slowly, as slowly as excitement and pleasure would permit. He found it good, and, altering very little, copied it fair



upon foolscap sheets. He was eager for approbation of it, but sickened at the thought of criticism, and thought of the "poor sloppy devil" of old days. Almost at once he decided to send it to Murray Wilson. He folded it carefully, and enclosed it in an envelope with a note which began with modest apology, but ended with this sentence: "I think it is damned good," a piece of arrogance which gave Peter a feeling of equality with the elder man and compensated for the forced humility of the earlier sentences.

There and then he stamped the envelope, and stealing down the four flights of stairs, which creaked and groaned alarmingly, he opened the great front door, taking a piece out of the knuckle of his forefinger in groping for the key, and ran to the post. He hesitated for a little, then hurled the packet into the mouth of the red pillar and returned, reflecting fearfully that he knew Wilson really very little, and then, in a flash, he saw that the great man had avoided him for months past.

It was a sick and sorry Peter that returned to the house, and closed the door again. He struck a match to avoid a second hurt, and on the table in the hall lay a letter addressed to him, which he had not noticed on his arrival. It was a funny, dirty little letter in a hand that he did not recognise. It had been addressed first to the shop, where it must have lain some time, for it was stained and grimed, until the half-caste could snatch time from his various business to re-address it. Peter's correspondence was not extensive. He wrote many letters, but received few, and liked the reception of them. This piqued his curiosity, and to read it then and there he lit the gas. He opened the letter, and out fell two pounds in postal orders, with the post-mark

“ Fulham,” and a date of three weeks ago. There was no address at the head of the letter, which ran:

“ DEAR PETER,

“ You will be surprised to hear from me again, but I have been ill, and am still coughing. When you left me I tried to tell you that I had spent your money, but you did not hear me call. We have been dreadfully unfortunate since then, but I have now earned and saved a little money, and accordingly send you two pounds out of the fifteen I owe you. There are reasons why you should not know where we are. With love,

“ Your affectionate but unhappy Aunt,

“ ANNE WOLVERTON.”

Peter was puzzled by the letter. “ We,” and why the change of name? He turned over a leaf and found this:

“ P. S.—My husband’s name was Wolverton, but we are living under another name.”

Husband! Wolverton! Peter drew a breath. The name of the curate for whom he had left his aunt frying a steak, was Wolverton, and Scott had denounced him as a scoundrel and an impostor.

Peter turned out the gas and crept slowly upstairs, pondering this new mystery of human folly and recklessness. He was touched, too. The withered, dried little woman rushing into what must have seemed a deliverance from slavery, and the picture of her misery brought Peter nearer to understanding than he had been before. He wondered, as he climbed the stairs, whether she still wore her armour of jet beads.

## V

Mrs. SCOTT struggled for long to contain herself, but the unhappiness of the small estrangement from Mattie, who showed towards her a happy defiance and drew away from her, became impossible to bear without unbosoming, and, fearful of dissension, however slight, between the girl and her father, she went to her brother. Neither she nor the girl had mentioned Peter's name since that Sunday, and Peter did not visit them for many days upon excuse of pressure of work and imminent examination. He, priding himself upon his knowledge of women—what man does not?—imagined fondly that she would write to him words of reproach; but she had divined her Peter and recognised the force of silence. She went about her business, he about his, while each thought of the other. They were like enemies, ignorant of each other's locality, seeking a meeting ground, and both were alive to the fun of the game. It was the calm sense of purpose in Mattie that irritated and alarmed her mother. Had she taken it into her head to be lackadaisical and full of humours, it would have been easy to await the passing of the disease. The symptoms were unusual, and, therefore, terrifying. Mrs. Scott presented the case to her brother for diagnosis.

She found him just risen. It was two o'clock in the afternoon, and he was lounging in a large chair, clothed in a dressing suit and smoking his pipe. He had rooms in Piccadilly, overlooking the Green Park, and only a few doors from his club. He had very nearly quitted the rooms when the Campanile of the new Westminster

Cathedral had been erected; he disliked it and all that it represented so cordially. He stayed, however, because he thought his dog would dislike a change of neighbourhood. She was an Aberdeen terrier, the gift of Miss Dugdale, and her name was Matilda. She had a docked tail, and a hole punched in her right ear. When Mrs. Scott entered her master's room she was pointing at a piece of coal on the hearthrug—all the satisfaction of her sporting instincts she ever had in London.

Wilson had his hands thrust deep into his pockets. He had slid down in the great chair on to the small of his back—the very picture of dejection. It was impossible to tell from his long melancholy face whether he was idly watching the dog or thinking deeply, or weaving dreams, or roving in memory. He had a long inquisitive nose, which was now wrinkled up, and his lips were moving in and out as though words wished to force their way out against his will.

His sister knew very little of him. They had been almost of an age in a large family, and had held together against the rest. Their relationship had never changed, and even after her marriage they held together against the world. They had lived together in early days in London. He owed much to her. He was used to her panic visits, and, therefore, when she burst in upon him now, he made no sign of greeting, except to remove his hands from his pockets and raise himself in his chair. She sat opposite him, and Matilda went up to her to smell if she was the same. She waited for him to give some indication that he had observed her, for, during their residence together, she had been disciplined into never breaking in upon his thoughts. In those days he attached much importance to them.

At length he took his pipe from his mouth and said:

"Which is it? David or Mattie?"

"Mattie."

"And young Davies? He's a remarkable young man."

"You—you said he'd hurt himself—that night. Do you remember? Was—was this what you meant?"

Wilson chuckled.

"This or something like it. It won't hurt Mattie."

Mrs. Scott narrated the story of her discovery and described the symptoms of the disease in Mattie.

"Trying her strength," said Wilson, "the first fish. Too easily caught, too small . . . no sport. She'll throw him back into the water, or she may watch his scales glitter in the sun for a moment."

"But——"

The case was rightly diagnosed, and now that she knew that only Peter would be hurt, all resentment against him vanished, and she was sorry and a little sick at heart that Mattie should hurt him. Wilson shot at her thought, fairly accurately.

"They are all minxes," he said—"girls."

"I had better do nothing?"

"What can you do?"

"She has suddenly become so much a woman."

"It's a way girls have."

"But Mattie——"

"She's much like other girls."

"Then nothing?"

Wilson was already tired of the subject. She expected him to remain silent, and glanced about the room to see if there were anything new in it. She detected a new portrait of Miss Dugdale.

"I thought she was married," she said.

Wilson looked across at her a little resentfully. The remark sounded like probing.

"Wasn't she married to your friend Bond? They said it turned out badly."

Wilson's pipe was gurgling; an ominous sign. His acquaintance with the actress had been long subsequent to his sister's marriage, and she had known nothing of it, had never met her. Curiosity had tortured her on all her visits, but all efforts to bring conversation in that direction had involved always the same ominous silence and the gurgling of the pipe. Wilson had never been known to talk of Miss Dugdale, except sometimes to explain to his acquaintance that she had given Matilda to him.

The arrival of a new photograph tortured Mrs. Scott. She threw discretion to the winds.

"It was four or five years ago, wasn't it? Or more? Just after she became known. A secret marriage——"

She came up against the blank wall of silence.

"They say she's a nice woman."

She eyed her brother. He was unfathomable, and sank deep into the chair again.

Seeing a new medallion hung on the oaken mantel-piece, she diverged to that.

"Oh! how sweet——"

It was a Thorvaldsen, the design Pan teaching a young Faun his notes upon the pipes.

Wilson said: "That's me teaching Peter Davies how to sing."

She was puzzled by the remark and turned to him for an explanation. There was a strange light of en-

thusiasm in his eyes and a dancing humour, but he vouchsafed nothing.

She picked up the new portrait of Miss Dugdale and studied the face.

"She is lovely," she said.

"They say she's not bad looking," said Wilson, and that was all she had from him. She tried once again, and again, but all effort was fruitless. She amused him.

She left him without word of farewell, as she had approached him without word of greeting, in accordance with their habit.

Wilson knocked out his pipe and took another from the row of ten upon the mantelpiece. Going over to his desk on the other side of his study, he took from a drawer the five pages of foolscap which Peter had sent him some weeks ago. He sat in his chair again and read "Shivering Souls." Peter's words held him enthralled, for when Matilda came to demand to have her head scratched, he took no notice of her. She dropped her head and slunk away out of sight. It was an appalling catastrophe for her.

Wilson took from his pocket a pencil and marked certain passages where violence had marred the expression. The psychology of it seemed to him wild. He recognised the portrait of Miss Dugdale in the description of the triumphant actress, though not as the Mary that he knew. He scented the passion of the auditorium, and saw the fierce light of the stage in the description, but in spite of that he recognised also a reality of emotion underlying, which made the woman as seen by Peter curiously living, more alive, as he generously admitted, even in this slight sketch, than in any of his own more

elaborate portraits. He wondered if Peter would recognise the divinity in the heroine of his last book. He reached out, took the volume down, and turned its pages. Nowhere was a phrase so good, so illuminating, as Peter's "A woman worn by flattery, hungering for love." How the devil this boy, whom he knew to be in the throes of calf-love, had divined that from his seat in the pit or gallery was for Wilson an exciting problem. Chance. It must be that. He took the notebook which was always to his hand and wrote:

"Every true word, and every work of art, is a fluke." The word fluke offended him. He crossed it out, could find no other, and restored it.

Then he took Matilda on his knee—at his call she came timidly and humbly, fearful of deliberate rebuff. When he lifted her, confidence was restored; she wagged her stump of a tail and plunged to reach his face to lick it.

"Oh, Matilda, are you 'worn by flattery, hungering for love'? We were six months pairting this lady's portrait, botched it, and they gave us much money. Here comes bracing Achilles, sweeps her into six words, and they will let him starve—lucky beasts, to have no art. You're purblind, so you are, but none of you talk as though beauty, with a capital B, were a little preserve. Purblind—so are we, Matilda."

This came as a great discovery to Wilson. He nursed it, hugged it.

"Havering creatures, we are. We know more about each other than you people, Matilda, but less about the world, because we have drawn a film of art over it. It is enough to make a poor writer eat his pen. I should, if I did not know that I should go out at once and buy



a new one. We have not the good sense to use our minds entirely to make ourselves comfortable in this world. We torture ourselves with thought."

Sweetly reasonable as these conclusions were, Wilson was unable to practise their moral. He gave himself up to bitter reflection and contemplation of himself, and in the end laughed.

"Twenty years, Matilda," he said. "Twenty years and much shattering it took me to learn really and honestly to laugh at myself."

He put Matilda gently from him and tried to read, first one book, and then another, finally settling down to Goethe's "Aus Meinem Leben, Wahrheit und Dichtung." He read German with difficulty, was not in sympathy with German thought or German humour or sentimentality. Goethe was a refuge and a soporific.

With regard to Peter, his first impulse on reading the sketch had been to write to him at once words of congratulation and encouragement, but on reflection and recollection of Peter's button-holing of him in the Strand to exhibit him to his fellow-students, he refrained, from a conviction that he would, in the present stage of the boy's development and the crucial point in his career in the University, probably do more harm than good. Therefore he retained the manuscript, and did not even acknowledge its receipt.

Peter had for some days after its despatch watched the post eagerly for the letter of appreciation which he felt sure would come, just as he was sure that a letter of reproach would come from Mattie. When neither expectation was realised, he raged. He possessed and had cultivated a divination of action consequent upon his own. It piqued him always to find him-

self in error. He took no step in the direction of Mattie, but he did write a long, arrogant and reproachful letter to her uncle. Upon reflection he burned it. For some time he continued to expect word from him, but in the end, finding the impulse to write had gone, he plunged again into study and regarded himself as lost to the world. As he expressed it in writing to Scott, who had made inquiry, he had "thrown an ink-pot at his devil."

For three weeks almost he lived into seclusion, and was not tempted even by the promise of concerts by Janet Fildes. He felt that he had grown out of her circle. The baby was more than ever attractive, but he had left Janet further and further behind, and had almost definitely broken with her when he found her occupied with the hirsute young poet who had found his level in journalism and had a column in a weekly paper, whose policy was to throw mud at the literary great and high-perched. His paper enjoyed flashes of notoriety when the great were exasperated into retort, and the hirsute young man had been particularly successful in this direction. A series of singularly base articles on Murray Wilson had roused even Fleet Street to disgust, but had met with rock-like silence in the writer. The hirsute young man was known to be the author of these, and enjoyed a certain fame. He had made his mark, though a dirty one. Against his better feelings Peter was jealous of this man, and in the worst of his resentment against Wilson, sent him a copy of the journal containing the most scandalous article, wherein there were unmistakable references to Miss Dugdale. Wilson recognised the handwriting of the address, and, distressed that Peter should have so

much mistaken his silence, wrote and asked him to come and see him. He made no reference to the boy's work.

His letter threw Peter into a ferment which made work impossible. He read it again and again, carried it about with him, and in a burst of confidence shewed it to Janet. He had bragged much of his acquaintance with the great man, and could not resist flourishing a signed letter. She was sufficiently impressed. Peter knew perfectly well that Wilson had avoided him, and why. He knew also why the man had written to him now. He gave Janet no hint that he was upon anything but the friendliest terms with him. On the strength of this second-hand acquaintance, Janet defended Wilson against the hirsute young man, denied that there was any truth in the Dugdale story—though it was common tradition, known to every one but Peter—and finally broke with him. There was in this way something of a renewal of friendship between Peter and herself, though they never regained their old footing. Fildes and Peter never met, or rarely, but there was solid friendship between them.

Peter wrote that he would visit Wilson in the evening of a certain day, but when it came, he was sent for by old Adam, upon whom sickness had descended. Peter accompanied the daughter of the bird-shop proprietor, the messenger, an undersized girl with the body of fourteen and the face of thirty, a pinched old face, with shrewd glittering eyes. Peter did not remember to have seen her before, though more than once he had visited the friendless old man upon such an errand of charity as the present. He made inquiry as to her origin and habits.

"I been in the 'ome," she said, "they cotched me stealin' Bibles from the Sunday school, an' sent me to the 'ome. It's a nugly plice."

She entertained him with anecdotes, true and untrue, first-hand and traditional, of the disciplined and mechanical life of such a place. He, to whom freedom was most precious, whose most wretched memory was of the slavery of the tailoring shops, shuddered at the vision of chilled life conjured up by the vivid cockney phrases of this creature who ran by his side. In reaction from the enforced cleanliness of the institution, she was inconceivably dirty, so that Peter, who now had his bath every day, shrank from her. It pained him to contemplate old Cooper's habits, so fastidious had he become in his new life of the student. He was not very good company during the walk, for he was angry at being deprived of his evening with Wilson, but old Adam had so much insisted that Peter was his only friend, that to desert him, whatever the inducement, were inconceivable baseness.

Entering a post office, Peter sent a wire to Wilson to say that he could not come, then pursued his way with the bird-dealer's daughter. He asked her about Adam. She professed ignorance. She had been given twopence to run to Gordon Square, and beyond that had no interest. Purely from curiosity Peter asked the girl what calling she was going to pursue. Quite calmly she said:

"I'll go on the streets like Lizzie. It's that or a factory."

Peter was shocked. The idea of this gnomish creature selling her attraction was comic certainly, but revolting. She seemed to divine his thought, for she said naively:

“ I got pretty 'air when its growed and washed,” and she took off the battered straw hat she wore to show a small head, well shaped, whereon dark auburn hair grew in ragged, matted tails.

“ It shines when it's washed,” she said. “ They called me ' Evenin' Glory Jane ' at the 'ome, they did. One of the Inspectors said it first.”

This brought them to the bird-shop. Peter knew the father of Evening Glory Jane, and thought it wise to make inquiry after the state of his friend before he plunged up the dark stairs to see him. His especial trade was in singing canaries—he was famous as a trainer of them—but his shop contained all manner of beasts: dogs, cats, monkeys, marmosets, mice, rats, rabbits, parrots, snakes, chameleons, lizards, frogs, armadilloes, tortoises, squirrels,—a raccoon. It was his boast that he could procure anything from a flea to an elephant, and always he had some rare beast for greatest attraction to his shop. He was like some strange legendary or heraldic animal himself. There was something wild about him, and that he should have married and bred children seemed to be wrong and an offence against humanity. Certainly he tended his beasts more lovingly than his children, and would have denied himself and them even bread that the “ critters,” as he called the animals, might not suffer. His greatest pride now lay in a blue frog from the south of France, and he had a small army of boys of the neighbourhood catching flies that it might have its proper food. He doted on this frog and carried it in its bowl of green stuff, where it lay on a perch, quite still, only its pink throat pulsing, about with him, so that he might gaze on it whenever he might be in the shop or the store

behind. All the shop was full of cages and tanks, and all kept spotlessly clean, like himself. He eyed his slatternly daughter with disapproval, almost with dismay, as she entered with Peter, and drove her out. Then he turned to Peter with an amiable smile:

"No knowin' what the slut mightn't bring to the critters, Mr. Davies."

He turned and whistled to a painted thrush, whistled until the bird caught his note and held it: its first lesson in canary music. It needed only to sing for sale. Thereafter it might be dumb for all the dealer cared. He became suddenly mysterious:

"Seen my frog, Mr. Davies?"

"No," said Peter.

"Oh, a pretty critter. Feeds on flies. See his long tongue flicker out and strike 'em; lovely. They must be alive, for the critter won't touch 'em dead."

The frog was exhibited and properly admired by Peter.

"It's wonderful how clever the critters are—almost human, some on 'em; an' don't their bellies pinch 'em, too. Worse than human, then. Hunger only makes us sick and silent, but they cry out, and some beats against the bars when they see me. I'm food to them, and Providence."

The man said it with such pride that Peter, in one of his flashes, saw the whole secret of him revealed. It was power that he loved and found in this strange trade of his. In any other he must have been ground down.

Peter tried to put questions to the man, but found that he did not heed them. He knew Peter, but seemed to have forgotten what it was that brought him there,

and insisted on exhibiting all new treasures. Peter was making friends with an amiable retriever puppy with a ludicrously large head, when the door was darkened and two ladies entered. The dealer bustled up to them to ask their wants, but Peter did not stir. The dealer seemed to know them and they him, for the elder of the two asked after the frog.

"Oh, marm, he's well and beautiful." There was some murmured confabulation; then the elder said:

"You're not to buy it, Mary."

Mary! Peter pricked his ears. Sure enough, there came Mary Dugdale's voice:

"If you will not let me have it—I came to buy a cat—a Persian with orange eyes and silver coat."

There were three such in the shop, for the dealer was in touch with a lady who bred them. Peter wished that he might buy them all and give them to Miss Dugdale. Peter crept on tiptoe, and peeped round the pile of cages that concealed her from him. She was most dazzlingly clad, though it was near full spring, in furs, a coat of mole-skin and a muff, and though her face was veiled, he could see the flash of her teeth as she spoke, and, silhouetted against the light of the doorway, her straight nose. The cats were brought for her inspection, and she caressed them all. One scratched her arm—the brute! She laughed adorably, and sweetly admonished:

"Oh, bad, bad Peter!"

Peter darted back upon the utterance of his name. It startled him. Peter! The cat.

She chose the friendliest, and, with some words in praise of the frog, she turned to go. Peter had seen that upon soothing the smart of the cat's claw she had

dropped her handkerchief, and when the dealer bowed the ladies to the door he stole and stooped and picked it up, a tiny square of cambric, edged with lace, the letter M embroidered in a corner.

Like Clara's letter to old Cooper, it had the scent of heliotrope.

All innocence, he asked the dealer who the ladies were.

"That's Miss Dugdale, Mr. Davies, sir, the actress. She's kind to critters."

"Where does she live?"

"Mount Street. Flat."

"And—and—and is she married?"

"I dunno. They sometimes is an' sometimes not, these actresses; you never know—I never seed her act, not holding with stage-plays. I'd sooner watch the critters."

He returned to his work, and Peter could glean no more from him.

To reach old Adam's room he had to go out into the street again. A barrel-organ was grinding out a brazen ditty, and on the pavement in an admiring crowd the dealer's daughter was dancing, nimble-footed, making play with her scanty skirts. As she saw Peter she came dancing to him.

"Did yer see 'er?"

"Who?" said Peter.

"The actress. I'll be that; she's pretty, but my 'air's prettier than 'ers."

To Peter it was like comparing a branch of rhubarb to a tree: this gnome and the divine woman. He almost laughed, but was arrested by the face. Under its muddy covering there was an impish fire, and the eyes gleamed.



Something arresting she had, a queer spark of personality to draw all eyes, for the crowd was all agog.

Peter was stirred. He knew something of this rare gift of magnetism, the greatest gift of all, perhaps, and irresistible. It had made lowly women the mistresses of kings, and it only could carry poets to success. Since the discovery of its power—a lecture on Pompadour had revealed it to him—he had sought it everywhere and in himself. The question whether or not he had it had given him much occasion for self-torment. To find it here in this gutter-creature, blazing through squalor, through dirt, foul clothes and wretched living, staggered him. “Evening Glory Jane”—the name was not inapt. The word came to him. “Elfin,” he said, and tucked her away in his mind as a thing disposed of.

She flew dancing back to fresh applause. The rude skill of her steps and rhythmic movements amazed Peter.

He turned and passed round the corner to the street-door of the house where Adam lodged. He had been in no mood to see the old man. His bookish life of the last days had produced in him a feeling of remoteness, of being outside the affairs of mankind. He could not shake it off, painful though it was. Here and now, as by a miracle, by the vision of Miss Dugdale, close at hand, the hearing of her voice, the purloining of her handkerchief, and by the elfin dancer, he had been set glowing again, filled with kindness to satisfy all the Cooperian maxims and precepts. He kept these ever in his mind, but found them difficult to observe always. He had found in the desk much of Cooper’s writing, which he had devoured, more especially a long “Essay on Human Folly,” wherein he had found words that he

knew for truth, though the author's science and observation of animals were often at fault. Some day Peter had the intention of publishing these fragments as a monument to his friend, and a reproach to the country whose "crazy morality," as it was called in the essay, had wasted him. Under discipline Peter's mind had become stronger, more certain, while losing none of its swiftness, and he had lost almost all his untidiness of thought. Cooper became more and more real to him, and he approached even to a truer conception of the man as he really was. The wreck of him was appalling, and to find consolation Peter had evolved a saying, "No wasted Cooper, no Peter Davies." He had further observed that the more bookish and inhuman he became, the further he was from Cooper and Cooper-teaching, and this was to him the worst pain of that state.

As he ascended the stairs to Adam's room his mind was flooded with maxims from the essay, not words merely, but the full sense and great feeling of them. The Peter of two years ago would have been maudlin about it, but then the Peter of two years ago, just entered at King's College, would have comprehended only the half of it. He was learning to take the business in hand firmly by the scruff of the neck and keep thought and egoism in their place.

The business of the moment, Miss Dugdale or no Miss Dugdale, handkerchief or no handkerchief, was the comforting of the old man through whom he had come in contact with the bookseller. His amazing fortunes might be said to have begun in the chance collision with this old man, studying Lecky's "Map of

Life" outside the shop. Chance though it was, it was not a thing to be forgotten.

He found the old man in bed in the dim room which had been his home since long before Peter's birth. He was more than ever frail and shrunk, and his eyes "purged thick amber and plum-tree gum." The reedy voice that Peter remembered to have said, "How—how to live. It's difficult. I've tried and I know," had faded to a whistling shrill sound. To Peter, from the crowded street, thronged with strong, vital creatures, there was something appalling in coming upon this scarcely living thing in which cells and organs were almost exhausted. A thin hand was raised with difficulty from the coverlet, and Peter was requested to sit down.

The old man was cheerful, and though from confusion of memory he had difficulty at times in bringing Peter clearly out of the throng of young men of so many generations that he had known, yet he contrived to say what wish it was that had impelled him to send so urgent a message.

"It is twenty years," he said, "since I was out of London. There is a place in Surrey under Blackdown Hill. I was happy there once. There was an oak tree and a beech coppice—no; the coppice was by Fernhurst on—on a hill. There's a mild soft air blows southwest from the sea—and I who am nothing, have nothing, I am going there again. I have had little: neither love, nor wealth, nor health; but I have had that place—I—I am going—there——"

It took him long to say these words, and his voice then dropped into a murmur so low that Peter could not

catch what he was saying. The old man made an effort to become audible. He coughed to clear his throat.

"Peter," he said, "Peter Davies, even I have not found the world evil. I wished to see you before I go to tell you that, and to give you this ring: it—it was my mother's—I—broke her heart."

He tried to draw a ring, a plain gold band set with one pink pearl, from his finger, but because it was so loose, he dropped it into the bed-clothes. Peter retrieved it, and was ordered to place it on his finger. It fitted best the little finger of his right hand, and there he left it. The old man was content, and patted Peter's hand. He seemed to have much to say, but to be best pleased to say it so.

"Good-bye," he said. "Call the woman—I am going to-morrow. There is no place sweeter, even in Devon, where I was born. Good boy, good boy—Cooper and Davies—heh!—partners."

Peter called the bird-dealer's wife, and gave her money for old Adam. He asked her if it was true that the old man was going to Blackdown Hill.

"He's been a-goin' there these ten years, Mr. Davies. Always when he has been ill he's babbled of trees, and fields."

"Like Falstaff," thought Peter. "A babble of green fields."

He bade the bird-dealer's wife good-day, not without a wonder that she should be the mother of the dancing girl, she was so essentially a drab woman.

He liked the ring upon his finger, and he was pleased to think that the old man had thought so much of him, and so well.

He walked through the market to the Strand to the

College. In the students' common-room he found a group of young men and women heatedly discussing the question, then much in the boiling-pot, of the taxation of site values. Such words as "Socialism," "Spoliation," "Landlord tyranny," flew.

One young man with deep-set eyes and the narrow forehead of a fanatic cried, clapping his hands together: "I tell you the whole thing is based on fallacy."

"Explain the fallacy," said an earnest young woman with a preposterously small head perched on a long thin neck.

The fanatical young man plunged into a whirl of economic jargon.

Peter left in disgust.

"Science," he thought, remembering the ass's skin, "is only giving names to things. All the same, private ownership of land is an evil thing."

Then he remembered that Cooper had said, "What they call socialism is at the hearts of all good men," and from that made a *mot* which pleased him:

"Socialism will out."

"Decidedly," he thought, "the gods are good to Peter Davies. He will die young: say at twenty-nine."

Twenty-nine seemed far ahead to twenty-two, or no doubt he would have fixed his death later. In the early twenties it seems that life must begin to lose its interest at thirty. Wilson at forty-four did not seem to Peter much less old than old Adam at eighty-three. He did not know Mary Dugdale's age, but to think of her as anything but young had never occurred to Peter.

When Wilson received Peter's telegram he mistook the motive of defection, and wrote: "Do not be more of an ass than you can help. I want to see you."

Peter received this next day, and neglected his afternoon lectures to go to Piccadilly. He found Wilson in much the same attitude as Mrs. Scott had found him in. No one had ever found the writer in any other, and it was a mystery how and when he worked.

Peter was abashed, and for some moments they were silent: the boy awed at being in the room where known books had been written.

Matilda betrayed the keenest interest in Peter, smelling all round the ends of his trousers and over his boots. Then she rose and sniffed at his knees. He stooped and scratched her head. She ran from him and stood wagging her stumpy tail and looking inquiringly up at her master, as if she were wondering that he did not greet with enthusiasm this excellent-smelling young man. He sat, however, puffing great clouds of smoke, and Peter gazed round the room. Nearly the whole of two walls were covered with books. There were no pictures to give æsthetic satisfaction, only sketches by humorous artists, photographs of writers, actors and actresses, among whom Peter recognised, with a leap in the heart, Miss Dugdale.

Matilda, oppressed by the long silence, barked. Wilson lazily put out a hand—Peter saw that it was long and powerful, sensitive—and clutched her by the muzzle. She drew back and yelped.

“I’m glad Matilda likes you,” said Wilson. “Sit down.”

Peter sat down, prepared, if Wilson would let him, to lay bare his soul. Poor Peter was sadly in need of a real intimacy. In the matter of soul-baring he had suffered agony from want of discrimination. For some months he had resigned himself to receive confidence,

but to give none. Janet Fildes had hurt him terribly, young men at the College even more, and even Mr. Scott had shewn himself dense. There had been no one to understand like old Cooper.

Wilson recognised this desire in the boy, and drew into his shell.

“Do you smoke yet?”

“A year ago,” said Peter.

Wilson rose, and from a cabinet brought a box of cigarettes. Peter took and smoked.

“When do you finish at the University?” said Wilson.

“In November,” said Peter. (It was then April.)

“What is it that you want to do? Make books?”

“As for books,” said Peter, “I have bought them for fifteen shillings a ton.”

“That’s a ghastly thought,” said Wilson, and chuckled.

“Not so bad as the pulping pot.”

“They’ve served their turn then. It is awful, the power of print.

“Yes,” said Peter. “Caxton-bred vanity.”

The little swagger with which Peter paraded his poor little piece of pedantry killed the conversation, and for a time they were silent.

Matilda, however, seemed to be confident that friendly relations were established, for she turned from both men to her own comfort, and crept to the hearth, where she lay until the heat was past bearing, when she crawled into the coolest corner of the room and lay, tongue out, panting.

“That,” said Wilson, “is her Turkish bath.”

The remark did not call for comment, and Peter sat

silent, impatient for Wilson to come to the business in hand, yet not daring himself to plunge. The photographs of Miss Dugdale had engaged Peter's attention. With full knowledge that he was committing a stupidity, but unable to control his tongue, he said:

"She's prettier than that. She bought a cat and she called it Peter. It was a Persian and it had orange eyes. I saw them in the dark shop. The light struck them and they glowed. She was with another woman. She looked happy and then unhappy—bitterly. She seemed to me to be a woman worn by flattery, and hung——"

He looked in Wilson's direction and found eyes staring fiercely, almost menacingly. The words died on his lips, and he shifted uneasily, then took a cigarette.

"I—I—would—I—wanted——"

Wilson's face was inscrutable. Peter was decidedly uncomfortable. He had a ridiculous desire to weep, and an even more absurd desire to rise and hit Wilson between the eyes. He found himself carefully selecting the spot just above the vertical furrow over the nose; found himself doubling his fist and even rising from his chair, while tears blurred his vision. Blind rage held him for a moment, then he took it firmly, gulped it down, and sat giggling nervously.

He looked again at Wilson, and saw that he was lighting another pipe. He saw that a few specks of hot tobacco fell down on to the writer's trousers, that he flicked the specks away, and then with his forefinger, stained a deep brown, he thrust down the tobacco into the bowl of his pipe. Peter looked up from the hand to the face, and had a queer sense of having



dreamed that the eyes had ever looked out from under the heavy forehead so fiercely, and almost evilly.

"But," said Peter to himself, "they did, and they were very fierce, and the pupils of them swelled: they bulged and shone, and mine, too. Queer. But he's gentle, gentle and kind. I hurt him, I did, I did, I did—I hurt him—— She . . . Mary, Mary, Mary Dugdale."

Then in the thoughts of Peter Davies there was a sort of clot. On the point of understanding the whole thing, he shrivelled. Sympathy was clogged. Phrases from old Cooper's letter of triumphant love buzzed in his head, and he had again that dreadful sense of being faced with something incomprehensible, and therefore intangible, which yet, all the more for that, did exist, and existed vitally, immensely, looming. It!

The words forced themselves from him:

"What is It?"

He dared not look at Wilson. He waited for an answer. Matilda snorted, and the sound, breaking in on the silence, was ludicrous and trivial. There was silence again, and Peter hitched his shoulders. His hand stole up to twist his forelock. They had teased him out of the habit at the College. He returned to it now and leaned forward, straining to catch any whisper. The answer came cryptically.

"It is the aversion and the god of humanity. They run from it, but run in circles. It engulfs them, and they drown gladly. In the running is human comedy, and in the surrender is human tragedy. It is the fire in the world and all good things.—It has a pale sister called Romance——"

Wilson laughed.

"Some there are who deny it, from cowardice. So they remove all warmth and atmosphere: for what else is there?"

Peter shrank, chilled. The definition had not aided him in the direction of understanding, and in a queer way it had removed him further from Wilson.

He came to the surface to find Wilson already there waiting for him. He gasped, smiled, and both put their unhappy experiment in probing behind them.

"Have you read the life of Goethe?" said Wilson.

"No," said Peter. "But I know about Frau von Stein and Christiane, and—and I know about Byron and Lady Caroline Lamb, and—and I know about Keats and F—Fanny Brawne. They—they use women, the big fellows."

"And women offer themselves for their use."

"Do they know the real from the sham?"

"No—never." This came emphatically. Thus they discussed the problem which has provided subject matter and a living for countless generation of speculative writers and artists, who have sat before woman as travellers and sages before the Sphinx.

Something of this occurred to Wilson, for he said:

"The Sphinx is hermaphrodite. Woman is not more puzzling than man."

The thought was too swift for Peter, who could not follow it, but succeeded only in creating a mental picture of the Sphinx, which, from a cartoon in *Punch*, he associated always with Lord Beaconsfield. The statesman occurred to him with the features of the Vanity Fair cartoon, and Peter remembered now the words of the commentator. He spoke them aloud:

"He educated the Tories and dished the Whigs to

pass Reform, but to have become what he is from what he was is the greatest Reform of all."

"Who did?" said Wilson.

"Disraeli," returned Peter. "I sold him for one and threepence."

"The greatest Jew. The Jew is the brain behind England's beef—I liked your story."

At last he had come to it! Peter sat squarely, gaping for praise. He wished to pin his man down, but dared not speak. Wilson smoked his pipe, curled up his right leg, and when he opened his lips again it was, seemingly, to fly off at a tangent.

He said: "The English do not like wit, any more than they like art. In the time of Charles II. a French Ambassador on leaving the Court of St. James implored his Sovereign to send the dullest of his courtiers as his successor, for the English so mistrusted wit; and yet the gaiety of the Court of Charles II. is a source of irrational pride. Are you English?"

"My father was Welsh," said Peter with some pride. This tickled Wilson.

"No inhabitant of this country," said Wilson, "will confess to being pure English. The Englishman is an abstraction. There is no such person."

Peter took the bull by the horns. This shilly-shallying was intolerable.

"Do you think anyone would take it?"

"No," said Wilson. "The English have no sense of humour, or they would not let themselves be exploited by Scotchmen, and Irish and German Jews."

Peter clung to his point.

"But you liked it."

"I have liked the work of a great many men who

could not find their public until they ceased to do good work."

This was discouraging. Peter squeezed the palms of his hands together until they squeaked. Matilda scampered up, suspecting a mouse of intrusion.

"Your imagination's remarkable, and your power of simple expression."

"I saw the old woman," said Peter. "It was some years ago. I saw her like that. I had to write."

"Yes."

Wilson did not seem to be much interested in the process of creation in Peter.

"Why don't you think any one'll take it?"

"It's new, and you're new. I've sent it to a friend of mine."

Peter waited for a moment, then murmured thanks. The name of the friend was not disclosed, nor from all the signs would it be.

In despair of gaining more, Peter rose to go.

"I'll be glad," said Wilson, not rising, "if you'll send me any other thing you may write."

"I'll write no more until my examination's done."

"What shall you do then? Teach?"

"Teach!" Peter snorted. "No. I'll write and write and write."

"How will you live?"

"I've several hundred pounds with Mr. Scott."

"No profession? They'll keep you hungry for long years. They did me."

"All professions are bad," said Peter.

To this Wilson rejoined:

"When it comes to bread and butter, one form of prostitution is as good as another."

There was no bitterness in his voice, only sadness.

He added: "It is queer, but a man climbs the higher for it, if he climb at all."

Peter said good-bye and had reached the door when Wilson called to him. He turned, patted Matilda, who, under a mistaken impression that he was going to take her for a walk, was leaping and fawning upon him, and waited.

"Will you take this and read it?" This was a book, Lewes' "Life of Goethe." Peter took it, saw that Wilson had scrawled his name in it, and was proud.

"I shall be glad," said Wilson, "if you'll not lose touch with me."

He took Matilda in his arms to keep her from following Peter, who heard him addressing her as he closed the door:

"He smelled good, Matilda? Your nose is surer than the eyes of a man."

Peter glowed.

"It is the fire in the world and all good things.—It has a pale sister called Romance." Those last seven words and the tone of them!

Peter thought himself into a fine whirl, lost all logic and connection, and out of it all only retained clearly for long enough those words, "Pale sister," and they were ghastly, freezing. They bred in him a wholesome horror of romance and sentimentality, which only waxed the greater when, as he often did, he found himself plunged in both, and plunged the deeper from the care and elaborate precautions he had taken to avoid them. Flat ignorance was his undoing, and inability to force even an approximately accurate idea of the real char-

acter of his two bugbears. From much cogitation he evolved a theory of sex, and on that based all his relations with women. He flattered himself that he faced motherhood and fatherhood squarely, and took a delight in forcing upon the innocent youth of his acquaintance the vital fact, so fatal in his idea, to sentimentality, that women also have legs. He spoke to Mattie with a frankness which would have appalled her mother had she known of it. He justified himself. Once after a long harangue, during which he strode about the room, inveighing against fathers and mothers who shirked their responsibility, and would not see that the first duty of a parent is to see that his child is a better thing than himself, he stopped suddenly by the girl, stroked his head and said:

“You see, dear, I think”—(there was a fine ring in the I, and he stopped, as he always did, after saying “I think,” to convey the impression of profound and solid thought)—“I think that every honest word between a man and a woman helps the world along.”

And Mattie, flattered by the reference to herself as a woman, though she knew that she was no more woman than he man, both fledgelings, caressed his hand and said:

“Yes, dear. How you do understand!”

Peter looked modest and wise.

“Without you I should understand nothing. The minds of men are warmed to understanding by the love of good women. What glorious women Shakespeare must have had to love him!”

“Many women must have loved you, Peter, dear.”

As for that—Peter demurred and smiled conceitedly, then called her dear. They enjoyed calling each other “dear.”

Wilson had bungled. In giving Peter Goethe's life to read, he had hoped that the boy would read and re-read the episode of Friedricke, with its quotations from the Autobiography, and applying it to his own case, would leave Mattie as the poet had left his early love. His hopes were realised, and Peter read, re-read and read again the episode, in Lewes' and in Goethe's own words, was set aflame, and grew hot with indignation. He certainly did write a letter to Mattie telling her that he must ride away, leave her, and be the shadow, the pale shadow, of a man in her life, the man who had first touched her with life's treasure, romance; but the word romance mocked him and he burned the letter. Wilson's words tormented him. If there had been folly, he would make it wisdom.

"In solchem Drang und Verwirrung," he read in the poet's frank exposition, "Konnte ich doch nicht unterlassen Friederiken noch einmal zu sehen. Es waren peinliche. Tage, deren Erinnerung mir nicht geblieben ist. Als ich ihr die Hand noch vom Pferde reichte, standen ihr die Thränen in dem Augen, und mir war sehr übel zu Muthe."

Tears were in Friederike's eyes. Such tears should not be in Mattie's. Goethe was an ass: had not Carlyle said of him, "Goethe is the greatest genius that has lived for a century, and the greatest ass that has lived for three." Such an ass he would not be, and returned to Mattie, as she had known he would, after an absence of over a month. Mrs. Scott welcomed him with some show of warmth when he put in an appearance on Sunday. Mattie was icy, and exacted new courtship. Peter was hard put to it to find time for all that she demanded of him, but in the end she was kind to him, and helpful when he needed it most. He suffered a

terrible panic as his examination drew nearer, and wrote to her explaining that he must not see her, as he found she was interfering with his work. To this she replied that of course he must know best—that she made no demands upon him, and prayed him to take no account of her in the development of the great career that awaited him. Her letter brought Peter flying to her, full to overflowing of great vows and heated protestations; incidentally also to exhibit himself to her in his new tail-coat, his first, and top hat. He had bought them upon an imagined necessity for some function to which he had been invited through Janet Fildes. Mattie vowed that she knew no man more distinguished looking, and said that they made him look twenty-eight at least. Peter was delighted with her approbation and tactful comment, and at the earliest available moment kissed her.

Mattie took his face in her hands, and cooing over him, said:

“You’re getting quite good-looking.” Peter examined himself in the mirror. Certainly he had improved. His face was fuller, firmer, and the mouth and chin were better.

“Vain Peter,” said Mattie.

“I want to make it as presentable as possible—for your sake.”

Though he had not meant this for a joke, Mattie took it so and laughed. Peter was most adorable when he jested. Altogether serious, he was more than a little heavy. Whatever else Mattie did for him, she certainly did help to keep his sense of humour alive by never taking him, even in his profoundest and, as he thought



them, his sublimest moments, quite seriously. As for the poems he wrote for her, she laughed at them so openly, and so provokingly made them public, that presently he abandoned the practice, and, to his credit, sought no other and more appreciative Amaryllis or Julia.

All the same, Mattie was a little hurt when, teasing him upon the subject, he rejoined in his most dogmatic manner:

“ I think men do not make poems for the women that they really love.”

Mrs. Scott let the affair go on, confident that it would go the way of all its kind, and finding comfort in the thought that in a few months' time Mattie would be safe abroad, and that Peter would have ended his easy days of study and be engaged upon the engrossing task of earning a livelihood. Mr. Scott had at length become alive to the attachment that had sprung up between the girl and his charge, and amused himself with a mild jest at their expense. David received Peter with scorn, and developed a pronounced misogyny, the result of tedious hours spent with Mattie and Peter in picture galleries and museums, for though Peter disliked stolen meetings, he generously met Mattie in her desire for them, and never failed to meet her at the appointed hour before the “Nativity” of della Francesca, or the Velasquez “Venus,” or in the Watts room at the Tate Gallery, or in the Sloane Museum or the gallery at Dulwich.

On the whole they were happy days, and Peter certainly enjoyed writing long, long letters to Mattie during this period when he denied himself all other forms of writing.

They were happiest out of doors, wandering the streets north of the river, the great wide streets of splendid shops. Chelsea, too, they loved, and had blissful, foolish moments in selecting, and, in imagination, furnishing various houses for their home, for they doubted not that in a few years Peter would be celebrated and they two married and living in great state as Mr. Davies and his charming wife. Indeed, Peter drew up announcements of their betrothal and their marriage, and descriptions of their wedding in a style carefully imitated from the accounts with which the press had been lately inundated of the wedding of a popular young politician. Left alone together, they became uneasy, distrustful of each other, and Peter was haunted by old Cooper's tragic affair, and saw with fearful clarity that however delightful this might be, it was not it, not the strange thing that he did not understand; but he loyally gave Mattie all that she asked, confided much to her of fears, ambitions and aspirations, denied her nothing that she seemed to expect of him. That he should make her unhappy, leave her like another Friederike at Sesenheim, was unthinkable. He called it "damnable" in emphatic moments, and found great pleasure in condemning so great a man as the God-like man of Weimar. The insolent Peter was not altogether dead, but rather waxed strong in the sun of Mattie's favour. It mattered not much, and she did give him a much-needed confidence. He had resolutely refrained from any trial of his wings, "striding," as he called it, and the recognition of his incompetence in much of the drudgery and pedantic work demanded of him by the Senate of the University of London was a sad undermining of confidence in him-

self. Perhaps it was this more than anything which made him turn to Mattie.

Peter toiled and brought himself to sleeplessness. Mr. Scott, who saw that he was haggard and pale, advised a cessation of all work and a week in the country. Murray Wilson's cottage was suggested, but the writer had disappeared, as was his habit, and no man knew his place of sojourn.

Just then there came an invitation to the wedding of the second of his sisters, who was to be married to a young plumber named Newhall, whom he remembered as a large freckled youth at school, known as Podge. Peter had offended his family by refusing to attend the wedding of his eldest sister, that sister with whom and whose fiancé he had dined in Soho in old days in Shaftesbury Avenue, and correspondence had ceased. This new invitation came opportunely, and Peter accepted it. He packed carefully the tail-coat, borrowed a hat box from the Scotts to convey the treasured silk hat, took a tender farewell of Mattie in a corner of the balcony of the New Gallery in Regent Street, while David amused himself with dropping shot on the goldfish in the pool of the fountain in the hall, and took train for his native town.

He spent a miserable week. He expected them to make much of him. His family, however, took a purely commercial view and wished only to know how much a year he was making. Upon his confession that he had for three years earned not a penny, they refused to treat him with any respect and rated him for abandoning the bookselling business. They were really unkind to him, and he soon abandoned all attempt to describe his mode of life to them.

Curiously enough, his only sympathetic auditor was Podge Newhall, who confessed to an admiration for Peter dating from early days.

"You were never like the rest of us chaps. You weren't."

Peter was grateful, and took long walks with Podge out into the country, while he stuffed the poor fellow with ideas and theories of marriage which perfectly bewildered him. The responsibilities of husband and father were driven in upon him with such heat and terrifying vehemence that he cast a wistful eye upon the dwindling moments of his bachelorhood.

"Not, I think," thundered Peter, "not till man perceives himself as sacredly a father, as woman sees herself sacredly as a mother, will marriage be the holy blessed state that it is claimed to be in the marriage service drawn up in the time of Edward VI. Think, just think, Podge, of the state of mind, of the attitude towards divine things, of the men who could solemnly and in all reverence write of marriage as a state for 'such as have not the gift of continence.' If that spirit is preserved, then marriage will go—bust—scrapped."

Podge had not the least idea of what Peter was talking about, but was ashamed to say so. Peter tried to approach his sister in the same way, but she rose majestically and left the room, muttering indignantly about the filthiness of Peter's mind.

The happy pair were joined together in holy matrimony, no one having responded to the parson's invitation to declare any just cause or impediment why they should not be so joined (though Peter had an insane desire to make a dramatic protest), and were driven off

to the station, shaking rice and confetti from their hair and clothing.

They were to spend their honeymoon at Llandudno, a place which Peter remembered from early experience as a grisly resort much frequented by the middle classes of South Lancashire. He was angry with his sister, and took a spiteful pleasure in writing her a long letter of advice and philosophic comment with quotations from pagan authors. He had had no money to buy her a wedding present, and now on an inspiration he sent her the ring which old Adam had given him.

She returned it without a word. Peter spent three unhappy days after the wedding. His relatives' slipshod mode of living depressed and angered him: there was no Podge now to admire him and to talk to: and, worse than all, by a reaction from the excitement of preparation for the wedding, the whole family was depressed and irritable, and over all the house was an air of staleness.

Peter wandered in the woods of the countryside, trying to escape from the terror of the approaching ordeal. He wrote long letters to Mattie, full of sarcastic witticisms at the expense of his family and of the narrowness of provincial persons in general.

He visited old schoolfellows and friends of his father and mother who had been kind to him; but they all stood rather in awe of him. His old headmaster thought he needed taking down, and snubbed him remorselessly. After Podge's departure he found a really friendly reception only with the young assistant master who had vainly tried to teach him Algebra, now through all his examinations, married to his Alison, daughter of the curate, and the proud father of a baby larger and better

tempered even than Janet Fildes'. Peter made great friends with the baby and promised to be godfather to the next. He was surprised to find the little schoolmaster rather intelligent and tremendously impressed when Peter mentioned his friendship with Murray Wilson. It was from him that for the first time Peter heard a full account, garbled, it is true, of the relation of the writer with Miss Dugdale. The schoolmaster was full of such scandal and told Peter all that he knew of the actress—all the talk that there had been of her connection with Wilson, of her subsequent marriage with Mr. Bertram Bond, its unhappiness, and the separation. It had been kept out of the papers, and the schoolmaster would have it that she had virtually retired from the stage, and was on the point of entering a convent.

Peter said that he knew she was living in Mount Street.

It was odd that by a little provincial pedagogue's taste for scandal Peter's mind should be filled with thoughts of Miss Dugdale, for hers at this time was much occupied with Peter.

When Wilson had said that he had sent Peter's story to a friend, he refrained from divulging that the friend was none other than Miss Dugdale herself. He had scrawled at the head of Peter's manuscript "How like you the portrait?" and had sent it to her, thinking that the youthful adoration of the writer might amuse her, even interest her, for he knew that she was suffering much. She was touched first by Wilson's thought for her, divining all that lay behind, and then by the little narrative, the truth of the description of herself. She shed many tears over it, and meeting Wilson at some great house made him tell her all that he knew

of Peter, describe his personal appearance, the tones of his voice, and all that was most individual in him. She hugged the imagined boy to herself and longed to know him, for, as she told Wilson, she wished to play with his black hair.

"We'll make him write a play for me," she said.

Wilson said nothing, but gave her a look which she took rightly for a warning. Presently he said: "He saw you in a bird shop purchasing a cat with orange eyes."

"I called it Peter," said Mary. "How odd!"

"All your cats have been called Peter."

"What does he know of me?"

"Only common talk," said Wilson, and at the moment of his saying it, Peter was listening open-mouthed to the schoolmaster expounding the same common talk.

"Perhaps you will meet her some day," said the schoolmaster.

"I daresay," said Peter carelessly. He had not divulged that Wilson possessed several portraits of the lady.

"How old is she?"

"Oh, anything between twenty-five and thirty-five."

They took down "Who's Who" and found that she confessed to twenty-nine.

Peter returned a day earlier than he had intended. He did not let Mattie know that he was back in Gordon Square.

The evening of that day he spent in fingering the pink topaz necklace and in reading old Cooper's literary remains.

The idea came to him to send these to Wilson. The writer had asked him not to lose touch with him, and

the manuscript might be of use to him, would certainly be of interest.

In turning over the pages of the "Essay on Human Folly" Peter came upon these words:

True marriage is possible only where there is truth between man and woman. To begin with, truth is to forestall the crisis. Love reveals truth, but the eyes of most men are blinded to it, for the lie promises ease. In love it is for the woman to ask, for the man to give. There is no more blazing folly than for the man to dictate: for in all matters of love the instinct of the woman is true. The idea of possession is a taint. Truth starts from it, and Nature.

Peter copied these out and sent them to his sister by way of Podge, to whom also, by a happy thought, he sent the large gold watch that he had found in Cooper's desk. It did not occur to him that to neither bridegroom nor bride would the passage be intelligible, or, indeed, that its full import was lost upon himself.



## VI

YOUNG David was taken ill of a quinzy during the days when Peter was taking final instructions before vacation for his examination in October. When he recovered, Mrs. Scott took him and Mattie to Eastbourne and established them in lodgings at Meads, in an ugly little house looking out over the sea.

When, therefore, Peter called on the first Sunday of his freedom, he found Mr. Scott alone and inclined to be taciturn. However, he managed to evince some interest in Peter's doings, though the interview was made awkward for both by the boy's insane desire to improve the occasion by asking for his daughter's hand in marriage. The parson turned the conversation in the direction of finance, and Peter saw his own absurdity.

"My brother-in-law tells me that you have a desire to write."

Peter gasped at this touching of his tenderest ambitions, and the parson pushed the flagon of port in his direction.

"Ye—yes. I—I used to write a good d-deal," Peter managed to say, and could have kicked himself gladly for the fatuity of the remark.

Scott scrutinised Peter's face and seemed carefully to weigh his next words. Peter had a horrid fear that he was going to say something about Mattie, and it was with immense relief that he caught the words:

"When Mr. Cooper asked me to be your guardian he said to me of you, 'Give him the choice to continue

here or to shake free and stretch his wings.' He was a good man, old Cooper."

Peter was humbled.

"He was kind to me," he said.

"How will it be with you in your examination?"

"Fairly well," said Peter modestly, though he had a feeling of exultation when he thought of how he would pour out knowledge to confound the learned.

"We all want you to do well. You have this advantage for a writer: that you have known and can sympathise with poverty. It is the earliest years that really form a man."

This was a new idea to Peter, and he was inclined to flout it. His visit to his family had confirmed his impression that nothing but harm could have come to him from contact with such base things.

"My brother-in-law," said the parson, "always professes gratitude for a childhood of penury and suffering. It has certainly informed all that he has written."

"Beauty," said Peter, "is truth."

"There is the sort of truth you mean beneath even vice and wickedness."

"The business of the artist," said Peter, "is with the kingly and the saintly."

"Neither is extra-human."

Peter wondered what he meant.

"I am your guardian until you are twenty-five. It should be possible for you to gain some sort of living before that."

Again Peter had the insane impulse to drag Mattie into the conversation: and again he suppressed it.

"Did you ever," said the parson, "light upon traces of your lost aunt?" He chuckled at the recollection.

“Demophon we must suppose dead. Seven years for a human, three for a cat.”

Peter told him of the letter he had received.

“She married Mr. Wolverton, the curate.”

“The scoundrel. A disgrace to the cloth.” They agreed as to the rascality of the curate and very soon Peter departed, having gleaned Mattie’s address at Eastbourne.

He was engaged to study with a young contemporary until the second week in August, but except for those hours was content with gentle revision, and otherwise he was very much in want of occupation. He tried to write, but the term’s work had exhausted him and he could produce little or nothing. It was tragic and he was driven in upon himself. He wished very much to see Wilson, but felt that he must wait until an acknowledgment of the receipt of the Cooper papers should come. He wrote letters to Mattie and worked himself into a fine amorous frenzy concerning her, bewailing the day that should take her to a foreign country, professing an undying affection and a determination to do great things for her sake. He took himself very seriously and was offended more than a little at the light tone of her letters wherein she thought it proper to tease him, and to give him full and attractive descriptions of the boys and young men who had sought her acquaintance. David was better and sent insulting messages.

Peter chose to think himself despised and neglected, and mooned miserably. The summer air of London, together with fearful contemplation of the unknown future, was responsible for his condition. The heat was oppressive and the great city had taken on that air of

lassitude which is so distressing to the workers in it. "London," wrote Peter in his notebook, "is most hideous when she ceases to be a productive machine and becomes a city of pleasure."

He wandered miserably in the hot evenings about the West End, and often sat in the park by the bandstand watching the young men and maidens walking up and down, all predatory, seeking illicit sweets of tentative and shy love-making. Watching them, Peter remembered with disgust his own exploits in this direction as a schoolboy. All the same it gave him great pleasure to come upon real lovers locked in fond embrace, lost to the world, so that one might stand and gaze and gaze upon them for all they cared. Somehow when they kissed, Peter had a desire to laugh and a desire also to cry. In the end also he was disgusted with the park.

He haunted the pits and galleries of the theatres and occasionally patronised a music-hall, though he found these places of amusement dreary in the extreme.

For the first time in his life Peter was bored, and Peter bored was twenty times as offensive as Peter cock-a-hoop.

By chance he discovered a comfortable element in distressful London.

The first excursion he had taken on his arrival in Southwark was to look at the Thames, and the river had ever been a favourite haunt. In these dull days there was seldom an evening that he did not walk along some part of the Embankment, but he had never had the temerity to enter the precincts of the Temple, which for some mysterious reason he regarded as *sacro-sanct*. One night, however, that he had walked down from Westminster almost to Blackfriars, exalted and drunk

with the beauty of the broad stream and the drowning lights in the depths, boldness came to him and he turned up Middle Temple Lane. The place fascinated him; Brick Court, where Goldsmith had lived and Coleridge and Thackeray; Fountain Court, across which Ruth Pinch had tripped; Lamb Building, where Pendennis and Warrington had had their rooms; Dr. Johnson's buildings and King's Bench Walk; the Middle Temple Hall, where Shakespeare's tragedy of Julius Cæsar had been performed before Queen Elizabeth; and often on the boards at the bottom of the stairs Peter came upon the names of men who shone as literary lights, or were known as journalists, and Peter was jealous of them, they seemed so confoundedly important with their names writ large.

At the bottom of a stair in Crown Office Row he came upon a name which gave him to pause—Mr. Lawrence Greenfield. For a few moments he could not assign the name to its owner. Then his thoughts flew to Janet Fildes and from her to the young man in the green suit who had been so odiously patronising upon their first encounter, but had latterly been more civil, and indeed had seemed to wish to cultivate Peter's better acquaintance. Peter disliked the young man, but as Miss Dugdale's brother, tolerated his attentions, and had even promised to visit him in his chambers.

Peter decided to mount, and ascended to the third floor to a door wherever he found the name of the young man and that of another gentleman, Mr. Beaumont Scholes, whom Peter after a moment remembered to be the hirsute young poet who had gained notoriety by his attack on Murray Wilson.

Peter remembered with shame that he had sent the

offending article to Wilson; also that the writer had ignored the sending.

The outer door of the chambers stood open, and the door of the sitting-room just inside to the left was slightly ajar, so that Peter could see one end of the room, red-papered, and the walls profusely decorated with photographs of actresses and professional beauties. The room was untidy and littered with papers, and the table bore the fragments of a supper and an empty champagne bottle. There was an air of luxury about the apartment as Peter saw it which contrasted vividly with his own chaste abode in Gordon Square. He could see one end of a red sofa covered with a jackal-skin rug, which jutted out into the room from where he judged the fireplace would be. Though the room was brilliantly lit it was not occupied. Impelled by curiosity, Peter pushed the door open and peered in. Something crashed to the floor, and he stood waiting.

Presently a door at the other end of the room opened and Mr. Greenfield's head peered out. His jaw dropped as he saw Peter, and he jabbed with his thumb in the direction of the door.

"You left it open," said Peter. "I did not know you were in."

"Get out," said Mr. Greenfield.

"Can't I stay and talk to you?"

Mr. Greenfield glared. "You young ass. Go!"

He advanced into the room, switched off the light and pushed Peter out.

As he closed the outer door Peter heard a woman's voice raised in a giggle proceeding from another room.

He leaned against the balustrade of the stone stairs

and laughed and laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks and his sides ached.

Gasping to regain his breath, he descended the stairs slowly. He heard a light foot on the flight below him and, looking down the well, saw an elegantly gowned young woman, tripping. At the angle they met. He started and cried:

“Miss Dugdale!”

She stopped upon his cry and stood wondering who the strange young man might be. In that moment Peter hated Mr. Lawrence Greenfield; and his dislike for the unpleasant young man from passive grew active. He decided that he must lie, for, at all costs, Miss Dugdale must go no higher.

“He’s not at home—your brother.”

“But he said— Are you a friend of his?”

“No. I know him.”

“We have not met?”

“We do not know each other.”

“You know my name?”

“Who does not?”

“Oh!—That.”

“I know Peter. He has orange eyes.”

“Oh! Then you are——”

“My name is Davies—Peter Davies.”

On that she laughed so merrily, like water over pebbles, that Peter must laugh too. She gave him her gloved hand. He took it and they turned to make the descent.

Peter waited for her to dismiss him, though he was hungry for words from her.

She laid her hand on his arm.

“I have wanted to know you for long.”

Peter bridled with pleasure, but wondered uncomfortably what and how much she knew of him. Wilson was no doubt her informant, and there was no clue to the extent of Wilson's knowledge of him.

"Your little story," she said, "the old match-woman, shivering in the rain. Shall we not walk and we can learn to know each other?"

"I—I——" said Peter.

Responding to her pressure, Peter turned and walked with her, stealing shy glances at her as they walked out into Fleet Street.

"You don't live in the Temple?" she said.

"No. I had never been there before to-night. I love it."

Shyness overtook Peter. The charm of the unexpected encounter had carried him so far, but left him stranded. He was wordless and shrank from her, gazing at her with frightened eyes. She was watching the marching throng in the Strand, and Peter wondered what was in her thoughts, wondered also whether he should ever learn what was inside her pretty head. Something in the street pleased her. She laughed, leaping from a deep note to her middle voice. She seemed exultant. She laid her hand on Peter's arm and turned dazzling eyes upon him.

"Don't you love it all?" she said, with a sweeping gesture.

"Yes," said Peter. "But what?"

"But—but everything—all these millions of dear stupid people, all thinking themselves so clever, and the lights, and the noise of them, and—and the——"

"Oh! yes," said Peter. "But I love best in London



the thump of machines that seem to be making something, mightily."

"They make shoddy, most of them."

"I'm thinking of the machines in Bouverie Street."

"They spread lies." She frowned, and Peter thought absurdly enough of Alice and Ethel Stubbs, purveyors of fiction by the yard.

Again she laughed, and Peter laughed, too. He was thinking of her brother and the service he had done the young man. She was thinking of Wilson's wrath should he ever know of this escapade.

"Oh! oh! oh!" she said, "I'm glad—I'm glad you can laugh like that. So few people can."

"I dreamed of you once," said Peter, "as the spirit of truth prisoned in your well by a green dwarf with whom I waged battle. His hand on my throat was clammy. Also the first time I saw you you nearly ran over me. I returned good for evil by purchasing a portrait of you for a penny."

"I used to make two hundred a year from being photographed," said Miss Dugdale. "Enough to pay for my frocks."

To Peter who had never in his life had so much money in a year, and who knew of whole families bred upon the half, the sum seemed appalling.

They talked much together and Peter was busy disentangling the reality of the woman from his vision of her. Her voice jarred upon him, yet he knew it for beautiful and musical. It was a different voice from that of the theatre, more caressing even, but all the same disturbing by reason of the hardness of certain of its notes. The contrasts and contradictions in

the woman made her only the more adorable, and presently Peter had surrendered.

When they parted she said:

“You will come to see me?”

“May I?” said Peter, and for some time they saw much of each other.

Peter called upon her in her flat, or they would meet to walk, and once they supped together at a glittering place. It was on this occasion that Peter had his first taste of champagne. He was disposed to regard the sipping of it as a fall from grace. He did not like it at first, the taste of it being reminiscent of brandy, which had always been peculiarly repugnant to him, but soon he found in himself a keen sensation of enjoyment, and his tongue loosed. He leaned across the table and harangued Miss Dugdale, who found him sufficiently amusing, though his dogmatic tendency was occasionally irritating. She had been afraid at first that he would prove to be impossibly young and callow, and was relieved to find in him a really startling knowledge of reality. She held her glass up and drank to him.

Peter gulped and remonstrated only feebly when the attentive waiter filled his glass again.

“You see,” he said. “You see. I know myself and I know exactly where I shall go wrong.”

“I wonder,” said Miss Dugdale.

“Why do you laugh?”

“So many men have said that to me. They have all been rudely surprised. You see, men do not understand love.”

“Love is a strange beast that leaps out on you, out of the dark. It bears you down and down . . .”

“And up and up.” Her lip quivered and her eyes looked piteously at Peter for the tiniest moment. They smiled again, and she turned to trivialities. Peter frolicked and his mind skipped; he buffooned successfully for her amusement, surprised at his own powers. He told her about old Cooper and old days, about his family and Podge, and altogether indulged in a very intimate confession, though all amorous adventures were carefully expunged. She warmed to him and seemed to be more interested in Tessa than in any other person of Peter’s history.

“I think I know Mr. Warrington. He is a writer, a poor one, though very successful. His wife is an invalid.”

“Does Mr. Wilson know him?”

Peter thought this very adroit. He had been longing to bring the conversation round to that point. She broke away and was not to be led back, but took him among the great, gorging him with celebrities. There seemed to be no one whom she did not know in London, from the mighty Hebrew financier in Park Lane, whom she described as the only man with any real power in England, and the detested newspaper proprietor, greedy of power and abusing that which he had, to the tiniest poet of Maida Vale or smallest artist of Chelsea.

They sat for long talking so over the coffee and liqueurs.

She made Peter tell her more of Tessa.

She sighed. “I might have been that but for the grace of God: and might as well have been.”

Peter in his deepest tones said to her:

“Do you believe in God?”

"In nothing," she replied, scared a little, and on the defensive. "Don't, boy. Don't."

She put out her left hand and Peter saw that she wore no wedding ring. She marked old Adam's ring upon his little finger.

"I like your ring," she said.

"Do let me give it you," and he told her how he had come by it and the story of its rejection by his sister, Podge's wife, together with her criticism of the quality of his thoughts. Miss Dugdale laughed.

"I like Podge," she said.

"Podge is right enough," said Peter, and took the ring from his hand.

"Shall we be friends?" she said. "Really friends, I mean."

"Tessa said that."

"I am another Tessa, then."

She slipped the ring upon the third finger of her left hand, and held it out for him to see.

He nodded smiling approval.

"You shall call me Mary."

"Splendid Mary."

"Friends—really friends," and she rose to go.

Peter drove with her in her little brougham. She was silent, but clasped his hand, clutching him to her.

At length—"I so sorely need a friend. So bitterly. Your match woman was right—so right. Hold them close to you—for warmth—I too have been a hard woman."

"I am your friend," said Peter.

"Thank you," she said, and both were silent, nor looked at each other, so glad they were of these days which had brought them together.

Peter felt a certain relief when the car stopped and she, after a nodded farewell that she might have given to her most slight acquaintance, tripped into the bright hall of the mansions in which she lived.

Peter wandered home in a dream, the blood in his head throbbing with the unaccustomed stimulant of wine.

Without quite realising what he was doing, he sat down at his writing-table, took pen and paper and wrote an absurd story with the title: "The Purple Sorrow."

When Peter rose from the composition of this masterpiece he staggered and thought 'himself very drunk.

Peter was not really drunk, but he was drunk enough to forget his remedy for sleeping with his mouth open, which he imagined gave his mouth its loose indecisive character. With a view to repairing this he had invented a system of going to sleep with his fists under his jaw. To-night he forgot this.

He woke the next morning with a blinding headache and his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth. He rose with a sense of loss, and, looking down at his hand, missed his ring.

Then he remembered and swore with a nice choice of words for the space of thirty seconds. Sitting on the edge of the bath holding his head in his hands, he vowed that he would never, never more see the woman, that if she wrote to him, as of course she would, he would burn her letter unopened, and that if ever by any chance he met her again he would—he would—— He was not sure what he would, but it was surely something awful, something to wither and blight.

"The airs of a Princess, clay-footed," he said fiercely, as he shaved. The phrase did not altogether satisfy, but it served.

"Grabbed," he muttered. "She grabbed me." Masculine vanity was hurt. There had been no battle, not even with a green dwarf, and, as for wooing, there should surely have been some wildness. She had taken him as she had taken the cat Peter, and here he was possessed by a woman whom he disliked, really disliked—or so he told himself.

He strove to recall her appearance, but could not exactly remember even her costume. It was blue and suited her marvellously. He knew that. Her face eluded him until he went down to breakfast in the common dining-room of the establishment.

He postponed descent as long as possible, partly because his appearance was so lamentable, and his condition melancholy, partly because he was certain that he should find a letter from Miss Dugdale. He did not feel equal to the company of his fellow-boarders, whose humour, never particularly congenial, would this morning have reduced him to angry tears.

A lukewarm breakfast and a scowling reception from his landlady, Miss Bastable, a woman who reminded him of his aunt, though she was a more prosperous specimen of the same type, possessing more dignity, did not better his condition. He snapped a "Good-morning" in response to her greeting, accompanied with a meaning glance in the direction of the clock.

There were three letters by his plate, bearing thumb-marks as evidence that they had been passed from hand to hand. A blue envelope gave out a scent of heliotrope. On the flap it bore the stamped initials in elegant type,

M. D. Peter thrust it into his pocket unopened. Miss Bastable marked that and smiled grimly. The blue envelope had been the subject of conversation at meals these many days.

Peter's career during the three years of his sojourn under her roof had been so blameless, so unlike that of all the other young men, that it was with an unholy joy that she now scented a downfall. She knew the power of heliotrope.

Peter shifted uneasily under her scrutiny and opened the two other letters. One was from Wilson, thanking him for the Cooper papers and suggesting that as soon as possible he should come down to his cottage near Haslemere.

The other was from Mattie, in high spirits at the prospect of a continental tour with the beneficent aunt, Lady Chapman, widow of a Sheriff of the City of London, embracing the Loire, with its châteaux and cathedrals, Provence, High Savoy, and the Italian Lakes. She bade Peter good-bye in a manner which, in his maudlin state, seemed to him callous, promised to write to him, and urged him not wholly to forget her. Demeter, she said, should accompany her everywhere, to remind her of the intellectual treasures he had poured upon her. Herein the fool Peter chose to detect sarcasm, and was filled with bitter resentment. He made an imaginary Aunt Sally of Woman and shied her down.

"Liars and web-spinners," he said aloud. "Webs to catch worthless flies."

The remark in its vehemence startled Miss Bastable, enthroned behind the silver coffee pot.

"I apologise to your sex, Miss Bastable," said Peter,

rising. "It is my fate to be devoured. So be it." He left the room.

"Mr. Davies is touched," the august lady said to her slave. "Balmy."

"It's them books," said the slave, and Miss Bastable, correcting her English, she added: "My mother 'ad used to say as how books was printed madness."

Miss Bastable, who never encouraged loquacity, did not pursue the conversation, and left the slave muttering.

Upstairs Peter had thrown himself into the Victorian chair, and because it hurt his head to think, sought prevention, babbling verses from the Anti-Jacobin:

The same of Plants—Potatoes, 'tatoes breed,  
Unworthy cabbage springs from cabbage seed;  
Lettuce to Lettuce, Leeks to Leeks succeed;  
Nor e're did cooling Cucumber presume  
To flow'r like Myrtle, or like Violets bloom.  
Man only—rash, refin'd, presumptuous Man—  
Starts from his rank, and mars Creation's plan.

Even the effort of memory was painful, and in despair he took up the closely written pages of the story he had written in enthusiasm. Coldly viewed, the story seemed a poor thing—"Words, words, words," and the ridiculous phrase "purple sorrow" mortified him, yet he knew that it was not altogether bad. It had been at least a sincere expression, if vague and woolly. With the simple presumption so characteristic of him, Peter felt a jealousy of mad Swift, who could say on re-reading "The Tale of a Tub"—"What a genius I had when I wrote that book!"

Taking up the halfpenny newspaper which he shared



with a fellow-lodger, a young German serving as a volunteer clerk in a city office, he came upon a preliminary puff of a new comedy in which Miss Dugdale was to appear. No escape from the woman. He threw the paper down into the hearth, where it caught fire and gave him the relief of action in stamping out the blaze. He sat for a time watching charred pieces of paper float up the chimney. He thrust his hand into his pocket and fingered Miss Dugdale's letter. Then paced up and down the room. He tried to smoke, but tobacco made his head swim, and that, too, was abandoned. He made an effort to read, but words mocked him. He remembered: "Words are quick and vain." Words! What words would the woman use; what words could she use?

The whole world was detestable, yellow, and spiteful.

Peter took the letter from his pocket, snuffed the scent of it. Heliotrope. He marked the writing of the address, hurried, untidy, dashing. Daughter of a watchmaker, Mary Greenfield: a Devon girl, of rich red earth and green lanes. Dugdale! The fresh girl aping the fine lady, of the town towny; tired, restless, discontented, vaguely wanting. "A woman worn by flattery, hungering for love." Peter returned to that early divination of her and knew pity. He was sorry—and to condemn her, upon what he knew of her story, because—because—for the life of him he could find no reason for his resentment. She had been kind, and she had said that she lay in sore need of a friend. Well, then—well, then—— But she had said also that she resembled Tessa, a cramped woman, a wasted woman, and in her face, as he saw it now clearly, holding her letter in

his hand, there was much that there had been in the face of the early Tessa—that strained hardness. It angered Peter to find himself so unreasonably resentful, and he fell to probing in himself. The blood throbbed in his head, and his under lip quivered. He inflicted exquisite torture upon himself, like an Eastern mystic undergoing starving and flagellation to gain the moment of crystalline clairvoyance—the lucid vision of thought—and Peter’s mannikin, perched on the little French clock on the mantelpiece, leered down at him in his torpor. He pointed a long thin finger, like a wax taper, it was so long, and mocked:

“Fear; that is it. Fear. You are afraid, terrified, craven at the first contact with woman. Only half a man! Not only wine brought drunkenness, but new things striving in you, new great things . . . Terror. Scarcely a man at all. Threatens you? Does she? Does she? Does she? Threatens what—You? What are you? Homunculus, a little man in a bottle, snug and warm, curled in your glass. Embryonic. What are you? Nothing. Nothing without this: a cold clot. Threatens you, does she? Your career? The fido for your career. Your brain? What’s the good of it without blood, warm blood? What’s blood for, if not to race? It? Afraid of it? Tiny man, tiny man, tiny man. Take it. Take it. Both hands, tiny man. Be grabbed—gobbled, eaten. Share the common lot. Tiny man, grow big.”

A sob gathered in Peter’s throat, but being forced up into his nose, came out as a snort. His hands waved in the air as though he were brushing away stinging flies. A tiny voice near his ear, a voice no bigger than the chirping of a cricket and as shrill, shrieked:

“Tiny man!”

Peter in terror sprang to his feet and stood. Presently he laughed nervously, and pulled his forelock.

He was surprised to find Miss Dugdale's letter still in his hand. He hurled it into the fire, but rescued it immediately, before it had begun even to scorch. Setting his teeth, he opened it. She asked that if he would walk with her they should meet by the Round Pond in Kensington Gardens.

Peter, like many of his betters, brought suddenly to proximity with "It," resented the being deprived of the sweets of courtship.

"Twenty-nine!" His mind leaped suddenly to the root of the matter. Her age killed Romance, and humiliated him in the killing by forcing him to acknowledge himself no more superior to the "pale sister," but hungry for her.

Youthful prejudice also had much to do with Peter's state. He had suffered a milder form of the disease with his first contemplated plunge into matrimony. This had been at the age of nine, the object of his young affections a tom-boy cousin of fourteen, whose thick pig-tail of brown hair and skill in finding the nests of gold-crested wrens in spruce trees—lovely mossy hammock nests with tiny eggs—had wrought the havoc. The alliance had been long pondered, but in the end the great difference in their ages had proved an insuperable bar.

Miss Dugdale had confessed to twenty-nine. In face of the notorious mendacity of women it might well be that she were thirty-five, or, ghastly thought, forty.

These speculations were wild, but they sufficed to make Peter acutely wretched. He spent a morning of miserable idleness, and after lunch, vowing that if he

went out at all, it should be to visit the Fildeses in Southampton Row, he went up to his bedroom to don his tail-coat and silk hat.

He sat down on his bed and cursed. He cursed the day that he had come to London, the day that he had entered Cooper's shop, the day that he had matriculated in the University, the day that he had met Wilson, and most the ironic chance that had taken him up to Greenfield's chambers in the Temple. He cursed all his mode of living, his boarding-house existence and all the inmates of the house, the German volunteer clerk, the French musician; the two quadron ladies from Port Royal; the two old gentlemen who shared apartments and had lived from their youth together, possessing in their united incomes just enough for subsistence; the evil German-Swiss butler, who bullied Miss Bastable and was an over-lord; the coarse young man from Manchester, and the elderly young woman from Leeds.

The real object of his vituperation was the bi-sexual ordering of life, which, having survived the onslaught of Arthur Schopenhauer, was likely also to survive that of Peter Davies.

Peter set forth immaculately dressed; trousers most correctly creased—hat newly ironed and bright yellow gloves upon his hands.

He strode sturdily and turned in the direction of Southampton Row. He strove to force himself to enter the door of Russell Mansions, but shot past it and down into Oxford Street, where he boarded an omnibus.

Two lovers occupied the seat in front of him. Their talk sickened him, maudlin folly.

A slightly drunken man behind him had had an altercation with a Commissionaire, and was hurling obscene-

ities at the bashfully smiling head of the uniformed creature. The conductor mounting to collect fares, an officious spotty-faced young man complained, and there was altercation, as the upshot of which the offender promised to talk only to himself and to avoid the utterance of obscene terms. All the way to Marble Arch he talked aloud and volubly.

"Hell!" he said. "One man's as good 's 'nother. Mayn't talk to 'im, mayn't I? Ol' rip. I asks 'im wot 'e did in India for them medals. Preserved the Hempire, did 'e? I don't think—Black beauties an' dusky brides: that's Hempire buildin' fur 'im. Bally ol' rip. Straight I tells yer. I been there. S'good as 'im. I spends more money on beer in a mornin' than 'e'll make in a week. Arst anyone rahnd Coven' Garding."

Here the conductor remonstrated again, and the man protested.

"I c'n breathe, cawn't I? An' if I likes to breathe in words—I ain't usin' no bad words. I can, cawn't I? The hatmosphere don't belong to nobody, though there's some as'd like to buy it."

He rose grumbling and growling and stumbled down the staircase at Marble Arch, Peter following him. He wandered crookedly across to the Edgeware Road, and Peter watched him until he was lost, then turned into the Park.

He stopped for a moment, and made a resolution to walk straight through to St. James Park and Westminster to avoid the Gardens.

All the same it was not long before he found himself under the statue of Physical Energy, peering to see and not be seen.

He saw Miss Dugdale, a brave solitary little figure in blue, a gallant blue feather in her hat, her parasol of scarlet—flaming, flaunting woman. Peter fled and passed down to the Serpentine: then up again and out to spy upon her. He saw lovers meet and gladly smile and slowly walk away to some known spot for quiet, poor fools and blind: and mated birds he saw, and bees pay loving visit to the flowers. He strode out into the street by one gate, glad to escape, but by the next he turned in again and walked furiously down towards the meeting place. This time she saw him, and suspecting nothing of unwillingness in him, came tripping, crying greeting, gladness in her eyes.

They met, and Peter warmly pressed her hand, then held aloof and was silent. She took that for a sign of too great joy in him, and laughed, touching the silver notes that had most entranced the boy in the days of distant adoration.

They stood, he not looking at her, not daring, raging and yet near surrender, torn, while she, the red light from her sunshade tinging all to warmth, looked side-long at him, pursing lips, noting the details of his careful dress. For her? She thought it so, and laughed again; and Peter laughed.

“I’m glad I came.”

“Glad? Oh! yes. The sun, blue water: green leaves and smoky trunks. Such weather.”

She moved and Peter followed, caught her up and walked by her side, peeping under the sunshade at the bewitching nose, the smiling eyes, the chin in air. She walked divinely, pure Princess; and Peter said aloud:

“The airs of a Princess, clay-footed.”

She thrust out a foot neatly booted.

"Oh!—I can walk."

"On hills and over downs?"

"Twelve miles if you wish it, sir."

To student Peter twelve miles was great striding. He applauded.

"Do you swim?"

"I meet Leander half way in his passage—and drown with him."

"Leander is drowned?"

"Leander never came."

She brought him to a tiny dell close by the Serpentine, and there they sat.

"How is Peter?"

"Well," she said, and scanned the water. Then: "Will you swim for me?"

"Bathing," said Peter, "is not allowed before seven o'clock."

"Tell me more."

"More?"

"About yourself."

"You have told me nothing of yourself."

"With you I escape from myself."

"Do you—do you also possess a mannikin?"

She pondered this, and quickly perceived his meaning.

"A waspish little lady. Yes."

"Mine came to me to-day."

"And mine."

Peter looked up to find tender eyes upon him; they demanded confidence, extorted it.

"Mine said 'Tiny man.'"

"And mine, ferociously, 'Be yourself.'"

"Mine too. 'Grow big,' it said."

"I think they say that always."

"Can we be?"

"You and I? With honesty."

"Then why——?"

Peter stopped abruptly. He was on the 'point of demanding fuller confidence from her. He dared not. His youth forbade it. She divined something of his thought—and a filmy unhappiness of the moment came between them.

"Dear Peter," she said, and "Mary," said Peter, lashing himself for the lack of temerity to say "Dear."

Behind them a boy and a girl lay on the grass reading.

"We have invaded their Eden, Peter." The intrusion was soon forgotten. There were childish caresses and embraces.

"You, too, are young," she sighed.

"I am remarkably old," he said.

"And wonderfully young."

"Old," he said, and to show his knowledge and the depth of his thoughts he recited what he could remember of the story of the King's son, and his quest of the purple sorrow. Here in the sun, and with this kind and splendid lady, the story took life again and seemed a fine thing. Of the recurrent phrase she said:

"Why purple? Surely grey?"

"Grey," said Peter. "Grey as the sorrow of a childless woman."

The scarlet sunshade was lowered to hide her face from him. Peter babbled on until he felt that she was not listening, then turned and saw her face covered. He was hurt, and ceased. At once she raised her sunshade.

The situation was saved by the arrival of a shabby



man demanding pence for the hire of the little green chairs on which they sat.

"His Majesty's Commissioner of Works," said Mary. "This is Royal ground," and she wished to refund the twopence that Peter had paid. They wrangled deliciously, and in the end she slipped the two pieces of copper into his pocket when he was looking the other way. In silence presently they walked to High Street, Kensington, Peter pondering, she troubled, yet forcing laughter, and turning over two questions that she wished to ask him.

In the pleasant tea shop she opened fire.

"Why were you laughing on my brother's stairs?"

Peter put down the cup from which he was about to drink and gaped at her, then plunged into a lame explanation of this tenor, that he had been amused at the thought of climbing so many stairs to see a man not a friend, and—and—— He broke off and plunged into his meeting with her in the bird shop.

"When you left," he said, "your handkerchief lay on the ground. I picked it up and have it still."

"You must give it me again."

"May I not keep it?"

"I will give you something of more worth." Then for a second question she braced herself.

"What do you know of me, Peter?"

"What they say."

"And what say they?"

"Things odious."

"You know I am a wife?"

"I know."

"Unworthy."

"No, no."

"I could not keep my husband."

"I could not blame you."

"Dear Peter."

"He has left you."

"I him. The best has been withheld from me."

"Poor——"

"Where is my handkerchief?"

"With all my treasures."

"Others'?"

"Not mine. Old Cooper's."

"A romance?"

"He loved, was loved, and snatched wild happiness,  
I have his letters."

"May I read?"

"Mr. Wilson has them. I think we shall publish all  
his papers. A strange old man."

"I am going to stay near Mr. Wilson."

"I with him."

"Then we shall meet."

"I'll read you all the history. When do you go?"

"To-morrow. For months, until the autumn."

"I must lose you then?"

"We have to-night."

The "we" from her lips thrilled Peter.

"What shall we do?"

"Dine."

"Then walk. The river, Westminster: perhaps  
Chelsea; St. James Park at night is a place for splen-  
did dreams."

"We will dream then."

They appointed a meeting place, and Peter walked  
across to Mount Street with her. At the door he said:

"One thing only."

“And that?”

“No champagne to-night, I beg.”

She turned laughing and Peter left her, bearing in his mind a vision of Mary, young, happy, contented, at rest. The consciousness of power with her set him exulting and kept him in a state of exaltation such as he had not known for long enough, all the sweeter for the noble melancholy that tinged it.

In twenty-four hours Peter had grown apace, not without self-torture, but without growing pains. It was a calm transition, a floating and a blissful state.

They dined, not magnificently, at the little French restaurant in Soho, where Peter had dined once with his sister and her fiancé. Miss Dugdale's entry in the modest place caused sensation, and Peter found himself the mark of envious eyes.

They walked as they had planned, first by the river until darkness came, for, as Peter said, the gentle spirits of St. James Park hide under water until the lights of men, sinking to their abode, drive them forth.

“They live,” he said, “like swallows, under water for the winter.”

Mary scouted the idea.

“It is an old wives' notion,” said Peter.

The sky was pale and starry, sullen with the glare of the city, red and lemon tinted. At Westminster the great river, swollen with strong tides, smote both to awe.

“We have hemmed him in,” said Peter, “but water is kind, always kind.”

They leaned on the parapet, and their arms touched. Mary sighed.

“Water kind? Yes, even in the drowning.”

"Drowning," said Peter, "is altogether a pleasant sensation. See, the moon drowns herself, the mirrored moon."

"The mirrored moon," soft echo in Mary's voice brought to the words the notes that Peter loved.

"Oh! Mary," he said, and took her hand and kissed it.

"No, boy. Oh! no, no, no."

They walked then to the bridge over St. James' lake.

"They close the gates," said Peter, "at sunset, that the Saint may walk abroad unmocked. He is followed in his march by pelicans and drakes, and kingfishers and herons, the male of all the water fowl. Poor solitary, that never had a—a Mary."

And Mary cried, "Delicious boy."

"One Mary," said Peter in sepulchral tones, "is of more worth to human kind than all the saints. I'll give you Anthony of Padua, and Francis of Assisi, Polycarp and Xenobia, and Catherine, and Matthew, Mark and Luke and John, and all the Josephs, Henrys, Peters; I'll give you Barnabas and Jude, and Andrew, Paul, Simon, Anne and Benedict, Thomas, Ambrose, Martin, Xavier."

"Stop, stop, stop."

"Alban, Stephen, Joan of Arc, all martyrs."

They came upon the bridge, and Mary sounded, "Oh!" and stood, and laid her hand where the boy's might close on it.

"It is a place of fauns, and nymphs and reed-pipe dances."

"With saints? Oh! no."

"The saints are blind to them."

"Poor saints."

They stood there hand in hand.

"The rhythm of the place," said Peter.

"Let us go."

Her eyes sought his and her lips parted. Peter stooped.

From behind them came a cry, a sob. A woman stood, crouching, cowering on the bridge, wrenched by grief. She moved, and the moon lighting on her revealed a woman's face, drawn, drawn and white, blank, staring with tear-clouded eyes. Her hair streamed over her face, her hat was awry, but even in her great distress she was comely. She strove to walk, but anguish would not be controlled. She reeled and Peter leaped to stay her.

She turned and saw him, strained away.

"Tessa!" he cried, and caught her. Mary came, and together they two comforted the girl.

"What is it, Tessa?"

Tessa sobbed.

"Oh, tell me."

Still she sobbed, then wildly caught at Mary.

"Have you loved?" she said, "loved, loved and been cast aside?"

"Tell me," said Mary, and held the girl to her breast.

"He loved me: yes he did. He took me out of——"

"Yes, yes," said Mary.

"I was good to him, I was, I was. For years, three years, I was good to him, a plain man—Stanley Warrington. Then there came another, called himself his friend, and took me. I never wanted him—never—never—never. A bad man—Bond."

That word—Bond, struck fire. Mary's husband!

Peter turned to her—she caught her breath and swayed, then laughed, and laughed again, while Tessa babbled on unheeded.

Mary's face grew hard: she set her teeth and won to calmness. Peter gloried in her then.

Then Tessa fiercely. "I won't, I won't, I can't—go back to it. He's turned me out—out, and me so good to him."

"I think," said Peter, "I think the fauns have played us tricks."

Mary flashed: "To spite the saints," and Peter, feeling in the face of the lamentable condition of Tessa that at all costs he must say something, borrowed from Blaise Pascal.

"If Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, the whole face of the world would have been changed."

"Rubbish," said Mary. "What are we to do with her?"

"And you?"

"Oh, Peter—not I, but she."

They returned to Tessa and drew from her the confession that she had flown from the little flat in Chelsea by the four chimneys, just as she was, without thought of destination, housing, money or food. She had ranged over London, running, sobbing, striving to quell her grief, to penetrate the blackness that was upon her.

"I can take her to-night," Mary said.

"To your home?"

"I am alone, but for Peter."

"What will you do with her?"

"I shall think of that to-morrow. She must rest, sleep, be fed."

They led Tessa across to Pall Mall and hailed a cab.

Peter assisted the two women, and gave the address.

“Will you come, Peter?”

“There is nothing that I can do.”

“No.”

“Then good-bye.”

“Good-bye, we shall meet again.”

“In Surrey.”

“Yes. Good-bye. My handkerchief.”

“I will bring it, and you will give me——?”

“Many things. Good-bye, and bless St. James.”

“And damn the faurs.”

The cab rolled away as Mary waved a hand. Tessa, exhausted, had sunk into a corner. Peter stood watching. Mary had been admirable, glorious in the tender fooling; a heroine and great woman in the moment when the misfortunes of Tessa had touched home and shamed her.

And Peter cursed the name of Mr. Bertram Bond, the destroyer of Mary's peace and Tessa's home.

“A simpering fool-villain. Bond!” The reiteration of the gentleman's monosyllabic name brought comfort until there came the thwacking truth that Mary shared it. Greenfield—Dugdale—Bond! Bond! Mary B——; lips would not frame it.

The whole thing was misty, intricate. Out of the steaminess of it came Wilson's tragic face. How was he woven into the tangle? And himself, he, Peter Davies, tiry man no more, what was he to be in the weaving?

“Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos.” The names repeated themselves again and again, and Peter was seriously disturbed because he could not remember which of the three held the shears.

Then: "Mary, Mary, Mary." Tiny man no more. He squared his shoulders and strode. There was that in his face that made Mary turn to gaze after him in the street, and as he strode, he composed a letter:

"Love is not for hugging. It is rather a giving out and out and out. It is a treasure inexhaustible, to be had for the delving; a cruse to pour milk and honey over all the world—a divine possession."

Oh, damn old Cooper. He had said that to his silly Clara, simpering Demeter of Dresden.

Peter could invent no more phrases. "Mary, Mary, Mary," was sufficient. Xavier Cooper, over three years dead, overwhelmed Peter, swamped him, even in this great happening.

Peter never once gave thought to Mattie. A letter came from her next day to say that for two days she should be in London before setting out upon her travels, that she was anxious to see his dear silly face, and that she was ever his.

Another letter came from Mary, saying that she had decided to take Tessa to be her dresser in the theatre, and was going to send her to the sea to recover from the effects, more serious than she had conceived, of the calamity. There was no word of her own trouble, nothing of sickness at heart.

"Do not scold me out of this dear foolishness, boy dear; I never will demand of you more than you can give me, never, never, never. M."

"Everything, everything," cried Peter. "The whole world, stars, and the sun, all the worlds. Oh—fool!" and lovesick Peter kissed the letter.

He took the handkerchief from the desk and kissed that too; the necklace in his hands and held it long,



dreaming how he would one day clasp it about Mary's white throat.

He exulted to have kissed her hand. " St. James. St. James. St. James! Blind saint, never to see the fauns and numpfs, the goat-legged creatures, the reed-pipe dances. Wretched saint, most truly martyr. Pan! Pan! Pan!—Pan teaching a young faun his notes upon the pipes . . ."

Miss Bastable gravely discussed the condition of her lodger with her slave.

"It's a scented woman," she said with a sniff of righteousness.

## VII

TESSA, so Peter heard from Mary, was lodged at Barnstaple, where the gentle air of Devon would restore her strength.

Miss Dugdale paid visits in Surrey, Sussex, Kent, and Peter followed her with rhapsody, and glowing words. He soared so in these days of trembling happiness, and sped so swiftly through the air at dizzy height that he must sort with common things, or touch stars and be consumed. He would come quivering to the pen, and never read what he had written before he sent it to her.

A poem ran:

Ride in the air, winged horses, ride with me,  
Souls leaping to the sun.  
Swim in kind water, Me in grey green arms of sea  
Learn all the spaciousness of Earth's humility,  
Resolving two in one.

Sing, let your body sing, your soul chant with the earth,  
Make music with the moon.  
Sun drawing life through you, create, create, give birth;  
I, I, the instrument, bring flashings of God's mirth,—  
Laughter, the child's boon.

She divined his condition, and fed him with idle talk and gossip in her letters. She told him of horses she had ridden, or beasts befriended; of sick persons visited and children won from shyness; of odd characters among fellow-guests; of small adventures; of boys enamoured and old men enslaved by Diana.

"It has always been," she wrote, "that I am nicer out of London; as who is not? I wish so much to share green things with you. Already you have made me sweeter, delicious boy. I heard Sir John Defries, the judge, you know, and the kindest soul, 'Miss Dugdale is a girl again.' They know my story. I hugged you to me then. Sir John has been so good to me. He is the——"

Some word she had written here, but had crossed out again, crossed and re-crossed. Peter was hungry for more tender words, and curiosity was roused only for a moment.

In all the houses where she was there seemed to be great persons, Swain, the lawyer, and Bankes, the young Under Secretary, of so great promise; Barclay Coke, the socialist writer and wit; Sam Barker, the editor of the only respectable newspaper left in England; Newton, the publisher; Sir Isaac Moss, the financier; all controlling men. She seemed to move so easily among them all, and Peter, healthily a snob, was properly impressed, though she had never given thought to that. There was good physic in it, too, for it brought home to Peter the awful daring of his love, that he, a little student with no place to serve his kind, no ground assured, of small achievement, should look so high and not be blinded. He knew that she had raised him, and "in this dear foolishness," as she had called it, had taken him for her own, had stripped herself of armour for him. In that strange and dreadful time, with Tessa, they had been marvellously close together. And yet—and yet——; there was so much she had he must not share, could not, by circumstance, enjoy with her, from sheer unfitness. His life had but begun with her, while

she, with this, and this, and this, was formed, a creature to give delight to thousands and bring sorrow to a few. As dispassionately as he could, by an heroic effort he viewed the situation and achieved a humility that he had never known before, and never approached again save once. He knew and so confessed to her that there could have been nothing, no moment of that marvellous day and night without the Cooper wisdom in which he was saturated. In this mood he wrote out for her from memory the letters, Clara's and young Cooper's, and Mary wept for joy over the budget which she found waiting for her at the Bassett-Crewes, her greatest friends, and cousins of poor Warrington, whom she found there melancholy and mood-stricken, with his frail and gentle wife, another Mary.

She came to Peter's Mary with her woes and clung about her, feeling her strong and sure. She loved her Warrington, and, for he shed no light upon his doings, being by nature secret and by adversity more, sought the reason of his distraction and moroseness in herself. She was very wretched, and Miss Dugdale could do no more than listen. It had been long since she had been a confidant, and, though she thought comically of the Confidante of Tilburina in *The Critic*, she ascribed her new warmth and power to attract to Peter, told him so and set him greatly rejoicing.

More than ever alone, now that she was gone he roamed through London, but no longer despondently. He was full of charity to all men and keenly interested in all that they did and were. He began to plume himself on his perception, and in omnibuses and in restaurants, in streets or in the parks, would mark down men and women and weave a history for them. Most

often he was wildly in error in translating to them all his own emotions and experience. A great thought came to him as a result of these peregrinations.

“My emotions, thoughts, and experiences are the sum of all human emotions, thoughts, and experience.”

Another thought thrilled him.

“There are millions of forms of life which I can not see, nor feel, nor hear. How, then, if the whole human fabric is erected on primæval error?”

This, of course, was only Cooper's Shelley cropping up in him. He took it for a great new thought, and enlarged upon it to Mary, to whom it was altogether novel and shattering. In truth it was a ghastly idea, and, chuckling over his own wit, he found the refutation of it.

“Impossible: for the human fabric is built on Mary.”

To this she wrote:

“True, Mary is crushed.”

This interchange of letters was great fun and kept Peter happy and in a conciliatory mood, so that for the first time he won a sort of popularity in the house in Gordon Square. Since the momentous interview with Wilson, the foolish boy had been practising inscrutability on his fellow-boarders with disastrous results to the peaceful air of the place. The remark of Mary's “waspish little lady” had sunk home, and Peter struggled to be himself, though most often he succeeded only in presenting Cooper, Wilson, Scott, but made them all charming. A cynical person might say that the whole secret of it was that Peter made the boarders talk about themselves.

Cynics rarely do more than scratch the surface: they are so lazy.

While Peter roamed and loafed, and made new friends and told it all to Mary, she in the country sang his praises.

The Bassett-Crewe house was only five miles from Wilson's cottage, and he joined their party more than once. She never spoke to him of Peter, nor let him know that she had met the boy: but Bassett-Crewe, a solid man with mines and railways and whole kingdoms in America, to whom she had given what she could of Peter's charm and gentleness, had come to Wilson to ask him what he knew of Mary's friend.

"A brainy shop-walker," said Wilson.

"Miss Dugdale finds more in him."

Wilson sat on the parapet of the terrace looking out over water to blue hills pine-clad. He smoked his pipe muttering:

"So do I. The phrase was spiteful. He is to stay with me shortly."

"You must bring the marvel to visit us."

"Yes," said Wilson, and drew away from the topic. He did not care for Crewe, because he had red ears.

They fell to discussing the theatre in England.

"Kemble, retired to Lausanne, was jealous of the homage paid Mount Blanc," said Wilson.

Crewe laughed at this. Wilson was contemptuous, for he saw that the good man had no conception of the relation of men and mountains.

"This Davies. Can he write?"

"Very fast, I should say." Crewe stuck to his guns. He was not to be repulsed by Wilson's humour.

"Could he write to order?"

"The sort of stuff that is written to order. Good of its kind. He has an extraordinary memory, and can

tag you with the best of them in Latin, Greek, French, and German."

Mary joined them, and Peter was dropped in favour of discussion of the new comedy wherein she was to appear, an adaptation of Wilson's story of which she had stood for heroine. Wilson grew animated, but, Crewe prying, became irritable, bit at his pipe, wrinkled his nose and tugged at his moustache.

Mary knew the danger signals, and steered a clear course. Crewe left them, puzzled by odd Wilson.

"So rude," he said to his wife.

"I adore the man," she said.

"So do I."

Crewe was mystified and scratched his head.

"Shall I take you out on the water, Mary?" said Wilson.

He brought cushions, and together they went down to the lake where was a Canadian canoe. He held it for her, and she stepped in. Then slowly he paddled until they came to where the water lilies grew thick, floating cups, silver and gold. She gathered some and laid them at her feet. They dripped water on her pink linen. With her left hand she brushed the drops away, and caught Wilson staring at the ring upon her finger.

He said nothing, but when she had enough of plucking, took her to where a beech grew low over the water, trailing leaves and spreading, arbour-like.

"The gentleman among trees," said Mary.

"That's Peter."

"Yes," said Mary, startled into confession.

"The ring is Peter's, too."

"Yes, the ring is Peter's. An old man gave it him: an old man who—who loved this country. I—I had great

'days with Peter: one evening when—when he gave me this, and then again an evening when—when we walked——”

It was odious to have to justify herself with Wilson;—if he should condemn—that could not alter Peter. She looked across at the man, but nothing in his aspect told her his thought, or if he took the matter to himself at all. This ignoring cut deeply, opened old wounds. He knew the pain in her, but could not help: only maintained cruel silence. She drummed with her fingers on the canoe's edge. This irritated him.

“Why can't you be my friend?” she said. He muttered inarticulately.

“Peter says water is kind.”

“Old Cooper said it.”

“Mr. Crewe is starting a paper—a weekly. Will you speak for Peter?”

“I have,” said Wilson.

“Why are you angry?”

“I called him once an Achilles with brains. Who edits the paper?”

“Mr. Sandilands in all probability; it is Liberal.”

Wilson filled his pipe again.

“You have hurt poor Warrington.”

“I?—No—No.”

“What is it then?”

“I—I cannot tell you.”

“Where is—he?”

“He! I do not know. I think in London.”

“Urging the wretched Scholes to libel.”

“That is his trade.”

“Hard words, Mary.”

“I must be bitter.”



They were silent again.

"Will you go from here, Mary, before Peter comes to me?"

"I must not see him?"

"Why sweep him into our coil?"

"A son to me."

"H'm. He has written to you?"

"Much."

"Son-like letters?"

She gave wild Peter's verses.

"It is a betrayal."

"A boy——" This contemptuously, and Wilson took the paddle, and they returned in silence.

Near the house he touched her arm. She shrank from him.

He said, "You must go, Mary, or I'll not let him come." She was defiant for a moment, then caught her breath and ran into the house.

Wilson took his bicycle, and to avoid the Bassett-Crewes, walked across the park and out by the farm gate.

All that evening he sat and smoked. Not once did Matilda receive a caress from him.

Mary pleaded a headache, and did not come to dinner, but by the window of her room read a new letter from Peter in which he told her every affair of the heart through which he had passed; such a touching simple confession that Mary laughed and cried together over it.

She sat brooding on all that she had been, turning and turning over in her mind the hard facts—her miserable love for Wilson, the bitter hurt, the wild despairing search for remedy; her disastrous marriage entered into without thought, with no knowledge of her husband nor intimacy with him, no spiritual life with him or sharing:

hideous discovery, and the frightful moment when he had struck her: a cruel man at his basest, but nothing that he had done was fully known to her, until Tessa came: he had tortured her, twisted her, must have withered her, had she not left him for a sort of freedom, but great loneliness. Peter had come, kind Peter, with such understanding and sympathy, to give her warmth, and now—and now—she must go—not right for Peter: not fair for Peter. Just?—yes. She knew it to be just, but cruel for her, who had done no harm nor wrong, but in the blind squandering of tenderness. Peter too young? But—but Peter had such words——

The sadness of the moonless night came over her. She wept: and presently she slept, head on her arm, there by the window. So her friend, Cynthia Crewe, coming to offer sympathy, found her and aided her to bed. A large, kind woman, this Cynthia, a mother of fine sons.

Mary stole away and hid herself by the sea, first by Beaulieu River, and then at Mudeford on Christchurch Bay. She did not write to Peter. She lay often in the warm grass of the seashore, watching the light changing in the water and on the sandbank at the Avon's mouth. They said the bank would grow and grow, house martins and sea birds, put forth rough grass, until there came a storm, whereon the sea would devour the whole.

"I am so builded, and so I shall be engulfed," thought Mary, and sought comfort in the reflection that Peter would not see the swallowing. "He must not, shall not."

The sea bred in her a savage humility, which, sweet enough in itself, was foreign to her nature and not tolerable for long. She moved then to a small hotel by

Lyndhurst, and sought the comradeship of trees. They were comfortable, but in the end tormented her with memories of old Cooper's letter of trees and babies, and for her in the glimmer of the woods cherubic creatures floated like bubbles.

Again she fled, and went far north to a homely sister wedded to a farmer on the moors by Pickering. Here she found strength: the great air of this place and rude living fortified her, but did not altogether cast out weakness, for when the time was come for Peter's visit she wrote to Wilson.

He answered, but did not even say whether the boy was with him.

Peter, in fact, was not.

Two things had held in London—a letter from Bassett-Crewe concerning the new journal, and asking him to see Sandilands (the name was imposing for Peter), and the desire also to discover the state of Mattie concerning himself. Her letter showed that she scented change.

Peter had struggled manfully to act in accordance with the accepted code, and had written at some length, but, conscious that the phrasing was stilted, the expression insincere he tore it up. He seemed in his own view to cut a poor figure.

And then—and then—no word came from Mary. The last had been just before the flight from the Bassett-Crewes, had spoken of Wilson, and the possibility of the new journal providing work, but nothing of her movements. Peter would have journeyed post haste to Wilson but that he was still engaged with his fellow-student, and also busy with his professor upon research. This man had shewn Peter some tenderness and special

favour, and having an etymological theory was hungry for disciples. Peter promised well, and worked absorbedly until the Bassett-Crewe letter came to send him flying. Until it could become definite, however, he stood loyally to his man, and grubbed with energy after Aryan roots.

"Man first spoke in Asia," said the Professor.

"And the Himalayas grew the taller for it," said Peter. The Professor scented no irony, was indeed impervious to all such barbs, and said: "I dare say," absently, for he was intent upon an extraordinary use of a dental in the song of a *trouvère*. Peter had read many of these songs, and in the light of Mary-truth found all troubadours and knights rather shoddy people.

He went to see the great Sandilands in a little office in the newspaper regions. The man was known as an "intransigent," and Peter found him rather swollen with importance, and on the perception of Peter's youth he took on a patronising air. He sounded Peter, and talked vaguely of the literary staff, could promise nothing, sent him away disheartened. The Professor at least thought him worthy of courtesy.

Bassett-Crewe's letter, coming when it did, was not a little unfortunate for Peter, since in the march towards greatness it spurred impatience of the preparation for it: and while Peter found it amusing enough to earn a few pounds with the Professor in the root-grubbing, the more dazzling prospect of an entry into good journalism made Peter realise horribly, and with too sudden an insight, that his examination was no great thing. Too early he learned to despise the University and its methods, and developed a vein of diluted Cooper irony for the derision and contemning of education in general.

Altogether Peter was in a lamentable condition. Tender alarm had been the first result of Mary's defection from correspondence, then wrath, then sulkiness and vanity injured. The rôle of blighted lover was one that he enjoyed for a short period; he courted loneliness, and in an asinine plunge into sentimentality he revisited the scenes of wonder, heaving great sighs, and in the end worked himself into a condition so stupid, so dull and insensible as to destroy not only all his new popularity in the boarding-house, and the almost awe with which the little fellow-student with whom he worked regarded him, but his own self-respect. He recognised the fall, but gloated over the wounds, and drifted into slovenliness. He made no attempt to write, dressed deliberately in his oldest and shabbiest, and became careless in the matter of shaving, which, as his beard was black, was a matter of importance.

If Sandilands had been kinder the worst might have been avoided. Peter knew this and hated Sandilands. Wilson did not write, and Peter hated Wilson. No further word came from Bassett-Crewe, and him also Peter hated.

But most Peter was filled with loathing for himself, and so thoroughly enjoyed the loathing that he expended such energy of mind as was left him in thinking out new depths to which he might descend. He was so nicely constituted, however, that he could think of nothing worse than to visit Mr. Lawrence Greenfield.

He was hailed by the young gentleman as heaven-sent.

Mr. Greenfield was not a pleasant sight when he opened the door to Peter. He was towseled and unshaven, though it was half-past six in the evening. His

face was puffy and mottled, and little eyes were sunk and blinked in his head. He thought Peter unsightly, and after some moments smoking of his pipe, nodded his head and said so.

"Better not let Scholes see you," he said. "He'll put you in his book. It's about drunk—drunkards."

"As to drink," said Peter, "let me refer you to the remarks of Sir Toby Belch."

Mr. Greenfield stood blinking. He seemed to be amazed by the literary allusion.

'Queer little—little devil," he said at length.

Peter, a little weary of waiting, said pointedly:

"Are you alone to-night?"

"Come in," said Mr. Greenfield, and Peter accepted the invitation. He declined the whiskey and soda proffered as soon as he had found a seat, and Mr. Greenfield drank it for him.

In a burst of confidence he explained to Peter that his lady had cruelly deserted him, and Peter expressed sympathy. Mr. Greenfield was touched and shewed Peter a portrait of her successor, a young lady with masses of hair and eyes turned heavenwards in mincing innocence.

Peter expressed great admiration, and Mr. Greenfield said:

"Like to go to see her? She dances."

Peter accepted the diversion, as he would have accepted a suggestion that they should, like Solomon Eagle, set London in flame, or stand on the steps of St. Paul's hurling imprecations. He found Mr. Greenfield a bore, but took him for a castigation of the flesh proper to his mood and pose of martyr. Besides, having deliberately sought him out for the express purpose of deg-

radiation, he must pursue the creature whithersoever he led, as Faust did Mephistopheles.

This comparison pleased Peter. Himself as Faust, weary and sated with books, and poetic living, was certainly good casting. Greenfield was a sorry Mephisto, however, in nothing clever, vicious only from lack of character.

"A silhouette of a man," said Peter. "I prefer men in the round."

Determined to play the Faust game, he took this inferior Mephisto and waited while he retired to his chamber to array himself in gentlemanly garb.

In the room were two photographs of Miss Dugdale placed in the centre of the mantelpiece on either side of the picture of a faded old lady, obviously her mother, the wife of the Devon watchmaker. It seemed then that Mr. Greenfield, whatever his faults, had some sort of feeling for the womenkind of his family, and Peter, who had none, was set wondering.

Mary, in the earlier photograph, at the age of eighteen, was a pretty fool, hardly pretty indeed, so empty was her face. The later portrait showed the Mary that he knew, splendid, tender, with wonder in her eyes and sorrow. Peter compared the two—his Mary and the other who had no doubt been someone else's Mary. Not the same woman! His Mary was his alone, his creation.

That thought struck him as profound, and true. He noted it thus:

"Our friends are curiously the children of our souls: so that in all real friendship, deep-rooted, there is something of the passion of creation."

It is to be observed that here Peter used the word

friendship, not love. He was so ashamed of himself, and would not consider himself at the moment in the more blessed relation with the woman. He had been childish in his conduct, ridiculous and small in judging her without word from her, and knowledge of the inward happenings which had produced her silence.

He admitted this as he scrutinised her portrait, and for four seconds was for stealing away without her brother. The Faust prospect repelled him, but the hurt to his vanity came suddenly, twinging, and he sat obstinately to face the worst. She had exalted him only to send him empty away, dashing him to the ground. Her fault or his, the result was the same, and the greater the descent the more interesting himself under the microscope.

Besides, and this was the poorest excuse put forward, he wished to study the habits of the genus Greenfield.

Peter had never been either borrower or lender, and had not developed a nose for the predatory. An expert would have marked Mr. Greenfield in a moment, and would have avoided the proposed dinner at an expensive eating-house. Peter, however, having committed himself to the guidance of Mr. Greenfield, complied in all his suggestions, and, first diving into a bar (every entrance to the Temple has at least one tavern in its immediate vicinity), they partook at Peter's expense of sherry and bitters, a beverage new to him and rather distasteful. They dined solidly, and in gloomy silence, and when Mr. Greenfield shamefacedly confessed his penniless state, Peter paid without a murmur out of the five pounds he had drawn from the post office savings bank for the purchase of a new suit, hat and boots, prior to his visit to Wilson.



Mr. Greenfield's eyes gleamed hopefully as Peter shook the pieces of gold out of his pigskin purse into the palm of his hand.

"Money," he said, "is the root of all evil."

"No," said Peter, in his most fiercely dogmatic manner. "Jealousy."

"I have never," said Mr. Greenfield, "been jealous of anybody, man, woman or child."

"You lie." Peter was already weary of his companion with his trick of swallowing a remark, profound or otherwise, without applying it to any sort of test either of theory or experience.

"I," said Peter, "I am jealous of your fund of small talk: jealous of your appearance: jealous of the assurance with which you accost a barmaid: jealous of the insolence with which, without a penny in your pocket, you bully a waiter: jealous of your capacity to drink and lie and grumble: jealous of your easy conscience: jealous of your mode of living because it is so different from my own: of your clothes: of your acquaintance: of your work, because you are paid for it, and I am not: of your untroubled relations with women."

"Untroubled!" said Mr. Greenfield in protest. "Try it."

Peter did not heed the protest. It is doubtful, indeed, if he heard it, so intent was he in his harangue. He continued:

"Why, I am jealous even of the qualities in you which I should most dislike to possess—of those perhaps most of all."

"One of the first rules of modern play-writing is to avoid the tirade."

Peter had not thought Mr. Greenfield, green dwarf

with the clammy hand, metropolitan of unpleasant habits, one-half so subtle. The adroitly administered rebuke staggered him, and silenced him. He allowed himself to be led without a word, after paying the bill, out into the crowded Strand and away to a music-hall, where, upon payment of five shillings, they were admitted to a glittering promenade, where flashing women hovered, leering, and men of all conditions lounged and loafed. Peter quailed, and Mr. Greenfield, sensible to his companion's innocence, donned the Mephistic character, and leeringly took charge. He seemed to be known in the place, for uniformed officials, and the vendors of tobacco and alcohol, had all a greeting for him, while they looked askance at owlish Peter, blinking. There were many young men of the same kidney, all smoking large cigars, all a little loud in their dress, all a little fantastically affected in their mien, a nightmare of Greenfields. There were tiny Orientals, Siamese, and Japanese, paying attention to the largest of the leering women. The whole place reeked with the musky scent which was associated in Peter's mind with that first encounter with poor Tessa.

Applause drew their attention to the stage, and pushing their way through the throng they leaned over the brass rail and gazed at the ballet, a beautiful spectacular effect which had roused enthusiasm. The scene was a valley in France, a field near the ruins of a castle of the old régime. The tree of Liberty stood surmounted with its red cap, while in the new light of the dawn peasants danced and sang and rioted. The ballet was called "Revolution," and, after a Watteau scene disturbed in its peace by the rude entry of wild boors inflamed by the new ideal, shewed in its last tableau

that period in French history when the sun shone, and the whole nation, divining that the millennium had come and not suspecting that the tyranny of kings was to be succeeded by that of the army and the mob, went crazy, and wine ran free. "Not the minds and small aims of governors, but vines and corn are the life of the people"—and "The truth of politics is that nations are governed in spite of them"; these sentences the author of the ballet had printed on the programme for motto, and by way of text. Peter remembered reading the newspaper criticisms of the production, and that the "ballet with a purpose" had been flouted.

He found himself with all the multitude in the place enthralled, and yet with an uncomfortable sense that such sincerity in such a form for such people as he saw around him—heavy faces, low in forehead, fatted men, and women of small purpose, and no achievement—was near the grotesque.

Out of the wild leaping throng on the stage came a tricky figure, tripping lightly, careless, gay, clad in tri-color, and on her head the scarlet cap of liberty, while round her shoulders tossed and flew long flaming locks. All the house was silent save for a silly murmur and the clink of glasses from one of the bars. On the stage the little figure flew, speeding round with great strides, feet pointing yet scarcely touching the boards, hither, thither, in and out; urging, teasing, mocking, crying out and swelling tumult, while strange music followed her and mounted higher, higher, to a crashing close, whereon she stood on tiptoe and threw garlands to the mob and ribbons, red, white, and blue; touched glasses with a few, then tossed her cap in air, and stood with arms akimbo, head back, to drink the sun while

the music from low bird-like twitterings swelled and grew into the hymn of the Marseillaise. Silence then, and the curtain descended. Peter, with the rest shouted, stamped and roared and hurled his hat. A lackey held the curtain back while the little creature came simpering. Peter caught his breath and leaned forward. Evening Glory Jane!

She tripped away just as he had seen her dance back to the admiring crowd outside the bird-shop.

"Gosh!" and "Gosh!" again.

The curtain rose seven times for the little dancer to appear, but each time she drew with her now this, now that performer.

"Like to know her?" said Mr. Greenfield.

"I do," said Peter. "I have seen her do a greater thing than that."

"Bosh."

"What is she called?"

"Mignon. I call her Mignonette."

"I knew her once as Evening Glory Jane. That name is better: her hair, you know."

"She is going to America."

"The richest nation," said Peter, "buys always the best of all the others."

"Yes," said Mr. Greenfield, fatuously. "I had an offer to go there."

This met only with a disconcerting silence.

"She's quite new. Straight out of the gutter. Tubby Haines, the ballet-master, saw her in the street dancing like a mad thing, and took her into the corps for training. In this she was just one of the mob until the first full rehearsal, when she burst out like that, and down the stage she rushed. Haines cursed her, and would

have sacked her, but Cantagalli, the author, was wild about her, made her do it again and again, and there she is, the success of the thing. All London comes to see her, and they give her no more than if she were just in the corps."

"A glorious gnome," said Peter, and no more. Of his first acquaintance with the amazing creature he could not speak with Greenfield. He was quivering still with the pleasure she had given him. It had been so keen that tears had gathered in his eyes, and she had, by the perfection of her art, and the joyousness of her performance, called forth all the best in him, so that he was not a little ashamed of his recent self, ashamed of his seeking out of Greenfield, and ashamed that he could not now be more gracious to the hapless youth. He strove manfully, but in vain. Intercourse with Greenfield was too heavy going. He was relieved when a large florid man, fascinating in his loudness, wearing a shirt with many tucks and frills, be-ringed and be-monocled, shiny in hat and boots, accosted his companion and led him in the direction of a bar. Peter turned to the stage again.

After the whirling brilliance of Mignon, Evening Glory Jane so marvellously translated from grime to glitter, the other performances were flat, stale and unprofitable: performing dogs, and acrobats, and young women balanced upon wires, voiceless singers and humourless comedians. Much the most entertaining were the beasts, though they were pathetic, too—noble brutes trained to perform fool tricks.

The grim irony of it seized Peter, so that he could not bear to watch the poor women labouring to amuse. The cruelty of it: Peter recalled all the old stories of

clowns cracking jokes while their nearest lay dying, and singers giving delight while all that was best for them was lost; and he wondered to how many of the hundreds in the auditorium did the thought come that these painted creatures also were men and women with wives, children, cherished creatures and belongings. Puppets, poor wretches: with tradition to pull the strings for their antics.

"Helots and slaves," thought Peter, "sold to please. Mary is that, Mary a puppet, a helot and a slave. Slaves: yet divine things, too, like the rest of them. Painted dolls: but—but—what of the Empress Theodora, and Mary Dugdale, and Evening Glory Jane? These justify the thing—old Cooper's right. In all trade there is the lie, and there is cruelty: but even from the lowest truth peeps out."

Oddly the face of Greenfield's friend came back to him, a large face, handsome enough and clever, but by a certain thickness and puffiness distasteful. There was a certain fineness in the head but that it was held at too low an angle, as if for goat-like butting. Dark it was, hair close-cropped and thin, bald a little on the crown, and bald about the temples. Something about it made Peter shrink and shiver.

"Either," he thought, "because the ears are too low, or because the lips are——"

Peter knew then that it was the man's lips.

He looked up and saw him towering above the throng where the women admired him and seemed pleased that he should throw them a jest. There was strength in the man and among these people he seemed eminent.

A little man next to Peter seemed to admire the man, for he was gazing open-mouthed in his direction.

He turned to Peter and asked him if he knew what man he was.

"That," said Peter a little spitefully, "is a man after God's own heart."

The little man withdrew before this acerbity, and Peter was sorry.

To his amazement he found the hero bearing down upon him, followed by Greenfield, who by contrast looked little and mean. They stopped, and Mephisto said:

"This is my brother-in-law, Gertram Gond."

"You know my wife," said Bond.

Peter turned and without a word was walking from the place when he felt himself gripped by the neck, lifted clean into the air and sent flying. In his flight he had a glimpse of a dark face grinning savagely, with swollen veins about the temples and one thick vein standing out in the middle of the forehead. His foot crashed into a mirror, and glass fell to the floor, reaching it at the same moment as himself, so that he cut his right hand and wrist. Women shrieked and there seemed to be innumerable faces peering at him as he lay. They seemed to mock him. Then darkness came.

Later he found himself in the arms of a large official being carried through a curious crowd. Men and women whispered to each other the history of the incident, and Peter heard one woman say:

"It's that Bond. He's got the hell of a temper. They say she's going to divorce him."

"But why did he go for the little man?"

"They say he spat at him."

This explanation seemed so comic to Peter that he chuckled, and writhed in the strong arms that held

him. There was a twinge in his hand and, holding it up, he saw that it was roughly bound with strips of white handkerchief.

"I can walk," he said.

"What there's left of you," said his bearer, and Peter could feel his voice rumbling up inside his great chest. Just so he remembered his father's voice.

They took him to the vestibule and laid him in a chair while a doctor who happened to be of the company rebound his hand, and dosed him with brandy. This made Peter cough and then feel sick, but it restored the blood to his cheeks and dispelled his ghastly pallor.

Looking round, Peter could see neither Greenfield nor Bond.

"Neither Mephisto nor Silenus," he said.

"Gentleman's name is Bond, sir. We know 'im. Half Moon Street. You 'ad ought to get a new suit out o' this night's work. Where do you live, sir?"

Peter gave the address in Gordon Square, but seeing that they meant to call a cab for him, protested that he could walk, rose to his feet and reeled.

Out in the air he felt stronger, but allowed them to place him in the cab. He gave the kindly official half-a-crown, and the cab was just moving when a man leaped from the pavement and sat beside him.

It was Bond.

Peter laughed.

"Thank you, sir," said Bond.

The cab turned up Wardour Street.

"Romance and pasteboard," said Peter.

"Leather and prunella," corrected Bond, and throw-



ing up an arm, he lifted the trap and told the cabman to drive to 42 Half-Moon Street.

Peter turned to expostulate, but he felt such misery in the man that he said nothing. The cab swung down Shaftesbury Avenue into Piccadilly Circus, where they were held in the traffic.

"Over there," said Peter, "your wife nearly ran over me. It was my first glimpse of her."

He was afraid for a moment that the remark was wanting in tact, but it seemed not to prick at all.

"Over there," said Bond, indicating a theatre, "I saw her first six years ago; a supper on the stage. I was just famous and flushed with it. We were presented to each other and she asked me what I did."

He laughed at the memory of it, but said no more.

They drove along Piccadilly by the Green Park, and Peter for the first time noticed what a hill there was in the great street.

"Does your hand hurt you?" said Bond.

"How did you get away?"

"They know me."

"They said I spat at you."

Bond laid his great hand on Peter's knee and shook it. The strength of it pleased Peter.

"It might have been someone more—more brittle."

The cab drew up at the given house and Bond descended and paid the fare and more.

"Come in," he said.

Peter demurred. Sympathy with the man had gone, and he was confronted with the fool-villain of his conception on the night of the St. James Park adventure.

"What is it?" said Bond.

"Silenus," said Peter, and on the instant was sorry, for the man's face in the light of the lamp so plainly showed a hurt.

"I beg you to come," said Bond, "for company."

"Greenfield," said Peter.

"A cub. I beg you to come."

Peter descended and followed Mary's husband into the dark passage and up the stairs to the second floor.

An electric light switched on exhibited a careless, comfortable room, in many of its details womanish. There were flowers, glowing banks of them: books and dainty pictures: a desk: large chairs.

In the centre of the room Peter stood riveted. Over the mantelpiece hung a portrait of Mary, bewitching, elusive, not happy, and for that all the more attractive from the subtle smile behind sad eyes, the marvellous eyes. Her chin was in the air as always, and her mouth was soft, pouted a little. There was no hardness in it, none.

Bond turned the light upon the picture so that all the glory of the woman divined by the painter shone forth, and Peter remembered words to describe a heroine:

"She was a great huntress and she bore many children."

He kept the thought locked and, turning to Bond, said only:

"Thank you."

"I saw you walking with her one night, by the river. It is long since I have had word with her."

"I am sorry," said Peter.

"I struck her once."

Peter winced.

"She left me——"

"To-night, also, you struck me."

"It was the same."

The huge man rocked suddenly, sat, stared hollow-eyed at Peter, smouldering eyes; then buried his face in his hands and sobbed.

Peter sat waiting while his brain throbbled in the effort to grasp all that there had been.

Of all his adventures this seemed to Peter the strangest, to be first assaulted by a man, and then to come so near as to bring sympathy in the most intimate grief. The man was raw, quivering to a touch, and for the very bigness of him and the strength, his state was the more pitiable.

Peter could not find right words. He tried phrase after phrase, but rejected all. In a flash came:

"Not Silenus."

"No," said Bond, "full-blooded Narcissus. Worse."

"I," said Peter, "have been called an Achilles with brains, and that is worse than either."

"Only youth."

"What am I to say?"

"Nothing." The head was not raised and the voice came thick with wretchedness. "There is nothing. You understand marvellously."

Peter leaped at that. Old Cooper had called him a rare soul, well-born. Understanding was surely the mark of that.

"Let me tell you," came the voice scarcely audible. "It is not for you to judge, but from sheer necessity, to keep myself from judging—from thinking and—you know the woman."

"Yes," said Peter with eyes on the portrait. "I know the woman."

"I knew she did not love me."

Peter wished to steal away. He dared not look at the man for fear of meeting his gaze. He dared not move for fear of hurting him. He sat motionless, breathing noiselessly. His wounded hand throbbed, but he set his teeth lest the pain of it should force a sound.

"I knew that she had been hurt. I knew that she was rushing for distraction. I knew that she was worn and weary, almost in terror. I watched and watched, and watched, saw her try this and that: I saw her wandering among young things, among the helpless and weak: I saw her always turn away uncomforted: I saw her face grow thin, tired, almost hard: I heard new bitter notes come into her voice, and all the while I loved her. In the end she came to me, blinded and numbed, not knowing and not caring what I had to offer her. It was the best I knew: there needed more for her. I could not kindle her. Cold she was—cold, and I dense, vain, hurt that she should be cold. I had been spoiled by women—so many I had had unsought. She asked nothing of me and gave nothing. I knew nothing then—so much now. There was misery for both: she cold, I stormy, gusty words, violence, and *that* happened——"

He brought his hands down from his face and Peter saw them clench and the whole body of the man shake.

"She had seemed scarcely alive, but then all veils were torn asunder. She shrank in horror from me—

something she saw in me for the first time. She was great in that moment when I found and lost her. I think in that moment of losing her I saw her for the first time as she really was—but even then I knew nothing at all of her—nothing, nothing, nothing.”

Peter, out of his queer store of knowledge, could have told him that even in the greatest moments all that is not shared is hidden, and he remembered Clara’s “How well I know you!” and that Cooper had never laid claim to such possession of her.

“She left me. She left me. With her I had been miserably alone, but without her the world was frozen. I sank: drugs, wine, women, anything, until I am what you see, a wretched thing, broken, clouded in mind, uncontrolled and uncontrollable: a vain-stricken fool, with wretched creatures for my comrades: for I have no friends.”

To Peter this was the bitterest cry of all, for he thought of Warrington, Tessa’s man, a stout friend from all accounts until the betrayal. He had great pity for the stricken man, and because words seemed to be expected of him and he could find none comfortable in his impotence in the face of this tangle, he said simply:

“From what I knew I judged you. I called you fool—villain. I could not bear that—that she should bear your name.”

“You love her, then?”

“I do not think,” said Peter, “that you and I love the same woman. There is no absolute M—Mary.”

“Where is she now?”

“I do not know.”

"You lie."

"I do not know. I have not had word from her for long enough. Her brother does not know."

"Oh! Lawrence . . ."

Bond rose from his seat and took to pacing the room. He stopped.

"Queer," he said. "I do not know why . . . Good-night."

Peter moved slowly to the door. The man was again detestable.

"Tessa," said Peter, "is in Devon by the sea." The stroke was cruel. Bond stood menacingly with his head low, moving from side to side, his face grinning horribly.

Peter stole away and walked home, turning over and over in his mind the problem. Whatever the thing was it had the virtue of immensity: Mary, Wilson, Bond, Tessa, Warrington, Peter, and through himself it touched all those with whom he came in contact, even the Professor grubbing for his roots. It had even changed the destiny of Peter, the cat, for without it Mary would not in probability have visited the bird-shop.

A letter from Mattie awaited his arrival at Gordon Square. It announced her presence in London, and a desire to meet him by the della Francesca to say farewell before departure to the Continent, since, as she was to journey with her aunt, he might not come to see her go. Peter scented womanish love of intrigue and was a little repelled by it in conjunction with the round unformed handwriting. With his new knowledge of men and women he dubbed the letter childish, and despised it. Youth had become a dread-

ful thing to him, for late events had made him resentfully conscious of his own.

The next day, after a morning spent between his fellow-students and the prayers of certain mediæval saints, he entered the National Gallery at the appointed time, and sat opposite the "Nativity with Angels Adoring." He was never tired of the study of the picture, and found fantastic reasons for the elevation into the air of the brown ox pressing forward to sniff the quality of this new child before whom the pale kind woman knelt and the throng of singing creatures made such unpleasant sounds with strange instruments.

"The brown ox," thought Peter, "like the rest, knows the quality of the divinity. The son of the brown ox will know the same of every child, since from generation to generation the beasts do not breed error. What the sons of men have made of this same child will not bear thinking on."

He turned and gazed at a Raphael Sanzio.

"O pretty liar," he said, and would have harangued the Italian master but that there came a touch on his shoulder, and, turning, he saw Mattie standing above him, a new, brown Mattie, with her hair almost turned up and a frock that almost swept the floor.

Peter rose to his feet and she saw then his swathed hand.

"Oh! Peter. How?"

"Mattie," said Peter, "I have been living a dreadful life"

She protested.

"It is true, I broke a mirror in a music-hall, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

"Oh! Peter—were you—were you——?"

"I was not."

"Then how?"

"To tell you I should need to return to the temptation and the fall of Man. I am not sure but King David has a good deal to do with it, and I am certain the apostle Paul is directly responsible."

Mattie looked puzzled.

"Ask no questions and you'll be told no lies."

"Does it hurt you?"

"It is rapidly recovering."

"You look ill and tired."

"I am going away soon."

"Where?"

"To your uncle's at Fernhurst."

"Adorable place. How did you cut your hand?"

"You will observe how marvellously Titian understood the use of blue."

"That for Titian." She snapped finger and thumb and walked away in the direction of the very early masters. She walked well and Peter admired, though more than ever he was conscious of her childishness. She stopped and waited for him to approach. He walked stealthily into the next room and gazed gloomily at a dead Christ.

She had observed the manœuvre reflected in the glass of a picture, and waited for him to return, as presently with rueful countenance he did.

Mattie hung her head, then with a sidelong glance she said:

"Who is she?"

"She?"

"You are changed."

Peter was silent. She was disarmed. He knew it



and dared not speak. He was irritated by the smallness of the thing contrasted with the explosive other, but struggling to approach her he found that for her there was great bitterness, not less real for its origin in smallness. Peter had power, and knew that she had not. He was aware also where priggishness had landed him before, and fought against it now.

Simple Mattie's thoughts flew to matrimony.

"Are you going to marry her?"

Peter choked in the effort to suppress laughter.

"No," he said.

"If she loves you. She should not have let you love her if—if she would not marry you. You see—you see, I do understand."

This was too much for laughter. Peter mourned.

"My dear child," he said, and then found himself on the brink of the abyss of priggishness. He started back, and giggled from the strain of the mental gymnastic. His words had stung to fury, and Mattie very properly turned and rent him.

"Child!" she said. "Girls of fourteen are older than any man ever is. Child! and yours!"

Her scorn abashed Peter. He apologised for maladroitness, then was awkwardly dumb. He could tell this girl nothing except—except what she had already divined.

"I am going away," she said. "Perhaps for two years. Will you write to me?"

"You wish it?"

"I should like it. I am your—friend."

The crushing of Peter was complete, for in her tone there was conveyed the recollection of tailordom, the shop, and kindness conferred. She soared above him,

and though he raged against it, he knew himself for an upstart aping foreign manners. Yet for the generous sweeping away of all follies he was grateful, and accepted humiliation at her hands.

She stood mockingly in front of him, surveying him.

"Do you know," she said, "I think you are nicer than you used to be."

"I am much nicer," said Peter.

"There is also more of you."

"I am certainly stouter."

"Let us go into the Dutch room."

They went and sat before a courtyard of Peter de Hooch.

"Tell me a story about it," said Mattie.

"I am so dwarfed that you will not hear my voice."

Mattie pondered that saying. She patted Peter's arm.

"Great ladies," said Peter, "used always to have dwarfs and antic creatures for their sport."

"If you are small enough, you may climb to my shoulder and whisper in my ear."

"I am the tiniest of tiny men," said Peter, and "Tiny man! Tiny man! Tiny man!" rang in his ears.

His next remark was quite unintelligible to Mattie.

"His finger is so long that it is like a wax taper."

The girl sought the explanation of it in the Peter de Hooch.

"Whose?"

"The mannikin's."

"There is no mannikin in any picture that I can see."

"He is the creator of all real pictures. I will tell

you about him some day when you have a waspish little lady of your own."

"Is this the story?"

"No story to-day. My voice is too thin for you to hear."

"How queer you are."

"How queer we all are."

"But to-day, Peter: why?"

"Last night a very strange thing happened to me. I saw the good reality of an odious man."

"Was that how you cut your hand?"

"No. That was before."

"Peter, I don't understand you . . . I shall not lose you, Peter. Some day I shall ask and you will come . . ."

She was playing now with the buttons on his sleeve.

Peter looked tragically and remorsefully at Peter de Hooch's picture as though it were at fault.

Suddenly Mattie's hand slid down to his: she leaned forward and in a voice scarcely above a whisper said:

"Peter, we're both too young to know what it is. Some day you'll know, and then I think you will come to me. I am glad to go away . . ." Peter did not stir.

"Good-bye, dear," she said.

A large tear welled out of Peter's left eye and trickled down his nose into his mouth, where the salt savour of it was not altogether unpleasant.

She rose and sped away.

Peter sat gloomily staring, intent upon the process of the formation of a tear.

"A muscle relaxes, I suppose," he thought, "when

there is keen emotion. Bond last night, and to-day Mattie."

He wondered then why people are ashamed of tears. Bond had wept, and Peter remembered the feeling of shame that had come over him, the curious tugging it had given him to hear.

"Tears," he said, "are too intimate."

The idea came to him that he must go away out of London. It was a place of too great excitement and he was growing bewildered.

He wandered round the galleries and found relief in the pictures, but he could not cease from thinking. Angry with himself, he accosted a janitor and addressed him in these words:

"Thinking is an unhealthy thing. You move in circles and circles and in the end you know no more than—than Podge Newhall."

The janitor, who was used to eccentric persons, said readily enough:

"Yessir."

He scarcely emerged from his stupor, only stirred upon his stool and settled again.

Peter moved away and came upon two sailors surveying the Venus of Velasquez. One said:

"D'you think she turns round at night, Bill?"

Bill laughed.

"These," thought Peter, "are men: strong men and never tiny. What strong necks they have."

He pursued the sailors out into Trafalgar Square in order to gaze at their necks. They gave themselves the delight of a drive in a motor-cab and were lost to him.

Peter betook himself to the house of his Professor

and plunged into more holy utterances in the *langue d'oc*.

A week later he went to Murray Wilson's and was warmly welcomed by Matilda. Wilson threw him a curt greeting. Peter, as he drove into the garden, found him lying in a deck chair sucking his pipe and lost in thought. Matilda came tearing from the woods on the sound of wheels on the gravel, and leaped joyfully as Peter descended. Wilson had been remiss in the matter of attention of late, and at the cottage Matilda was accustomed to great games. It had been her first home with Wilson, for Miss Dugdale had brought her as a little black puppy small enough to be carried in her muff one Eastertide before her marriage.

Matilda grew fat in London, and in the country worked a cure by the chase of rabbits.

"This is her Homburg or Spa," Wilson had said.

She accepted Peter as a possible playmate, and in fact kept him busy all afternoon throwing tennis balls for her delight.

Beyond shewing him the room consigned to him, Wilson paid no attention to Peter until nearly dinner time, when he said:

"We dine at Crosslands to-night."

Peter remembered that Crosslands was the name of the Bassett-Crewes' house whence Mary had addressed her last letter to him.

They drove in a gorgeous motor-car that came for them and flew through winding lanes. Wilson swore in a voice of profound melancholy with every jolt. He became suddenly communicative.

"Crewe has red ears. One is hairy and one is not."

"How—how did he make his money?"

"He caught hold of the right coat-tails."

Peter waited for an elucidation of this remark, but none came.

"He does not wish to enter Parliament; he will finance the journal for party service."

"I went to see Mr. Sandilands."

"A clever lout. He wrote to me. 'Young Davies seemed very bright.'"

"Bright!"

Wrathful, Peter drummed with his fingers on his knee. He still wore a small bandage round his wrist where he had been most cut.

"How did you hurt your hand?"

"I—I met Mr. Bertram Bond."

Wilson froze again and not another word was spoken until they reached the door of Crosslands, where they were received by a Butler and a Footman, august creatures who inspired Peter with great awe. He had once seen a butler, and knew something of rank and etiquette below-stairs, for his father had had some trade in liveries with the great houses in Leicestershire. The butler took Wilson's coat, the footman Peter's.

They were led through the thickly-carpeted hall with its trophies of sport (a great brown bear supported an electric lamp at the bottom of the stairs) up to the drawing-room. As they went Wilson muttered:

"Don't be too clever. Crewe is slow of digestion."

Peter thus started the evening with a handicap.

Bassett-Crewe stood by the fireplace, hands flapping coat-tails, booming to two men of enormous age who stood by him. The room seemed to be full of charming and beautiful women.

Mrs. Bassett-Crewe, moving to greet them with hand outstretched, seemed to Peter so gloriously a woman, so great that he could have knelt to worship her. This goddess detected fright in Peter and took him under her wing that he might gain confidence before the plunge into new acquaintance. Wilson knew everyone in the room and wandered from group to group cracking the jokes that were expected of him.

Peter, unused to dinner-parties, was oppressed by the atmosphere and the desultory attitude of host and guests. He remembered no gathering more chilling except that of his relations at his father's funeral.

"The first time I saw Cooper, he said to me, 'The world is at your feet, but not for kicking.'"

"Mr. Cooper?"

"The bookseller in Shaftesbury Avenue."

"I remember. You must tell me about him."

Wilson here looked so comically woe-begone that she laughed aloud—a laugh so like Mary's, though with deeper notes, that Peter was thrilled. He found also that Mrs. Crewe pronounced certain words with the same odd inflections.

He spoke his thought.

"You are so like Miss Dugdale."

"We are friends. Poor Mary."

Peter longed to question, but Wilson escaped and came to protest.

"I came to be fed. I will not roar."

"A very mild growl will satisfy that child."

"She will watch me feed. I told her Davies was the coming man. She insists on presentation."

"Too bad," said Mrs. Crewe, and turned to Peter to find him scanning the young lady who was absurdly

conscious of his scrutiny and gave him her best profile.

Peter was led away a sacrifice, and Wilson returned to Mrs. Crewe.

"That is so like you." There was affectionate chiding in her voice.

"I can't do with her."

"So Peter must? I was beginning to like my Peter. It is extraordinary what he has done for Mary. She came here almost—happy."

Wilson looked utterly blank and Mrs. Crewe stroked his hand with her fan.

"I am glad she is to be in your play in the autumn."

This provoked Wilson to a remark.

"It is not like you to be so stupid."

"No. I beg your pardon."

Dinner was announced, and they filed downstairs, Peter with the interested young lady who had begun at once to pay subtle tribute to his intellect. Half way downstairs she said:

"Do you prefer comedy or tragedy?"

Peter heard Mrs. Crewe just behind them give a delighted chuckle, and he floundered.

Through dinner the young lady pursued him remorselessly until Peter, astounded at the depth of his knowledge and the brilliance of his remarks, became resigned. He was placed within reach of Bassett-Crewe for study. Mrs. Crewe seemed miles away at the end of the table, almost hidder behind little orange trees and candles.

Peter knew that she was making Wilson talk about him, and a remark floated up the table which he knew to be a *mot* from the Cooper papers.



The remorseless young lady turned from Greek tragedy, whereon she discoursed of the relation of the Bacchae of Euripides to the Licensing Bill of 1908, to the newest comedies and from them to Miss Dugdale. A fervent young attaché, a cousin of the Bassett-Crewes, desirous of breaking ground with the young lady, caught at the name and plunged.

Mrs. Crewe strove to divert the stream and made signals to her husband, but Mary was a common topic, and the conversation became general. The unhappy woman's history was enlarged upon, distorted, twisted and coloured. Neither Wilson, nor Peter, nor Mrs. Crewe, who knew the facts, made contribution. Mrs. Crewe marked Peter's silence, and was firmly his friend from that moment.

"Bond," said the young attaché. "Someone told me an extraordinary story about him the other day. He's a great roaring fellow, they say. In some music-hall he picked up a man who insulted him and threw him through a sheet of glass right over the counter of one of the bars. The fellow was cut about a bit."

Peter thrust his hand under the table, and another voice took up the tale.

"Warrington and he were thick as thieves, you know. There has been a row: some woman, they say, and now old Stanley is going about calling down, or up, Hell-fire on old Bertram's head. She doesn't live with him."

Bassett-Crewe said:

"I never could stand the man."

There the matter stayed, and Peter, much relieved, plunged into a discussion of the influences of the Abbey of Port Royal and the Jansenists, on Racine.

"I write a little," said the young lady.

"That is very interesting," said Peter.

Peter gulped champagne and was immensely relieved when Mrs. Crewe rose to his salvation.

The young lady dropped her fan, as Peter thought, that he might bring it to her later in the drawing-room. He gave it to the young attaché, who seemed grateful.

Bassett-Crewe invited them to close up and made room for Peter by his side. While port, coffee and cigars were discussed, fire was opened, and Peter found himself examined and cross-examined as to every detail of his past life. He confessed to the tailor father, and succeeded in finding an audience for the tale of his early adventures. There came an explosion from an old soldier:

"God bless my soul, George Davies in the High Street your father? Made breeches: never was such a hand for breeches, though he could only cut them when he was——"

"I remember my father as most often drunk," said Peter.

"God bless my soul. There used to be swarms of children in the shop."

"There were six of us."

"I have a pair still that he made for me fifteen years ago."

"You went to see Sandilands? We start in November." This from Bassett-Crewe, who thought the reminiscences had gone far enough.

"Sandilands," said Wilson, "thought Davies bright. The word is very like Sandilands."

"My examination is in October," said Peter. "The results are published in November."

"What are you doing now?"

"I'm helping one of the professors with his book on the Romance languages."

"Sounds dull," said Bassett-Crewe.

"It's better than selling books: to make them, I mean."

"People do write books on extraordinary subjects," said the old soldier.

"I remember cataloguing once," said Peter, "a large volume called *The Heralding of Fish, Notices of the principal Families bearing Fish in their Arms, with 205 charming engravings from stained glass, tombs, sculpture, carving, medals, coins, pedigrees, etc., and I remember adding an attractive note to the effect that nearly 600 families were noticed in the work. And besides the several descriptions of fish, fishing-nets and baits, were mermaids, tritons, and shell-fish.*"

Peter stopped and confidence left him. He looked across at Wilson and was comforted to find no disapproval.

"The mermaids, at least," said the attaché, "sound attractive."

"They were," said Peter.

Bassett-Crewe looked round to see that cigars and cigarettes were finished.

"Shall we go up?" he said.

Peter felt considerable elation. Not since old days in the shop had he been so central a figure.

They found the ladies in the hall assembled to gaze at a surprising moon behind trees, great beeches that grew within a few yards of the house. An expedition was proposed. Bassett-Crewe and Wilson excused themselves and retired to the chamber called by courtesy the library. It was the one place in the house not pervaded with the Cynthia atmosphere.

Mrs. Crewe turned to Peter as they passed into the air.

"Do you swim?" she said.

"Lovingly."

"We have a bathing-pool. You must come over and use it."

"I will bring Matilda."

"I once rode into a river on horseback," said Mrs. Crewe, and the vision of this great lady riding so from a golden meadow into gleaming water entranced Peter, and he gaped at her.

"Let me show you the pool." She started to walk over to the beech trees, he following, away from the rest.

"It is wicked to escape."

"I am glad of it," said Peter with tremendous gallantry. She took it, laughing.

"I bring my babies to swim almost before they can walk."

"Babies: like the world of them in Titian's picture of 'Fecundity.'"

"I do not know it," said she, and Peter described it to her.

"Beautiful."

They came to a hedge of privet clipped into an arch through which was only blackness.

"It is here," she said. "Oh! with this moon—— You must close your eyes and I will lead you. Close them honestly."

Peter screwed his eyelids and she took his arm, and, tiptoeing mysteriously, led him stumbling and tottering; then held and turned him.

"Now," she said, and Peter gasped

“ Oh! ”

She held his arm and crooned delightedly.

They stood upon a rock whence rough-hewn steps led to the water's brim: such water, a soft still pool of it, wherein were mirrored willows swooning and dark firs, sweet dangling ferns and clematis, jasmine and wild rose: the hill whence sprang the feeding stream: long fleecy clouds, and, silvering all to tenderness, the moon, not shewing all her splendour, crescent still. The tiny stream rang tinkling notes and the soft warm wind bore whispered melody from the trees.

“ Such a night,” said Peter. “ And such a place.”

“ Mary loves this place.”

“ Yes,” said Peter. “ She loves water. I took her to St. James Park. It is the best in London. If I could bring her here——”

In that place he felt brave: St. George for courage.

“ Yes. If you could,” said Cynthia. “ Shall we sit? ”

They turned to a little white temple built for a bathing-house, and on a stone bench, brought from Italy, they sat. They were silent for some minutes. Both thought of Mary Dugdale.

At length Peter broke the silence, reciting from memory:

“ St. George, a Knight of Cappadocia, came over into a place called Lybia, where lived a King and people in much terror of a huge Dragon which demanded tribute. All things were offered to the worm, but he asked only the King's daughter. When the King saw he might no more do, he began to weep and said to his daughter, ‘ Now, I shall never see thine espousals. ’ Then returned he to his people and demanded eight days’

respite and they granted it him. And when the eight days' respite were passed they came to him and said, 'Thou seest the city perisheth!' Then did he so array his daughter like as she should be wedded and embraced her, kissed her and gave her his benediction and after led her to the place where the Dragon was. When she was there George passed by, and when he saw the lady he demanded the lady what she made there, and she said, 'Go your way, you fair young man, that ye perish not also.' Then said he, 'Tell to me what have ye. And why weep ye and doubt ye of nothing.' When she saw that he would know she said to him how she was delivered to the Dragon. Then said George, 'Fair daughter, doubt ye nothing hereof, for I shall help thee in the name of Jesus Christ.' She said, 'For God's love, good knight, abide not with me, for ye may not deliver me.' Thus as they spake together the Dragon appeared and came running to them. St. George was upon his horse and drew out his sword, and garnished him with the sign of the cross and rode hard against the Dragon, which came towards him: and smote him with his spear, hurt him sore, and after threw him to the ground. And after he said to the maid, 'Deliver to me your girdle and bind it about the neck of the Dragon, and be not afraid.' And when she had done so the Dragon followed her as it had been a meek beast and debonair."

Peter ceased, and at that moment the moon was hid behind a cloud, and the place where they sat was dark.

Mrs. Crewe echoed:

"'Go your way, you fair young man, that you perish not also.'"

Then she rose and they walked to the house. Peter asked her:

“Do you know where she is?”

“No more than you: but I suspect the Arun valley: always a refuge for her. You will come and see us again?”

“I will come to swim in the pool.”

“I want my husband to like you—as I do.”

“Thank you,” said Peter, astonished at his own simplicity.

Wilson was ready to go when they reached the house. Peter went in to be assisted into his coat by the footman, in whose demeanour he imagined greater respect.

Mrs. Crewe turned to Wilson:

“Such a dear boy.”

“You women,” said Wilson, “are an infernal nuisance. But without you nothing is done.”

That was all she had from him, but, knowing him, she found in the words all that she wished.

Peter wished her good-night, and they plunged forward into the darkness of the drive. The moon shone again and Peter enjoyed sweet melancholy while Wilson grumbled because the car went too fast for him to smoke.

Matilda was delighted on their return, partly because she knew biscuits would be forthcoming and partly because she had resented being deprived of her Peter.

They sat far into the night, Peter sipping a very mild whiskey and soda and throwing biscuits to clamouring Matilda, while Wilson walked up and down and round and round the room, occasionally throwing out a remark or an anecdote.

“Do you know John Levens?” he said.

"No—o," said Peter, fearful of displaying ignorance.

"I'd like you to know him," and Wilson turned and went upstairs, where Peter heard him in his study.

He returned with an old book in his hand and gave it to Peter.

"A Caxton."

"John Levens lives inside it."

Peter opened the book and found it to be a copy of *Legenda Aurea*, the Golden Legend, of Jacob de Voragine. Inside was written: "From all evill and mischief good Lord deliver us John Levens citizen Draper of London *John Levens*." On another leaf, whereon was engraven a woodcut of a horse, there was written in the same hand: "This booke doth lye as fast as a horse can trot."

"John Levens," said Wilson, "first taught me the value and place of literature."

"Yes," said Peter. "I am beginning to understand some of the things Mr. Cooper used to say."

"We'll publish some of his papers. I'll write an introduction."

Wilson resumed his meditation, pacing, and Peter rose to go to bed.

"Bassett-Crewe is willing to try you in November. He'll give you two hundred a year."

"Gosh," said Peter, and ran upstairs two at a time, Matilda after him.

She slept at his feet all night.

For long hours Peter lay awake building gorgeous palaces in Spain.



## VIII

WHEN Wilson had to return to town for the rehearsals of his comedy, Peter was transferred to Crosslands, for Mrs. Crewe thought that he should stay in the country as long as possible.

Peter, therefore, wrote to his Professor to explain his defection, and announced his projects for the autumn. The gentle philologist applauded the spirit of adventure and deplored the loss to science. He warmly commended Peter's work. Because he was, in his province, a very distinguished man, Peter was proud, and shewed the letter to Cynthia Crewe, who forthwith took it to her husband. He sent it to the curmudgeonly Sandilands, who had grumbled much at having a tyro thrust upon him, and had offended Mrs. Crewe by referring to her protégé as a "raw little prig."

Under the onslaughts of Sandilands, Bassett-Crewe had wavered until Cynthia, defending, had said:

"Of course, I suppose it is natural for the sandy ogre to wish to provide for that nephew of his, but the paper is yours."

Nepotism was odious to Bassett-Crewe, and he had insisted.

When, therefore, Peter took up his residence at Crosslands, by way of testing his worth and capacity he gave him secretarial work to do; and Peter was completely happy in feeling that he was doing something to justify his position in the house.

He had said to Wilson: "It is so comfortable," but living in the place he found the atmosphere good in its ease and security, and in the smooth running of its machinery. His admiration for Mrs. Crewe knew no bounds: her house, her gardens, her clothes, her children, her horses, her dogs, all were perfect. Here and there he learned what she had been to Mary Dugdale, and how much her friendship had done for the dear woman, and in a very sort time she had procured from him a complete unbosoming.

Thrilling to the fresh romance, Mrs. Crewe wrote to ask her friend to Crosslands to recuperate after the fatigue of long rehearsals. She made no mention of Peter's presence, and guessed rightly that secretive Wilson would not have uttered his name to her.

Mary came late on the Saturday evening when it chanced that Peter was away at the other end of the county.

Mrs. Crewe was romping with her children in the nursery, Hob, Patch, and Jane, all Mary-worshippers. They were Indians bringing tribute of flesh, skins and beads to Great White Squaw, impersonated by their mother sitting in a wigwam of a clothes-horse covered with a blanket, under a real totem pole. She smoked and muttered gibberish and sniffed at all their offerings. The Indians brought these with lamentable howls to express humility, and grovelled with "wallah-wallah-wallahs" of terror, while they waited upon the mood of the chieftainess. Did she scowl and raise her hand in menace, back flew the fierce hunters, Long-Eye, Silver-Birch, and Hugging Bear: yells upon yells of terror, then hysterical laughter and the game began again.

When Mary entered the room war had been declared

upon the cruel tyrant, and three redskins on the warpath, fully armed, and knife in mouth, were crawling on their bellies like serpents through the waving grasses of the limitless prairie, while Great White Squaw offered prayer and sacrifice to the Totem, bowing in abasement. For miles and miles the redskins crawled and Mary dropped on hands and knees, a scout to spy upon them. She smelt their tracks, and wrinkling her nose, said:

“Pah. Dogs of Cherokees.”

There was scouting, skirmishing, discovery, a despairing charge, the palissade scaled, death to the Great White Squaw, death to the slinking spy, capture of the token, pow-wow, dancing, and offering of bear steaks, bloody, to the War God. The camp was razed, then off again on the track of honey-bears.

Mary, as a honey-bear, was captured, killed, flayed and robbed of her claws for ornament: her corpse was searched for honey.

She protested through laughter, and tears of laughter that bears have no honey-bag.

Said Silver-Birch:

“Peter says they has. And Peter knows.”

The dead bear rose to her knees and looked reproach at Cynthia.

“He is here,” said Mrs. Crewe.

“Oh! Cynthia!” The mood for frolic was gone, and the children, sensitive to the destruction of atmosphere, stood anxiously and a little afraid. It was not like their Mary to spoil sport.

She knew what she had done, was sorry, and left the room.

Out into the garden she went and past beeches to the bathing-pool. She sat there in the little temple and

blamed herself and foolish Cynthia. Yet she rejoiced that Peter was a personage to Patch.

That "Peter knows" rang splendidly, for, though to Patch it might mean only the lore of honey-bears, to her, clutching at sympathy, Peter had knowledge direct from earth. He had written words for her so ridiculously true as to provoke tears, and tears of late came not too easily to Mary's eyes, not after the first wild shedding of them in this very place where now she sat.

On the stone seat she had flung herself and cried aloud, sending birds whirling and water fowl scuttering over the water's face. She remembered where a moorhen had flown, touching the water to arrowy streaks, to hurl itself into comfortable reeds far from the wailing creature: and where a tit had cocked a comic eye at her.

The memory of the tit brought a smile to her face, and she knew that that Mary was dead, and that her sorrows were dead with her.

The new Mary so far as she was known, the mystery of her unravelled, was whimsical, ironic, puzzled, waiting upon the event; more generous, more appreciative, glad of her friends as the old Mary had never been, glad of Cynthia, glad of the new kind Wilson, more silent and diffident than the old, glad of new-found Tessa, and very glad of Peter, who had seemed at first inevitable and then so easy to avoid.

After she had said to herself, "That was a girl—this is a woman," and again, at Mudeford and Beaulieu and Birpham in solitary days of pondering by gentle sea and river. "For Peter's sake. It is not fair to Peter."

And now—Peter! Fond Cynthia with her "Two and two make four" and easy plunging into romance had brought about this meeting desired, yet undesired of

both. She knew her Peter and vowed that he knew nothing of her coming, and so—and so—should she not go?

Cynthia came.

“Peter does not know?”

“That you are here? The boy is wild for you.”

“Then I must go.”

“You are happy, Mary?”

“How can I say?”

“You have so much.”

“All that you have I covet.”

“Peter wrote to me. I did not write to him. He says you brought him to the pool.”

“Yes. I said you loved it.”

“The hill.”

“I did not tell him.”

“He calls it ours. May I tell you? These are his words, dear words.”

Mary spoke them softly.

“‘I am still by the wonder of you dazzled, and yet so sure of foot on these heights of ours. Do you know that the hill, our hill, touches the farthest sky? It is dangerously near the sun, and at night we shall touch the stars. I have done it, and I thrust a finger into the moon, so that it came away all love-sweet. Oh! All this place cries aloud of you. Have you not made it? Am I good soil for seeds of kindness? I can be for the tending: there is at least that merit in youth.’”

She was silent.

“He is so young.”

“Oh! . . . Mary,” and Cynthia laid her hand on Mary’s, for she saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

"Poor Bertram came to see me."

"He dared."

"He had met Peter."

Cynthia smiled. "Peter told me."

"He asks now what I have never given him. If you could know the misery of it . . ."

"It has been so twisted for you."

"If Peter had come earlier . . ."

"What then?"

"I could have played the woman."

"There might have been. But Buntie says——"

(Buntie was an unexplained nickname given to Wilson and used by both women, all his friends and many impertinent acquaintances.)

"Buntie says that if we had the second chance we should do precisely the same. I should."

The thoughts of both flew to Cynthia's period of revolt, and the splendid lover long since dead.

"I am happy now," said Mrs. Crewe.

"Perhaps I shall be," said Miss Dugdale, and sighed.

The rushing motor came up to the house and they returned.

"The children adore Peter," said Cynthia.

"They must."

"He swims with them."

"I asked him once if he would swim for me."

"Your frock is charming."

Peter, knowing that he would be too late to romp with the children, had gone upstairs to see them in their beds and give them peppermint-creams, strictly contraband.

From his bed Hob cried:

"Give the countersign."

"A dark night and a heavy swell."

"All's well. Have you got the stuff?"

"A near squeak, touch and go, with the excise," said Peter.

"Give Jane some."

Peter filled opened mouths and sat upon Hob's bed. A story was demanded, and "Little Robert and the Owl" was received with favour.

"Did you make that story?"

"No."

Jane was indignant.

"Buntie makes all his stories."

"Buntie is four hundred years old," said Peter. "I am only fifty."

Hob was too old for kissing, and Patch from emulation was beyond it.

Peter kissed Jane and went down to the library to deal with the evening letters, arranging them in their piles of the important, the unimportant, and the silly.

He found one for himself from Mattie, re-addressed by Miss Bastable to him "*At Crosslands*," though he had given his address as care of William Bassett-Crewe, Esq. Miss Bastable was above all things genteel.

The letter was long, written from an hotel at Arles, where Mattie and her aunt had stayed entranced with the place. They had journeyed first through Normandy, Rouen, Falaise, Bayeux, St. Lo, Countances, Chartres.

"We saw the Cathedral at Chartres by moonlight. Auntie cried, and I was troubled. Oh! Peter, how you would love it! There is a kink in the aisle, and the windows——! Of course, they have ugly statues and pictures. I gave fifty centimes to St. Anthony and wished. They say he always gives, and there are tablets

on his pedestal, "Merci, Merci," and the date, mostly; I think, for the gift of children. There are always women, Auntie says, kneeling before him, and he has hundreds of candles."

All her letter was in this vein, some rapture, queer little stories, praise of her aunt, delight in new things, strange people, unpleasant English. From Normandy she jumped to the Loire: Angers with its dark towers, Tours, Blois, Chinon, Chenonceau, darling places. Then Provence and the sun: Nimes, Arles.

Mattie was curiously aloof, only in her postscript did she come near to old relations.

"Demeter is with me, but in travelling her head has broken off. What does it mean? Perhaps I shall be able to mend her."

Peter put the letter in his pocket, and went upstairs as the dressing-gong sounded. He met Crayes the footman.

"Is Mr. Crewe come back?"

"No, sir. Not till Monday."

"Thank you, Crayes."

Crayes bowed respectfully, to Peter's delight. It was a great joy to him to mark the growing deference of these mighty beings, though he never dared remonstrate with the second footman, who always spirited away his clothes for cleaning just when he wanted them.

He was surprised to see a light under the door of a bedroom near his own, and to account for it invented an absurd ghost.

"The ghost," he said, "of dead Demeter." He pursued the ghost through wild adventures, weaving them into lurid form for Cynthia's children on the morrow.

He found Mary seated in a low chair in the drawing-



room staring into the fire. Her back was towards him, and without turning she said:

“How do you do, Peter?”

In three strides Peter was across the room and by her side. He took her hand and kissed it, then knelt and she tugged at his hair.

“A brown Peter.”

“I am fat.”

“Young.”

“I am a little younger than Jane.”

“Here it is impossible to be old.”

“I love it—Crosslands. I had not dreamed of such places—and Cynthia.”

Mary was silent.

“Did she tell you I was here?”

“No, or I should not have come. Not so close to me, Peter.”

“Must I not?”

“No—over there.”

Peter in obedience moved to the other side of the fireplace, then he leaned forward.

“Have you heard of Nehemias Grew?”

“No.”

“A gardener. He was before Linnæus. Flowers have honey guides, spots of bright colour, heavy veining for the visitor. I watched them first that day when I met you in the Gardens. I had not then heard of Nehemias Grew, and did not know that the commonest flower is adjusted to the length of a butterfly’s leg or a bee’s tongue. I know. This is for you. Truth, Mary—truth. There is an elder-bush, Mary, where on midsummer night the king of the fairies holds his court, and they sport upon wild thyme. There was such

a moon three nights ago that they took it for midsummer, and I saw them. They drove me out because I was not with you. They——”

“Oh! Peter. You have said it all.”

“Again, then. Why did you go?”

“I should go now. I must, unless you promise.”

“I have your handkerchief.”

“Give it me.”

“It is in my room.”

He raced to fetch it, and with it brought the pink topaz necklace that had been Clara's. He tumbled both into Mary's lap and gave a shout of glee as she took the pretty thing in her hands. She looked troubled.

“Oh! Peter. This for me?”

“Yes. Did I not tell you? It was old Cooper's, in his desk. It was his Clara's.”

“It is so pretty.”

Mrs. Crewe, coming into the room, was called to admire, and Peter, as he had dreamed, clasped it about Mary's white throat.

“Some dreams are realised,” he said.

Romantic Cynthia divined his meaning and laughed aloud.

They were merry at dinner, but Peter was disturbed a little, for he had found yet another Mary—Mary with Cynthia: not less adorable than the others, but strange. A great lady, precious indeed, but remote: and though she smiled across at Peter sitting opposite to her, she was intangible.

Peter entertained them with reminiscences.

“We expect great things of you, Peter.”

“I am an egg,” he said, “which will prove addled from too much sitting.”

"You think we are broody hens."

"It is to be observed that I have no single friend of my own age."

To Mary this was calamitous, and this egoistic Peter was to her a new thing and a deplorable.

He added: "You see, I grow too fast," and was at once sorry, for Mary was so palpably hurt. She turned to Cynthia. Peter shrivelled and sat miserably making bread pills. It seemed that he had no concern with them, save that the nine pink topazes winked mockingly at him. He had counted to gain so much by the gift, but here he was beggared, and he thought:

"I have climbed into a class which is not my own. I cannot go back, and if they will not let me forward, then—if they ignore me, then—if it is certain that I am unworthy, then——"

What then was not quite clear—there was no leaping the obstacle—gloomier and gloomier in his thoughts he arrived finally at death, and with almost a sob in his voice he said:

"Demeter is dead."

Cynthia protested.

"My *dear* Peter."

In the most tragic voice Peter said:

"There is a legend of the myosotis of a lover who, gathering flowers for his lady, fell into a deep pool and threw a bunch at her feet, crying as he sank for ever from her sight 'Forget-me-not.'"

"She should have saved him," said Mary.

"Perhaps she did not love him," said Cynthia.

"I expect she could not swim," said Peter, who from hearing himself talk was beginning to emerge from his gloom. Mary, who had been seeking in herself the

cause of it, brightened, and for the rest of the meal they talked engaging nonsense.

"If only Buntie were here," cried Cynthia, and, at once leaping to the tactlessness of the remark, she rose and to atone ran and left them.

"To the hill," said Peter, and wrapped his Mary in a blue shawl, round her shoulders, over her hair and under her chin. He was near her and stared very hard at her lips.

"I have never kissed you."

"You must not."

"This night is ours."

"Say rather yours and mine."

"Together—ours."

"Yours and mine."

"In my letter I said 'Ours.'"

"For that I did not answer it."

"My arm," he said.

She took it and they scaled the hill where tall beeches grew.

"It is so dark," she said, and he led her to the edge where they looked across the valley and a sea of rising mists. Trees loomed and the chimneys of the house. From another hill there signalled comfortable lights.

"The glow worm's light is a signal to her lord—the lamp of Hero."

"I said—do you remember? Leander never came."

"There was a new Mary to-night."

"There are so many that you do not know."

"I will know them all."

"You may not."

"Oh. Let us go." She clutched his arm, and she was trembling. She was peering through the darkness

up at Peter. He stooped and gazed into frightened eyes.

"What is it?"

"This place—this place."

"What then? What then?"

"I am cold . . ."

Peter threw an arm round her.

"Warm, warm in a cold world," he whispered.

"Yes, yes. It is that. Cold, cold for love."

"Mine!" cried Peter, and enfolded her, stooped and met lips seeking his.

She beat with clenched fists on his breast, and ran from him. He spun round and flung himself on the soft beech mould and plunged his arms into the cool stuff and snuffed the scent of it. Then up he sprang, and after her to find her hugging a tree, crying, crying, crying . . . He leaped to her and embraced Mary and tree together.

Then "Hush," he said, and Mary feigned terror.

"They are there," he said. "The little people by the elder tree. See, see, see, glow-worm torches, silver lights dancing. How they dance, in and out and round about: elfin music, tiny elves. They dance to the rhythm of Mary's name. Mary, Mary, Mary. See the King there on a toad-stool, over there that great red toad-stool, and the Queen reclining in the spider's web in the heather clump."

"I see them. Oh! I see them."

Peter stooped, and held his closed hand to Mary. She listened.

"Oh! what is it?"

"A small goat-footed boy—an envoy. What does he say?"

"Just music."

"Well?"

"I cannot speak."

She was pale and swaying. Peter held her and forgot the game. He laid his cheek on hers and chafed her hands and came upon his ring.

"You wear it still?"

"It never leaves me."

"You are cold. Let us walk."

Out of the woods they walked and down a lane until they came to the brow of a hill whereunder a great fire blazed, shewing by its light a hut, a smoking heap, and a black figure moving.

"A charcoal burner," said Peter. "Shall we ask his blessing also?"

"The first human thing," said Mary, and so delighted Peter that he took her in his arms again and kissed her.

"You are warm again."

"I have hugged you close." They ran hand in hand until they came to the charcoal burner, who stayed in his work and stood scowling, blinking, filthy of face and uncouth of manner, at this strange casting forth of the night, a lady and a gentleman in fine raiment, washed and washed to unimagined clearliness. He turned and slaked his heap.

"Have you a name?" said Peter.

"Smoky Wootten's what they call me. Christened Thomas."

"You live here?"

"In the woods. Wood's my living, and Bessie's and the baby's."

"A baby?" Mary hugged Peter's arm. Smoky Wootten jabbed with his thumb in the direction of the

hut. And on the instant Mary flew, her skirts gathered up. Smoky Wootten's eyes followed her.

"That's a fine wench," he said, and spat on his heap.

Mary called to Peter, and he went. She had found the mother suckling the baby, and, when it was fed, had taken it in her arms while the little woman hovered anxiously. The baby slumbered in Mary's arms, who, on Peter appearing, cried to him:

"Its feet, Peter. Its dear feet, the toes of it and the little dimpled heel."

"I like the creases where its ankles ought to be. Does it know yet whether it is a girl or a boy?"

"A boy, sir," said the woman.

"Liberal or Conservative?"

Mary laughed. Her face was radiant as she held the tiny creature, and with her hand caressed its feet.

"A real, real, real wild baby, born in the woods."

"All babies," said Peter, "are wild. They grow on tree tops."

Mary kissed the baby and restored it to its mother.

"Has it a name yet?"

"We thought of Thomas."

"Call it Peter."

"My godchild?"

Mary flung out her hands to him, and he kissed them. He had half a sovereign in his pocket, and gave it to the woman as they left. They bade Smoky Wootten good-night as they passed, and he swore at them. As they climbed the slope they heard the woman come crying:

"Tom, Tom. It's gold. He gave me gold. They're lovers." Smoky Wootten took the piece and bit it, then thrust it in his pocket.

"They're mad, them gentlefolk. Mad. Twins next, old girl: and let the old heap look to herself."

Peter and Mary wandered further through meadows. He burst into song.

"I have seen Mary, real golden Mother-Mary."

From her there came only the sound of a sob stifled, and while Peter sang softly she spoke no word.

They turned presently, and found the road that should take them to the gate of Crosslands. A heavy shambling figure passed them and growled "Good-night." Peter put out a hand to hold him for the exchange of philosophy, but the man thrust him off with an oath, and plunged into the darkness at a trot.

It was Smoky Wootten hurrying to the village and beer.

"Are you wearied, Mary?"

Such a mournful voice came:

"It has been too much."

"Oh! I am sorry."

He held her so that he bore much of her weight.

At the house, she said:

"Good-night, dear, dear Peter."

"So early?"

"I will not see Cynthia."

"Cynthia will be glad."

"You must not tell her."

"Then you——"

"Yes. What there is to tell."

"Demeter's ghost. I told you Demeter was dead. She has lost her head. I think she must have found Demophon dead."

"The cat?"

"No. The baby that she nursed."



"I do not understand."

"Neither do I. Some day I will explain for you—and for myself."

"Good-night, then."

"Good-night. Is Cynthia to know nothing? She made it possible."

"No—nothing."

"Then I shall tell Jane."

"Her you may. Good-night."

"Good-night."

He held her hand.

"Really good-night now."

He released her. Then would have held her but she fled laughing.

Peter entered the drawing-room, and without a word sat at the piano. With one finger he played the air of a chant.

"A freezing melody," said Cynthia.

"That," said Peter, "is the Litany of the Virgin Mary. I heard it once in the Cathedral at Westminster. It is very pleasing and almost induced me to take an eremite's vow."

"What is an eremite?"

"An eremite," said Peter, "is a person who has never seen the King of the Fairies sitting on a toad-stool."

"Have you seen him to-night?"

"I may not tell you," said Peter, and Cynthia smiled as she poked the fire.

"Mary has gone to her room," said Peter, and Cynthia smiled again. She thrust at a bubble of tar in a great coal.

"My husband is very pleased with you, Peter."

Peter endeavoured to look modest.

"He talks of having you for secretary."

"I would rather write for his journal."

"You can do both. You will earn more. If you will do that you must live near us."

"Leave Gordon Square?" Peter was up and standing over her in a moment.

"It is out of the way, and if you are going to belong to us——"

"If? I do."

This sudden hoisting to security almost took Peter's breath away. The interview with Sandilands had discouraged him, and he had not dared to contemplate the future. These weeks of happiness at Crosslands had made the survey of it more than ever bitter. It had opened up new ground, new lands of rich promise, and though he was not lacking in confidence in himself, yet he had been led in these great days to insist in self-dissection on those qualities which he lacked rather than on those which he had.

"Perhaps," said Cynthia, "I should have said nothing to you until my husband made you an actual proposal, but I am so grateful to you."

This embarrassed Peter, who thought that gratitude must be from his side. He picked up a bluebird from the mantelpiece, and reading the inscription, said:

"What is a grünspecht?"

"You are delightfully irrelevant. You have made Mary happier than I have known her for years. She is almost as I first knew her."

Peter took refuge in sarcasm.

"It is an earth-shaking event."

"Every event is earth-shaking."

"Yes," said Peter. "There was once a widow-woman

of great cleanliness and unimpeachable respectability, for she was of the middle class. Being poor, her children must attend the public elementary school. One day she found a louse in her daughter's hair, and the whole world burst into flames, and was consumed."

"Oh!" said Cynthia, shocked.

"It is a parable," said Peter. "An earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

Then he sat down, and because Mrs. Crewe looked so kind he plunged into confidence, and told her all the Mattie story. When it was finished, with the recounting of the breaking of Demeter, because she was silent, he said suddenly:

"How old is Mary?"

She, startled into truth, said, "Thirty-one."

Peter, at his most whimsical, rejoined:

"She is not old enough to be my mother."

He waited still for comment.

All she said was as she stroked his head—he was sitting at her feet—"There is yet no practical issue to discuss. It is time for bed."

"If only," said Peter, "I had had a mother like you."

"If only," said she, "my Hob may grow a little like you."

As Peter reached the door she said:

"Mr. Wilson is forty-four."

The remark filled Peter with dismay. Passing the door of Miss Dugdale's room, he saw that she was not yet asleep, and he had an insane desire to call to her:

"Mr. Wilson is forty-four."

He controlled the impulse, and as he traversed the few yards of the corridor to his own little room he

thought: "He is forty-four. Just twice my age. That he will never be again."

This reflection struck him as enormously clever, and he chuckled. As he turned the handle of his door he heard a door open, and looking up he saw Mary emerge fully dressed in morning costume, and pass along in the direction of the great room where Mrs. Crewe slept. He would have cried out to her, but words would not come. He found that he was trembling, and, putting his hand to his forehead, that a cold sweat had broken out upon it.

He passed into his room, but did not turn up the lights. The moon had risen and pale beams streamed in through the window. The night was insufferably hot, and he lay fully dressed on his bed cogitating the events of the evening. He conjured up an image of Mary, first Mary young as in the early portrait in Greenfield's room: then Mary as she had been in the little brougham more than five years ago; then the Mary of the stage: the Mary as he had first known her: the Mary of the bridge in St. James Park: the Mary of the hill when for the first time he had kissed her: and last the Mary he had just seen walking along the corridor. How bravely she walked! Gallant! He had the comfort of finding the right word. He turned to all that he knew of her, all that scandal had said of her, and all that he had discovered. That she had been unhappy was easily dismissed: that she was still the wife of the wretched man in Half Moon Street mattered not at all: but beyond that lay a region unexplored, mysterious, baffling, terrifying. Peter's brain whirled, and his breathing came heavily. He thrust and thrust at the thing. It was like walking into a myriad of spiders' webs. He tore away and perceived this one word:

“Wilson!”

Over and over again there buzzed to the air of the Litany of the Virgin Mary:

“Wilson is forty-four. Good Lord deliver us!”

Peter remembered the occasion when he had wished to strike the man, and had carefully chosen the spot between the eyes. He clenched his fist now and struck out at the visualised face hanging in the air, as old Cooper's face had hung that first day in the shop. His fist smashed right through it, and Peter dashed his knuckles against the wall.

“This will never do,” he said, and strove to bring himself to ecstasy by murmuring “Mary! Mary! Mary!” In vain. His lips were parched, and he moistened them with his tongue. Slowly these words framed themselves in his mind:

“Do I really want the woman?”

He shrank from the question, and refused to find the answer to it. He evaded it by framing another more general.

“Do I really want any woman?” This again was avoided by a further question, and yet more and more and more.

“Does any man want any woman, or any woman any man? Are these wild flashes more than things of a moment? Why? Why? Why? Does Podge Newhall really want my sister? How long would Bond want his—his wife if he could have her? Why do men and women live hideously together?”

There came back to his mind that memorable utterance of his father's in the parlour behind the shop.

“You to talk. You're any man's woman.” Then the questions buzzed again.

“Is not every woman any man’s woman? Is not every man any woman’s man? Why property? Why impossible pledges? Why pretend so much that is obviously false? Why build upon a lie and call it sacred? Why do lies kill loving kindness? Why? Why? Why? and why again? What does she want of me? What can I give her that she has not already tasted bitterly? What am I to her, or she to me?”

Peter groaned and rolled from his bed. A cool, moist wind came in at the window, heavy clouds were in the sky, and over beyond the hills was black menace. In the thick air the little wind seemed a thin stream.

He lit his candle and caught sight of himself in a mirror.

“Damned ugly I am,” he said.

The wind shrieked suddenly and blew his candle out. The curtains bellied up into the room. He undressed and dressed again in his blue-serge suit, then tottering and afraid he crept downstairs and out at the door.

He looked up and saw a light in the window of Mrs. Crewe’s room, but in none other. There was a crack in the sky like the tearing of cloth—lightning flickered, then thunder rolled. A heavy drop of water spattered on to his forehead.

Mary appeared at the window to look out and up at the sky. She made some remark which Peter could not catch. A flash of lightning illumined her face. She looked marvellously beautiful.

Peter sobbed, and, stooping, he picked up a clod of earth and threw it at her. It struck the tiles of the wall ten feet below the window, was shattered, and tinkled down into a gutter and on to the ground.

The rain came, swooping, and in a trice Peter’s

clothes were soaked and heavy. A glorious warmth filled him, and he turned and ran, ran blindly through the park up through heavy lanes, past farms and cottages, stumbling, slipping, falling, blundering into thorny bushes, spattering mud, tearing his clothes, up and up to Blackdown Hill, where at the summit he came to a little temple of pine trees growing at the edge. Here he fell and lay in the wild weather, sobbing, sobbing, because he was so miserably alone.

Presently he stood on the height looking down over the wide valley, over the downs towards the sea, butting with his head against the tearing wind. He blotted Mary and all questions from his mind and fell back upon low oaths and pothouse words. He climbed to the tall crest of a tree and hung there swaying to the wind. Two trees hard by had grown together, and they screeched. The wide rhythm of the swaying and the storm soothed him, and he shouted greeting to each flash and hail to every crashing thunder, and the wind swept the tiny notes from his lips as he uttered them. Branches were wrenched from his tree, but he clung there crying aloud. He saw great trees fall to the ground and stones, wood, and earth hurled through the air.

The storm passed and stars shone again. Peter clambered from his tree, and down the hill he leaped, great flights, until he came to the pool. Here he stripped and bathed, and after ran naked through the park.

He stole up to his room again as dawn was peeping. He slept heavily.

It was a wretched and sorry Peter who crept down to breakfast at a late hour. Near the door of the dining-room he sneezed violently and realised that he had a very severe cold. When he opened his mouth to pro-

nounce the morning greeting there issued only a grotesque rattling noise which brought tears to his eyes.

Mrs. Crewe prescribed quinine before breakfast and dosed him.

He noticed that breakfast was only laid for two, and that Mrs. Crewe had already come to the end. He was more than usually taciturn and munched in silence.

Her first thought was for his cold, then only for the hurt she had to deal him. She watched him until he became conscious of her scrutiny and fidgeted irritably. Decidedly he was unwell, and she was solicitous for him. She observed that he tasted his food, then thrust it away, sipped his coffee and left that too. Without his usual polite request, he began to smoke, and that she took for the worst sign of all. He rose and stood looking gloomily out the window at the glorious day, then came and stood by the empty fireplace as though he hoped to gain warmth. She noticed, too, that he had cut himself in shaving. He sneezed again, so that his whole body shook, and he clutched the mantelpiece to steady himself again, and, his right hand sawing the air, he swept a photograph of Mary to the hearth. The glass of its frame was shattered, and it lay there face downwards. Cynthia could bear it no longer. She went to him and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Mary has gone," she said.

"I'm not going to cry about it," growled Peter, and sneezed again. "I threw a clod at her last night."

The whole thing was so ridiculous, Mary's second flight from a boyish lover, his cold and sneezing only made matters worse, and Cynthia, desiring to offer sympathy, was hard put to it not to laugh.



"You may," said Peter.

"What?"

"You may laugh. I'm too young, and youth is food for laughter. It is so—so fluffy."

He stroked his chin as though to reassure himself that his beard grew in strong stiff bristles. Then he sneezed again, and after blinking away the tears his eyes looked up into Cynthia's and found such kindness there that the bitterness in him died.

"Did she say anything about—about me?"

"Shall we go out into the sun?" They went out, she seeing that Peter donned a hat—a Homburg of Bassett-Crewe's that nearly extinguished him—and while they walked up and down on the eastern terrace she told him how Mary had come to her happy and unhappy, —laughter bubbling through tears—how she told her of their wonderful walk together and their coming upon the charcoal burner and his baby.

"It was that, then?" said Peter.

"It was because of what you said. You are so young."

"I understand that."

"It is because you understand so much, and yet not enough that she has gone."

"When did she go?"

"Early this morning. I lent her the car."

"I am not—not to see her again."

"She will not forget you."

"Ha! Ha!" The bitterness swelled in Peter, but was gone on the instant.

"It is better so. You have to grow."

"I am still tiny man, then?"

This puzzled Cynthia. Peter offered no explanation.

"You have given her, Peter, a knowledge of herself and—oh! wonderful things."

"To me," said Peter, "she is Woman. If she is cruel I must accept as I would the cruelty of the earth, or the wind on the sea. The gift I bring to her is tiny, by the acceptance of it alone she makes it and me great. She is——"

He sneezed here, and when he groped for the thread of poetry it was gone.

"I am your friend, Peter," said Cynthia.

"In your eyes I am an ass."

"No, no."

"You know everything. I must seem an ass. I must go."

She protested further, but he clung doggedly to his point, insisted on the sulky wearing of long ears, and in the end she let him go, upon a promise that he would write to her, and would be careful to avoid serious consequences of his chill, and, when in the autumn she returned to town, he would let her find a residence for him near their house in Park Street.

There were loud lamentations in the nursery, for the children saw at once the non-fulfillment of certain dazzling promises of adventure that Peter had rashly made.

Peter wired to Miss Bastable, and, coming from the houses of the rich (Crosslands was a "stately home of England" for the purposes of popular magazines), he received a welcome and a subsequent consideration from her, which he found embarrassing and made him postpone till the last possible moment the announcement of his departure from her hospitable roof.

He made no attempt to see Miss Dugdale, and wrote

to her only a few words to let her know that he had discussed the matter of themselves with kind Cynthia. To this she replied with three words:

“Thank you, dear.”

He was glad then that he had given her the necklace, and that she had old Adam's ring.

He thought much about these trinkets in the intervals of the very thorough revision for his examination, to which he applied himself in his little room at the top of the house, and he decided one day to go to visit the old man and incidentally the bird-dealer, the father of the now more than ever celebrated dancer.

He found an enormous crowd outside the shop-windows, and the bird-dealer, fat and bursting with pride and pleasure. His daughter had definitely broken with him, and had given him a sum of money with which he had bought a large ape in a specially constructed glass box. This he had in the window, where the animal lay under a sack gibbering at the curious crowd.

“All but talk, he can,” said the enthusiastic man. “Eat! He can eat like a human. Tuck a napkin round his neck and you wouldn't know him from the Lord Mayor o' London.”

He took Peter inside and whispered confidentially in his ear.

“I'm teaching him to go to bed.”

Then he exhibited the tiny bed he had made, a bed in the fineness of its detail more magnificent than any at Crosslands, more splendid even than that on which Peter had sat while Tessa went through her elaborate toilette.

“Get 'im to do that, an' we'll go on the 'Alls. Fifty a week they'll give 'im, that's more than any of the fools

out there gapin' at 'im 'll git, not if they lives to be as old as Methoosalem."

"The comment on humanity," said Peter, "is needlessly cruel."

"Jane's only gittin' twenty," said the bird-dealer, and Peter, as he marked the glitter in his little eye, remembered the day when the same man had driven his daughter from the shop.

To avoid further unpleasant reflection, Peter explained the purpose of his visit.

"Old Adam," said the bird-dealer mournfully. "Gone."

"Not——?" said Peter.

"Not 'im. 'E'll never die. That sort o' stringy old man never does, just to spite their relations. No. 'E's in the country, like 'e was always talkin' about."

Peter was glad to hear this.

"It was Miss Dugdale, sir."

Peter started.

"'Er what was 'ere when you come that last time. Bought a cat, she did. In she walked fresh as a new lily, Mr. Davies, sir, an' with 'er Mr. Murray Wilson. They asks arter the old chap, an' up they goes to see 'im, an' off they takes 'un to an almshouse near Guildford. Thought the old chap would 'a died wi' the excitement of it. Not 'im—they don't die—not that stringy sort."

"How long ago?" said Peter.

"Matter o' five months."

"Much obliged," said Peter, and declined to be shown the other new treasures of the place.

He rejoiced in his friends, his Mary and Wilson. Wandering vaguely, he found himself standing in

Shaftesbury Avenue in front of the shop over which he had once been so proud to see in white letters on a green ground the legend: Cooper and Davies. Memories thronged in him, and as he stood there he could clearly see old Adam shivering and shaking in his old green overcoat over the book-boxes as the boy Peter had jostled against him. He remembered the pride in him that the old man had shared with Cooper, X. Cooper of the large red nose, the great eye and little eye, and the enormous kindness.

“No wasted Cooper, no Peter Davies,” he said again, though with a humility that was impossible for him at the time when he had coined the saying.

He wondered how the Beasley family were progressing in the colonies; and Tessa—Tessa must be happy: was she not with Mary?—and the journalist, and the little milliner who had signed old Cooper’s will: and Demophon—alas, long since presumed dead.

There were signs that the rooms above the shop were occupied as business premises; possibly, Peter thought, they housed the various nefarious concerns which brought profit to the half-caste barber.

Putting his hand up to his hair at the thought of the barber, Peter found that it needed cutting, and went into the shop.

The half-caste was there, no feature of his villainous face perceptibly altered. He had assistants no less villainous.

It was as Peter had thought. The rooms upstairs were occupied by the half-caste, for they communicated with the shop (enlarged by the removal of the parlour wall) by a circular iron staircase up which now a lean dark man, with eyes too close together, went with a nod

and a smile to the barber. He was a famished-looking creature, out at elbows, wolfish, and his smile was not pleasant. He had one tooth at the side, just showing in the grin, crowned with gold. The gleam of it was oddly familiar to Peter, who stood staring up at his back, whereon the seams of the coat were worn, its elbows shining. The back also was familiar. He disappeared, and Peter demanded to have his hair cut.

The half-caste did not recognise him, and was servile in his attentions to so elegant a gentleman. He left the little shop-boy on whom he was operating to the mercies of an apprentice, and himself attended to this distinguished head of hair. Without much encouragement from Peter, who was busily endeavouring to place the man with the gleaming tooth, he ran through the range of tonsorial conversation, the weather, horse-racing, the last music-hall sensation, the doings of the colonial cricketers then making the tour of the country, and the advisability of a singe and shampoo. Peter was hot on the scent of the tooth man, and because he could not locate him, except vaguely in South London, where he might have been seen in the street or in the train, he at length asked the half-caste. The barber looked anxiously at Peter's boots, then said:

"Oh, that! that's Parson George. He works here upstairs."

Parson! That was it. Peter had him now.—Wolverton, the scoundrelly curate who had lodged with his aunt and finally had married and disappeared with her.

He asked no more, but decided to wait until the man should descend again. To that end he had himself shaved, shampooed, singed, manicured—though the half-caste

was no adept in this last. At length, at the end of all the operations, the man appeared again and sneaked out of the shop. Peter flung the barber half-a-crown, and ran after him. He touched his arm, and the man swung round, raising his arm as if to ward off a blow. Then, with his little red-rimmed eyes, he stared at Peter, and seemed to be taking stock of the quality of his clothes. He grinned nervously, and the tooth gleamed. Peter was beginning to find that he had nothing to say to the man, and a sort of nervousness seized him. They stood on the edge of the pavement grinning absurdly at each other.

Peter put out a hand, which the other took with a dirty paw. Presently Peter found words:

“You are Mr. Wolverton?”

Peter’s hand was dropped and the man was for shambling off. This angered Peter and roused obstinacy in him. He hitched his shoulders in his old way, and said again:

“You *are* Mr. Wolverton.”

“My name is Kelly.”

“Parson George,” said Peter.

The man cringed.

“When I knew you,” said Peter, “your name was Wolverton.”

“I was born Wolverton,” said the man, and seemed to be searching in his memory.

“You—you’re not young Scott?”

“David?” said Peter. “No. You—you are my uncle.”

“Young Davies?”

Peter nodded, and the man seemed dumbfounded. He took Peter’s arm and led him to a bar which bore

the homely title of "Aunty's." Wolverton would not hear of Peter's paying for drinks, but borrowed half-a-crown of him to do so. There was cheese and biscuits on the counter, and these the wretched man ate as though he were hungry. He drank to Peter's good health, as is the custom in such places, and then launched into a tale of woe. He seemed to be trying to justify himself in Peter's eyes. He had retained a certain amount of self-respect, for he was shaved and his linen, though frayed, was clean. What Peter found most pitiful in the man was that his voice had not altogether lost its parsonic tone, and in his bearing there was the subtle swagger which is in all ministers of all sorts of religion. Finally he asked Peter point blank if he could not find him work, since the post of jackal or racing tout to the half-caste was both distasteful and unremunerative.

On this Peter made inquiry for his aunt. Mr. Wolverton adjusted his black tie, and in a melancholy tone proclaimed her death three months ago.

"We went down and down," said Mr. Wolverton. "I was glad that she died."

He said this with such sincerity in pity for the woman whom he had ruined that Peter was sorry for him, too. He gave him what money he had, and left him murmuring thanks and thanks, and wishes for the best of luck.

Peter came away from this encounter with a bad taste in his mouth. It was an unpleasant reminder of the world from which he had escaped, all the more unpleasant from the thought that there must have been a time when this same degenerate parson had known life as sweet as that at Crosslands. It came as a contrast and reminded him of that which once had been ever present



in his thoughts—the insecurity of livelihood of the greater part of humanity.

In writing of the adventure to Mrs. Crewe, he said:

“To understand humanity it is necessary to know the difference between five shillings and half-a-crown.”

He was pleased with this phrase, and used it on more than one occasion. He presented it to Mr. Scott, whom he visited in order to tell him of the letter he had received from Mr. Bassett-Crewe offering him the post of secretary at a salary of two hundred and fifty pounds a year, with opportunity to write as much as Sandilands would take for the new journal. This was a fortune, and Peter went to his friend as much to crow as to render account of himself.

David was better, and was soon to be sent into the country to spend two years in studying for the Indian Woods and Forests Service, which had been pitched on as providing a suitable career for a healthy and not over-studious young man. They had had good accounts of Peter from Wilson. He was warmly greeted, and Mrs. Scott showed him various photographs and trifles which Mattie had sent home from her travels.

Peter was irritated to discover that he found the Scotts rather dull and narrow. He disliked himself for it, but could not make headway. He seemed to have developed a new sense of humour which was unintelligible to them. He made several remarks which had been very successful with the Bassett-Crewes and their circle, but here they fell absolutely dead. He struggled manfully, however, and Mrs. Scott was charmed with him.

“My dear,” she said, when Peter was gone, “how he has improved!”

Peter, away in his room, was thinking the matter out, and leaped suddenly on the discovery that Wilson in that house was entirely different from the Wilson who was called "Buntie" by innumerable friends and admirers. He remembered also that much the same thing had happened in him with regard to Janet Fildes when he had first been drawn into the Scott circle. He hated that it should happen, but he recognised the inevitability of it, and he devoutly hoped that the thing might not happen with regard to Crosslands. The prospect of developing a sense of humour which should cut him off from that was too ghastly to contemplate.

He took down a Latin text and a note-book, but he found himself thinking hazily of Mattie, and Nehemias Grew, and bees.

"Decidedly," he thought, "I have not left Mattie behind. Odd! Nehemias Grew said that it was necessary for pollen to reach the stigma of a flower in order that it might set fertile seed. Fertile?—do we only live for fertility?—Bees kill the drones—Bees—Bees—Bees—Buzzing—Mattie and Bees. What has she to do with bees? Mattie is in France: besides, I'm in love with Mary—— Am I not in love with Mary? I am. I swear I am—she's married: married to a bee—ha! ha! Bee in my bonnet. . . ."

He rose chuckling at his little joke, and thinking that any joke is good enough for oneself. From his bookshelf he took a book on bees and bee-keeping that had been in the shop and he had kept without quite knowing why, for he had never yet read a page of it.

He opened it now haphazard and read: "All variations which render the blossoms more attractive, either by scent, colour, size of corolla or quantity of nectar,

make the insect visit more sure and therefore the production of seed more likely. Thus the conspicuous blossoms secure descendants which inherit the special variations of their parents, and so, generation after generation, we have selections in favour of conspicuous flowers, where insects are at work. Their appreciation of colour, because it has brought the blossoms possessing it more immediately into their view, and more surely under their attention, has enabled them, through the ages, to be preparing the specimens upon which man now operates: he taking up the work where they have left it, according to his own rules of taste and developing a beauty which insects alone could never have evolved. His are the finishing touches, his the apparent effects: yet no less is it true that the results of his floriculture would never have been attainable without insect-helpers. It is equally certain that the beautiful perfume and the nectar also are, in their present development, the outcome of repeated insect selection: and here, it seems to me, we get an inkling of a deep mystery: Why is life, in all its forms, so dependent upon the fusion of *two* individual elements? Is it not that thus the door of progress has been opened? If each *alone* had reproduced itself all-in-all, advance would have been impossible; the insect and human florists and pomologists, like the improvers of animal races, would have had no platform for their operation, and not only the forms of life, but life itself would have been stereotyped unalterably, ever mechanically giving repetition to identical phenomena."

Peter shut the book and said aloud:

"A dull writer."

Then he plunged again into his reverie.

“What is a pomologist? Two hundred and fifty pounds a year. . . . Health, wealth, what more for happiness? Mary, Mattie—odd! Strange. I cannot call to mind Mattie’s face: but for Mary, I can see her in every moment in which I have known her: her attitude, her gestures, the fold of her dress, the expression of her eyes, almost I can reconstruct the thoughts she had at such and such a time in such and such a place; almost, but not quite, for there is always the inmost holy unattainable, even for the most beloved. And yet, and yet, she ran from me—I am what? Too young—too little experienced—‘Go your way, you fair young man!’ Heuh! It’s true: young and too clever. Rubbish! One can’t be too clever, but one can have the wrong sort of cleverness. When—when—when—she is marvellous, but she is not great like—like Jane, Evening Glory Jane—she is what I choose to make her, and—and if I am big enough I can make her more and more glorious. She’s afraid—that’s it: she’s afraid. . . . Not the end of it: only the beginning—there is never an end to anything—and—and death is only another beginning.”

This reflection so startled him, coming as it did in the midst of his muddled thoughts, that it effectually woke him up, and he found himself having bitten his thumb until it bled. Up went his hand to his forelock, and he paced up and down the room, turning the phrase this way and that for scrutiny and to see it in all lights. It was so ridiculously simple as to appear almost preposterous—and certainly appalling.

“I don’t know,” said Peter aloud, and those three words struck him as really the most comfortable that had ever occurred to him.

He turned to a mass of papers on his writing-table and began to peruse them.

Wilson had been actively engaged with the preparation of the Cooper papers for publication. It had been impossible to discover any relation of the old man, and he had applied to the Townsend family, who, searching among their archives, had found a number of documents relating to the unhappy George. It was proposed that Wilson should write a preface and Peter a personal memoir of the old man, and the Townsend material had been handed over to him. He had resolved not to touch them until his examination was over, but now that his mind was full of old Cooper, Peter found the temptation irresistible.

The papers were docketed and indexed. They covered several years. There were letters exchanged by the two men: letters from great personages and men in high places; from women; from artists and men of letters; newspaper articles of a political character, and a draft scheme for a society which was to procure liberty and equality, universal franchise, and the remodelling of the social order.

Peter read this very carefully and was startled to find it so unlike the Cooper he had known; for it had the tendency of modern socialism to ignore the human factor. It was bureaucratic.

The discovery of Cooper the ridiculous reformer was almost as startling as the discovery of Cooper the impassioned lover. Peter took it very sensibly as a warning, and all his life he had a horror of upstart intellect.

Peter had just happened upon a letter from a great actor to George Townsend when there came a knock at the door.

He invited entry, and was more than surprised when there rushed into the room Mr. Lawrence Greenfield and Mr. Beaumont Scholes. Mr. Greenfield was his suave smooth self, but the poet had a wild eye and his hair was tossed and tangled. He stood nervously, shifting from one foot to another, until Peter could bear it no longer, and insisted on their sitting. They sat, Greenfield in the velvet chair, Scholes in the farthest corner of the room. Peter offered them cigarettes and apologised for the absence of alcohol. Then he waited for them to explain the visitation.

"He won't see us," said Greenfield, "and my sister refuses to do anything."

"I am in the dark," said Peter.

Mr. Scholes took from his pocket a copy of the journal to which he was a weekly contributor and gave it to Greenfield, who handed it to Peter. They watched him narrowly as he read it.

"Am I to applaud the style or the taste of it?" said Peter.

"It was—was just a joke," said Greenfield with a little nervous laugh.

Peter was too angry to say anything. The article was an attack on Wilson's forthcoming comedy, written obviously without knowledge of its character, and contained a brief and subtly warped history of Miss Dugdale's marriage, based on information which Scholes could only have obtained from Greenfield.

"Well?" said Peter.

"He has instituted proceedings. The paper can't afford it."

"It is undoubtedly libellous."

"We will apologise."

"The mischief is done."

"It was just a joke," said Scholes.

"You will see him?" said Greenfield.

"What can I do?"

"It will do no one any good to take it into open court."

Peter turned to his papers again and refused either to hear or speak more. The unhappy young men looked at each other uneasily, tried argument, threats, flattery, but all to no purpose. In the end they went.

Peter waited until they had gone, and then went to Wilson's rooms, found him out, and stayed talking to Matilda until he came in. He had not seen Matilda since his return from Crosslands and had a good deal to say to her. She listened with most sympathetic interest, more especially, it seemed to Peter, to the information concerning Mary.

Wilson greeted Peter more warmly than he had ever done, and Peter was glad.

"I have never taken any notice of such things," said Wilson, when Peter told him of his visitation.

"I suppose the thing sold."

"Oh, yes! The public is greedy of scandal.

"What an odious period we live in!"

"Vulgarity is not a special quality of this that we call the age of commerce. There was a gentleman called Catullus who declaimed against his contemporaries in these words:

"*O saeculum insipien et inficetum!*"

"An age without judgment and without taste," Peter translated. "They are counting on the publicity of it for advertisement."

"I think," said Wilson, "they will not go on with

it. The process of the law is too costly. They will settle out of court, but I shall carry it on until there is a thumping bill of costs. That sort of muck-rake man will always find a living."

"But Greenfield! . . ."

"That sort of man either marries a woman with money or the capacity of earning it, or he drifts to the colonies."

The subject was distasteful, and they turned to the Townsend papers, while Peter narrated all that he had discovered.

Peter rose to go.

"I am glad that Crewe is to take you—free-lancing is deadly work."

"Yes," said Peter, "I am glad."

"That is a nice jewel you gave Miss Dugdale. She is to wear it in my play."

On that Peter left, after condoling with Matilda, who had been cherishing a hope that he had come to take her for a walk.

As he walked home, turning over this desultory conversation, Wilson's last remark struck fire. It occurred to Peter that this was the first time he had ever volunteered a remark concerning Miss Dugdale, and the circumstance seemed unaccountably ominous.

He went back over the whole affair, remembering scenes, actions, snatches of letters, conversations, and everything converged in the most ridiculous fashion on that remark of Mrs. Crewe's:

"Mr. Wilson is forty-four."

That was impassable. Peter tried to scale it, but it rose the higher: to circumvent it, it ran endlessly. He knew that on the other side of it lay solution, but the



character of the hidden thing defied imagination. "The age of a man is a hard fact," said Peter. "It baffles thought."

In Piccadilly he saw a match-seller with a nose larger than his own. For that he gave the man threepence.

He was sensitive about his nose ever since the Crewe children, drawing his portrait, had each given him a nose like that of the celebrated idiot of the early nineteenth century. He had never told man or woman the story of the urchin in Southwark who had first drawn his attention to its dimensions.

## IX

THE new Wilson comedy was produced with triumphant success.

Peter was present at the production in Mrs. Crewe's box. He dined with her first in the delightful house in Park Street.

They both thoroughly enjoyed the play, and Peter succeeded in forgetting Mary the woman in Miss Dugdale the delicious actress, so much so that it seemed odd to see her wearing his necklace. She was certainly a delightful artist, though she had not the compelling force of Evening Glory Jane, but she was so neat in her method and so sure and tactful, that to watch her was sheer pleasure. The evening was a triumph for her, and as she appeared for the sixth time in answer to vociferous calls, Peter saw that there were tears in her eyes, and she was trembling and overwrought. He shouted with the best, but was struck dumb when she looked up at him and bobbed a curtsey in his direction. The illusion was shattered and he was left only with the desire to catch the elusive woman.

As Peter helped Mrs. Crewe into her motor-car she said to him:

"I have found your rooms, but you are not to see them until they are furnished."

With that she drove off, and Peter was left with murmured protestations and thanks on his lips.

He stayed lurking in the little knot of people by the stage door, and saw Mary come out on Wilson's arm,

He saw Wilson help her into the little brougham, then follow her, and as they drove away he saw Mary lay her hand on Wilson's, and his close on it.

He turned to rush away, jostled roughly through the crowd, cursing, and walked for hours in the streets, insane with jealousy. He strode in blind fury, hands clenched, teeth set, and the muscles of his throat drawn so tight that it ached. His blood raced, and at his temples it throbbed, while he recounted to himself every scene with the woman, every word of tenderness that she had uttered, and he recreated the first kiss of her hand, the first kiss of her lips: he muttered all the wild words that he had written for her, and dragged into words the crazy emotions which at the time had been inexpressible. In the end he suddenly realised that he was modelling his behaviour on that of Bond, on the strange night of the visit to the music-hall. With that he burst into a shout of laughter and was sane again, to find himself in an unknown and unexpected region of London—a region of long terraces of stucco houses, dreadful in their similarity. It seemed that all the inhabitants had retired, for of all the windows there were here and there only those on the first and second floor illuminated. The roar of a great thoroughfare was audible, but to ascertain the direction of it was impossible.

Peter found the Great Bear, and by that turned his face to the east. Eventually, without seeing a creature other than an occasional cat, he came upon a place which he thought must be the Regent's Park, and from that he bore south and east. Arrived in Portman Square, a name which had for him the ringing sound of opulence, he stopped in his career to gaze appreciatively

after a woman who had accosted him after running quite a hundred yards to place herself in his way. He made no response to her greeting, but after she had passed he stood and shivered.

"To wander through so much of London and see never a soul, that is the strangest adventure that has befallen me."

The woman, thinking he had stayed for her, advanced a little, then stopped, advanced again and up to him, smiling fixedly. Peter saw that she was quite old, forty-four perhaps, but not without comeliness and a certain air of good-fellowship.

In a voice of complete disinterest she gave him her stereotyped invitation and waited. Peter took off his hat to her and said:

"Thank you."

"It's not far from here," she said, and jerked her thumb over in the direction from whence he had come.

"Into those streets again?" said Peter. "No."

"Are you tired, dearie?"

"I have emerged, good woman, from a fit of the craziest passion known to man."

The strangeness of this address took the woman aback, but, accustomed to all manner of odd whimsies, and because it was late, she gave polite attention to this possible client.

Delighting in the freakishness of this encounter and in the absurdity of discharging subtlety upon this fatuous countenance, he continued impressively.

"Jealousy, good woman, is the root of all evil. How shall a man possess a woman? Yet to be jealous he must have the desire to possess, and I tell you that in nothing is a man so mocked as in this desire, for it

is of a piece with the rest of his arrogance, the desire to possess the infinite. You are a woman, and therefore infinite."

He clutched her shoulder and wagged a forefinger in her face.

"From the first dawn you are the mother of all children, and the wife of all men. You are this world and all eternity. The secrets of the earth are yours and the profoundest depths of the sea. For the brief moment of his life a man is yours, a moment in your march to new triumphs of creation. Somewhere in Egypt there is a strange effigy called the Sphinx, erected by men of ancient days to the glory of woman. What man is there would dare to possess the Sphinx? Yet just so eternal is each woman, all-embracing. . . . A man jealous is a child crying because he may not have the moon. Woman is sun, moon and stars, day and night."

The woman edged away from him.

"Hell," she said, "but you *are* drunk!"

She shook free and moved away. There was in her a sort of horror.

Peter ran after her.

"I beg your pardon. I am not a man, but an ass laden with books."

He thrust money into her hand and she took to her heels.

A cabman soliciting his custom, Peter complied. In the cab he felt curiously shrunken. He shook like a man sick of a palsy, and suddenly burst into tears, and knew that this was the salvation of him. As he held up his hand with the fare he looked at the cabman.

"You look ill, cabby."

"Well, sir, I do feel a bit queer. It's these misty nights," and he fell to coughing, and coughed still as he drove round the corner out of the square.

Peter knew again that by this sudden sympathy he had atoned for the dreadful madness of the night.

Hereafter he spent sober weeks of study, and was not sorry when the early days of October brought his examination and release.

He succeeded in satisfying the academic gentlemen who were appointed to test the extent and quality of his knowledge, and the University of London in due course gave him the degree of Bachelor of Arts, and he shook the dust of King's College in the Strand from off his feet, resisting all blandishments to the pursuit of a thing called the Doctorate.

He reported himself to Mr. Scott, and then to Bassett-Crewe, who was anxious for him at once to take up his work with him.

Sandilands also was interviewed, and appeared to be resigned to the inevitable, for he took more interest in Peter than he had done on the first occasion. He was even conciliatory and threw out suggestions for articles.

Mattie wrote from Paris, where she was settled *en pension* with a Madame Vignon, expressing congratulations and pleasure that fortune was so favouring her friend—this word was underlined. She expressed a hope that Peter would find time to write to her, and that it might be even that he would come to Paris. There was a bantering tone in the letter which Peter answered in his most whimsical vein. He signed himself "P. Davies, Baccalaureus Artium, and none the wiser for it."

He gave notice of his departure to Miss Bastable and made the august lady umbrageous.

Mrs. Crewe made no further mention of his rooms or their locality, but that there was something brewing he gathered from the mystery of her, and the archness of the children's manner. All this unsettled him, and he found that he could not apply himself to any sort of work except the clerical.

At length relief came in the shape of an invitation from Hob, which ran:

"Mr. Henry Bassett-Crewe requests the pleasure of Mr. Peter Davies' company to tea at four o'clock on the afternoon of Friday the tenth December. R. S. V. P. to the above address."

The above address was 4 Waverton Street, Mayfair, W., printed in green, while at the opposite corner of the paper was printed "Telephone No. 5432 Mayfair."

The invitation was accepted, and at the very first opportunity Peter went in search of number 4 Waverton Street. He unfortunately chose the most foggy day of the year and had great difficulty in finding the place. He knew that it was somewhere off Berkeley Square and groped his way thither. Once in the square he found it no easy matter to escape. How many times he circled it he never knew, but he grew to loathe the gates of Devonshire House, which apparently possessed an irresistible attraction for him. At length he hit upon the happy idea of hugging the wall and so reaching the street which, according to his idea, ran west from the middle of Berkeley Square. In this way he escaped from circumambulation and plunged along until he came to the wall of a house. Through the murk he saw a

gigantic figure looming. He rushed towards it, miscalculated the distance, collided with it, apologised to it, and asked it the way to Waverton Street.

"This is Waverton Street," said an indignant and husky voice.

"I want number 4."

"Over there by the mews, where the light is."

Peter thanked the owner of the voice and took the direction indicated. He walked into some railings, struck a match, and found that they belonged to number 4.

He could see nothing of the house but that it possessed an attractive door and a fascinating bay-window with many panes.

"George I.," said Peter, and hoped that his room might be that with the fascinating window.

A fine smell came from the mews, but Peter extended the proprietary glow which had come over him to the smell and found no fault with it. He patted the railings and stroked the door. Then he returned by the way he had come.

In Berkeley Square the fog had lifted, and on a house on the east side he saw a tablet bearing this inscription:

Horace Walpole  
Lived and died here

and he gleefully invented an inscription for a tablet to be erected on the wall of number 4 Waverton Street.

He whistled suddenly, and repeated to himself, "Waverton Street!"

George Townsend had lived at number 12, and old Cooper must often have visited there, if not also lodged



in the neighbourhood. There was certainly in those streets and houses the flavour of old days. Peter wondered where it was that Clara had lived, Clara of the pink topaz necklace, the simpering Demeter: and which of the great houses of this region was the cold palace of which old Cooper had spoken in his strange and melancholy narrative.

On the appointed day Peter returned to number 4 Waverton Street. The little door was opened by a grave, elderly man, who, bending as though he were hinged at the middle, inquired Peter's name.

"Mr. Davies."

"Will you step this way, sir?"

The grave man turned and slowly ascended one flight of stairs. Peter heard a scampering of feet and an excited giggle. The grave man led the way up to the second floor. Here he opened a door, stood inside a tiny hall to take Peter's hat, coat and umbrella (Peter had donned his most fashionable for the occasion), and then, throwing open another door, announced in a thunderous voice:

"Mr. Peter Davies."

There was a clapping of hands and shrill cries of delight. Hob rushed to him and jumped about him. Jane came and clutched his leg while Patch shouted "Hurrah!" Hob tugged this way to show him this, Jane that way to show that. Peter saw nothing. His eyes were filled with tears, and he could only gurgle inarticulately.

He blew his nose.

"Look Peter," said Hob, and pointed above the mantelpiece. "I did that."

Peter saw pinned to the wall a long strip of white

paper on which, in large ragged letters, in every conceivable colour, was written:

“ Peter Davies lives here.”

To save himself from breaking down and incurring the contempt of Hob and Patch, Peter stooped, picked Jane up, and hugged and kissed her. When he released her he found Mrs. Crewe standing with a kettle in one hand and the lid of the teapot in the other.

“ Can’t shake hands,” she said. “ How do you do? ”

“ Oh, Mrs. Crewe . . . ” said Peter.

“ We will have nursery tea round the table.”

As they devoured the good things on the table the children shouted to draw Peter’s attention to this and that, each clamouring for approbation of his or her device. Mrs. Crewe controlled them gently but firmly, and smilingly she watched Peter as he surveyed his new home.

It was a tiny room, the ceiling only seven or eight feet from the floor, the walls panelled and painted white. The whole of one wall was taken up with bookshelves, filled magnificently with the finest. These drew Peter’s eyes, and he longed to handle them.

The inaugural meal over, he went straight and took down Florio’s translation of the essays of Michael, Lord of Montaigne, the first volume, and read in the preface:

“ Reader, loe here a well meaning Booke. It doth at the first entrance forewarne thee, that in contriving the same I have proposed unto myselfe no other than a familiar and private end: I have no respect or consideration at all, either to thy service, or to any glory: my forces are not capable of any such dessigne. . . . Had my intention beene to forestal and purchase the world’s opinion and favour, I would surely have adorned

myselfe more quaintly, or kept a more grave and solemn march. . . . Thus, gentle Reader, myselfe am the groundworke of my booke: It is then no reason thou shouldest employ thy time about so frivolous and vaine a Subject. Therefore farewell. From Montaigne, the first of March. 1580."

Peter turned to Mrs. Crewe.

"Shakespeare borrowed wisdom from this gentleman."

He returned the volume to its place, and Mrs. Crewe drew his attention to Wilson's eight volumes. On the fly-leaf of the first was inscribed:

"To Peter Davies, these small things in a great company whereof they are unworthy, except that they also are written by a man."

Hob cried for attention to the writing-desk, which was fully equipped with every material. Hob's especial pride was in the note-paper. The whole room was perfect, and on the mantelpiece in silver frames were photographs—Mrs. Crewe, the children, Mary——

"Has she been here?" cried Peter.

Mysterious glances were exchanged, and Peter was led to his bedroom.

The door was opened, and out rushed a little dog, the image of Matilda, and sniffed at Peter. The children clapped their hands. Peter lifted the little beast, and they baptised him then and there under the name of Herbertson.

"Mary's gift," said Mrs. Crewe.

The bedroom was charming, modelled in its decoration on the little room that Peter had occupied at Crosslands, and down one step from it was a tiny bathroom.

That was the extent of the place, and Peter could have wished no better.

Back to the sitting-room they went and tested everything, the electric light, the telephone, the speaking tube down to the regions where the grave man lived with his wife, the deep cupboards filled with china, the drawers of the desk, the windows.

"You like it?"

"Oh! . . ."

"Wicksteed and his wife will look after you well. He was my father's valet. When will you come?"

"To-morrow."

Mrs. Crewe smiled at his eagerness.

"We must leave you now."

Wicksteed appeared and embraced the charge of Peter, gave him a key to the house door, and was altogether amiable.

Peter was left alone, and once more he took down Wilson's book with its generous inscription. He was almost intolerably happy as he sat in the great leather chair nursing Herbertson, and mumbling to the fire. He was troubled by the thought that his brothers and sisters were still living in the old shiftless existence behind the shop. The chances by which he had escaped to this were little short of miraculous.

Then he remembered that his sister, the wife of Podge Newhall, had rated him for the filthiness of his mind. Therein he seemed to probe deep into the mystery.

The first letter that he wrote on Hob's magnificent note-paper was to his brother, the tailor; the second was to Miss Dugdale, to thank her for the dog.

"It is like you," he wrote, "to have given me a living thing: all that you have given me has been that."

Then he laid down his pen, picked up, cleaned it, swung round in the swivel chair, and leaned towards

her portrait. He hitched his shoulders and tugged at his forelock. The portrait was in profile, the left and most perfect side of her face.

Peter allowed himself the luxury of a romantic sigh, then laughed at himself, and rubbed his nose with the now wet end of his pen.

"Her nose and mine," he said, and on his blotting paper drew his own profile in caricature over and over again.

He returned to his letter and read it through, then traced the Y of yours, but scratched it out. He rose and wandered round the room, and for distraction planned where he would hang his pictures, and where in the bookcase place those books which he had at Gordon Square.

He wandered into his bedroom for a second survey, and into the bathroom, where he turned the taps on and off, and lifted up and down the knob labelled "Waste," which somehow seemed to be a much grander affair than the brass plug which had been in the bath at home.

In the bedroom again he noticed for the first time that on the dressing-table were new brushes, combs, and little boxes for studs and the like fugitive belongings. There was a label attached to the buckle of the brush case. On this was written, "With love from Tessa."

Back he flew to his letter.

"Many, many thanks to Tessa also for her gift. It seems to be her special charge to provide me with what barbers call 'toilet requisites.'"

He hesitated for a moment, then plunged:

"Am I not to see you again? Is it only a question of youth and age? Oh, these divisions! There are

neither young nor old, more than there are sheep and goats. It is all one. The world is round and embraces everything. There is neither good nor bad, nor right nor wrong. Half-way is the only course, and the ibis walks safest in the middle. There is so much given to me, only you withhold yourself. I have made you happy. I know that, and Mrs. Crewe has said it. I ask of you nothing that you cannot give me; only let me see you."

He did not read what he had written, but sealed and stamped it.

Then he summoned the grave Wicksteed, gave Herbertson into his custody, informed him as to the day of his arrival, was given a key, and went stumbling down the stairs. Near the front door there hung on the wall a Vanity Fair cartoon of Wilson with his pipe, and his legs outstretched, as Peter had seen him on the first occasion in the rooms overlooking the Green Park.

"I expect," said Peter, with some vehemence, remembering old days, "I expect you are worth twopence over the counter."

By the pillar box he debated for some moments whether to post his letter to Mary, slipped it into the mouth, and then wished he had torn it up.

On the receipt of it, a few hours later, Mary consulted her friend Mrs. Crewe.

"It is of him that I am thinking. He must not brood."

"He has occupation in plenty."

Mary was relieved and said:

"For the present then I shall not see him."

She had other affairs to discuss with her friend, the most pressing the sum to be given to her brother, who, reduced to odium through his unfortunate connection

with the journalistic exploit of his friend Mr. Beaumont Scholes, had announced his intention of emigrating to Canada to farm. Mary was perfectly prepared to buy him a whole country, but she was restrained by her more sagacious and far-seeing friends.

Cynthia said:

“Two hundred pounds for the present.”

“There are his debts.”

“They must be paid for him.”

“Poor Lawrence.”

Peter saw the young gentleman just before his departure. They met by accident in Regent Street, outside a restaurant where Greenfield was to meet a young woman in order in a fitting manner to say farewell to “dear old London.”

He shook Peter’s hand warmly and talked expansively of a “life in the open.”

“Cork,” said Peter, and left him without more.

It was the eve of his departure from Gordon Square, and he was hurrying home to collect his chattels.

As before in his aunt’s house, and in the little room behind the shop, he laid out all that was his own on the floor and on his bed, but now he was a person of considerable property, things that from association he treasured and things that were worthless.

He presented a quantity of old boots and clothes to the German Swiss butler, and for the first time won courtesy from him. To Miss Bastable he gave sundry pieces of the heavy old jewellery which he had found in old Cooper’s desk, and she rewarded him with embarrassing lamentations and undue praises of his virtues in the presence of her other lodgers.

He sought out a bookseller in Charing Cross Road,

whom he remembered as a boy like himself, and sold him the majority of the text-books and annotated editions which he had collected during his three years at King's College. He drove in a four-wheeled cab with two trunks and a packing case to 4 Waverton Street, and when he had eaten his first dinner there, a plain meal cooked by Mrs. Wicksteed and served by her husband with oppressive solemnity, he felt that he really had entered upon the career of which he had fondly dreamed, and that the world did now lie at his feet, if only . . .

He plunged into sentimental abstraction, in which he created a filmy being whom he labelled Woman—for she was certainly not Mary, nor Mattie, nor any female creature that he had ever known. He could not clearly see her face, but he knew that she was fair. He made no attempt to draw her into conversation, but only occasionally blew a cloud of smoke in the direction where she hovered. He had an idea that the time—it was nearly eleven o'clock when she first appeared—and tobacco and the warmth of the fire had something to do with her hovering: also that he shared her with many thousand other lonely young men. He could only define her—the word woman proving inadequate—as a comfortable presence. About ten minutes to twelve, finding that she was still there, he evolved the pretty fancy that she was the ghost of some woman who had loved a former occupant of the rooms. He found names for her and for her lover, Esther Vernon and Evan Withington, and began to weave their romance. On that she disappeared, the room was cold without her, and Peter took refuge in bed, where also Herbertson slept, curled up against his new master's stomach.

Thus Peter lived and worked, eating, sleeping, mak-



ing an ever wider circle of acquaintances, and here and there finding new friends, though never, for many years, a man of his own age.

The preparation of the Cooper papers for publication proved to be the work of months, since the greater part of his time which was not given to Bassett-Crewe was occupied with turning out short leaders, reviews, notes on current events, occasional verse, and occasional stories for the new journal, which was everywhere well received. Peter loved his work and delighted to meet the men who had rejected those unhappy little effusions which he had written in Shaftesbury Avenue. He was especially anxious to discover the author of the phrase "Poor sloppy devil" that had so tormented him, but that seemed hopeless.

Twice a week he used to go down to the office where Sandilands presided and either write there or come away armed with review copies of books, to occupy bare evenings.

He corresponded fitfully with Mattie, but seemed to lose touch with her, though he found the study of her development interesting enough. Occasionally he visited the theatre where Miss Dugdale was playing, but she was most skilful in avoiding him, and though he heard of her at various houses, and from Mrs. Crewe and the children, he never once met her, and she never replied to his letter. He did not write again, but was content to wait, having an unreasoning conviction that she would come to him.

At times he had fits of despair and wild panics; moments when he saw himself as worthless, useless, a parasite, an upstart, without talent and without character, and, worst of all, with none of the qualities that make

for success; a creature who ate and should eat always of bread unearned. Sometimes in these moods he would write to Wilson fevered letters of enormous length, full of abuse, self-recrimination, despondency, attacks on institutions, persons and tendencies, self-analysis and discontent. Wilson at first had some alarm, and used to come in the evening to sit and smoke and talk over their joint work, and though Peter found some solace in the flattery of these visits, he was most often reduced to greater depths. Injured vanity throbbed, and Peter's outlook took on a more and more bilious complexion. He grew to conceive that Sandilands disliked him—because the poor harassed man had reduced an over-long article by a paragraph; that Bassett-Crewe was disappointed with him; that the Scotts regretted ever having befriended him, and, most preposterous of all, that Wilson patronised him. After each attack he fully recognised the physiological origin of the disease—the weather and too much tobacco acting on his liver; but at the worst he descended to further depths, and sighed for the condition of his relatives, whom he imagined to be happy. After a time Wilson grew hardened and learned to leave the disaffection to take its course, though, if Peter wrote him a more than usually outrageous letter, accusing him of ruining a young life or blighting the career of a promising bookseller, he would reply with a curt postcard bearing these words:

“Growing pains.”

The mischief and unhealthiness of the thing was that Peter rather enjoyed these fits of despondency, and just as in old days he used to weep to find himself so beautiful, he now wept to find himself so unworthy of all the kindness that had been heaped upon him. He

took a fierce delight in explaining to Herbertson, who in course of time became an understanding beast (for, as Peter expounded to him, animals, like human beings, depend for their intelligence and character upon the persons with whom they come in contact), the fraud of himself.

“Such a fraud, Herbertson, and only you seem to know it. A large watery eye, Herbertson, and they will have it that behind there is a mighty brain. . . .”

(These addresses were only made when the turning point had been reached and recovery had set in. Peter then chanced upon a satiric vein.)

“This brain, Herbertson, which is in you, so far as I know, only a nerve centre most easily reached through your little black rose, is in me a wild whirling thing perpetually busy in the distortion of facts, and the propagation of lies, since by the ironic force of circumstances I am to be a maker of books instead of a seller of them, and though I were to speak so truthfully and with such force as the Angel Gabriel himself, there would come one after me to be my apostle and to confound me, to turn my clear-running message to a poisonous stream; for, mark this well, Herbertson, after the real man there is always your ass, and there is no lie so palatable as that which is merely dead truth. I have no message. I am a fraud like the rest. It is all a buying and a selling. I have that to sell which it is not easy to sell, for the best of a man is not marketable. I trade, therefore, upon the opinion that good people form of me, and, though I know it to be erroneous, make no effort to correct it while I find them more profitable. I am a cheat and a liar, and some day, perhaps, I shall be a fatted man and care for no cleverness

other than that which can cheat and brag, and overreach, and undersell; perhaps I also shall care nothing how the people of these islands hear of me, so only that they hear of me and talk. Perhaps I also shall write paragraphs and whole columns of words about myself in the newspapers. Oh! Herbertson, I think there is more of truth in you than in all humanity, for you have no books, no priests, no law, and no prophets, no St. Paul, no Voltaire, no Shelley, no Wycliffe, no Wesley, no Spencer, no Karl Marx, no Descartes, no Comte, no Darwin; you have such food as I give you, and as many wives as you care to woo. . . . Oh! damn it, Herbertson, damn, and damn, and damn. . . . And yet, and yet I would rather be a man, for even dogs are eaten. . . . On the whole, it is better to eat than to be eaten. . . .”

After such a harangue Peter would take Herbertson for a walk, out into Mount Street, where it was a nightly duty to salute the windows of Mary's flat, and to the house in Charles Street, which, because it had a charming doorway, with rings for the torches of linkmen, had been pitched on as Clara's dwelling. This also was saluted, and the promenade was continued down into Piccadilly to the house where Wilson had his rooms. Here Herbertson sniffed at the door to discover if an entry were possible to the shrine of the entrancing Matilda, and if Peter continued, he would stand in protest.

One night, very late, close upon twelve, it chanced that there was a light in Wilson's room, and Peter, inflamed with a bright idea for the Cooper book, rang the bell, and because a sort of madness came over Herbertson, he picked him up and carried him in his arms. The door was opened by a man of Wicksteed's breed,

though even graver, and knowing Peter, he admitted him and suffered him to go upstairs unannounced. To keep Herbertson from barking he held a hand upon his nose and stole quietly upstairs.

The door of Wilson's sitting-room was open. Though no sound came out of the room, Peter could see a shadow moving. Wilson was pacing rapidly round the room. He stopped, and a pipe was knocked against the bar of the grate, then laid on the marble mantelshelf with a click. Then silence, and the shadow moved again, stopped, and a sound half sob, half wild laughter, came from the man—then a woman's voice:

“Oh! Buntie—Buntie—dear.” Mary's voice!

Peter squeezed Herbertson tight, and for the life of him could move neither forward nor back. Wilson gave the queer sound again, and Mary laughed, proudly, exultingly.

Miserably, Wilson cried:

“Ay, you can laugh and you can laugh . . .”

And Mary laughed the more. Furiously Wilson turned on her:

“I'm just a man like the rest. . . .”

Mary laughed no more.

“Oh! Buntie . . . does it hurt?”

“No,” said Wilson, a sort of flinging triumph in his voice. “No—no—but I'm—I'm so—so glad of it.”

They laughed together, and Peter, hugging Herbertson yet tighter, and yet tighter clutching his muzzle, stole downstairs and out into the street.

He walked so fast that Herbertson's little crooked legs were hard put to it to keep the pace. Peter made straight for St. James Park and the bridge over the water.

He stood there, and Herbertson, with his tongue well out, squatted on his haunches, panting. Peter wanted to think, but it hurt him to think. He could not pass beyond.

“I kissed the woman. I kissed, kissed, kissed the woman.”

He remembered the night of the play, when he had seen Wilson's hand close on hers. Out of the marvelous evening when he had stood with her here above the water he could recall only the moment when, stooping to kiss her, they had heard the wretched Tessa sobbing. Tessa, Warrington, and—Bond. That brought him back to Bond, and Bond and Bond again. Bond sobbing in his room in Half Moon Street, and Bond, as flying rumours now painted him, degenerate, wretched, poor, living dreadfully. Bond somehow seemed to be linked with those words of Wilson's:

“I am just a man like the rest of them,” wherein was confessed the whole silly story. “Silly,” was Peter's word for it, for here, in his panting state of jealousy and disappointment and wounded vanity, the whole matter seemed small, tiny as himself at his tiniest. Silly it might be, small it might be, but yet Peter found it to be beyond his reach, blurred, and out of focus.

Two things seemed to explain it a little. He remembered once seeing a small whirlwind, a spout of air into which scraps of paper, dung and skins of fruit were swept and kept twirling, to be dropped suddenly.

This was perhaps a little like that. Lately he had heard of a young man—the story was current scandal—who had attempted to live by theory, and had come to

the idea that life was vulgar. In this state he had taken unto himself a wife from among the many young women importuning him, had journeyed with her to Tyrol on their honeymoon, and thrown himself from a great height into a torrent.

That also seemed to bear some relation to this.

Peter stooped and picked up a pebble. Waiting until the moon shone forth—a thin sickle of a moon—he dropped the pebble into the water and watched the rings spread and spread.

“A man,” he thought, “drops like that, and the rings that he makes spread and spread; for the pool into which he falls is boundless. . . . If only . . . if only I were not so infernally young.”

He walked home slowly, and, because he saw that Herbertson was exhausted, carried him the greater part of the way. He walked especially to salute the house which he had chosen for Clara’s happiness and old Cooper’s. In case the ghost of Clara might be floating by, he recited for her benefit a passage from the letter, and it seemed that he was nearer to understanding of the lover than ever before.

A spirit of divination came upon him. He bent down to Herbertson and said:

“She will write now and ask to see me.”

The prophecy was not altogether accurate. She did not write, but the next occasion upon which, by invitation, he had tea in the nursery in Park Street she was there. They met as though only the day before they had parted.

“So the dead also greet those who die,” said Peter, the which funereal utterance so upset Mrs. Crewe, who

was repapering the drawing-room of Jane's doll's house, that she thrust the handle of the brush through the window and occasioned tears.

Mary looked with admiration at the well-groomed Peter.

He expatiated on the virtues as a valet of grave Wicksteed. He noticed that his ring was transferred to her right hand, and that on the third finger of her left she now wore a ring set with a single sapphire.

Hob insisted on their playing a game called "Charcoal-burner."

Its origin was so palpable that Mary smiled, and Peter was disgusted to find himself blushing.

"Do you remember," he said, "Smoky Wootten trotting along the road for beer?"

"Oh, Peter: yes—and the baby."

The game was exhausting. Hob had corrupted it, and made of it a sort of Hellish drama wherein Smoky Wootten had become the fiend who shovelled lost souls on to his heap. Peter was shovelled in due course, but Mary insisted on an apotheosis, and was properly sent to Heaven. They emerged presently, he from the everlasting fire, she from celestial regions, and together they quitted the house.

They walked in silence into the Park, and across into Kensington Gardens until they came to the spot where they had sat looking on to the Serpentine.

Neither had spoken.

Then, as they sat, "How do you know?" she said.

"How do you know that I know?"

She tapped his arm.

"How well I know you."

"Clara said that."



"I am another Clara."

"I have never seen you so happy; nor known your voice to be so soft."

She laughed.

"But for you, Peter, it would not have been. It is very wonderful."

"You make the whole world wonderful."

Mary cast a shy little glance at him and fell to tracing a head on the ground with the spike of her parasol, not the famous red, but a soft blue. Peter watched the tracing. The head was the head of Wilson, but the nose was certainly his own.

Peter hitched his shoulders, removed his hat and twisted his forelock. Then, while Mary traced, he applied himself to the critical study of her physical attractions. As the result of it he said:

"After all, you are not so very beautiful."

"Oh, Peter!"

"You are just a woman, like the rest of them."

Mary stopped in her tracing, and, turning, looked full into his eyes.

"Your eyes are glorious," he said. Then, though he would gladly have had her ascribe his knowledge to perfect sympathy, he must tell her how he had come by it.

She was silent. Almost at random Peter quoted:

" 'There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than your philosophy can wot of.' "

This was followed by a remark uttered scarcely above a whisper, and something of his awe reached Mary as she saw that his eyes were glittering and starting from his head.

"There are more things in this world, Mary, than

ever entered even Shakespeare's head. That is truth, Mary, glorious inspiring truth. . . . Gosh!"

Then he laughed a little wearily, for he saw that the words had not at all touched Mary's imagination, while his own was whirling.

That was the end of the woman's glory. He was now only sorry for her, sorry for himself, and everybody. Foolishly he decided that, because it had become impossible to share with this woman rare things, there was nothing more in store for him.

"I'm done with such things," he said, and almost as soon as the words were spoken he knew that he was in the most parlous state, without defence. Desperately he strove to clothe the woman again in her glory, and poured forth a torrent of words.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "they are all cold. . . . Fake. But—but I know now why men and women play with fire, and toy with faked emotions. . . . I can't—I can't make you beautiful again."

He restored his hat to his head and rose to go. She, too.

"We are always friends, Peter."

"Really friends now—for the first time."

She took his arm and they walked back to Mount Street.

Here he was for leaving her, but she said:

"I should like you to see my new room."

Peter mounted with her.

Tessa opened the outer door for them, and Tessa lingered, smiling upon Peter's bright greeting in hope of words.

"Tessa born again this morning."

"Such a fine gentleman, Mr.—Mr. Peter." That was

all; she opened the inner door, and Peter entered and was closeted with Mary, to find that he had nothing to say to her.

He prowled about the room smoking the cigarette that she had offered him.

The room charmed him.

"If I did not know you," he said, "I should love you already through your possessions."

"Knowing me," she said, "you are done with such things."

"How odd that you should possess a Bible." He took the book down, and found it to be a gift from the Vicar of the Parish of Topsham in Devonshire to Mary Greenfield on the occasion of her confirmation.

"I never knew Mary Greenfield."

"You would not have liked her, Peter."

"Shall I like the new Mary?"

"I wonder."

She sighed. Peter restored the book to its place by the side of the plays of Tom Robertson. He turned on her suddenly:

"You have always been his."

Mary held out her hand as though to shield herself. Peter was quivering with excitement. He pursued this discovery hot foot, leaped upon it, hugged it to his own hurt, and because of the hurt spared her nothing. Everything that he knew of her he laid before her, raw facts, and traced them back and back to their origin in the first and only real tenderness. She sat miserably silent. It was detestable what he did, but spurred on by the memory of Bond with his hands clenched in front of him, by the recollection also of his strange wanderings through unknown and dreadful streets, he rushed ham-

mering at the poor woman, who hung her head, and at the last burst into tears.

Peter was then all tenderness, and knelt by her side to soothe her. Wildly she clung to him, held him to her breast and sobbed.

“How could I? How could I hurt you so, my hoy—my boy?”

The strange noises that they made roused Peter the cat from his slumbers on the cushioned window seat. He advanced cautiously to investigate the character of this new invader.

“He is the ram caught in the thicket,” said Peter, as the cat was caught up and dandled. “One Peter is as good as another. A cat has little sympathy—even a cat with orange eyes.”

He was talking to gain time and possession of himself—for he found himself again worshipping the woman whom he had been battering. She was glorious again, more than ever before—splendid, admirable, generous.

He had found in Cynthia Crewe great warm qualities which he had never looked for in Mary: his relations with the two women had been so different. Yet here they were in this new Mary, blazing, shining forth. He remembered then that in Cynthia they had been most apparent with her children, and Peter had shared with them. Here in Mary’s eyes was the great thing all for himself, and he felt himself growing and growing, swelling until it seemed that he enveloped her, and from somewhere in the heart of him came Mary’s voice:

“I said once—a son to me.”

With that Peter was at her feet to give thanks, and to adore. She kissed his forehead.

“But—but——” he said.

She stroked his hair.

"Such a brother for my babies."

Peter leaped to his feet so suddenly that the other Peter arched his back and swore at him, then with tail bristling with indignation marched back to the cushioned window seat.

"Now," said Peter, "now I can work."

He squared himself and looked brave.

"I could eat dragons," he said. He chuckled and quoted:

"'Go your way, you fair young man.' Mrs. Crewe said that, long ago, at Crosslands. You have found the way for me, Mary dear."

"I stumbled on it."

"We have all been groping. How blind we were!"

"St. James is not altogether wrong, Peter."

"Nor are the fauns, Mary—the great thing is that you are happy."

"Yes. Oh! yes. I am happy."

"Then nothing else matters."

With that he left her.

How much of all this she told to Wilson he never knew. They contrived to have the Cooper book ready for the autumn season. It bore for title: "The Literary Remains of Xavier Cooper, sometime of Booksellers' Row and of Shaftesbury Avenue, with an introduction by D. Murray Wilson and a memoir by P. D."

It was curiously received. It was reviewed as fiction, as history, as biography, as a Christmas book (in this notice Cooper was compared with Scrooge), by a curious mistake, as Archæology, and in one case it was contemptuously dismissed as mere book-making. Though

one or two important journals took it up, it made no great stir, but sold steadily and well.

The grave Wicksteed, to whom Peter proudly presented a copy, read it and was scornful.

"Them sort of men," he said, "what are always waggin' their tongues about life in general, nearly always come to grief. Talk about human nature, no one knows anything about it, as hasn't lived below stairs. I never knew a gentleman as had the faintest glimmer. I back Mrs. Wicksteed agin all the writers and talkers in the world, I do—she'll give you any of the ladies she's been with in six words so as to make you shiver in your shoes at 'em: six words more and she'll make you go down on your knees an' worship 'em. That's what I calls bein' in love, when you're grovellin' to the woman one moment, an' spittin' in 'er face the next. In the books it's all grovellin'!"

"I knew a man once," said Peter, "who threw a clod at the woman he loved."

"Did he 'it 'er?" asked Wicksteed.

"No-o-o," said Peter. "It was a poor shot."

Mr. Wicksteed, who by this time had cleared the table, snorted and left the room.

There and then Peter began to write the story of a man who threw a clod at his lady-love and hit her. The name of the man was Evan Withington, of the woman Esther Vernon.

## X

ONE night Peter visited Wilson at half-past eleven and stayed with him until after three, propounding new discoveries. He had been reading a scientific work on morals. Wilson listened with an attention which Peter had never before obtained from him to the tirade of protest, denunciation, confused explanation, conjecture, statement and misstatement, argument, and theory. Peter talked and talked, until his voice grew hoarse, and as he talked he became more enthusiastic, wilder. He strode up and down the room, biting at his thumb and tugging at his forelock. He rushed at the elemental facts of humanity and plunged into the most intricate disquisitions.

“Woman, infinite glorious woman,” he said, “they regard as a chattel. *Sub potestate*, they say, and forsooth she must cosset the man who is unfaithful to her, while if he is kind and forgiving he is plunged in dishonour. Dishonour! Under such a law marriage itself is dishonourable.”

There was much more in the same strain.

At ten minutes past three Wilson knocked his pipe out on the bar of the grate.

“The relation of a man and a woman is too great a thing to be influenced by the Law,” he said. “Each man and woman can make the thing the noblest in the world or the basest. What is wrong with your court is that it can conceive only the base.”

He sucked his empty pipe, which, because it was foul, gurgled.

"I believe that the wrong will right itself, when the collective intelligence of the world has grasped at the truth. This is the very heart and centre of society, and I believe that the collective intelligence is moving towards a nobler conception: slow it is, but the surer for being slow. Drastic reform in so vital a matter would plunge the world into even more disastrous error, oh! yes, the thing will right itself. . . ."

"But to do something to help—to *do* something."

"No man can do more than live nobly, decently, and in accordance with the truth as he knows it: no man stands alone, as, praise be to God, nothing in this world stands alone, not even the mind of a man. Purity in one mind breeds purity in ten thousand others. . . ."

They sat for some moments in silence. Peter could say nothing. He knew that at last he had touched the reality of the man, was behind the veil of inscrutability, and though the moment was glorious, it was almost intolerable.

He wished to creep away, and, Wilson staring into the grate where the fire was long since dead, he rose stealthily to his feet.

Wilson shivered, turned, and looked up at him.

"Dulcinea del Toboso," he said, "is the most beautiful lady in the world, and I am the most unfortunate knight."

The same thought was in the minds of both, the image of the same woman.

"I—I know," said Peter, and stole away. There were long hours before he sought his bed, long hours of brooding, of snatching at elusive visions. His thoughts went in a maddening circle. To escape he took down book after book from his shelves, but in none could he



find comfort; couplets, epigrams, phrases that he had once thought to be the last word, now seemed to him no more than to touch the fringe of this problem. None of the great vision-men had seen, or if they had seen, had projected that which could be of use to him or to any other man. Peter could achieve nothing more than this:

“For each man the solution is in himself; no thought nor reason can clear the way, but only—only the brave and simple going out to meet truth.”

Fear seized him as he seemed to understand, and where it was that Wilson had failed.

Grasping at the truth, Peter was filled with horror of himself, and a curious fear of all womankind came upon him. Human effort, human striving, human words written and recorded were useless, for in the one real charge laid upon man, all must be rediscovered by each. The only true knowledge must be learned through bitter, bitter experience, and even when the thing was grasped, there was no telling where joy begins and pain ends—and—and—marvellous things had been written, but there was no understanding them until—until there came the illumination of the encounter. Without that light nothing was true. . . . The—the—the source of all error. Human striving. . . .

He collapsed, limp, his hands to his face. He was cold, bitterly cold.

“Oh!” he said. “I know nothing—nothing—nothing.”

All the same this discovery of ignorance did not keep him from working on the story of Esther Vernon, who lived in Clara’s house and loved her Evan; nor did it keep him from making notes of phrases and great

thoughts in a little book which he kept for that purpose. A whole page was devoted to this sentence:

“Nothing stands alone: least of all the mind of a man.”

Many years later when he was a person of consequence, as he turned over the leaves of this book contemptuous of his youthful ardours and impressions, he added in pencil:

“With these words I became a man and put away childish things.”

The comment was hardly at all true, but to the student of Peter's career it is interesting: so characteristic of his absurd introspective habit was the determination of the day and hour when he emerged from adolescence. It was true to this extent that his outlook became wider.

There were anxious times for both Peter and Wilson, as the time approached for the hearing of Mary's petition for divorce. Peter haunted the court and sat through the dreary hearing of many a sordid case, more and more repelled by the atmosphere, tortured with the idea that Mary should come to such a place, Mary whom he had seen in the woods, Mary who had held in her arms the charcoal burner's baby on that most wonderful of nights. That she should come to tell of her most sacred life to the singularly ugly old gentleman who sat under the anchor, and the coarse-grained men who made their trade the asking of vile questions, was an odious humiliation.

Peter came raging to Wilson one day to report a remark that he had heard from the Leader of the court. The man—a well-fed gentleman with a shiny pink face, whereon a child-like smile sat ill,—had expressed weariness of his profession.

"No law in it," he said, "never any law. Always the eternal question, Did she or did she not?"

The juniors fawning upon him had taken up the joke, and it flew from mouth to mouth.

Peter was livid with rage. Wilson was more sensible.

"It is their business," he said.

Very curiously just at this time Peter received a disreputable-looking letter from New Zealand. It was bulky, and the envelope was addressed in a handwriting he did not remember to have seen before. The envelope contained this document:

Care of Box 771, Wellington, N. Z.

MY DEAR PETER:

I daresay you remember your Aunt Jennie, although it is nearly nine years ago since she saw you. I have often thought of you and the talk we had when we walked to the Five Oaks Common. At that time you were then only a boy. I could not speak to you as I can *now*. You are a man, and know good and evil. You know, of course, my unhappy life—but you do not know everything. I am telling you now because I do not think I shall live very long, and I want you to set me right with my children, whose minds have been poisoned against me by your Aunt Anne Daltry. I had not a fair trial. As Lawson Jones remarked to the President, "It is a prejudged case, my Lord," to which the Judge replied, "I think that is rather a hard term." "Not at all, my Lord, my client's witnesses have not been heard." The foreman of the jury just heard me, and then sent up a note to the Judge to say he was satisfied I had done wrong, and the case had better not go on. Of course, had my witnesses been heard I should have had my chil-

dren and my character cleared, for I never did what they said I did. I was imprudent, but I know you will believe me. I did not do wrong, and it has been the only consolation I have had since in knowing that. You do not know what it was to have had the children taken from me. The foreman of the jury, old Pardee, who kept the Hotel at the corner of Tottenham Court Road, was a great friend of Anne and the odious Daltry man. I did not know until after the trial what the foreman was, who he was, or else we should not have allowed him to be in the case at all. . . . Do try and get the children's photos for me. The detective will tell you how cruel the trial was against me. As he said to me when I saw him last, "Everyone who swore falsely against you has been punished somehow," and so they have, but that is no satisfaction to me. It does not give me back my character nor my children. Well, I shall not be here long. The climate is so cold and damp, and both my lungs were never strong, and they are worse now. We are just battling along—as we can. Write to me and tell me about my children.

With love,

Your affectionate Aunt,

JENNIE.

Peter remembered the unhappy woman, a beautiful creature she had been, his father's sister, and how, after her catastrophe, she had come to his house to receive kindness from his father, and cruelty from his mother, so that there was no refuge for her there. He remembered, too, the walk when she had begun to tell him something of her history, and then had stopped abruptly in the telling and turned to a mood of wild and desperate

gaiety of a few moments only, for then she sobbed and clung to him. Now at the other end of the world she had remembered him and sought the comfort of confession.

It was ridiculous that it should come at such a time, this pathetic letter with its dreadful picture of the Court, Judge, Counsel, Jury—Peter's vision of the publican foreman was dreadful—all interested in nothing but the sordid question, Did she or did she not "do wrong"?

Peter's thought was for Mary rather than for poor Jennie, though her letter had moved him to pity.

He was present in court when Mary obtained her decree nisi. Bond did not defend. The case did not occupy the court more than twenty minutes. Five other undefended petitions were disposed of that morning.

Mary told her story quite simply. Tessa gave evidence of her share in the matter, and a former maid proved cruelty. There were few people present besides the parties and witnesses in the other cases and their friends. Of the idle and curious there were none, for the hearing of undefended petitions is a cut-and-dried business.

During the hearing Wilson was pacing up and down the great Central Hall, the dreariest place in London, sucking at an empty pipe. Occasionally he so far forgot himself as to make a face at any man in wig and gown, so acutely did he detest the Law and all its machinery. A legal acquaintance recognised and came to speak with him. All that Wilson said was:

"In a little church in Cornwall there is an epitaph which records as the chiefest virtue of a sailor man that never in all his life was he engaged in a law-suit."

"It would be pleasanter," said the barrister, "if honest men more often came to us."

Wilson looked round the vast hall.

"It costs the country a pretty penny to adjust the quarrels of scoundrels."

His friend noticed a solicitor whom he thought it wise to conciliate. He walked away and disappeared up one of the dark staircases with a greasy little man, red-eyed like a ferret.

Bassett-Crewe and Sandilands had made valiant efforts to keep the case out of the papers, but the celebrity of the parties (Bond was not yet sunk from notice) proved too tempting for the evening journals, and already as they emerged into the Strand they were confronted with placards on which in enormous letters was printed: "Famous actress obtains Divorce."

"Damn," said Wilson between his teeth.

They were married as soon as the decree was made absolute, and, after a grand tour, settled in a little house in Queen Anne's Gate, overlooking St. James Park. Here Tessa was parlour-maid, and very handsome in her gown of purple cloth, frilled apron and mob cap, in which Mary dressed her: and here Peter was welcome as often as he chose to visit.

He made great efforts during their absence to have his book ready for their wedding-gift: but though he finished the writing of it, he found greater difficulty in coming upon the Town than he had anticipated. Publishers told him that though they personally preferred the class of work upon which he was engaged, they must consider the interests of their partners or their shareholders, and that such a book would not sell, though if Mr. Davies could see his way to sharing the cost of pro-

duction—— Peter remembered Mr. Beaumont Scholes, and his method of publication, and regularly replied that his work must be taken on its merits or not at all.

In the end he sent it to a firm who had announced a prize of £100 for the best first novel. The prize was awarded to Peter and two others, the publisher thus obtaining three novels for the poor price of one.

The book was published on very poor paper, and in a hideous cover, a few days before Peter's twenty-fifth birthday. He sent copies to his family, to Janet Fildes (whom he had not seen for many months), to the Scotts, to Mary, to Mattie in Paris, to Thomas Bloomer, that pedagogue who had so cruelly smubbed him on his only visit to his birthplace. Wicksteed also received a copy.

On his birthday Peter was invited to dine with the Scotts, and his guardian gave an account of his stewardship. Peter was possessed of a fortune of nearly five hundred pounds.

Of these he sent two hundred to be divided among his brothers and sisters, who one and all wrote to him with awe and respect, for they had not thought so much money was to be made by the practice of literature as a profession. They sent Peter their love, but by postscript, and as though they doubted whether so fine and opulent a gentleman could have need of such a poor commodity, and herein Peter first tasted the bitterness of the advance to greatness, and first began to perceive the isolation to which a man is brought in mounting to a pinnacle.

Though his accomplishment was small, he found that the "promise" that he was said to show and the "future" predicted for him did stand almost irritatingly between himself and those who had been his friends.

He suffered considerably, and began to loathe the word success.

He approached Wilson on the subject.

"It is a poor thing that should not stand in the way of all that is really worth doing in this world."

"To be kind and strive always to be kinder," quoted Peter.

"That old Cooper——"

They laughed, and Mary, entering at that moment, asked the reason of their merriment. Neither could explain, though they gave Mary the subject of their conversation.

She took the chair that her husband brought forward for her, and sat so with the glow of the fire upon her face. Then she sighed, and, turning to Peter with a slow smile (softer than it had ever been in the old days), she said:

"Peter dear, if you never in all your life did anything more than you have done, you would still be to me most wonderful."

"You are more glorious now than you have ever been."

Her eyes turned to her husband, and Peter knew her thought, that every word he had written or might write, could add nothing to the understanding of himself, which had been his great gift to her. As she gazed at her husband all the tenderness in the world was in her eyes, and Peter knew that he had had his share in bringing it. He reminded her of old Cooper's dream-children descending from the trees to circle the lovers and dance.

"Yes," she said. "It is true. That is creation no less than the other; each baby has a dream-baby for brother or sister."



“I am inclined to think,” said Wilson, “that dream-babies have no sex.”

All three laughed on this.

As he took his leave Peter kissed Mary’s hand. He saw that she still wore old Adam’s ring, plain gold set with one pink pearl.

In Waverton Street he asked Wicksteed his opinion of the book.

“Personally,” said the grave man, “I like something with a little more of a story. Oh, Esther’s all right, but she’d ha’ been sick o’ that Withington fellow in a week and off with another. But I suppose there’s books no worse than that makes a heap o’ money.”

“After deducting the cost of typewriting, I have made exactly twenty-seven pounds, twelve shillings and sixpence,” said Peter, settling into a chair by the fire and lighting a pipe. “After all, it is a trade; and the most celebrated and widely read author in Europe is—Karl Baedeker.”













