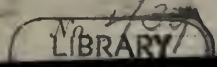




THE
MAGAZINE
CLUB

1915



Signals have been sent by wireless telegraph through a suite of seven rooms, the doors of which were closed. They were transmitted through a telegraph switchboard containing both dead and live wires.

A submarine cable from Cape Town has been laid to St. Helena, and the cable was landed Nov. 23, 1899. The present tariff is \$1.70 a word, but on the final completion of the line the rate will be 97 cents to England.

In the experiments which have been carried on in South Africa with the Marconi system in wireless telegraphy it was found that candelading had no effect on the system.

In London a burglar has been caught and among his implements of trade was found a portable electric-light set. It was undoubtedly intended to be used in his business, as it could be easily switched on and off and there would be an entire absence of odor.

There has been opened the first Chinese electric railway and it connects the Peking

SPARKS OF ELECTRICITY.

ordinary talent for distinguishing good from queer plays, fine from shabby acting. She reports Mrs. Langtry's play rather tiresome and that radiant woman herself as the most beautiful of beautiful creatures, neither marred nor touched by time and tide. Miss Agnew turns on Broadway and thinks "Three Little Lambs" the cleverest farce with the cleverest comedians that the season or the style of musical farce has brought out. Marie Cahill has made an enormous success and two young comedians little known have taken the town by storm in the other two lambs, Marie being one of the three. Mr. Frohman, having overplayed his privilege of gobbling up all the available plays on the market, finds himself crowded out of theaters and short of players because of his oversupply. "The Maneuvers of Jane," a corking comedy, in which Mary Mannering and Little Busby are so good, must close to furnish other plays with talent and for want of theaters to give up dates. Just the policy of this sort of thing is not apparent to the humble outsider, except that it displays to the playless the advantage of everything, including dramas. Plays are at a premium, especially comedies worth playing, and yet Mr. Frohman has a lot of them; all to all ostensible purposes. It is mysterious but not especially inspiring to note, even "Make Way for the Ladies" was hustled out of New York in the middle of a successful run and many more things meet the same fate. "Quo Vadis" has to go away from McVicker's when standing room would be at a premium if it sold at a dollar or two. Keller would not be bought off, neither would Cincinnati and other cities claiming dates for the production.

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THE BACHELORS' CLUB



I MET HIM IN THE ATLANTIC AND CONGRATULATED HIM.—P. 217.

THE
BACHELORS' CLUB

BY

I. ZANGWILL

JOINT-AUTHOR OF 'THE PREMIER AND THE
PAINTER,' ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY GEORGE HUTCHINSON

*'A slavery beyond enduring,
But that 'tis of their own procuring.
As spiders never seek the fly,
But leave him of himself ' apply ;
So men are by themselves employed,
To quit the freedom they enjoyed,
And run their necks into a noose,
They 'd break 'em after to break loose.'*

HUDIBRAS.

'A man may have a quarrel to marry when he will.'

BACON'S ESSAYS.

FOURTH EDITION

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CAUTION

IN writing *The Bachelors' Club* I have not so much had in view the public interest as my own. While I have carefully endeavoured to free the book from anything instructive, I have not shrunk from making it amusing, even at the risk of being taken seriously; and if I succeed in making only one reader laugh, I shall have written wholly in vain. The subject of the work is one that is full of interest, especially to readers of either sex, and I venture to hope that I have treated it as well as it deserves. The book is hereby dedicated to the bachelors and maidens of the world, in the hope that they will each buy a copy, and recommend its purchase to their married friends. It may be as well to state that the work does not libel any of the existing Bachelors' Clubs in particular, but all the others. An index to the jokes is in preparation and will be forwarded to all professional humourists on application, in writing, to the publishers. Some of these jokes have already appeared in *Ariel*, and I have to thank myself for my kind permission to reproduce them. I regret there should be some puns amongst them, as they will be a difficulty to the Chinese trans-

lator, but he may rely on my cordial co-operation. I have also to apologise to my critics for this book not being some other book, though it shall not occur again, as my next book will be. In conclusion, I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to my friend and fellow-Bachelor, Mr. M. D. Eder, for numerous valuable suggestions. Whatever the reader or the critic does not like in this work Mr Eder suggested.

I. Z.

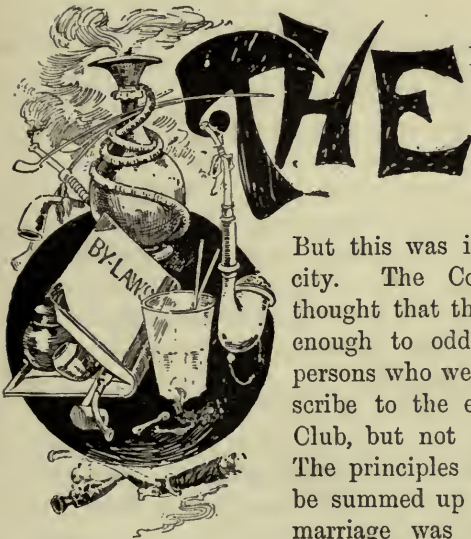
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THE BACHELORS' CLUB.

PROLOGUE.

OF THE BACHELORS, THEIR BELIEFS AND BY-LAWS.



BACHELORS' CLUB was a Club in which all the members, without exception, were Bachelors.

But this was its only eccentricity. The Committee rightly thought that they had sacrificed enough to oddity in excluding persons who were willing to subscribe to the exchequer of the Club, but not to its principles. The principles of the Club may be summed up in its axiom that marriage was a crime against woman for which no punishment, not even exclusion from the Club, could be sufficiently severe. The conditions of membership were four. No member must

follow a profession involving celibacy. No member must have ever had a disappointment in love. No member must be under thirty. No duly-elected member must use a latch-key.

It was incumbent upon all candidates to deposit with the Secretary two independent certificates of non-marriage, each signed by a householder (married) who had known the candidate from his cradle; and, furthermore, to make oath that they held the marriages of other men, and especially of their fathers, to be failures. The respectable married householder had to fill up a printed blue form, containing the following six questions:—

1. What is the full name of the candidate?
2. What is his age?
3. How long have you known him?
4. Has there ever been any matrimony, or tendency to matrimony, in his family?
5. Has he ever had a disappointment in love?
6. Is his celibacy compulsory?

No. 3 was rather a trap, as by a simple comparison of the replies to it and to No. 2, the Secretary could ascertain whether the certifier had really known the candidate from the cradle. Some babies are so precocious that one cannot be too careful.

In the early editions of the Celibate Catechism, which were preserved in the annals of the Club, No. 5 ran simply, "Has he ever been married?" But the inadequacy of this was early perceived. Though a candidate had never committed matrimony, he might have committed himself in other ways to the matrimonial heresy. "Has he ever been in love?" was tried and found even less comprehensive, plausible as it

looked at first sight. A negative answer, it was perceived, by no means excluded the possibility of the candidate having married any number of times and women, whether in Oriental simultaneity or in Occidental sequence. The form finally chosen, "Has he ever had a disappointment in love?" was thought to cover every possible case whether of incipient or developed matrimony in the candidate's past. If a man had loved but had not married, the disappointment in love was obvious. If he had loved and *had* married, the disappointment in love was more obvious still. Thus it will be seen that the Bachelors spared no trouble to confine the privileges of the Club to gentlemen who had a clean record, and whose escutcheon was free from the suspicion of their having ever had honourable intentions towards any woman whatsoever. The sixth question furthermore ensured that they were Bachelors out of pure love. Priests, junior bank-clerks, and others are sometimes required to remain single, and in such celibacy there is obviously no virtue.

As for the provision against the use of latch-keys, every member had to give his word of honour that, in the event of his refusing to go home till morning, he would always on arrival knock or ring, or do both, if so requested by the device on the door-post. The reason for fixing the age of Bachelorhood, in the esoteric sense, at thirty was based upon the scientific fact that celibacy in earlier years is too common to be the touchstone of an elevated soul. It had been originally determined to frame a condition to exclude those who had ever taken part in the marriage-ceremony, but on reflection it was decided not to keep the best men out of the Club, nor to fail in respect for the Cloth.

Should the various documents, oaths, and assurances be satisfactory, a matter on which the Secretary reported before a General Court of members, the candidate was permitted to be seconded for election. No member was ever "proposed," as the word was held too redolent of evil associations. As soon as a candidate was seconded, he paid his entrance fee and his annual subscription, and became entitled temporarily to the privileges of the Club, including a vote. As the presence of one white ball amid the black was held to constitute sufficient desire on the part of the Club for the new recruit, the candidate was generally elected.

Connected with the Club was a small Benefit-Society. By paying a trifle extra with their monthly subscription, members could insure their single lives. The treasurer and actuary, Moses Fitz-Williams, whose second cousin had been a senior optime, had drawn up tables showing the average duration of the male single life; but as the ordinary agamo-biological statistics were considerably modified by the superior single vitality of the members, the sum assured to be paid on marriage was very large in proportion to the instalments. Thus the unfortunate wife of a departed bachelor received a very pretty penny in compensation. In practice the scheme did not work well. Just as some heavily insured husbands generously die for the benefit of their widows, so one or two Bachelors quixotically married for the benefit of their wives. It did not happen often, for such generosity is rare; but it was a difficulty. The very first night I visited the Club, Felix O'Roherty had a motion on the paper recommending the invalidation of the policy in cases of wilful matrimony, just as suicide rendered ordinary life-assurance null and

void. Out of respect for O'Roherty it was referred to the Executive Committee, and so it passed decently into oblivion. I may as well mention here that the rules regulating the admission of visitors were two, and two only :—

1. No married gentleman admitted.
2. No unmarried lady admitted.

It was plain that if married men were admitted, the virgin purity of the atmosphere and its freedom from the reeks of domesticity would be threatened, while if unmarried ladies were allowed access to the symposia, the single-mindedness of the members might be impugned, and their attentions misconstrued into intentions. Of course the advisability of admitting ladies was never for a moment in question. It was universally felt that to isolate themselves from the society of woman was the surest means of shrouding her in a halo; just as, on the other hand, free communion with her was the safest prophylactic against affection. Nevertheless, in spite of the exclusion of their husbands ladies rarely availed themselves of the opportunity of visiting that unknown animal, the Bachelor, in his native haunts.

To distinguish the waiters from the members, who many a morning turned up in evening dress, it was insisted upon that they should belong to the lower caste of married men. The head waiter owed his supremacy over the rest of the staff to having served a term of years for bigamy, though, on the other hand, the rest of the staff had the consolation of feeling that *he* was nearer to the bachelor caste than his superior. The steward was a dusky Indian who had married at the age of three.

The apartments of the Club were situated in Leicester Square, so that the Alhambra and the Empire music-halls were within easy walk, at least during the early part of the evening. When conversation languished at the Club for scarcity of members, the few faithful Bachelors frequently repaired in a body to these temples of the ballet to save the gas and the fires, only going back to the Club that night if they picked up sufficient members at the temples to make it worth while. In many cases the fortunate waiters (who were expected to sleep on the building, and did so at every opportunity) had the Club to themselves for hours together—although these hours of idleness were usually small.

The premises were neither palatial nor inadequate. They consisted of two rooms, communicating with each other by rather loud remarks. The one you entered first, if you had been careful to ascend two flights of stairs instead of one, was the smoking-room; but the members always smoked in the other and smaller room, because a pipe was more of a luxury there on account of the placard proclaiming "No smoking allowed."

As all the Bachelors were members of the Anti-Anti-Tobacco League, and were never without a pipe or cigar in their mouths, except when brushing their teeth of a morning, and as the cosy little room also contained the bar, it came about that the better half of the Club was always deserted by the members—as was perhaps only consistent.

It was, however, generally occupied by the waiters, who retired there not to be in the way when members were getting their drinks from the bar. This was rather hard upon the poor married fellows on account of the misgamous texts with which the walls of the

room were hung. Fortunately custom dulls the edge of environment; else the revised Decalogue, in which "Thou shalt not marry" replaced the more conventional form of the Seventh Commandment, might have procured them incessant conscience-ache. In time they bore with equanimity the most hateful aphorisms; and occasionally dusted them. These dogmas were the work of the secretary, Mandeville Brown. Here are the worst of them:—" *There is nothing half so sweet in life as the awakening from Love's young dream.*" " *Marriage is egotism on a sociable; bachelorhood altruism on a bicycle.*" " *At seventeen a woman's heart is affected, at twenty-seven her affection.*" " *Merit makes the man and 'Worth' the woman.*" " *Man proposes and woman poses.*" " *Love is the only excuse for marriage; and it is not an excuse that will wash or wear well.*" " *You can give your heart to a woman for life, but who can guarantee that she will not lose it?*" " *The truest chivalry to the woman who loves you is to leave her a spinster.*" " *A love-marriage is a contradiction in terms.*" " *Marriage is a sacrament of souls and a profession for women.*" " *Good conduct may lessen the term of other life-sentences, but bad conduct is the only curtailer of marriage.*" " *Marriage is a man-trap.*" " *There are three things which every good wife detests in her secret heart—tobacco, a faithful income-tax return, and her husband.*" " *The only true love is love at first sight; second sight dispels it.*" " *Love cannot be bought or sold; traffic requires realities.*" " *Marriages are made in heaven; but this brand is not exported.*" " *Genius should only marry genius; and no woman is a genius.*" " *Marriage is as fatal to the higher life as the higher life is fatal to marriage.*"

By the very conditions of the Higher Bachelorhood

few of these articles of faith could have been the legitimate offspring of experience. Hence the veneration in which they were held by the sect. They were sacred and beyond inquiry: a precious heirloom to be handed down from Bachelor to somebody else's son in holy apostolic succession. Another mural ornament deserves mention. It was a sort of fresco, consisting of a great black-edged oval, on either side of which flew allegorical figures of Diana and Tolstoï, weeping; at the head was inscribed in sombre letters the words "Here lied," which surmounted the names of the married and gone apostates. A small proportion of the space was filled; for the Club had naturally been a little unsettled in its origin. Now, however, that it had steadied itself we felt sure that it would maintain its equilibrium, and that the gaps would be left for ever gaping.

There were only twelve Bachelors. The Club was foolishly superstitious, and dreaded the fatal presage of matrimony if ever thirteen of the members should be present at once. Limiting their number to twelve effectually blocked this possibility.

I need not say that these twelve men (or eleven, to affect modesty) were considerably above the average in intellect. That is implied in the fact of their membership. When I joined the Club (which was on the 31st of December, some six months or so after its formation), it was constituted as follows:—

ANDREW M'GULLICUDDY, *Founder and President.*

MOSES FITZ-WILLIAMS, *Treasurer.* ✓

MANDEVILLE BROWN, *Hon. Sec.*

These three formed the Committee. The others were—

OSMUND BETHEL, ✓

ELIOT DICKRAY, ✓

JOSEPH FOGSON, M.D., B.Sc., ✓

OLIVER GREEN, ✓

ISRAFEL MONDEGO, ✓

HENRY ROBINSON, ✓

FELIX O'ROHERTY, ✓

CALEB TWINKLETOP, ✓

and, last but not least, myself. Of these self-chosen spirits, several had won celebrity, or lost it, in literature, science, or art. Most of those who had done neither were trying to. We were all full of humour—good and bad; for when the wine was in the wit was out and could not be restrained. Though some of us were poor, and two of us were old, the majority were well-to-do and in their prime to boot. As a rule our hearts were light and our pockets heavy, and we took no care for the morrow beyond staying up for it. The New Year dawned upon no merrier dozen than that which quaffed the cup of good-fellowship and puffed the pipe of peace, and vowed eternal friendship and celibacy in those dear and expensive old rooms in Leicester Square.

Strange to say, I owed my chance of election to the duodecimal system which prevailed at the Club, for it indirectly opened the door to the ejection of Willoughby Jones, into whose shoes I stepped. Poor Willoughby! You may read of his crime in the matrimonial columns of the *Daily Wire*; but what drove him to it has never before picked its way into print.

Willoughby Jones had got the idea that if twelve good men and true could be packed into a box, a room was quite enough for a Bachelors' dozen. So he seconded a motion that the large room be sublet, and the staff of waiters and the subscription be reduced by one-half. Those who were present have told me, individually and in confidence, that they will never forget the indignation with which this secondation was received by the others; though, speaking for themselves, it seemed eminently reasonable. They were not, however, the men to go against the sentiment of the majority, and declared hotly that the dignity of the Club required at least two

rooms to spread itself over. Besides, as the only way to the inner room lay through the outer, it was felt that, when the tenant moved in, grave complications might ensue, especially if he were domesticated or a musician. Poor Willoughby tried hard to argue that if the tenant were a musician, he would probably be an Italian, so that there would be no necessity for him to practise his revolutionary music at home; but he had a weak case. As for lowering the subscriptions, the Bachelors unanimously thought the others thought such an idea could only occur to a low-minded fellow, who might be expected to turn recreant some day; and they did not hesitate to express one another's opinions. The fiery cross-eyed Moses Fitz-Williams openly taxed him with flabby convictions; whereupon the unfortunate young man lost his head and defied them all, and confessed that he had cherished the grand passion all along, and was looking about in his spare hours for a woman to fit it on to. It was a scene to be remembered, and the atmosphere was tense with emotion. Willoughby Jones stood with his curly head thrown back in the attitude of Ajax defying the telegraph wires; or an early Christian Father (if you can call a Bachelor a Christian Father) inviting the Lions to breakfast. For a moment the members were paralysed. It was as if a Government bomb-shell had fallen at their feet and then exploded. Being Bachelors, they were not used to being defied and having their sacred emotions trampled upon. They opened their mouths, but nothing issued from their lips, except their pipes, which fell unheeded on the floor. At last a member was sent to fetch the President, who was unfortunately absent in the hour of crisis. After a long and fruitless search, it

struck the envoy that M'Gullicuddy might be at home ; where indeed he was, and in his beauty sleep. But he rose to the occasion and drove to the Club ; where he at once prescribed marriage or the payment of the arrears of Willoughby's subscription. Willoughby's eye was seen to light up, as though it were a member in the room where smoking was not allowed, but he said nothing except that anything was preferable to being out of debt. When it was too late, the Bachelors remembered that he was heavily insured. Later in the day, about 9 A.M. to be precise, a lady was hunted up by the accommodating head-waiter. It was the lady who had denounced him for marrying another lady before her, and had thus procured him five years of state-supported celibacy. Against her he had long cherished an unreasonable grudge. Everything comes to him who waits, so the head-waiter was at last rewarded by seeing his widow, by a former marriage, married off to the owner of the unattached grand passion. When the curly locks he had thrown back were entirely a memory, Willoughby pleaded hard to be allowed to rejoin the Club ; but the rules were inexorable. He, however, found salvation by a side-door ; for, the by-laws admitting married men as waiters, Willoughby donned his dress suit and installed himself in the outer chamber, where, as nobody ever interfered with him, and he was never called upon to execute an order, he grew in time to be indistinguishable from the other waiters, and the members forgot that he had ever occupied the social position of a Bachelor. He soon got reconciled to seeing his name under the funereal " Here lied, " and as the Club hours were from sunrise to sunset and *vice versa*, he settled the assurance money upon the head-waiter's first

widow, and was regular and punctual in the discharge of his Club duties, highly satisfied with retaining a position in the Bachelors' Club and cheerfully continuing to neglect his subscription in lieu of salary. But from that day to this no member of the Bachelors' Club has ever cherished the grand passion, whether for woman in the abstract or ladies in the concrete.

Which is a record to be proud of.



CHAPTER I.

THE SECOND TICKET.

THERE was always something about me which invited confidence. It was my tongue. When I saw a Bachelor (the capital "B" always denotes the esoteric Bachelor) walking about with a wobegone air, or a new necktie, or taking his drinks irregularly, I made it a point to sympathise with him. It is only thus that I can account for the fact that I was the solitary recipient of the confidences of nearly every member in turn. Osmund Bethel once said that I was the dustbin for the ashes of everybody's past. But then Osmund always affected cheap epigram, and even that at other people's expense. But let me not speak ill of him. He is beyond our censure now.

Little Bethel they called him at the Club; not because he ever had any Methodism in his madness, but because they did not like to set themselves up against the inevitable. Little Bethel was a tall, handsome fellow, with a mass of tawny hair and a pair of sunny eyes. He carried his head high, and a Malacca cane, but that was before the days of his prosperity. No happier journalist breathed or lied in England than Little Bethel till the day when Slateroller, the dramatic critic of the *Whirlpool*, died suddenly at a *matinée* of a new play, and the editor called Osmund into the

sanctum, and asked him if he would care for the reversion of the post. Osmund's heart gave a great jump, for he felt that this was a great leap forwards for him. He had hitherto been a mere reporter, whose duties were to attend company meetings and review ethical treatises, but he always knew he was cut out for a dramatic critic, because of his contempt for Slateroller and his reluctance to struggle for a seat at the pit-door. It was true that on the only occasion he had understudied Slateroller, he had shown such unstudied antipathy to Slateroller's past record, that the poor man had to spend the next day in writing letters of apology and explanation to his friends, and that he, Osmund, was sent ignominiously back to his ethical treatises. But there must have been something in that article—else, why should the editor have sent for him now ?

Osmund went to his apartment that night in a hansom, and gave his landlady notice. His heart swelled with joyous expectation. He had always loved the drama ; and now his passion for plays was to be requited. He would see three hundred a year at nothing a month. He would be able to bask gratis in the rays of the sacred Lamp of Burlesque ; and to gaze freely into the eyes of Melpomene. He saw himself one of the critics, ranged neatly in their stalls, who are pointed out, not in scorn, by the finger of the pittite ; a first-nighter mingling easily with the rank and beauty and fashion that attend *premières* for nothing but the love of the drama. He saw obsequious managers asking him for plays, and timorous dramatists inviting him to drink. But this was not all.

The question of marriage had always troubled Osmund greatly. Life had always been a hard fight to him ; it

was as much as he could do to exist on the earnings of a reporter. He led but an insipid, lonely life in his apartment, and in spite of the occasional delights of the Bachelors' Club, it was natural he should sometimes feel a longing to marry. Now, however, he was a comparatively well-to-do man; his salary had gone up £95 a year, and he realised with joy that he was at last in a position not to marry. No; there would be no necessity for him now to be false to his principles, no temptation for him to be untrue to the Bachelors' Club, for the sake of marrying a woman of means or drawing his assurance money. In the straits of poverty, the sturdiest soul may stumble and fall; and Little Bethel's soul could not help knowing that it resided in a shapely body. But, Heaven be thanked! the matrimonial Satan was for ever behind him henceforwards.

It is plain that Osmund was afflicted with a conscience. When a man suffers from a conscience, you never know where he will end. But for Osmund's conscience his story might have ended here.

The first ticket he got was a stall for the first night of a Shakespearian production at the *Lymarket*, and Osmund felt a proud and happy critic. He was a little damped, however, when his editor told him that he was not to find fault with anything but the play or the author, as the principal actors were above criticism. "Most young critics start life," said the editor kindly, "by slating the first show they have to do. Unfortunately for your epigrams the first people you are called upon to criticise happen to be public favourites, so I naturally dread your disagreeing with our readers, who won't have seen the show." "But mustn't I think for myself?" said Osmund, rather taken aback. "What

next?" replied the editor. "The business of a critic is to think for the public." Osmund took it out by slating the second show.

He did not always get tickets for the stalls. The high-class theatres, whose seats were at a premium, generally sent stalls, but the second-rate houses, where the audience was usually thin, except at the top, mostly sent him dress-circles. Perhaps it was policy of this sort that kept them second-rate. Whenever he got dress-circles, he revenged himself by not dressing.

One fatal day early in January the *Frivolity* Theatre sent him two dress-circles. As he tore open the envelope, a gleam of triumph shot across his features. "Aha!" he cried, "they are beginning to read me. They are beginning to find out that I am not a mere phonograph like Slateroller. They see that I have ideas—and that I come by them honestly." The dramatic department of the *Whirlpool* was agitated that day; even the editor was drawn into the vortex.

When the first flush of exhilaration had died away, it was borne in on Osmund's mind that somebody would be able to go with him. Again his heart leaped with pleasure. He was not only conscientious, he was sympathetic. He remembered, though it was not easy to recall it, how *he* had longed for orders for the play in the far-off unhappy days; how pleased he would have been had some good fairy unexpectedly presented him with a dress-circle. His whole being glowed with generous anticipation. Some mortal, treading somewhere the thorny path of duty, dreaming in no wise of things celestial, would have that path illumined by a ray of purple light—the heavens would open and drop a dress-circle at his feet. Nay, more; the favoured

mortal would sit at his own side, and from that coign of vantage learn who everybody that was anybody was, perhaps even pay for the split sodas of the critics. It only remained to settle who the favoured mortal should be.

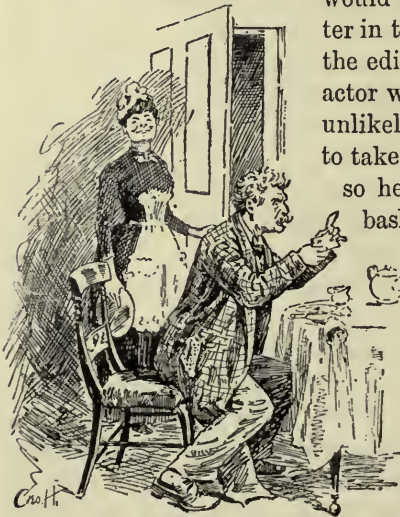
Osmund, let me insist again, had a conscience and reviewed ethical treatises with it. It is not surprising, therefore, if he felt that his first duty was to his relatives. Parents he had none. His mother had perished in the accident of his birth, and as his father had died a month before, Osmund had commenced life as an orphan. Now for the first time in his life Osmund missed his parents. He thought how glad his poor consumptive mother would have been to go to the dress-circle and have her narrow horizon illumined by the Sacred Lamp; how it would have delighted the heart of his dear white-haired old father to see the play for nothing. Poor simple folks, few pleasures, indeed, had fallen to their lot! As he thought of these things, his eyes filled with tears. To picture them lying in the cold, cold ground, when they might have been sitting comfortably in the dress-circle of the *Frivolity*—oh the pity of it! Would that they were alive again, or at least one of them! But, alas! wishes would not recall them to earth. Mastering his emotion, the poor young critic thought of his maiden aunt. Lavinia Lobbleby had brought him up by hand—in such fashion that he had taken to his heels at the first opportunity. Still he owed her some gratitude; she had been a raven to him without any suspicion of his being an Elijah in embryo. She lived in Sydenham, and it would take a day to discover her mind on the subject. But the performance was not due for three days yet, so there was plenty of

time. He would write to her at once. "At once" did not come on till the evening, for the *Whirlpool* received a solicitor's letter threatening a libel action because its dramatic critic had said that a certain actor did not know two words of his part; so Osmund had to discuss the subject with his editor. The latter, as is the way of editors, was for apologising and explaining that the critic meant two words literally, the actor having said, "God bless you," when the text said, "Good-bye, God bless you." But Little Bethel's blood was up, and he said unless the editor of the *Whirlpool* upheld the dignity of his critic, the drama would go to the dogs. He could prove that the actor was an intimate friend of the author's and considered himself privileged; and he

would also put the prompter in the box. Thereupon the editor reflected that the actor was impecunious and unlikely to find a solicitor to take up the case on spec; so he put the letter in a basket where he was in the habit of placing waste-paper. And in the evening Osmund wrote the letter to his aunt.

A day passed without a reply. Osmund was noticeably restless and uneasy. His

head drooped a little, and his Malacca cane was swung



a trifle less jauntily. He came into the Club, and talked with feverish gaiety. I understood afterwards how his mind must have been racked by the thought that he might not hear from his aunt, or hear too late to allow somebody else to make use of the ticket. Early hardship had taught him economy, and he could not bear to waste a crumb; much less so fruitful a potentiality of pleasure as a ticket for the dress-circle. All that night he lay tossing sleeplessly on his bed, waiting for the morning post. The long expected rat-tat sent his heart into his mouth, and the unwonted morsel almost took away his appetite for breakfast. The letter ran as follows:—

“MY DEAR OSMUND,—I write you these few lines—hoping you are quite well, as, thank God, it leaves me at present—to say that I am astonished at your insulting one who always tried to do her duty by you, and to forget your ungrateful behaviour; but I am afraid when young men run off to London they are lost to virtue, and I have heard say they think nothing of seeing Ballet girls Tight on the stage, and am ashamed, and hope you will send me a ticket for the Crystal Palace, which is near me, and where plays may be seen in the open air without going into a theatre, which I have never done, and, please God, never will. Good-bye.—From your affectionate Aunt, LAVINIA.”

Osmund was annoyed. But he reflected that there was yet a day in which to give the ticket away, and, after all, he would have had to see his aunt back to Sydenham, and to refrain from seeing men between the acts. While he was eating the breakfast, his brain was

whirling with all the remaining possibilities. Who was the best person to have that ticket?

His relatives all disposed of, he fell back on his antecedents. Several persons had done him good turns in the past, but he could not get at them in time. He didn't know the addresses of some; others, he knew, would not be found at their addresses in time. There were his acquaintances of to-day, and his brother Bachelors; but there seemed to be no reason to hand it over to one rather than to another. His was an eminently philosophic mind, given to weighing pro.s and con.s, and the balance was so equal as nearly to send him off his own. M'Gullicuddy's claim was ethically the highest, but he would feel more pleased if Oliver Green went with the ticket. On the other hand, it would do him more good to stand well with Eliot Dickray. Smith was, perhaps, the most advisable man on the whole, but then Smith's mother-in-law had just died, and he might not care to be tempted to exhibit his joy in public. Rogers lived handy to the theatre, and Osmund could go and have supper with him afterwards; but then Rogers' wife would be jealous at not having been asked too. He knew several of the other sex, but he could not ask any of the girls to accompany him, for Mrs. Grundy would incontinently publish his engagement to her; the married ladies would hardly venture to incur the suspicions of their consorts; and the widows were either too fresh or too stale. With an aching brain Little Bethel pushed his breakfast aside, and reeled to the office.

You may call him a donkey. So he was; but of the philosophic species, which starves between two bundles of hay. About seven in the evening he came into the

Club, breathless, with a wild light in his eyes, hysterically brandishing a pink ticket. He had spent his day in wiring to or hunting up his acquaintances. Nobody could go with him. But one short hour remained before the curtain of the *Frivolity* rose.

I took pity on him, and went with him. I hate the theatre, with its draughts and stuffy smells. I have been behind the scenes, and know what a fraud everything is. There is no gilt for me on the green-room ginger-bread. I know actors and actresses are only men and women—spoilt. But I went—for this occasion only. It was necessary to save Osmund's reason. I felt that, and I sacrificed myself. I shall never forget the wild cry of gratitude with which he fell upon my bosom. His tears moistened my shirt-front, but he assured me it didn't matter. He hadn't dressed, himself. We were going to the dress-circle.

Next day the threatened writ came to the *Whirlpool* office. The actor, for a wonder, had meant what he said. The case duly came up for trial. Osmund stood up in the witness-box for the rights of free criticism; he bore his cross-examination with truly Christian patience. The jury misunderstood the case, and returned a verdict for the defendants, with costs. The court cheered, the judge threatened to clear it, and the circulation of the *Whirlpool* went up ten quires.

After this the *Whirlpool's* critic got two stalls regularly from all except the very paltriest theatres, and Osmund aged rapidly. His brow learnt many a wrinkle one so young should not know. His tawny hair, too, began to be threaded with silver. Every extra ticket meant to him hours of distraction, correspondence, and suspense. Too economical to waste it, too conscientious

to give it away casually, too honourable to sell it—he went through agonies of doubt each time. Three agonies of doubt per week soon tell on a man.

What need to prolong the agony? The end was near. One wild bitter day, towards the end of January, when the floodgates of heaven were opened, and a cold rain plashed mournfully on the passive pavements of the sombre metropolis, I met him walking along. His head was bowed, and *the Malacca cane was not in his hand!* If I live to be a hundred, I shall never forget that strange and melancholy sight. I invited confidences in the manner aforesaid. “I am going to get married,” he said abruptly. “Come under my umbrella.” I obeyed, for though I always carry a bulging umbrella myself, I cannot bear the trouble of opening it only to fold it up again. “It’s no use, my dear fellow,” he went on hurriedly, anticipating my remonstrances, “my mind is made up—if it is not to break down I must get married.”

“Why?” I gasped.

“Have you noticed what happens when the average young man gets engaged to the average young woman?”

“He buys her a ring,” I said feebly.

“*Nonsense,*” he said sternly. “*He takes her to the play.* Many a man I know has not got engaged, simply because he cannot afford to do this. Young men only marry now-a-days, if they can afford to take the girl to the play, or if she will go to the pit. This she is usually too respectable to do—after she is engaged.” The words came out coherently enough, but there was that in his eyes I did not like. Poor Little Bethel! The rain plashed heavily on the umbrella, dribbling more gently on our hats, for it was not a new one, having

probably been pawned by Noah after the Deluge. Otherwise the silence was tense and painful. "Don't you follow?" he asked fiercely. "Don't you see that many a struggling man would give his right hand if he were only in my position; that half the pretty girls in the world would take that right hand to occupy a stall at all the famous first nights?"

"But surely you will not marry because other men would?"

"No, of course not," with a strange guttural laugh. "But don't you see that if I bind myself to a girl, she will insist on accompanying me and so spare me this perpetual distraction about the second ticket, which makes my once happy life no longer worth the living?"

"But your Bachelorship—your vows——"

"Broken—but not on principle. I don't wish to marry the girl: only to be engaged to her, so that she may accompany me. I would willingly remain engaged to her for ever, but the narrow vision of society," he said gloomily, "sees only one issue to engagement—and that is marriage. I will take her regularly to the play. She shall bless or damn at my side. And when she insists upon it, I shall marry her."

He spoke quietly but sadly. The tears came into my own eyes despite a cynicism I had thought waterproof. Poor Little Bethel! It was useless to reason with him in the state he was in.

"Tell me at least who she is?"

"I do not know. To-day I commence my search. The woman who loves the play most, to whom the theatre is a passion and the drama a perpetual delight—the woman who will never weary in play-going, nor ever refuse to take my orders—she shall be the critic's

bride." I turned away to hide my emotion. There was another moment of silence, broken only by the splash-plash of the rain. Then a soft syllable quivered on the air.

"Paul."

"Yes, old fellow." I turned towards him, but could not see him. My eyes were blinded with tears and rain. "Promise me one last thing."

"I promise," I breathed huskily.

"Promise me," his voice faltered again, "that you will break it to M'Gullicuddy."

For answer I pressed his hand. My heart was too full to speak. Was this to be the end of all that bright young career; those roseate promises? He pressed my hand in return and unclasped it slowly. Suddenly he uttered a loud cry as of one in mortal agony, then I heard the rattle of a hansom—and he was gone.

So Little Bethel married, and the Bachelors' Club mourned him for ten days, and pilloried him for all time upon the sable fresco.

* * * * *

The *Whirlpool's* leap upwards was but a spasm. It did not remain a waterspout long. The innumerable penny insurance rag-bags choked its current into slimy stagnation. The acting-managers send it only one ticket now.

CHAPTER II.

THE FEUDAL ANGEL.

CALEB TWINKLETOP nearly took my breath away one foggy February morning about four o'clock by inviting me to dine with him later in the day. I saw that the invitation had slipped out inadvertently, and that he immediately began to bite his lips for the careless way in which they had kept guard; and as I was very anxious to solve the mystery of his private life, I hastened to decline, upon which he naturally became so pressing that when I ultimately consented he had no chance of backing out. Yes, there was a mystery in Caleb Twinkletop's life; nay, two. The second mystery was how there came to be a first. For Caleb was a simple, guileless old fellow, innocent as an unborn lamb; who found his sole recreation in playing chess and the harmonium. He divided his time between the Bachelors' Club, the City Chess Club, and the prayer-meetings of the Little Bedlamite Brotherhood; for his income was large enough for all these luxuries. He was understood, too, to be a man of family—which is of course very different from a family man. Like most ardent devotees of chess he was a very bad player; and the Bachelors used to rally him on being so frequently mated. We never tired of the obvious joke; nor did Caleb. Both sides were certain of the fixity of Caleb's

habits, to say nothing of his opinions; and a joke that lacks the sting of truth is a compliment. Caleb was the sort of man who would not marry even if he were a marrying man. He moved in a daily rut which it was impossible to conceive him diverging from. He was the tram-car type of man. Whatever change his soul might be planning, his body would always carry him along the ancient grooves. Had he been married, he would have gone on being married day after day, year after year—all in the same automatic way. But he was not married—we had the word of two passing respectable married householders for that—and so there was not a single man in the world, or a Bachelor in the Club, of whom we felt more sure than of Caleb, or Cœlebs, as we called him in our fun. It may be said that, passive as he was, he was the sort of bachelor who would fall an easy prey to the first woman who determined to marry him—even to his own servant, if she should set her cap at him. But the Bachelors knew better. Caleb's mind was too busy with chess problems and gambits to be responsive to solicitations or hints from without, or to be aware of any attention less marked than a proposal. Even in the extreme contingency, his fidelity to the Club might always be counted upon. And yet there were premature furrows upon Caleb's brow, in strange contrast with the candid ingenuous pellicle natural to the forehead of an old bachelor. Even his eyes were those of a married man. Nothing could quite extinguish the cherubic twinkle; but at times there was a far-off expression in them, as if posterity were already troubling him with its teething. It was probably only the chess-nuts he could not crack, for he was the soul of honour, and if he had stumbled

into matrimony, would have been the first to see the impossibility of continuing to drink with us. And yet I felt vaguely that there was a mystery, and made no effort to repress my natural sympathy with him. But all I could learn either from himself, or from the numerous persons to whom I manifested my sympathy for him, was that he lived by himself in a flat with an old and faithful housekeeper, who had been left to him as an heirloom. Though abroad he spent his money as freely as any one chose to eat or drink at his expense, he would never join in the meal. He seemed to be always reserving himself for sybaritic luxuries at home. No one had ever been invited to cross the threshold of his lift; therefore, when Caleb met with the accident of inviting me to dine with him, you may imagine how eagerly I jumped at the chance—though, like a man of the world, I jumped backwards.

But Caleb had the good sense to hide his chagrin, and was all cordiality when I arrived. He did not even bring up the problem of how to force black to mate himself in a hundred and twenty-nine moves—the animated discussion of which had led to my invitation—till after dinner.

He opened the door himself when I knocked, so that my expectations of seeing the faithful attendant were not gratified. I began to fear Twinkletop would withhold her of malice prepense. The mystery commenced to thicken. I was on pins and needles to know what manner of woman she was, and imparted the desired information as to my state of health as indifferently as if I were speaking of some one else's. My eye wandered sympathetically about the room, trying to gather hints of her. Everything was luxurious, not to say

artistic. There were several handsomely-framed oil-paintings, and a number of humorous pen-and-ink drawings, in ebony frames, representing society dinner-scenes, restaurants, and the crushes at supper buffets in the gilded salons of Belgravia. There were also some pretty water-colours, mainly devoted to the portrayal of picnic parties and filling the room with a suggestion of youth and summer. A lithograph over the mantelpiece was only the well-known ecclesiastical "Gourmand." Struck by the strictly proper tone of these pictures, I examined the canvases, the largest of which represented "The Love Feast of the Bedlamite Brothers." A copy of Paul Veronese's "Wedding Party" also had a prominent position, while the smallest of all was a Teniers-like domestic interior, comprising a peasant playing the spinet while his wife lays the table for supper which is seething in the pot on a hearth of the kind on which crickets chirp. Depositing my hat on the revolving book-case, which stood by the harmonium, I glanced at the backs of the neatly-arranged books, catching sight of Oliver Wendell Holmes's prose works; Soyer's *Recipes*; Staunton's *Chess Praxis*; Sims's *How the Poor Live*; *Dyspepsia and How to Cure it*; and *Harmony for the Household*. I do not subscribe to the current maxim that you can tell a man's character by the books on his shelves, though you may possibly tell it by those he returns. I like to draw my conclusion from his premises as a whole. What I saw rather terrified me. I perceived that Caleb was in the hands of a Guardian Angel with a duster. When a man is in the hands of a Guardian Angel there is always a danger that he will realise some day what a trouble he is to the Angel; and should the Angel be clad in petticoats, his pity may

pass over into love. I felt this, and I shivered with ominous foreboding. With beating heart, and sympathy grown more acute than ever, I awaited the arrival of Caleb Twinkletop's Angel, stifling as best I could the dread that she would be kept in the background. She came at last, and dinner with her. I was glad to see them. I could barely suppress my joy as my eyes met hers. She was a creature of delight when first she gleamed upon my sight. I could have sat and looked at her for hours, content to let the world go by and the soup grow cold. She was literally the ugliest woman I had ever seen. Never before had I realised the potentialities of ugliness to which old women may attain if they live long enough. Not Meg Merrilies herself, nor the witches in Macbeth, could touch her for hideousness. Hers was not only a perfect ugliness of *ensemble*, every feature was perfectly ugly.

"Don't you like the soup?" queried my host, a shade anxiously, as I sat in complacent reverie, dreaming of the frightful old crone who had left the room to fetch the second course.

"Oh yes, it's very nice," I said mechanically, lifting the first spoonful to my lips. I hope that unintentional lie will be forgiven me on the Judgment Day.

I tried to disguise the flavour with pepper and salt, but in vain. Caleb seemed to be looking at me out of the corners of his eyes.

"She's a good old soul," he said, rather irrelevantly. "She is like a mother to me, and watches over me like a dog."

I did not point out the animal implications of the two metaphors taken together, but silently passed the pepper.

"She is quite a romantic character, you know," he went on, mechanically accepting the pepper-box; "old family retainer, does the whole work of the flat single-handed, madly jealous of anybody else interfering, a sort of feudal relic of the time when my people lived in a moated grange in Lincolnshire, just like Sir Walter Scott, don't you know?"

I permitted the dubious statement as to the novelist's residence to pass, and stuck to the sherry (which was



magnificent) till the subject of our discourse whisked away the soup-plates and transformed them into meat-plates. She did not appear to allow her master fish. Perhaps it was Lent, and she a devout Catholic. Many faithful servants do not expect their masters to go to heaven. The kidneys were passable, but unfortunately there was no other guest to pass them to.

"She is attached to me with the last drop of her blood," he went on. Personally I should have preferred a more solid method of attachment, and at the worst the first drop of blood to the last. But I was silent. To throw all the onus of the conversation upon him was the surest way of making him indiscreet. But he did nothing but recommend his '75 Lafitte (indeed a divine dream) till the joint arrived and the female retainer departed again.

"The beef is a little overdone, I am afraid," he said solicitously.

I observed that retainers in their zeal *would* overdo things sometimes.

"Yes," he assented, with an undertone of sadness in his chirrupy accents. "But I am glad you like the potatoes. For my part I prefer them cooked in their skins. All the classical works recommend that method, so I sometimes venture to get one in the streets when my appetite can bear the strain. Unfortunately, baked potatoes are not evergreens—they only flourish in the winter. Cookery is a subject on which Tabitha disagrees with me. And her cookery sides with her." He smiled at this way of putting it—a smile pathetic as it was sweet. It needed not this deeply-felt confession to apprise me of the relations of the gentle old chess-and-harmonium player to his cook. Every look she gave him was charged with solicitude, every movement she made in his service was eloquent with devotion, every word was tremulous with the tender tyranny of love.

But the marvellous vintages which danced and bubbled in my glass through this strange uncanny dinner softened everything for me; and by the time I was smoking Caleb's aromatic cigar in Caleb's

voluptuous arm-chair, I had come to the Panglossian conclusion that all was for the best in the best of all possible flats. The dangers I had imagined for my good friend Caleb Twinkletop were imaginary. True, I was hungry and the coffee was impossible, but what were these things in comparison with the knowledge that Twinkletop's Feudal Angel was a hideous crone and a horrible cook?

Good wine may need no bush, but it needs something more to make a good dinner. I would not dine with Twinkletop again.

* * * * *

A fortnight afterwards I was lounging with a dead cigar in my mouth in the smoking-room of the Bachelors' Club, lazily meditating on the principles of our faith that decorated the walls, when I received a telegram. I tore it open feverishly. My heart beat loudly. As my eye darted over the pink paper, I gave a loud cry of agony which woke up the waiters who were sleeping on the premises as usual. I had not seen Twinkletop for a week and my worst fears were confirmed. The telegram ran as follows:—"Come at once in Heaven's name. I am marrying. Twinkletop." To dash downstairs three at a time and into a lamp-post was the work of a moment. Recovering myself, I hailed a hansom and crawled towards my unhappy friend. I found him lying in his arm-chair, smoking and smiling genially. It was the gaiety born of desperation and drink. By his side stood an open champagne-bottle. Still I was disappointed to find him so tranquil and fearless at the approach of marriage.

"Thank you for coming, old friend," he said cheerfully. "When I wired you I was in a nervous mood,

due to reaction and fear of what M'Gullicuddy would say. Tabitha had just consented to become my wife after a week's obstinate siege. For seven days I have been imploring her to take pity on me and become Tabitha Twinkletop. It has been an anxious time for her, dear old creature. She has, of course, no blood and was afraid that by marrying me she would tarnish the scutcheon of the Twinkletops. Her love for The Family outweighed her love for Me. But despair lent me eloquence and at length she returned a blushing positive. Then the reaction came. I remembered the Club and wired for you to break it to them, for you are the only man who has ever known my unhappy secret." His voice faltered with emotion. I did not speak. My breath had not yet had time to come back.

He resumed more cheerfully. "But now I have dared and done. The nightmare is rolled off my life. A year more and it would have been too late. My digestion would have been a memory. Now the years of old age lie before me peaceful and painless." His eyes lit up in ecstatic vision.

"You have proposed to your housekeeper?" I gasped.

"To my flat-keeper," he corrected me; "to my cook; to my feudal devotee." Still the same beautiful look of happiness upon his gentle brow. Good old Caleb!

"Oh Paul,* he went on, "if you only knew what my life has been up till now, ever since the unhappy day when the faithful Tabitha was left to me as an heirloom under my aunt's will. Her jealous devotion to me, her pride in me and in The Family, and in our descent from the Lairds or what's-a-names of Lincolnshire—all this, great Scott! I could have borne. But

her cooking!" He put his hand on the fifth button of his waistcoat in tragic silence. The blinds of the room were down as if in anticipation of the marriage, but the bright fire threw flickering shadows on the wainscoted ceiling. One of them fell upon Caleb's face. To me, sitting with unstrung nerves in that weird room, it seemed, despite his bright visions, an omen of his future.

"How can I tell you what I have suffered?" he resumed, when he was calmer. "She would not let me dine out—it would have been an imputation on her cookery; and who knew what unhealthy things they might give me? I could not eat two dinners—my appetite, though fastidious, is poor. For six months I tried getting my meals surreptitiously from a restaurant, and burnt hers or buried them under the floor. Need I say I nearly got arrested for murder?"

"But why didn't you get rid of her?"

"Paul, I am surprised at you. You talk idly. Can a man get rid of even his old pipe or his slippers?"

I saw I *had* talked idly. The idea of Caleb's having strength of mind and initiative enough to break with a servant! Why, the dear old fellow would have been polite to the old man of the sea, and asked him if he felt quite comfortable on his back.

"I soon wearied," he continued, "of subterfuge and trickery against the woman whose ideal I was. I tried to live up to her faith in me." His voice broke and he dashed away a tear. "I gave up trying to deceive her and sought consolation in my wine, and my cigars, and my pictures of banquets, and my treatises on cookery, to say nothing of the delights of chess, the Bachelors' Club, and the even higher fellowship with the Little

Bedlamite Brothers. I bought *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*, thinking it concerned itself with the pleasures of the matutinal meal. It will come in handy for reading now that my Barmecide banquets of the intellect are to be replaced by the real. But why recall the dead unhappy past? It is buried at length, more surely than my ancient dinners. Tell the Bachelors I am really mated at last."

Again that beautiful smile of ineffable peace overspread Caleb's worn features. His brow began to unfurrow itself, and all the smoothness of cherubic childhood settled again upon his wan features. He rose and opened the harmonium and played some strange celestial chord. "But this is fool's mate," I cried. "You are mad; you are putting yourself beyond the possibility of ever shaking her off now."

The seraphic smile lit up the eyes again. The marrying musician touched the keys softly, and the haunting notes rose and fell like a prayer.

"You don't understand," he said. "When she is my wife, she will allow me to get another cook. The dignity of a Bride of the Heir of the House of Twinkletop will not allow her to do her own cooking." He ceased, and his head fell back in mute ecstasy, and through the silence of the dim room I heard the soaring rhapsodies of the Wedding March rise Heavenwards.

* * * * *

So Caleb Twinkletop married his Feudal Angel, and the Bachelors' Club mourned him sore, and M'Gullucuddy maltreated his memory upon the mural monument.

* * * * *

I dine with the Twinkletops often now.

CHAPTER III.

HAMLET UP TO DATE.

ELIOT DICKRAY took the blow of Caleb Twinkletop's marriage most to heart—with the possible exception of Caleb Twinkletop's cook! He did not re-appear at the Club till the Ides of March, and then his face seemed to have grown some years older. He was always a strange, irresolute being, and his glance round the smoking-room was wild and wandering. His eyes flitted from text to text, he shook his head, he stepped towards the inner sanctum, he retreated, he read the texts again.

Eliot Dickray was not Eliot Dickray, but his son. *The* Eliot Dickray was the famous novelist, essayist, dramatist, and universal provider. Our Eliot Dickray was the least celebrated of his father's works; and his popularity was limited to a select circle of friends and Bachelors. His father's position had of course secured him a certain measure of prestige; but at best he was merely a *succès d'estime*. He was of no use in the world except as a support to the theory that genius is one of the diseases which are not inherited. The colossal mental energy of the father had beggared the family estate; it is unfortunate for the inheritors of fulfilled renown that there is no power of intellectual entail. The paternal geniality was, however, his in plenty; and

in spite of his occasional fits of taciturnity and depression, his cronies accepted him on account of his amiability, and the champagne suppers in his chambers overlooking the Green Park. His generosity was princely; he had nothing to do with his money or his time but spend them, and he did so right royally. But he paid for his pleasures in ennui. He drifted aimlessly along the stream of existence, giving heavy toll at all the locks, and taking little heed of fog-horns. He was too diffident to steer for anywhere. A low self-estimate may do credit to a man's judgment, but it will not carry him far. Modesty is but a poor virtue, though its ravages are not extensive. I used to shudder to think what would have become of Eliot Dickray had he been born sucking the wooden spoon instead of the silver. He would have swallowed it and choked himself.

O'Roherty came up to him as he fumbled about with his eyes and legs and asked him if aught ailed him.

"No; quite well, quite well," he replied nervously. He shuffled away from his interlocutor. "I can't stop," he said. "Good-bye."

"Why, you're going away before you've come!" said O'Roherty, uplifting his eyebrows.

"I have seen all I wanted to. You must really excuse me."

"You have seen only me. And apparently you *don't* want to."

"Oh yes, I do—I mean I don't. I only came to look at these texts again."

The arch of O'Roherty's eyebrows widened. "I thought every self-respecting Bachelor knew them by heart!"

"Yes, yes; of course they are engraved upon the book and volume of my brain; but still——"

"Well, and now you have read them, you are thinking that——"

Eliot's eyes gleamed with troubled light,—“That,” he said hesitatingly, “there are more things in heaven and earth, O'Roherty, than are dreamed of in our philosophy.”

“What do you mean by *our* philosophy?”

“The philosophy of us Bachelors, of course.”

O'Roherty snorted. Eliot's eyes strayed once more towards the texts. “Do you know,” he said, half in reverie, “what strikes me on looking at these texts again with fresh eyes—I—I mean after an interval?”

“Do you take me for a thought-reader?” growled O'Roherty.

“Well, it seems to me,” went on Eliot, in the same abstracted way, “that there is a note of regret about some of them, a smack of sour grapes.”

“Eh, mon! what's that?” cried M'Gullicuddy, appearing suddenly from the inner apartment. “Wha's talkin' about sour grapes?” The President's eyes glared suspiciously from beneath his horn spectacles.

“Dickray says we are dwelling under sour grape vines,” said O'Roherty angrily.

“No, no, hardly that,” said Eliot. “What I say is that these texts have not the true grit, the hearty honest ring of hatred and contempt. That one, for instance, says that ‘*Love is the only excuse for marriage; and it is not an excuse that will wash or wear well.*’ Now the first part of that proposition is a distinct admission to the enemy. It grants that there *is* one excuse for marriage.”

“Nay, but dinna fash yersel’, mon. The second part sweeps it brawly away agen,” said M’Gullicuddy, speaking his native Scotch, and taking snuff in his agitation.

“By no means,” persisted Eliot.

“By a’ means,” said M’Gullicuddy, growing pale at Dickray’s blasphemy. “It’s an awbsolute annihilation of the love-argument.”

“It is very like a wail,” said Eliot quietly.

“Verra like a wail?” repeated the President, dropping his snuff-box in horror.

“Certainly. It laments that the excuse is not durable. It says, What an excellent thing a love-marriage would be! Only, unfortunately, wedded love has no staying-power.”

“Tell that to Mandeville Brown!” said M’Gullicuddy menacingly, as he mopped his brow with his coloured handkerchief.

“My dear Dickray,” added O’Roherty witheringly, “if you have made a fool of yourself by falling in love, say so like a sensible man. But don’t go and abuse the plaintiff’s attorney.”

Eliot smiled with quiet melancholy. “No,” he said simply, “I am not in love—nor likely to be.”

“Then why,” said M’Gullicuddy, dropping into English, “do you call into question all that we hold unquestionable? I am glad no weaker brother has overheard you; it might have unsettled his faith.”

“It is for your sakes I call it into question; your texts tacitly assume that love is the only motive that might induce a Bachelor to marry, and they concentrate themselves upon showing that love, if it be not altogether an invention, is at best as fleeting as the snow-

fall upon the river. But love is far from being the only danger to be guarded against; it is money, position, convenience, comfort, conscience, social pressure, a thousand and one things that induce men to marry. By comparison, love is *une quantité négligeable*. Not one of your texts admonishes Bachelors against these; you muster your apophthegms and dash your serried maxims against a shadowy foe; the real enemy lurks in a million guerilla forms along the route. Remember how Twinkle-top fell and Little Bethel. These texts are but the lamentations of a disillusioned but romantic spirit; the jeremiad of a lover who sees the worm at the core of Eve's apple. They are, I say again, very like a wail." He turned away more resolutely and strode to the door, then he took a last glance at the Club, dashed his hand across his eyes, and was gone.

M'Gullicuddy and O'Roherty looked at each other aghast. What was the matter? What could have happened? What had produced this mental aberration? Dickray had never spoken so well—nor so lengthily.

The two men were seriously alarmed. M'Gullicuddy's dignity kept him taciturn and tragic, but O'Roherty came over to my rooms the next morning and put the case to me. I was chagrined at having missed witnessing the symptoms for myself. *Cherchez la femme* was my conclusion. O'Roherty agreed with me in fearing the worst.

Woman had robbed us of two of our members; was another to be amputated by the same dexterous manipulator? If she could be found in time we might forbid the banns or hinder them. But how to get at her? Ay, there was the rub. O'Roherty mentioned a detective

agency ; I am afraid he has no delicacy of feeling. It took me some time to convince him of the meanness of having a fellow-member spied upon, as if he were a criminal or a coming co-respondent. I said that so long as I had a footing in the Club, no Bachelor should be dogged by an outsider. O'Roherty wriggled his mutton-chops, but my veto was absolute. I said that rather than use such dirty spy-glasses, I would try and ferret out what I could for myself.

I called upon Dickray in the course of the next day, but his valet reigned in solitary majesty in the luxurious apartments. He condescended to inform me that something was worrying his master, who had turned his bedroom into a promenade instead of a sleeping chamber. This was all I could extract from the valet, though I made speech silver for him. I concluded that the yield of information was exhausted, and abandoned the shaft.

In the evening I went to the Club ; nothing had been heard of him. M'Gullicuddy and O'Roherty listened to my want of news with unconcealed anxiety. A sense of coming misfortune hung over us all. If only I could find the woman ! I went out into the streets and wandered aimlessly about, as if expecting to meet her by a miracle. I looked at every passer-by as if he or she might be Eliot Dickray or his evil genius. When the passer-by was two in one, my stare became almost insulting. Near midnight I found myself at the end of Northumberland Avenue. The March wind blew cold and keen from the river, but I did not turn back. Was it Fate that led my steps, or Chance ?

Suddenly I became aware of commotion and bustle at the entrance of a building facing me, and in another

instant remembered it was the National Liberal Club. What was going on? I crossed over. The hall was filled with an excited conversational throng. A momentary curiosity was succeeded by a flash of recollection. They were waiting for the verdict of Sloppleton.

The member for Sloppleton had died. The tragedy of his death was sore. Years of ambitious lying were crowned by but one anonymous line in the evening posters,—“Death of an M.P.” Sloppleton was a sleepy place, the inhabitants of which were amiable and stupid, concerned only about their souls and the local industries. They would not even go to the poll, except when driven by a natty coachman to the sound of brass bands. Naturally, therefore, the eyes of England were turned on the by-election at Sloppleton; there was fixed the axle of Fortune's wheel; for a week and a half it was the hub of the universe, the centre of political power. Justice, Religion, Political Economy, Foreign Policy were among the things that were being weighed in the balance—at Sloppleton. Was the flowing tide with the Liberals, or were they drifting back with the ebb? Was the great heart of the nation still throbbing for the Tory, or was it aching for the Radical? Such were the questions over which heads were broken at Sloppleton—where strong things were said and drunk on both sides impartially. It was an anxious half hour in Fleet Street, where the leader-writers were waiting, manuscript in hand, to know whether the victory they had won was a numerical victory, or merely a moral victory. It was a no less anxious crisis in the hall of the National Liberal Club, where the movements of the tape were watched with far from bated breath. Why do people waste so much loquacity in

speculating on news that will be stale in half an hour's time?

I pushed my way into the Hall. I was never a member of any London Club except the Bachelors'. I like to do one thing at a time. But I find it convenient to turn into one sometimes, especially when I have been there with a member and the waiters know my face. So long as you do not take a mean advantage of the culinary resources of the establishment, nobody is a penny the worse. The National Liberal Club was at this time one of my favourite lounging-places. It is such a huge caravanserai, that I have always regarded myself as an honorary life-member, a kind of under-study for the Ex-Uncrowned King who has never shown his face in the place. It frets me to see an honorary life-membership wasted.

It was Eliot Dickray who had first introduced me to this happy hunting-ground; perhaps I might find him here now. I elbowed my way through the crowd into the smoking-room, which was thickly studded with argumentative groups and heavy with the cloud-wreaths from a hundred cigars. I sauntered along, casting glances to the right and the left and peering into all the cushioned niches. My quarry was nowhere to be seen but I was on the right scent, for I met a man who told me he had seen him in this very room half an hour ago. While we were talking a change came over the scene; a roar was heard outside; men pressed towards the entrance; the news flew from lip to lip and lit up face after face like a flying electric spark; the Liberals had scored an unexpected victory; the roof rang with cheers; the smoke swayed before the waving hats and handkerchiefs; some one shouted the majority;

it was large ; the excitement redoubled ; everybody was shaking hands with somebody else ; the crowd tossed about, huzzahing like a parcel of schoolboys ; somebody—who *was* a somebody—jumped on a chair ; there was a fresh round of cheers ; fresh contingents of Liberals poured in from the hall and upstairs ; then a deep silence fell upon the members, as they hung upon the great man's exultant rhetoric. I gave one last sweeping glance round the smoking-room, then turned and walked up the noble staircase—in search of Eliot Dickray. I met a dozen or so belated members, accompanied by the waiters, hurrying down from the various rooms towards the oratory ; otherwise the upper storeys of the Club were deserted. The library was my last chance ; but even that had been left alone in its glory. I walked up to the extreme end of it to see if perchance my man might lurk in a corner. In vain. It was obvious I had missed him in the unusual crowd or that he had left the Club. Keenly annoyed, I threw myself dejectedly into an arm-chair.

As I sat there brooding, a murmur of voices seemed to be wafted to my ear. I started up ; no one was near. What could it be ? A keen gust of wind smote me in the face and answered me. The balcony ! I had forgotten the balcony. I moved stealthily towards the glass door of communication. It had been left slightly open ; hence the draught of words and chill air. Scarcely breathing in my excitement I peeped cautiously outside. The night was sombre ; the lights of the river gleamed redly ; the moon shone fitfully through brackish cloud ; the leafless branches in the gardens and on the embankment rustled mournfully. In the furthest corner of the balcony, before a small round table, with

their faces towards the railway bridge, sat two men—one slim, the other burly. Both wore overcoats and crush hats. One back I did not know; the other was Eliot Dickray's.

"Very well, Eliot, you are obstinate, I am firm. There can be no advantage in continuing the conversation, except to our doctors, for the air bites shrewdly. It is very cold and my cigar has gone out. This is the second time you have wasted my time with your insane demands. Let us go in."

I heard a match strike as he re-lit his cigar. I bit my lips; I had come at the end of the conversation. But the next words rekindled my hopes and heated my interest to boiling point.

"Father, will you not understand?"

So this was Eliot Dickray, *the* Eliot Dickray. I ventured a long glance at the great literary lion. I had never seen him before; he did not keep his son's company. He was a star, far-off, inaccessible. To-night he had fallen as near earth as the Club-balcony. I longed to see the face of the man whose books I had so often borrowed, but his skull was not transparent. It was not the back he wore in my ideal portrait. What that visionary back was I did not know. I only felt it was not the back before me. Still, the face might be more in harmony with my preconceptions. Noiselessly I wheeled a capacious arm-chair towards the window, and obscured myself in its luxurious depths. With ears pricked up, I listened to the dialogue as from a stall, though I and the persons of the drama were back to back.

"My boy, I understand perfectly—that you are a fool."

"Do you also quite understand what I have resolved to do?"

"Certainly—to demonstrate the fact to the world."

"Father, since our first conversation I have thought over this thing day and night. You have eluded me. Yes, sir, you may smile, but you have eluded me. You were never in when I called."

"My dear Eliot, my engagements!"

"Are not to balk my engagement!"

"To whom?"

"You know whom, father."

"You never told me you had gone so far as to engage yourself to——"

"Yes, father, I am in honour bound. I made the poor old man a definite promise of redress. What other course was open to me as an honest man when I learnt the truth? The sin must be expiated; cost what it may, justice must be done."

"My dear Eliot, when you know as much of the world as I do, you will prefer the heavens to fall."

"Oh yes, I know now how the times are out of joint."

"You are not the man to set them right."

"But you are, father."

"Not even I. I tell you again you are making a mountain out of a molehill. Such molehills are the natural pimples on the unhealthy face of the world of to-day."

"Yes, sir, I know. You are quoting——"

"My own book. Quite right."

"Well, sir, I refuse to accept the sentiment. I had hoped it was not—yours. I still believe in honour—and what it asks of us. Come, father, I will not believe

that you will set your face against the only righteous way out of this unrighteous situation. It is hard—it is a great sacrifice; but it must be made.”

“For the last time, Eliot, if you have taken leave of your senses, allow me to retain mine.” There was the noise of a chair moving violently. The elder man had sprung to his feet in a huff.

“Then you refuse?”

“Absolutely. It will disgrace you no less than myself.”

“Then I must act without your consent.”

“You threaten?”

“Nothing. No, father, you know I have not the strength for that.”

“And yet——”

“And yet, unless you change, our lives must drift apart never to meet again. I cannot touch a penny of your money, sir, henceforwards.”

“What! You will throw up your allowance!”

“Yes, sir; you have always been very good to me; but now, since you and I are of so vitally different a mind on the most important crisis in my life, it is impossible for me to be dependent any longer upon you.”

“Oh, but this is stark, staring lunacy! Why, Eliot, think a moment. Where does the expiation come in if you have no money?”

“I have my youth. I am only thirty-two.”

“But what will you live upon? Upon your youth? I have heard that others have lived upon your youth, but you can't do it yourself.”

“I will live upon money earned—honestly.”

“Earned how? You have not been trained for anything”

"And therefore am ready for everything."

"My dear boy, you are an absolutely incompetent young man. It seems cruel to say so but it is kindest to remind you of it. You have never succeeded in anything you have undertaken; your will is weak, your execution random, your laziness incorrigible. You are a shiftless, thriftless being, with a bent for metaphysics and champagne. Faults or virtues in a man with an income become vices in a man without one; and as, moreover, you propose to add honesty to all your other vices, it needs no prophet to foresee you swirling among the flotsam and jetsam of humanity within a twelvemonth. No, my boy, you are not well; you have been going to bed too early in the morning. Pack up your portmanteau and go off to the Riviera for a month, and pitch your fads and your scruples into the Mediterranean."

"What you say of me, sir, is unfortunately too true. I have been but a well-dressed tramp, a vagabond in broadcloth. But I am not too old to turn over a new leaf."

"And what do you propose to write on this new leaf?"

"A story."

"A story?"

"Yes, sir, a story!"

"*You* write? Ha! ha! ha! Well, well, so the leaf you turn over will be taken out of *my* book."

"No, sir. I hope to write my own books. And yet, in a sense, it *will* be a leaf out of your book."

"In what sense?"

"Does it not strike you, sir—you who have seen so much of novel-writing—what an excellent germ for a story we have here?"

"Damn it, sir! Do you mean to say you are going to

publish this story—that you are going to foul your own nest and wash your dirty linen in public?”

“No, sir. I shall publish the story anonymously. Nobody will ever suspect it has anything to do with me or you. Besides, it would not do to invite comparisons between my work and—the other Eliot Dickray’s. I should be damned instanter by all your enemies, whose malice is impotent to damage your own popularity. I am not so prolific at plots as my—my namesake. Why should I trouble to invent when I have a subject made to my hand? My first tottering steps will be best taken if I lean on the go-cart of reality. I shall start my new life and my story to-morrow.”

So long a silence ensued that I thought it would never end; all I could hear was their heavy breathing, as if they were glaring defiance at each other. Then there came a roar of laughter from the great novelist’s lips.

“’Pon my word you are right. It is indeed a plot—for a farce! You will make your *début* in fiction by telling the truth! Ha! ha! ha! Excellent. And I’ll tell you what: you annoy me dreadfully, Eliot Dickray; but I’m hanged if I won’t give you an introduction to my old chum, the editor of *The Banbury Magazine*, and ask him for my sake to publish your first essay in—truth. Ha! ha! ha!”

“Father—for the last time I use that word—you will not understand me after all. This is no subject for levity. It is the deepest tragedy of my life. I am much older than I was a month ago. I am old enough to earn my own living now. If your decision is final, so is mine. My life must henceforwards be lived apart

from yours—not helped by it to the extent of a farthing, or even of a letter of introduction to any one. Fortunately—alas! that I should have to say it—my mother is dead. The tie between us is not a complicated knot, it concerns you and me only. It can be severed at a stroke. When I have written my story, it is not to your friends that I shall go——”

“Then go to the devil!” roared the great novelist, as he burst open the casement door, bumped against my arm-chair, and strode off with another oath. I had barely time to catch a glimpse of a handsome sensuous full-bearded face writhing with vexation.

Would his son follow him? I waited, not daring to stir a finger. Presently I heard the young man pacing the terrace with restless, unsteady feet. I shifted noiselessly in my seat and peered over the back of the arm-chair. The moon was hidden now by the rack of clouds, and the sough of the wind among the plane-trees by the river was the only sound that mingled with those tragic footsteps. Eliot Dickray paused at last, and leaned his elbows on the parapet, and gazed long and intently towards the sombre water that coiled like a black, red-spotted snake below him. Then I saw his shoulders heave convulsively. He was sobbing like a child.

Oh the tragedy of it! “The deepest tragedy of my life!” What a dark tale of sin and shame was here; deepened by the cynical worldliness of the father—so false to the fine teaching of his works,—relieved only by the resoluteness of the guilty to make atonement. O Eliot, Eliot! thou whose eccentricities astonished even the Bachelors, how couldst thou have fallen into so conventional a gin? True, thou hast redeemed thyself

somewhat as an original by casting off thy father, because he will not have thee marry the woman of thy choice; but yet, methinks, it were better to have loved and lost.

* * * * *

Though the broad outlines of the story were clear to me, I waited with pitying eagerness for the details. Long before my sympathy was appeased, Eliot had written the letter of resignation which I expected daily. Its arrival put the seal upon my hypothesis—if a thing so certain could be called a hypothesis. Our grief for the departed was unusually severe, and, for my own part, I do not know how I should have borne up, if I had not been sustained by the duty of reading, or rather skimming, the fiction of the month. To anticipate a little, I may say at once that during the next few months I sat several hours a day, with wet towels round my head, reading everything that might possibly be the story of Eliot Dickray's secret sin and marriage. My mind became a chaos of incongruous impossibilities; my brain a blood-sodden pulp; my skull a seething caldron of inane sentimentalities. But I read on. Till you try to keep pace with it, you have no idea what an appalling amount of unnecessary lying is turned out every month. And they are not even new lies, they are such an old pack. After I had hunted the needle, sick and dizzy, for a fortnight, it occurred to me that I was neglecting the American hay. At first I read everything; in widening my sphere to take in Transatlantic lying, I found myself driven to select, and to discard stories whose titles were out of all relation to the plot of which I was in search. That was why, when the story did come along, I tossed it aside; and

it was only by the merest accident that I came to read the following story, under the queer label of

HAMLET UP TO DATE.

One o'clock and a foggy night. No watchman proclaimed the tidings, for it was modern London over which the fog lay, and the contemporary night-patrol speaks only from the soles of his boots. But the bell of St. Paul's tolled the hour, and the fog needed no telling. "Hell is a city very much like London," as Shelley hath it; but never more so than in February, when the weird street-lamps serve but to render the darkness visible. To-night the fog wrapped the metropolis in its yellow folds so thickly that unfortunate pedestrians despaired of home and even of England and beauty; the very cabmen had, as a rule, preferred their beds to crawling with smarting eyes through the Egyptian darkness. Up till midnight torch-bearers were to be had, but now even these men of light and leading were inaccessible, counting their gains in the doss-houses.

Harold Ross groped his way along, looking for a hansom. He had retired early from a gay supper-party in one of the Inns of Court, taken a few steps eastwards in search of a remembered cab-rank, then lost his bearings, and was now approaching Fleet Street by way of a slow succession of buildings and objects quite unfamiliar to him. He knew the world's great cerebral nerve as well as most Londoners; but he knew it by perches and roods. In a fog you have to feel your way by inches. You see your own street as under a microscope and are astonished at the unknown world that opens upon you at every step. But to Harold Ross the revelation of Fleet Street in all its minutiae of

brick wall, iron railing, and quaint portal and alley, was not sufficiently interesting to compensate for the choking in his throat, and the exacerbation of his eyeballs.



He made up his mind to fight his way back to the supper-party and abandon the hope of reaching his comfortable bed in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park. Naturally, at this point he caught sight of a hansom's

beacon-fire looming ahead, and making for it, found that it was one of a series smouldering sullenly through the murky atmosphere, but flashing to him the message of hope as the news of the return of Agamemnon was flashed to Argos. He concluded that he had wandered away from Fleet Street and stumbled upon a cab-rank unawares. He hailed the first driver—in more than one sense. The vehicle was engaged. Still light-hearted, he accosted the second. He, too, was engaged. Harold's heart began to sink. Something was going on, and this file of futile hansoms was but a symbol of it. A steady progress down the rank convinced our weary traveller that to him these hansoms were but a mirage, their beacon-fires but wills-o'-the-wisp. What was going on, he discovered, was writing. Half-way down, the resplendent offices of the *Daily Wire* threw an electric light on the mystery. The myrmidons of the press were busy settling the affairs of the universe. The gods of the modern Olympus were launching their columned lightnings, and measuring out praise and blame; the smudgy sons of Vulcan were manufacturing their cheap thunderbolts. When the gods and giants had fulfilled their dread functions, they would be driven home to their villas in Camberwell by constant Jehus, who made the usual reduction on taking a quantity.

Harold Ross passed down the ghostly line tempting the buttoned-up phantoms, and receiving good-natured banter. It did not matter to him what he paid, nor which smart journalist suffered. In great crises like these the best of men are selfish; and Harold Ross was far from being the best of men. He was the thriftless son of a famous man of letters—a poor rich creature, fond of chicken and champagne and careless chat; a

lover of literature and art—but a mere dilettante; a being without a backbone, a dreamer of dreams, lounging lazily through life, the prey of random impulses and flickering ambitions, never putting his hand to the plough without drawing it back; in brief, one of those men whose lives are literally the “dream of a shadow” of the Greek poet.

The last hansom had been left deserted by its driver. Harold waited patiently for his return, refusing to extinguish his last hope and half forgetting the lapse of the minutes in one of his customary reveries. His thoughts were sad and compassionate. He asked himself why these poor men should have been tarrying there in the wretched fog and cold, whilst he, who had never in his life done a stroke of work for his fellows, had been sipping Chablis and swallowing oysters in a warm and happy atmosphere of good fellowship? For the thousandth time he wallowed in the luxury of pity and high unselfish thought; conscious all the while he would never move a finger to help anything or anybody in the world. His reflections were ended by a tall, shabby figure lurching up against him. The odour of the fog was momentarily ousted by a waft of whisky. “Pardon, guvnor,” was jerked in thick, hoarse tones from the figure, already grown phantasmal half a yard off. “Didn’t know you were there. Whoa! stand still, my beauty.” There was a sound of equine impatience mingled with patting.

“Are you the driver of this cab?”

“Yessir, not at your service.”

“Oh, come now. Don’t say that. I’ll give you what you like to take me to Regent’s Park.”

“Wouldn’t advise the (*hic*) canal to-night, sir; but

not surprised you're thinking of suicide. Night like this would recon(*hic*)cile a murderer to the gallows."

"It'll be the death of me in any case if I don't get home," said Harold, rather struck by the man's perfect English, marred only by the little Latin expletives in the brackets. "Come, what will you take?"

"I should say whisky neat, sir, if it were a more Christian-like hour, but as the public's are all closed, thank you for nothing (*hic*). Unless you'll take me into a club." And the gaunt driver leered with a ghastly grin through the gloom.

"Come, come," said Harold impatiently, "I'll give you a sovereign to drive me to Regent's Park."

"Sir, I am engaged. My hirer lies yonder." He flicked his whip in the direction of the *Daily Wire* offices. "Whoa, Bucephalus!"

"Two sovereigns."

"Sir, I am a cab(*hic*)man of honour (*hic*). Still I cannot afford more than a sovereign's worth of such a luxury. Jump in."

Harold obeyed with alacrity.

The driver addressed him through the trap-door. "You won't back out of it afterwards for a couple of bob? What's fare isn't fair in this weather," he added chuckling.

"It isn't. The four-mile radius is sponged out of existence. Drive on, my good fellow, and my man shall give you some grog at the end of the journey." He let down the window, boxing himself up from the fog, and relapsed into reverie as the cab crawled cautiously onwards. How long he mused he knew not; but when the cab stopped suddenly with a shock and a tremor, he turned the door-handle and jumped

out mechanically, thinking they had arrived. Before he had time to look around, the gaunt driver was at his elbow with a lighted lantern in his hand.

"Poor brute's injured himself, I fear," he said, more soberly than he had yet spoken. "Not my fault. Walked into a pillar-box. Bruised his scapula. Gee up, my Pegasus. Bear up, Bucephalus." He caught hold of the bridle and tried to lead the animal along. It made a few steps, then paused, breathing heavily.

Harold groaned. "What's to be done?"

"I am afraid, sir," said the cabman philosophically, after forcing the horse another few paces, "that this is one of the situations in which the only thing to do is to ask what is to be done."

"How far are we?"

"About half-way. Fortunately, if I am not mistaken, we are only within five minutes of the stable. I will lead Bucephalus there, and forfeit one sovereign and the grog."

"And what if I refuse to pay?" said Harold, choking with annoyance and fog.

"Then, sir, I shall commence to swear. I have the filthiest and most extensive vocabulary in London."

The unexpected threat so tickled Harold that he burst out laughing.

"But what is to become of me?" he said, gasping from defect of breath and excess of fog.

"I live near the stables, sir, and if my humble hospitality can be of any service to you, it is freely at your disposal. I can work off the second sovereign that way."

"You are, indeed, a rare bird," laughed Harold, the Bohemian adventurous instinct taking strong hold of

him. "I will accept your hospitality as freely as it is offered—that is, at a charge of a sovereign."

"It is a bargain," said the gaunt cabman. He strode forwards gallantly, holding the bridle of Bucephalus with one hand and his lantern in the other. The horse laboured along no less gallantly, and Harold trudged at the side of the twain silently, but in no morose humour, scenting a new experience as keenly as the war-horse the battle.

In ten minutes' time he was following his host up the creaking rickety stairs of a slum attic. Streaks of light descended upon them through the chinks of a cracked, blistering door.

"Why, who's wasting my paraffin?" said the cabman. "Surely Jenny is gone to bed!" In another moment he threw open the door, disclosing a large but dingy garret with white-washed sloping ceiling, dimly lighted by an oil-lamp standing in the centre of a bare deal table. A pale woman rose as the door opened, with a piece of calico in her hand.

"Back so soon, father!"

"Up so late, Jenny!"

"Yes, father. I expected you home by half-past three, and as I had a lot of sewing to finish I thought I might as well sit up and do it, and it's such a fearful night that I thought you'd like some hot coffee when you——"

She paused, catching sight of the stranger.

"Jenny, my love, this is Mr. Fare, a gentleman who cannot find his way home in the fog, so I have offered him the shelter of our lowly roof. Mr. Fare, this is my daughter Jenny. Be careful, sir, or you will bang your head against the lowly roof in question. *Sublimi feriam*

sidera vertice. In medio tutissimus ibis, come into the middle of the room and your crown will be safe."

Harold Ross bowed to the cabman's daughter and the garret's roof. He walked towards the bright fire, and, having warmed his hands and sloughed his overcoat, he cast a curious glance at the strange couple who stood exchanging whispers. For the first time he saw how hollow-eyed, thin-cheeked, and puny-chested a man his guide and companion was. The lips were full and red, the nose was aquiline and carmine. The brow was high and broad, crowned by masses of tangled grey hair. Dissipation was stamped on his features; the big D of drink was branded like a curse upon his forehead. His skeleton was so thinly padded with flesh that it reminded Harold of a scenario. The daughter's look was no less cadaverous, but the refinement of her face, the unflinching earnestness of her sad eyes, spoke rather of poverty and pain than of culpable physical bankruptcy. She might have been any age between thirty and thirty-five. She was slim and tall like her father, but her print dress was as clean and neat as his coat was greasy and crinkled. She put down her sewing, and, turning towards Harold, said with exquisite courtesy, "You will let me give you some coffee, Mr. Fare."

The cabman seemed to chuckle with his eyes as his daughter addressed the visitor by name.

"Oh, thanks!" said Harold, "I am freezing."

The coffee was served in huge clumpy cups, and the specific aroma which the *bon vivant* visitor loved was absent; still it was hot and not unpleasant to swallow. Jenny spread a coarse table-cloth for the edification of

the guest and cut some thin bread and butter, of which Harold did not partake.

"And now, Jenny, you must go to bed," said the cabman. "To the deuce with your sewing. I am rich to-night. Long live King Fog!"

"O father, give it me," pleaded the woman impulsively, and her eyes told the story not of cupidity nor rapacity but of anxious dread. Then she blushed with infinite delicacy at the betrayal of the family skeleton. "I want you to make me a birthday present," she said, laughing nervously.

"My dear, the £ of the £. s. d. is in somebody else's pocket just now. There are two of them. But I have no fear as to the transfer. Good-night, Jenny."

She bent down and kissed him as he sat at the table, then with a "good-night, Mr. Fare; sorry the accommodation is so bad," she flitted noiselessly through a door in the wall and Harold heard the key grating in the lock.

"My daughter," said the cabman proudly, "has always had her own bedroom. It is the one luxury she has been able to retain."

"From which remark," said Harold with interest, "I gather that you have seen——"

"Better nights—precisely. *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, sir." He got up and went to a cupboard and had a tussle with the handle, which refused to open the door. "Jenny must have locked it," he said at length, "and the glasses are there. I had intended offering you some whisky." He drew a flask from an inner breast-pocket.

"Not for me, thank you," said Harold. "Another cup of coffee will do for me. Thank you, I can help myself."

"In that case, sir," said his host, "there can be no objection to my sipping at the fountain-head." And he put the bottle to his lips.

"Can I offer you a cigar?" said Harold, suddenly bethinking himself that he would like to smoke.

"Of course, sir," the cabman said, selecting one from his guest's case, and kindling it over the lamp. "It's not often now I enjoy another man's cigar by more than the scent of it. But do not let me keep you up; there is your bed. You will find it clean, if hard. Trust Jenny for that."

He pointed to the furthest corner of the gloomy room. For the first time Harold noticed a sort of curtained alcove.

"My good fellow, you are very kind, but I can't take your bed. I can very well smoke by the fire."

"Just what I was thinking of doing, sir. A cigar like this to my whisky is not to be bartered for a bed of down—much less a shake-down. Confound the lamp," he added, as he noticed the dwindling flame, "the wick wants trimming." He carefully drew off the lamp-glass and operated on the cotton with the scissors which lay on his daughter's calico, apparently careless of the fact that her work would smell of the lamp. "What a nuisance to have no gas!" he said, adding, with a splendid American accent, "Yas, I have struck it, but it's a darned little recommendation in the Old Country, I guess." He laughed bitterly. "Jenny ought to be run after by the British peerage."

The lamp burnt steadily for a moment, then the flame began to sink. "Curse it all, it's the oil that's run out," said the cabman. "I'll keep the fire up." He threw some coals on it and choked what flame there

was. "But I haven't got any more paraffin, and I don't suppose you'll like to sit up in the dark. Come, sir, you needn't be afraid of being robbed and murdered here, though nobody in the world knows of your presence here to-night and the opportunity is excellent. Not that I should have the slightest scruples in killing you, but there's Jenny to square. Jenny, sir, has old-fashioned notions, and what is worse, she has absolutely no sense of humour. Jenny takes life seriously—I, in a mere spirit of frolicsome irresponsibility; in that spirit I should take yours."

The lamp flickered weirdly; the fire smouldered dully; the room grew dimmer and dimmer; the spasmodic dying lamp-flame threw the strange gaunt form of the host in ghastlier outlines on the frowsy ceiling and the white-washed walls. The end of his cigar was a circlet of fire in the gloom. Harold shivered; decidedly, it would be pleasanter to go to bed like a Christian. He had not the least fear of robbery or assassination; the vein of queerness in his own composition gave him the instinct to understand the strange being at his side; he knew he had to do with a harmless Bohemian exiled for his sins from his native land. To sit upon a hard wooden chair in the dark garret might be romantic, but it were nicer to lose consciousness beneath a counterpane. He went to the window, lifted up a corner of the striped glaze blind, to see if haply the fog had lifted. There was nothing to be seen but an ocean of opaque mist. With a gesture of resignation, he betook himself to the alcove, drawing aside the curtain which slid on a ring overhead. An iron pallet was revealed, over one corner of which were two triangular book-shelves fixed in the angle of the wall.

Not without curiosity Harold's eye rested upon the books. They seemed familiar. The title of one of them caught his gaze, but ere he could be sure he had read it aright, the light failed and the room was plunged in a dusky fog.

"You are looking at my books," came in strange sardonic tones from the darkness.

"Yes," said Harold, "I thought——" The jet of flame leapt up defiantly and shone steadily for a moment in the face of death. Harold uttered a cry. "How strange!" he said, "why, you have all my father's books!"

The flame sank, spurted, sank—and rose no more. There was a moment of intense silence.

"Are you Harold Ross?" came in strange tones from the depths behind him.

"Yes, I am the novelist's son. And now you know who I am, pray tell me in return, who are you?"

He turned and looked towards where the thin, haggard figure had stood, but there was nothing visible through the gloom except very, very faint white wreaths of smoke curling fantastically round a terrible eye of fire. A strange eerie sensation came over him. His blood ran chill. From the centre of the vaporous impalpable Thing there came in sepulchral tones the words, "Harold, I am thy father's ghost."

Harold's pulse stood still, preparatory to making a spasmodic spurt. Then he turned away nervously from the white film and laughed uneasily. He surmised at once that the man had been an actor in his better nights, and had thus acquired his fund of quotations, and his command of language good and bad.

"Come," said Harold, "that's not a fair return for

my confidences. I told you who I am; tell me who you are."



Again the voice came from the centre of the curling rings, "I am your father's ghost."

Harold laughed resignedly. "Well, keep your secrets. Fortunately my father is alive, but if he were dead I hardly think he would be reduced to driving a hansom in the next world."

"He drives a handsome bargain in this," sneered the smoke-rings.

"If you mean he only allows the publishers a commission——"

"And he drove a publisher's hack hard," continued the smoke.

Harold's blood recovered its warmth. "What do you know about my father?"

"As much as a ghost usually knows about the author of its being, that is all."

"What do you mean?" said Harold, his breath coming fast and his chest contracting.

"I am your father's ghost, and wrote all his books."

"The devil!"

"Precisely; that, like the jackal, is another name for it."

Harold rushed at the sardonic smoke-rings on chasisement bent, but barked his thighs against the table, and the room rang with hollow laughter.

"My dear Harold, facts are facts. From the noise of the collision between yourself and my hospitable board, I gather that they are also news. I should have thought there would have been no secrets between you and your illustrious father."

"Good God, man! are you mad?" said Harold huskily.

"The critics think me a genius," said the mocking Mephistopheles.

"I know little or nothing of my father's private

relations," said Harold vehemently. "But I know that you are a liar."

"That is what I am telling you. My lies have filled your father's volumes and his pockets. All his eulogists say that I am one of the greatest liars of the age."

"Pah! you are drunk," said Harold contemptuously.

"Not now," retorted the cabman. "But if I had not been a disciple of Bacchus neither your father nor myself would have been found on the rank we now occupy."

"Good God! this cannot be true! *My father!*"

"Do you think," said the smoke indignantly, "that I would tell a lie for nothing? Me, an old pressman, who began life as a penny-a-liar!"

The room was not warm, but Harold's agony exuded from his forehead in beads of perspiration. His voice was hoarse with a terrible fear that the liar was telling the truth. The conceptions of a lifetime were tottering.

"What proof have you of this?" he demanded fiercely.

"Proof? A thousand proofs!" said the smoke-fiend sardonically. "The proofs of all your father's novels. He destroyed the manuscripts (Ross's MSS. will never be sold at Sotheby's) but in his confident carelessness he took no steps to prevent me retaining the proofs. The corrections are all in my handwriting. Of course he could not correct his books himself. They were not his own children. To-morrow you shall see them."

"No, I must see them now. I cannot rest with this horrible suspicion on my mind."

"Have you cat's eyes?" queried the ghost.

"No, but poke the fire, man. I shall see by its light."

The devil stirred up the smouldering coal till it stuck out a mocking tongue of flame and revealed the sub-

stance of a grinning phantom, which went to the table-drawer and drew out a heap of printed slips. Harold knelt by the broken fender to examine them. His shadow was an amorphous un-human blotch upon the whitewashed wall. It was a horrible moment. He let the proofs fall from his hand and put it to his eyes. The writing was not his father's. When he spoke again, his voice was tremulous and subdued, and charged with respect and pity.

"Forgive me for my offensive language," he said. "If this be true, and you cannot expect me to believe it without further and different proofs, you are a much-wronged man."

"I can give you plenty of proofs of that!" said the ghost.

There was a long pause before Harold spoke again. Then he broke the silence suddenly, and there was a note of hope in his voice.

"My father's new novel was published last week. You could not have written that."

"No, I did not. When I said I had written all his books I was speaking loosely. His last three books were by another 'hand' in your father's factory. Is it not a commonplace of criticism that your father is now in his second manner?"

Harold groaned. It was too true.

"The second manner," pursued the devil implacably, "in the critic's mouth, implies that the author of the earlier manner is dead. New experience, fresh ideals, have gradually modified his first literary personality till it is completely moulted. So, too, your father gave up the ghost of his first period and hired another. The critics say he has struck a rich new vein of char-

acter and incident, and a maturer manner, and shaken off the last crudities of adolescent genius for the full ripeness of the autumn grain. The first part is true, but I happen to know that the new ghost is barely out of his teens. They would never recognise my maturity, even if I had been fifty years in bottle." Again the drunkard's hollow laughter reverberated through the room and sent a shudder through the listener's being. Harold could scarce longer battle with the belief that his father was a rogue. His filial instincts bristled defiance; but his susceptibility to new impressions was a powerful ally on the side of conviction.

"Speak on; tell me all the story," he muttered.

"The story of the stories! Yes, I will tell it you. But get up from your knees and sit down. That's right," he said, as Harold obeyed mechanically. "Have a cigar. I can recommend the brand." Harold took out his cigar-case and his father's ghost selected a cigar for him and lit it with a wisp of paper.

"Now we are comfortable," said the ghost. "Life is smoke but smoke is life. Ashes to ashes, but ash to ash. A ghostly tale should begin and end in smoke. Thank you; yes, I will have another cigar myself. And now, sir, to my story, which shall be brief as gratitude."

He drained the whisky flask and commenced:—

"Honest labouring man as I am now, I began life as a pressman. I am fallen, fallen, fallen from the Fourth Estate. I began as a brilliant penny-a-liar, and if ever my editor complained, I pointed out that I supplied him with exclusive information, which appeared in no other paper. By stages far from easy, I mounted from penny-a-lying to dictating the policy of *The Twinkler* to an amanuensis. But the intoxication of power was

too much for me, and I fell down the ladder I had climbed so tediously. I was not discouraged, for *la joie de vivre* was always strong in me, and I knew a few pressmen, who got me occasional work when I proffered to do it, so that I made enough for bread and cheese and kisses! They would not trust me with regular work, that had to be turned out with punctuality and despatch, but I earned enough to keep body and soul apart whenever desired. I was recognised in quilldom as one of those brilliant Lucifers but for whose providential fall the respectable Gabriels would find no market, and the mellifluous Michaels be compelled to sheathe their quills in their wings once more. Then I met your father. He was a cross between Lucifer and Gabriel—clever, but commonplace and careful. He wrote very smart articles and lived decorously and gradually gained a wide reputation as a brilliant but reliable journalist. He made one or two contributions to the heavy magazines and became a recognised man of light and leader-writing. This is the journalist's climacteric—his most dangerous period. It was never more dangerous than to-day, when the mass of readers has augmented out of all proportion to the number of men they care to give hearing to. Your father was besieged with invitations from editors and syndicates. He wrote anonymous dramatic criticisms for eleven papers—London, provincial, or foreign; picturesque parliamentary reports for twelve; and occasional leaders and signed articles for about twenty-five. It is so hard to refuse cheques. But it is harder to earn them. The task of writing eleven dramatic criticisms, all different, is not so easy as it looks. When you have said a play is good, bad, and indifferent, you can only go on ringing

the changes. The Parliamentary reports are not so bad, for the politics of the paper you are writing for is a guide to the shades of colouring.

"It is when writers attempt too much that they go to the devil. In due course your father came to me. My beginnings were small and my devillings spasmodic, but I soon became indispensable. I wrote most of his London Letters for him. He got three guineas for each, which he honestly shared with me. I did not grumble, for I was spared the trouble of looking for work, and I hate trouble. I liked writing London Letters and putting on the grand air of haunting the Lobby, being hand and glove with all the lions, and having a private peep-hole in the Cabinet Chamber. They were no trouble, and the only species of work I could be trusted to do regularly. I kept sober to do them. I invented a story in one letter, varied it in a second, commented on the discrepancies in a third, and contradicted it in a fourth. The London evening papers often quoted all the four versions, and I wrote numerous leaderettes for your father commenting on them all. This was a happy innocent time in my life. I was more often sober than not, and in short was quite moralised by my devilry."

"Then my father did not even write his own articles!"

"Not all of them. How could he? How can any respectable journalist get through the work he has to do? Why, I know journalists who write descriptions of ball-dresses who don't know a flounce from a fur-below."

"And how do they manage?" inquired Harold sadly.

"They get the blue devils, of course—the learned

lady writers, you know. But your father never got entangled in the clothesline—at least not directly.”

“All this is a revelation to me,” said Harold. “My father never cared for me to mix in his own circle, and he impressed upon me that I ought to feel grateful for being able to live without it, in both senses. But surely he wrote his first novel himself—*Winifred Wynn*—that made such a sensation?”

“Not a line. He has no idea of novel-writing. He is a smart journalist, but he couldn’t tell an *artistic* lie to save his life.”

“But how came he to turn novelist?”

“Somebody started a magazine and wanted it written by well-known names. He offered your father ten guineas for a thousand-word tale.”

“But if my father had never won his spurs in fiction,—had never even written the smallest story!”

“Magazine editors are always on the watch to discover new talent—in old names. If a man explores New Guinea, there is a great demand for his views on the Deceased Wife’s Sister’s Bill; if he makes a hit as a comedian in the House of Commons, editors pester him for lyrics; if he invents a patent safety sausage-machine there is a sure market for his stories of high life; and if he distinguishes himself by succeeding to a peerage, the ‘title’ pages of the so-called *Nineteenth Century* will be thick with his lucubrations.”

“Yes, I have noticed something of the kind,” said Harold wearily.

“Well, then,” said his father’s ghost, “that was how I took to novel-writing. Your father came to me in great trouble—he was going to be married and wanted money—and told me of the offer. He said that he

thought my London Letters gave promise of a novelist, and as he generously offered to share fair and share alike, I consented to try. The result justified the editor's sagacity. The little tale created a little sensation, and I wrote *Winifred Wynn*. After the success of that my head was turned and I took to drawing my money in advance, mitigating my claims in consideration. Somehow, I got very little out of the volumes of *belles lettres*—novels, essays, poetry, and the dramas—that succeeded—in two senses. The more he made the less I got. But it would not pay me to quarrel with him, and no publisher would touch my work without his name on it. Besides, I knew that if I had not been a literary ghost, I should have been a literal one long ago. Your father used to lock me up in his room for months together when a new book or play was on the stocks, so I was steady perforce. Even then I was very erratic; and often and often, when your father got letters of remonstrance from the publishers, he used to come into my den and indignantly reproach me with the discredit I was bringing upon his character. But he ought not to have reckoned without his ghost."

"But how did you fall so low?"

"To the driver's perch? Yes, I suppose it is a fall; though Carlyle says all work is equally sacred. I did not drop into that at once. Whether because my invention flagged, or because I was too uncertain, I forget, but after twenty years of faithful service your father started giving me less and less to do. He was feeling for his second manner. He found him, and I was discharged—with a caution to hold my tongue."

"And nothing else?"

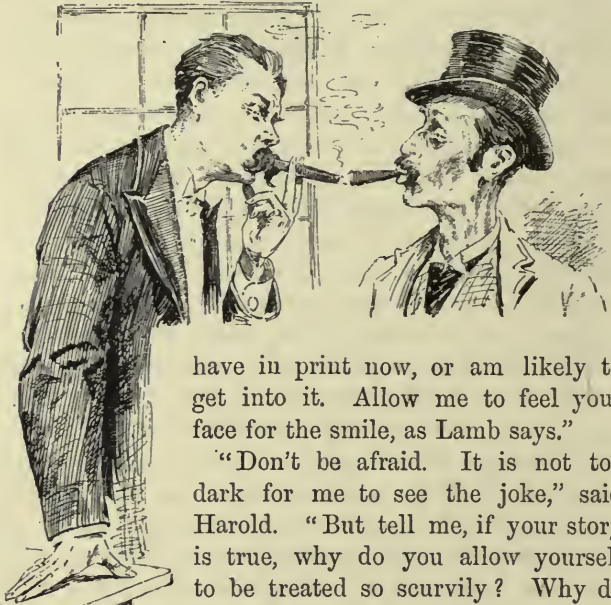
"Yes, a hundred pounds or so. A hundred pounds

doesn't go far with me. Rarely further than the first holiday place I get to. This went with me to Brighton. I returned alone. That was four years ago. Since then I have tried all sorts of things for a living. I could not go back to journalism or literature, for *I* hadn't written a line for twenty years, but in my struggle for a living I have drunk in—no, not merely whisky—lots of materials for another novel. I have been a penny steam-boat steward, a bum, a dog-fancier, a mesmerist, and a super. For a year I served in the Salvation Army; but I was saved by getting a situation as M.C. in a dancing saloon; I lost that and supported myself for six months by Jenny's sewing, after which that goddess out of the (sewing) machine induced me to become a 'bus conductor; from which the transition to my present position was easy. I sought out an old friend who had risen to nearly the top of the *D.T.*, and the memory of our early struggles together in Fleet Street induced him to transfer to me the job of driving him home after his work—on condition that I did it cheaper. This I have done—cheaply and expeditiously—for the last three months; for the night traffic is light and I should not like to see Jenny's eye if I lost this regular job. I have been really like a ghost revisiting my old haunts and the pale glimpses of the moon; but what may ensue from my leaving my old chum stranded in the fog to-night, I cannot say. Allow me to re-light my cigar at yours."

Harold was deeply moved as his cigar met the cabman's in the masculine substitute for a kiss. The dual glow was a symbol of mutual sympathy henceforwards.

"But why not publish this novel you have in your head?"

The cabman shook the head containing the novel. "Who would publish it? My daughter Jenny," he said with a despairing chuckle, "is the only thing I



have in print now, or am likely to get into it. Allow me to feel your face for the smile, as Lamb says."

"Don't be afraid. It is not too dark for me to see the joke," said Harold. "But tell me, if your story is true, why do you allow yourself to be treated so scurvily? Why do you not denounce my father?"

"What! Tell the truth? Where? Through what medium? To whom?

No doubt I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word would harrow up the soul—but the law of libel has to be reckoned with, that lovely invention for the protection of scoundrels and the scourging of honest journalists. Your father could easily put me into a prison or a lunatic asylum. The proofs would be said to be a fabrication; the accusations malicious or

maniacal. Might is Right, now as ever. There are a dozen leading organs in which your father could champion himself and ladle out vilification or badinage to me."

"Do you mean to say my father is so base that he would descend to write anonymously about himself?"

"You forget that his ghost would do it. No; I am no hot-headed enthusiast to risk exposing him. I am an old man, sobered by half a century of drink. Do you think I would sacrifice myself on the altar of Truth at my age? When I was younger I might have done it perhaps. But now when I am not the ghost of his former self!"

"Then I will do it," cried Harold, starting up.

"You?"

"Yes; it is monstrous that you should be cheated out of your reputation and your earnings. Oh to think that I am the son of a swindler, who has lived by exploiting the talents of others! And I—it is your money that has kept me in luxury all my life! I dare not look you in the face!"

"By the time the sun dawns you will have got over it, my dear Harold."

"Never," groaned Harold. "You have crippled me for life. But this injustice must be righted. In all the catalogues Harold Ross must be replaced by—by——"

"Edward Halby, at your service. You're a fine fellow, Harold, but you don't know your own father. It's a wise child that does. I am sorry I told you but I really couldn't help it. The situation was so odd. Let us say no more about it. There are only four persons in the world who know."

"Who is the fourth?"

"Jenny. It is her only happiness to read the old reviews on your father's books. When she is very angry with me, she turns to some lofty moral passage out of one of the books themselves, and then comes and combs my hair tenderly. She would have married some honest man long ago and deserted me, if I hadn't thrown in those soul-moving sentences. 'Cast thy bread upon the waters,' you see!"

"Poor girl! What a lot should have been hers! A great man's daughter, respected and admired." The young man bowed his head in grief and abasement.

"Don't take on so. It's an everyday matter, as I've already told you. Most of the famous writers of the age are quite unknown. Have you not noticed that some of the most celebrated names are sometimes affixed to contributions contemptibly weak?"

"Oh, of course I have. You mean that they have let ghosts do the work."

"No; their ghosts have been laid up, and they have been compelled to understudy themselves. The fact is, that great baby, the Public, is only a judge of the quality of names, not of the quality of the writing; so that when a man has made a reputation in the literary line, he follows the example of all successful tradesmen nowadays and turns himself (though quietly) into a joint-stock company. Or, if he prefers to retire altogether, he sells his name to a syndicate, which pays him the capitalised value of it, partly in money, partly in shares; calculated according to the number of years his popularity is likely to last. Then he puts his hands, together with this lump sum, into his pockets for the rest of his life, while a score of unknown authors are employed by the directors to turn out books with the

special brand on the cover that the Public raves about, and containing gore, or psychology, or humour, or piety, according to the nature of the first success. Sometimes they blunder into hiring a very clever hand in the "works," and the author's reputation is bolstered up for an unexpected term of years, to the great advantage of the dividend. Now you understand why the books of present-day writers are so curiously unequal."

They sat talking till the morning light stole into the garret. The wasted brilliancy of this consumptive-looking creature fascinated him. The cabman's mind was a distorting mirror of paradox, and its reflections were twisted quaintly and not seldom disagreeably; but the flashing phantasmagoria of images held Harold's attention enchained. He even accepted some breakfast when the deft-fingered and early-risen Jenny proffered it. His father's ghost knew so many shady things that were worth being introduced to. He went away burning with admiration and righteous indignation, and the cabman had to go after him to ask for the two sovereigns.

Harold did not go to bed that morning. He searched, Japhet-like, for his father, but the great novelist was a social eel and was always at home at other people's. A little arithmetical calculation would have shown that he must have written his books in his sleep; but nobody had all the data. After some days Harold hunted him down. An eminent actor had returned from America, and was re-opening the *Lymarket*, with *Hamlet*. Knowing of the friendship between his father and the tragedian, Harold purchased a stall. By good fortune it was behind his father's, but the overture had ceased before the lion came in. Harold had just time to greet

him as the curtain went up. Then a religious silence settled on the house till the entrance of the Danish Prince set it rocking for four minutes by the clock. During those minutes he made several efforts to say to his father what was raging in his soul; but the great man's nonchalant complacency and air of distinction awed him. The easy affability of the novelist's nod to the celebrities strewn about impressed him. Was it possible this man, whom he had so revered, to whom the world looked up, was a mere windbag? He began to hope again. The smoke-clouds of the garret rolled off him like a nightmare at sun-dawn. The audience ceased their applause at last, and the mediæval Danish Prince left off grimacing to the nineteenth century. The play proceeded. The fifth scene arrived.

"*Alas, poor ghost!*" said the great tragedian.

"*Pity me not,*" replied the ghost, "*but lend thy serious hearing to what I shall unfold.*"

"*Speak,*" replied Hamlet, "*I am bound to hear.*"

The art of the player, the intensity he put into the words, held the audience spell-bound. But to Harold every word struck home, bringing back the scene and the agony of the night of the fog.

"*So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear.*" The dread, sonorous tones smote him like the sound of a trumpet.

"*What?*" said Hamlet.

Harold bent forward and hissed in his father's ear, "I am thy father's ghost, Edward Halby!"

An electric shock seemed to traverse the novelist's body. His head fell back, his face pale as death.

* * * * *

For hours that night his son talked with him, pacing

the streets of the West End, both unconscious of the flight of time. Harold's demands for perfect justice were insistent. He conjured his father to throw away the worser part of his heart and to acknowledge his guilt to the world. His father argued, stormed, and jested, but never budged an inch. The novelist contended that his position was thoroughly justifiable; nay, one that redounded to his credit, if the ledger were fairly balanced. He pointed out how the moral effect of these books, which were influencing thousands for good, would be dissipated if they were known to be the work of a drunken Bohemian. The Public abhorred the "devil" and all his works, and stupidly confused the work of art with the artist. He said he could easily have written the works himself, if he had had time, and he had simply acted like the masters in all trades, sub-letting the work according to a contract that was perfectly free on the side of the employee. It was a gross breach of confidence and good faith on the part of the workman to reveal the secrets of the craft, even to his master's son. Edward Halby had always been dealt with generously and had all the inner satisfaction of successful authorship, quite as much as Sir Walter Scott. He simply published his books under the pseudonym of Harold Ross—that was all. What did it matter if, as the schoolboy said, Homer was not written by Homer but by another man of the same name? It was no concern of the world's. Besides, he was not the only person involved. Numerous critics and publishers and even friends would become public laughing-stocks, if he made the indiscreet avowal his son desired. There was that friend and admirer, the French writer, M. Bourtain. who, in the *Revue des*

Deux Mondes, had shown the inevitableness of Harold Ross's writings in the light of his birthplace and his early upbringing, and had cited him as a shining illustration of the theory of heredity and of the application of science to literary criticism? What had the theory of heredity done to him that he should deal it such a blow? If he owed something to Edward Halby's reputation, he also owed something to his French friend's. Who should decide which should suffer? Ethical questions were by no means the simple things his feather-headed and unworldly son imagined! They involved endless conundrums and people; and casuistry had never yet been reduced to principles.

The son replied hotly that people with principles had never yet been reduced to casuistry. But his cause was hopeless. He could not prevail upon his father to disavow even one book, and thus gradually break himself of his reputation. The dawn found the great man still as set against sunset and eclipse.

It was when the young man began to realise the impotency of his wishes, when he felt himself distracted at the burden of duty set upon his weak shoulders, and his reason slipping away down the precipice so suddenly opened at his feet, that a gleam of hope burst upon his brain. It was the idea of vicarious reparation! To expose his father was beyond his strength; could he not expiate the sin? Could he not rise in the scale of being and develop into a scapegoat? What if he took himself seriously, if he banished his self-mistrust and gave keener ear to the promptings of literary instinct! What if he made a reputation and paid it over to Edward Halby! His father was a moral bankrupt; well then, it behoved the son to discharge his hereditary

liabilities in full. But Edward Halby was a dying man; the sunshine of fame was not for him. One thing alone remained. Edward Halby had a daughter. If he married her, any reputation he might make would be kept in the family. Edward Halby's blood ran in her veins and the compensation would be as logical as the catastrophes of Greek tragedy. Harold Ross had looked upon himself as a confirmed celibate; but Fate had thrust a life-task upon him and he must not shuffle it off like a coward. Yes, he would marry Jenny Halby, and take his wife's name. He made a last appeal to his father—perhaps he might yet be saved from the cruel necessity of marrying a worn, middle-aged woman, whom he did not care two straws for.

But of this he said nothing to his father; he did not want his father to be swayed by pity for him, but purely by considerations of right and justice. The final scene took place at night upon a terrace overlooking the Thames. It reminded Harold of the battlements of Elsinore. His father told him to go to the devil. He went to his father's. He gave up his tainted allowance. His end was as tragic as Hamlet's. He married Jenny Halby. His reputation is yet to make.

* * * * *

So ended the enthralling story, to which I alone had the key. It was rather amateurish in parts, I thought, and the title was rather forced; and, being a ghost story, it ought to have come out as a summer Christmas number; but still I followed it with breathless interest. Whether any one without my reasons would find it so exciting I could not tell. Of course with this powerful clue I easily discovered the real Edward Halby, whose name was Canning, and the real Jenny. The

ghost gave up the flesh six months afterwards and within a week of the funeral Eliot Dickray published a novel under the name of E. D. Canning. It was at once hailed as a work of immense power, and so I, alone in the world, knew that the world was mistaken; that Eliot Dickray senior was a sham, and Eliot Dickray junior the genius. His father had just that measure of talent which so often sires a genius. His father's reputation had always overshadowed the son; it helped, combined with his natural vacillation and diffidence, to keep him a flaneur. But the sudden demands made upon him had drawn out the latent genius and E. D. Canning promises to be one of the glories of contemporary literature. His identity will soon leak out, however, and he will become one of the stock instances of hereditary genius.

I believe the strangely assorted couple, whose union was such a blow to the Bachelors' Club, lived happily ever afterwards, for the woman had a noble and cultured soul.

But quite by accident I discovered one day that she was only the cabman's step-daughter.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BACHELOR ABROAD.

By this time the Club was in a reduced condition, not only as to members but as to finances. We were now only nine and the drain on the assurance money was very great. We felt that if any more of us married we should die.

An extraordinary general meeting was called for the first of April. The extraordinary thing about it was that it answered. The first idea hit upon was Henry Robinson's. It was to graft our Insurance System on to a popular penny paper. We immediately went to the Editor of *Silly Snippets* who lived in the Square and told him that we were willing to become nine annual subscribers and transfer to him our reserve fund in exchange for back numbers, if he would insure us against Matrimony, as he insured his other readers against Death. He pointed out that he did not insure them against death but only against accidental death. He was willing to accept the risks of accidental matrimony. If any one of us was found married with a copy of *Silly Snippets* in his pocket, he would plank down the money. But if it could be shown to be a case of marriage of malice prepense—well, he kindly offered to see us condemned antecedently.

He proceeded to complain that his readers were a

most ungrateful lot, who were hardly worth wasting scissors and paste upon. He said that they had a most unpleasant habit of going and getting killed in percentages that flew in the face of all statistics. I said that the frequency of cases of sudden death while reading *Silly Snippets* was quite easy to understand. We then left. We heard afterwards he had looked upon our visit as an attempted All Fools' Day hoax.

The Editor's refusal to take the risks of deliberate matrimony naturally damped our spirits. His fear that we should marry communicated itself to us and we were sad. Henry Robinson was especially doleful at the failure of his idea. He had a good position in a bank and so was supposed to divide the financial genius of the Club with Moses Fitz-Williams. We returned to Leicester Square and sat smoking and thinking deeply. The extraordinary general meeting was resumed. What made matters worse was that no new applicants now stepped forward to fill up the gaps in our ranks as they used to do in the early days of the Club. We did not wonder at this; the developed stringency of our conditions and the uncertainty of receiving the minimum of white balls naturally disheartened any who might have offered themselves for election. Still their subscriptions would have been welcome.

M'Gullicuddy was the first to stop thinking. "Bide a wee, lads," he said, and his dropping into his vernacular showed how deeply the simple old Scotsman was agitated by the peril to his Club. "No sae dowie. We will pay oot na mair siller to a departed Bachelor till he has been married twa years. We tak ower little trouble to varify the records o' oor members' marriages. We see the registrar's certeeificate, verra true. But we

ken richt weel that clerks will sign marriage certificate recklessly for half-a-croon. Gentlemen," said M'Gullicuddy, blowing his nose impressively with his picturesque pocket handkerchief, "we maun haud a post-nuptial examination and speir for oorsels before we part wi' the bawbees an' toom the exchequer. I shall be the coroner and you the jury. Gentlemen, if we conduct the inquest by legal methods, we maun do it slowly. (Hear, hear.) We couldna do it under twa years. (Cheers.) Twa years is no ower lang to sit upon a renegade." (Loud cheers, during which the honourable old gentleman resumed his seat, flopping down as vigorously as if the renegade were already upon it.)

It was universally felt that M'Gullicuddy had saved the Club, and we competed eagerly for the honour of supplying him with whisky. In his anxiety to avoid invidious distinctions, the good old Scotsman submitted to taking a "wee drappie" from each of us. He drank Irish. He knew how the other sort was made.

Thinking it over in calmer moments since, I have got hopelessly muddled to understand how staving the difficulty off for two years could be of any use. But then Scotsmen always have a talent for finance. In two years anything may happen. To shift the burden off the shoulders of to-day,—is not that the whole principle of modern business and modern politics? Tomorrow can take care of itself. It will shift the burden on to the shoulders of the day-after-to-morrow. There was a Chancellor of the Exchequer wasted in M'Gullicuddy.

We had hardly concluded the formal passage of the statesmanlike motion seconded by our venerable President, when we heard a commotion in the Smoking-

room, and, opening the door, we saw a red-faced woman (we knew she was a woman because she wore no gloves) quarrelling with the waiters.

"How dare you insult a honest woman as earns her bread by washing and doing for gentlemen, you pair of good-for-nothing shirt-fronts?"

"Hey, my sonsie lass, what ails ye?" said M'Gullucuddy in his broadest Scotch. He generally adopted that after copious Irish.

"Why, I've come with a telegraph for Mr. 'Enery Robinson. It's very important I know,



'cause I've opened it, knowin' it was very important, and so I took the trouble to bring it myself as I had to go this way. But them tailors' dummies was both snorin' around when I came, and when I woke 'em up,

they up and asked me if I was a married woman. I says, what's that to them? and then they says, unless I was married I couldn't come in. As if I wasn't married in Bow Church five years come next Whitsuntide, and my certificate is framed in the parlour next to the memorial card for my poor sweet William who flourishes in 'Eaven a twelvemonth come next

Quarter Day, little knowin' the cowardly aspirations that would be cast on one who——”

“Dry up!” said Henry Robinson, blushing violently and pushing his way to the front.

“Yes, dry up your tears, my good woman,” said Joseph Fogson, M.D., B.Sc., who had a soft heart and could not bear to see even a fly weep.

Robinson's blushing face turned white as he read that telegram. He put his hand to his heart and the pink paper fluttered slowly downwards. I put out a sympathetic hand to arrest its threatened collision with the floor and in doing so could not help reading the message.

“Come at once Albert Gate. Gold discovered. You must leave England immediately. Rose.”

“Thank you, thank you, Paul,” said Robinson, clutching the telegram feverishly. “Good-night, boys. Important business. Keep my fire up, Mrs. Twittle, I shall want some hot coffee about eleven.” And with that he was off.

We looked at one another blankly. My heart was beating wildly but I said nothing to the Club. Why should I betray the poor young fellow yet? Shocked as I was beyond measure by the awful revelation latent in that simple telegram, all my sympathy was still with the unhappy Robinson. After all he might be innocent. Rose might not be his wife after all, but only an accomplice in the robbery. It is so easy to misjudge our fellow-creatures. Not till I had ascertained beyond all shadow of a doubt that he was guilty would I denounce him to the Club. Then, and then only, would I brand him before the eyes of his fellows as a married man.

I allowed a decent interval of five minutes to elapse. Then I said I had an important appointment to attend.

I flew to the Albert Gate in an omnibus and walked up and down in the cold for an hour, disguised in a beard which I always kept in my pocket in case I should be asked to play in charades at evening parties. Robinson did not come, though every now and then I saw some one that looked like Rose. At first I waited patiently, because I surmised that Robinson had taken a cab and would be on presently. But as the minutes wore on without any signs of him, I began to be very uneasy about him.

Robinson was a stumpy young man, somewhere between thirty-one and thirty-three. The Bank he was in was "Murdoch Brothers," and he was understood to enjoy the confidence of whoever ran the concern. Murdoch Brothers of course were dead, poor fellows; but all men may be Brothers if they can afford the shares. "Murdoch Brothers" had ceased to be men. They were a "house" and Robinson was in it. He had a salary of three hundred a year, which would have sufficed for his wants if he had not contracted the incurable habit of trying to get his plays produced. There is no harm in writing plays, but it is expensive trying to get them produced. It is a habit that grows on one. Now at last I knew by what means he had been enabled to indulge it so long. I do not know why Henry Robinson wrote plays; the only reason I can divine for it is that his name was Robinson and he thought Robinson was as good as Jones. Nobody but myself in the Club knew that Robinson tried to get plays produced, though the way he spent his money in Strand taverns on supers and disengaged tragedians

might have opened the eyes of the blindest. Nobody but myself knew even the amount of his salary. I am afraid there is very little mutual sympathy even between Bachelors.

Thus much I had known about Robinson before ; but now a new and lurid light was shed upon his existence. The confidence he had enjoyed at his bank he had betrayed. True, it was a small matter ; but a scrap of paper shows which way the wind lies. How could I hope that he had been faithful to the higher confidence he had enjoyed at his Club ?

With distracted brain and restless umbrella I tramped up and down, blowing my fingers and peering eagerly into the darkness. If Rose was at the rendezvous, she was as disappointed as I, for Henry Robinson was nowhere to be seen. Perhaps the news of the discovery of the gold had been too much for his weak nerves, shattered by a steady course of trying to get his plays produced. Perhaps he had taken flight for the Continent at once, leaving Rose to shift for herself. The clocks struck ten. With a heavy heart I shaved off my beard, put it in my pocket, and returned to my chambers. I lit my pipe and settled myself in my rocking-chair before a roaring fire. But I could not rest. My heart was heavy with foreboding and aching with sympathy. The wind began to wail outside like a lost Bachelor. I got up, walked up and down, threw myself on the rug, sat down again, deposited my legs on the mantelpiece. All in vain. There was a something tugging at my breast, urging me not to sit supine while Robinson was in danger. It was an undefinable feeling, something like a St. Bernard dog, and it tugged me on in dumb

piteous insistence—on, on, towards Robinson's lodgings. It was eleven o'clock. Robinson would be having that hot coffee. I knew Mrs. Twittle's coffee. She was not one of those rare souls who have risen to the secret of coffee. Still, bad as it might be, Robinson would be up and drinking that coffee now. Why should I not share it, with his other troubles? Yes, I would no longer hesitate. I dismissed the tug and ran the rest of the way to Robinson's diggings. The wind was almost cutting now. The stars were still hidden. I should have been quite cold if I had not run. At the door I paused. Suppose his instructions to Mrs. Twittle had been only a blind. Suppose, knowing that she had read the telegram, he had given them only to show he did not intend immediate flight. But no; the odds were he was at home, packing up his belongings and swallowing the hot coffee before taking the night mail. If so, my visit might not strike him as opportune. However, it was too late to draw back now, and I was about to perform my peculiar rat-tat on the knocker when it struck me I should be surer of a welcome if he fancied it was the neglected Rose come to reprove him. I therefore simulated the knock of an irate but cautious female, allowing as well as I could for the fact that her Christian name was Rose.

I had not long to wait, though my heart compressed twice as many beats as usual into that short minute. I heard Robinson's shuffling step in the passage. He lived on the ground floor. As he opened the door, there was a careworn, anxious look upon his face, but the moment he caught sight of me an expression of relief took its place and his eyes lit up in welcome.

"Come in, Paul, old man," he said warmly.

My dodge had succeeded. He was under the joyous reaction from an anticipated scene with Rose. Congratulating myself on my knowledge of human nature, I followed him into his sitting-room.

"Sit down by the fire, old fellow," he said, "and have a cup of coffee. It's nice and hot."

It may have been hot but it wasn't nice, if past brews were to be relied upon. However, I accepted a cup and began to spill it stealthily in the ashes. The room was indeed in a litter. All the signs I had anticipated were present in abundance. A large travelling-case was yawning in the middle of the room, and articles of necessity or virtue lay promiscuously around. A pile of MSS. tottered uneasily in a corner. Robinson himself walked about the room, neither tottering nor uneasily. His unperturbed air, as if there were nothing surprising in being surprised in preparations to fly the country, convinced me that he had mistaken his vocation. It was not that of a playwright nor a defalcating clerk. Henry Robinson was a born actor.

"You are the very fellow I wanted to see," he said, with an admirable assumption of candour. "I was thinking of writing for you to-morrow. I shall be too frightfully busy to call on anybody."

"Oh, indeed," said I, with an equal assumption of ease; "anything up?"

"Rather! Don't you see what a mess I'm in? The fact is, I want you to break it to M'Gullicuddy and say good-bye for me to the fellows."

Break it to M'Gullicuddy! As he said those fatal words, which I had heard so often, my hand shook so violently that the cup fell from my hand. It did

not break as it would have done in one of Robinson's plays, and he picked it up and refilled it to the brim, without noticing the spoilt dramatic effect. As I had spilt at least half of the stuff before this, I could not curse my awkwardness sufficiently, especially as I had to do it all internally.

"Don't be so cut up about it, old fellow," said Robinson, as a tear came or was pumped up into his eye. "It's the best thing that could happen to me."

"Ah, they all say that!" I could not help observing. "But I thought you liked the Club too well to give it up."

"Of course, I shall miss it awfully. Still, there are compensations. You see I can't afford to throw away this chance." I could not quite get the hang of the thing yet, but it was evidently a case of the most flagrant kind. "Money?" I inquired curtly.

"Eight hundred a year."

I whistled! A braw tocher, as M'Gullicuddy would have said. Verily, a vile world!

"But of course it won't go so very much further than my present income, big as it sounds."

"That is self-evident, especially as the years roll on and you increase and multiply. But what does Rose ——?" As her name slipped out, I bit my careless lips in vexation.

"Rose?" he repeated. I knew he would want to know how I had learnt her Christian name, and it now dawned upon me that in any case I had hardly the right to call her by it. "Rose?" he went on. "He thinks it's a splendid thing for me and rightly counts on my eternal gratitude."

"He counts on your eternal gratitude!" I gasped.

"Well, after all, Mr. Rose is the bank-manager,

and has all the say. He promised me long ago that if there was a new opening for a branch bank, I should go out and establish it, and it seems he's heard the first news of a new goldfield in South America and there's going to be a big rush there and I'm to be on the spot to snap up the *clientèle* first. It'll be no end of fun. That wire I had from him to-night was about it." He handed the damnable scrap of paper to me. I took it and perused it with a show of interest. It cost me all my strength not to crush it between my fingers, as though it were of wax.

"I've just come back from Rose's house," he went on unconscious of the tempest that raged within my breast. "Awfully swell place in Albert Gate, don't you know? No. 32. Wish I had his income, by Jove!"

"Yes, and now you will marry!" I said bitterly. He laughed a frank, almost boyish laugh. "No fear of that, Paul. My plays are my wife and children; if they are not my bread and butter. Down among the diggers I shall get lovely new materials; besides the money to pay for matinées when I return. Re-assure yourself, old man, there's as much chance of my turning traitor to our common principles as of a manager putting a play of mine in the evening bills."

"And you propose to still continue a member of the Bachelors' Club?"

"I do *not* propose—to still continue a member of the Bachelors' Club," he replied, making a note of the *mot* on the summit of the tottering mss. "Good bit of repartee, that! Yes, dear boy, you don't get rid of Henry Robinson as quickly as you can mention his brother Jack's name. To show you how earnest I am, before I leave England (which I have to do by the end

of the week) I intend to pay two years' subscription in advance. It'll be at least two years before I can revisit the old country. Cheer up, Paul. Why, there's not a sounder Bachelor in the Club than Henry Robinson, always excepting you, my dear misogynist!"

"Don't be so sure," I could not help saying. I knew how the stoutest of us may fail suddenly, disappearing down one of the trap-doors of that terrible matrimonial bridge in Addison's wonderful allegory of the Vision of Marriage.

He laughed a bright defiant laugh.

"You will be very lonely in the New World," I said, "away from all your old companions and comforts, among rough diggers with bowie-knives and six-shooters that you won't care to mix yourself up with. When night falls on the Sierras you will be glum and miserable. There will be no Bachelors' Club to go to; reason will not feast and soul will not flow. There will be no music-halls and you will not find Nature's stars a sufficient substitute. Your characters would, but you wouldn't yourself. Now frankly, old man, you wouldn't, would you?"

Henry hesitated a moment, for, like all the Bachelors (I do not include myself for obvious reasons), he was keenly conscientious. Then he laughed heartily once more, his stumpy figure shaking with merriment.

"Don't be an ass!" he gasped.

"That's what I'm afraid *you'll* be," I said gloomily. "You'll get dull and depressed and in a low state of health and you'll go and commit matrimony!"

He laughed again, but this time there was a nervous tremor in his voice as if he had begun to realise the danger I foresaw so vividly. "But it takes two to

make a marriage!" he said more seriously. "Where is the other party to come from? Why, there's no creature on earth so rare at the diggings as a woman. That's the only place in this wide world where she's worth her weight in gold. If man is but dust, then woman is gold-dust at the diggings. A petticoat is as rare as a plesiosaurus. As for a baby, it's so scarce that they use it for a Salvation Army and an Art Department, and it moralises and refines a whole camp of the dregs of humanity."

I shook my head obstinately. Though I could not meet his arguments, I was not convinced by them.

"The very rarity of woman will enhance her value in your eyes," I said. "Read the political economy books. If there is an insufficient supply of woman she will become dearer to you."

He began to look troubled.

"And then there is the voyage!" I went on remorselessly. "Look what temptations you will be having on that voyage. There is sure to be a beautiful young girl on board with a history, or an Italian grammar, or something of that sort, which she will draw you into conversation about. She will swing in a hammock on the deck, with a straw hat, a muslin dress, and a bewitching smile, and she will look up artlessly into your face as you bend over her and she will wonder, opening her blue eyes to their widest, how you manage to know everything about currents and compasses and other things you are ashamed to confess your ignorance of. And then at night, especially if it is rough, she will tumble about the deck to look at the Southern Cross or the Aurora Borealis or things of that kind and she will catch hold of your shoulder with her dainty hand while

you slander the Pleiades and take away the character of the Great Bear. After that the ship will be wrecked—who knows?—and then you will be saved.”

The thought was too much for me. I broke down, buried my face in my hands and groaned aloud. Recovering myself, I went on: “You will be saved. And she.—You about in a w h e r e you will out in sun-still look do every-taste. Sea-no power will divide looking in-eyes and the sky seascape lovely ef-you are fathoms this means escape running into a would do if you tried to boat will ultimately the beach of a desert you will find one white-hairy inhabitant, an old gentleman who has been marooned half a century ago by Spanish pirates and who has lived there ever since, forgotten by the world which flattered him in the days of his prosperity, and living on the charity



of his relatives, the monkeys. He will have approximated to the ape himself by this time, but the sight of you will bring back some glimmering recollection of his former state. He will remember that he used to be a priest. Simian as he is, you will not dream of doubting his words. You and your fair companion will now feel that you can be married. The thought of living in that isle in divided misery all your lives, the unspoken dread that had hung over you both like a dark cloud, will be dispelled in an instant. You will fall upon each other's necks—for the first time—and weep! In one of his lucid intervals the priest will marry you; in one of your insane intervals you will be married by the priest. While the Bachelors' Club is re-echoing with light-hearted merriment, little dreaming of the blow in store, down in that distant southern isle a man in whom it so trusted as to be willing to take two years' subscriptions from him in advance, will be trampling upon his pledges, deserting his principles, and exhibiting his unexampled dishonour to the pure round-eyed gaze of a tropical honeymoon."

I looked up. I saw that Robinson was as pale as a ghost. I also saw another thing. In my distraction I had forgotten that odious coffee. My cup was too full. I pressed Henry's hand convulsively, seized my umbrella and hurried from the room, as midnight pealed successively from six of the neighbouring steeples.

Summoned by special telegraphic whip from me, the Bachelors' Club (minus M'Gullicuddy, who was too sacred for every-day use) called in a body on Robinson the first thing the next morning, to the disgust of Mrs. Twittle. We found him calm and his luggage collected.

He wasn't going for three days yet, but he said he liked to be "packed up" in good time. He told us that he was glad we had come, because he had been thinking over what I had said the night before and he now fully felt the force of it. He had quite underrated the temptation to marry when away from the healthy contagion of the choice spirits (using the phrase in both its senses) of the Bachelors' Club and solitary amid the burning or snow-capped Sierras (he didn't know which was the right adjective). Nor had he hitherto done sufficient justice to the ocean-steamer as a marriage-trap. But the danger had only braced his nerves to sterner resistance.

My fellows all applauded to the echo and the annoyance of Mrs. Twittle. I alone was still sceptical!

'Will you bind yourself by an oath not to get married during the two years you are abroad?' I asked maliciously.

"Certainly," he said, without the slightest hesitation.

"Will you bind yourself not to get married while abroad, even though you remain away longer than you bargain for—five years, ten years, twenty years, for ever?"

"Certainly," he repeated firmly. "For myself I do not need this oath, but if it will make your minds easier I am ready to take it."

They all jumped at the idea and we bound him by a fearful oath. I still shudder at the remembrance of it. It would almost have turned my beard grey if I had been wearing it at the time. Think of all the oaths which the uninitiated fancy that Freemasons have to take—think of all the most ghastly and gruesome oaths that the morbidity of a Poe or a De Quincey could

devise, and you will have some faint idea of the sort of oath which Robinson took without flinching; though the set rigidity of his muscles and the whiteness of his cheek showed he was not unconscious of the strength of his language. None of us would doubt Robinson's merest word. Even I believed in him since the rosy light thrown upon his supposed crime. Had he merely affirmed, it would have been enough. And yet there was nothing to be lost by being on the safe side. When the oath had been administered, a solemn hush fell on the room. Its awful sanctity and fearsomeness lay upon the untidy chamber like a heavy pall. We felt stifling. It was as if a horde of weird and mocking demons we had raised from Hell had their hands upon our throats. We gave one last look at Robinson's white face, then we turned and fled into the fresh air of the Bloomsbury morning. It was indeed a last look. None of us ever saw Robinson again.

* * * * *

I received a letter ten days or so after this gruesome scene, bearing the postmark of Lisbon. I uttered a cry of joy. The writing was Robinson's. During all the interval I had been in a ferment of sympathy about him. He had left his chambers on the morning of the oath and had not returned since. All my proffered sympathy at "Murdoch Brothers" was met with chilling agnosticism. I did not know the day he left England. I did not know by what ship he sailed. I was denied the consolation of waving my best handkerchief at him as he faded away into the great waters.

With fluttering heart I tore open the envelope. A piece of cardboard fell out but I did not stop to pick it up. The letter read as follows:—

"The Occident, Eight Bells.

"DEAR PAUL,—Just a line to inform you that I am married. You were right. The temptations to marry abroad would be too great. Since you put the thought into my head it has never gone out again. Taking that frightful oath made it worse. After it was done, I began to think how dreadful a sacrilege it would be if I were to desecrate it down in those lonely Sierras or bending over that syren in the hammock. To break that oath would not be perjury. Perjury is too mild a word for it. It would be blasphemy beyond the dreams of atheism. The more I thought about the danger of violating my oath, the more intense the danger grew. I cursed myself for having put myself within the possibility of trampling on such an oath. And yet I felt I should do it as inevitably as the moth flies to the chandelier. I was looking down a frightful abyss and I knew I should get giddy and crash down its devilish depths. The thought was too horrible for words. Was there no way of escape? Yes, one and one only. I had sworn not to get married abroad. If I could find some one to be married to before I left England, the fearful peril and temptation would be lifted from my soul. Time pressed. The vessel sailed in three days. I took out a special licence, proposed, was married, and am now sailing with my bride for a honeymoon in the Sierras.

Ever yours and hers,

HENRY ROBINSON.

"*P.S.*—Under the circumstances the Club will excuse my not forwarding those two years' subscriptions.

Instead, I shall claim my assurance money at the end of the two years, under the new rules."

The letter fell from my nerveless grasp. I picked it up, and with it the piece of cardboard. It was a photograph sandwich. I extracted the picture from between the cardboards. It was the portrait of a middle-aged but not unprepossessing lady. Across the foot ran the inscription, Inez Robinson. Through my tears I recognised the face. It was that of Inez Staunton, the well-known editress of *Woman's Wrongs*, the champion of female independence and the authoress of *Mistaken Marriages*, the great work in which the evils of all alliances not based on a thorough mutual knowledge and esteem are lucidly exhibited and analysed.

* * * * *

So Henry Robinson married and the Bachelors mourned him and had their hair cut and were not comforted until the even.

CHAPTER V. .

A GENERAL COURT.

WE were all so overwhelmed by this new blow that for some days we went about like married men. At last we determined to dine it down and drown the remembrance of it in a feast of reason and a flow of soul. The Eight of us assembled at the Hôtel Cavour, as the culinary resources of our Indian steward were inadequate to anything beyond sandwiches from the adjacent restaurant. After dinner we adjourned to the Club, which was fortunately only a minute off, to hold a General Court and listen to papers. The first paper was by Moses Fitz-Williams, the treasurer and legal luminary of the Club, upon "The Centenary of the High Hat." Moses is such a little spitfire that we had to nudge ourselves to keep awake. When you have an audience of seven it is not hard to fix them with your glittering eyes. Moses had the further advantage of being astigmatic, so that he could subdivide the work and let each eye stand sentry over three-and-a-half of the audience. But he had to look at his manuscript sometimes; during those precious instants we snatched segments of slumber. At least the unobserved three-and-a-half of us did. We knew his essay was going to be published as a leader in *The Times*, for, like most successful barristers, Moses lived by journalism; and we thought

we could just as well read it in print. But that is always the way with lecturers. They expect you to go and hear their lecture before it is published and to read it afterwards. If you don't go they never forgive you, and if you do go you never forgive them. As we composed ourselves not to listen to Moses Fitz-Williams's paper, we felt an acute envy of the waiters.

This was Moses's paper, as reprinted by kind permission of the Editor of *The Times* :—

THE CENTENARY OF THE HIGH HAT.

Every Englishman is so anxious to celebrate centenaries, from the centenary of the cholera bacillus to his own, that I am lost in astonishment at the omission to celebrate the introduction of what is unquestionably at the head of modern civilisation—I mean the high hat. Who, when he first saw this ungainly article of head-gear perched on the human cranium—like Poe's raven on the bust of Pallas—but would have laughed at the prediction, "It will be all the same a hundred years hence"? And yet so it is. Science has changed the face of the world; fashions have come and cut and come again; dynasties have been o'ertopped; faiths and forms have changed. But the chimney-pot hat remains, and still lifts its glossy glories to the wondering heavens. The suns and snows of a century have fallen on it in vain; it still stands, like some mighty Alp, serene and steadfast in the indomitable pride of its lofty supremacy. High hats perish; but the high hat remains, immortal, undyeing. Demure in black or frisky in white, squat with broad brim or rakish with curly, it is still the unchallenged monarch of the hats of Philistia, before which all other hats remove their wearers in respectful homage. Its surface manner may be beaverish or silky, but its power is felt. For every year of the century has but added to its sovereignty, till now it is become the seal and symbol of respectability, and the hall-rack mark of a gentleman. And yet at first its meaning was quite other. It was a reaction against Benjamin Franklin's simple Quaker's hat, and he who wore it was stamped as a man of progressive views, and of liberalism to the race of hatters. Short people, no doubt,

jumped at it, for it made them rise in the world by many inches at once. And then tall people were naturally driven to it to assert their superiority, and to restore, or rather to re-dress, the balance. As for the medium-sized people, how could they hope to make headway against a fashion everybody else was adopting? Thus the hat was enthroned in supreme sovereignty above all human crowns; till the fierce republicans and socialists, for whom nothing is sacred, began to revolt against its brow-beating tyranny. They indulged in high treason and low hats. They said "the high hat must be crushed"; and even the commercial co-operation of the operatic Gibus could not satisfy their anarchistic aspirations. Englishmen, they cried, could not be slaves; and so long as this foot of cylinder was on their heads they were but as worms that grovelled. So the lowly hat became what the high hat had started life as—a mark of heterodoxy and progressive views. William Morris walked across Hammersmith Bridge in a billycock, Stepniak sported a sombrero, and John Burns was a man of straw. And the disciples clothed their heads in their several ways till the funereal funnel became incompatible with sound views on the doctrine of rent or accurate conceptions of the functions of capital. And then one day there arose a bold revolutionary thinker, who, in the columns of the defunct English Socialist Magazine, *To-Day*, asked why low hats should be the badge of all their tribe. And the eccentric editor, who himself wore a shockingly good high hat, rejoiced and echoed, "Why indeed?" And then there raged "The Battle of the Hats." The high hat has survived *To-Day*, and it will survive to-morrow. It is ugly and it is heavy and it is surcharged with prosaic modernity. You cannot imagine Homer in a high hat, nor Shakespeare, nor even Hamlet. But Mr. Grundy will long go on wearing it; because his wife orders it. And you cannot get a divorce from Mrs. Grundy.

The silence that followed Fitz-Williams's last words roused us from our reverie. We discussed his "High Hat," and crushed it and sat upon it. It was extremely rude of him to make such personal remarks. Did not Oliver Green wear a high hat; did not O'Roherty?

But even worse than this insinuation of respecta-

bility against his fellow-members was the implicit coupling of their names with Mrs. Grundy! As if a Bachelor could be linked even metaphorically with a married woman! Joseph Fogson, M.D., B.Sc., intimated that if the discussion bore out its early promise, there would be no time for him to read his scientific paper. The reminder that we had to face more papers so unnerved us that for a moment we were struck dumb; before that moment was over, Fogson had commenced his paper:—

THE RED TAPE-WORM.

A comatose creature, of the *genus* bore and constrictor, not to be confounded with its prey the "Serpentine" species, or the worm that turns in Hyde Park. Some varieties—especially the English—attain a monstrous growth. The body is composed of multitudinous rings of an official character, each spiral stripe resembling a piece of red tape, whence the name. Its heavy, sluggish breath fascinates all who come near, and reduces them to a state of torpor as deep as its own. Its grip is fatal. Encircling its victim in its horrible folds it crushes the heart out of him and squeezes every drop of blood out of his veins. Living in a Paradise of its own creation, this sluggard snake is, of course, able to speak. Its voice is harsh and sibilant. What it says is circumlocutory and periphrastic. Its sentences are as involved as its folds. It covers up truth with a surface of slaver. It makes promises or rather it promises to make promises. It never performs unless under compulsion; and then it is so long about it that the people who yearn to witness the performance are dead and buried before it begins. It is hard of hearing. So languid are its nerve-currents that if you try to set up a sensation at its tail, decades elapse before the message travels to the brain. Its flesh has the gift of persistent vitality. Hack it for months with pointed pens, grind it for years in the Press, lethargic life still lingers in its slimy sinuosities. Cut it up how you will, each fragment assumes independent existence; with the luxuriousness that comes of independence. Its maw swallows up millions. It never disgorges. It cannot do wrong and it never does right.

Loud applause greeted the tail of this short tape-worm. Life would be so much longer if art and literature were shorter. Fogson mistook the meaning of our applause and announced, amid ominous silence, that at the next meeting he would read a paper on two species of Ring-Worms—the Dramatic Ring-Worm (*vermis annulatus theatralis*), and the City Ring-Worm (*vermis annulatus pecuniarius*). After that Israfel Mondego got up and left. He said he had to sing at a conversazione at Lady Partington's in Piccadilly. We were not sorry, because Israfel had done little else than stroke his beautiful moustache gloomily the whole time, and had contributed nothing to the discussion but his ears. He was always saturnine, sad, and picturesque—especially after dinner—and never said funny things like the rest of us. He was the only member of the Club absolutely devoid of a sense of humour. When he was gone, Mandeville Brown observed that he had found out why Israfel Mondego was in so much request at conversaciones—it was because his singing was such a stimulus to conversation. We all laughed. Mandeville expected it. But we all knew in our hearts that it was quite untrue, for no lady would have dropped a pin while Israfel was warbling his erotic nothings. That was why we hated him. The only virtue we could discover in Israfel was that he was a Bachelor.

O'Roherty took advantage of our good-humour to ask whether any of us had been round the studios, the Spring Art Epidemic being near. Green incautiously replied that he had—when they were not square—but that in some cases, where champagne was on tap, the studios had gone round him. It then transpired that O'Roherty had read an oration upon "Show Sunday."

Determining to have a feast of reason is one thing; but on the top of a heavy dinner you find it rather indigestible. We solaced ourselves by waking up the waiters and demanding lemon-squashes.

“One never knows,” said O’Roherty musingly, as if he had never thought of it before, “what a bore Art is till

SHOW SUNDAY.

Spring comes and your artistic friends send you cards to view their pictures. Why they do it can only be explained by their beastly vanity. Imagine an author sending out cards to his friends to come and laugh at his newest old joke, or to attend a reading of his great work on “The Conservation of the Police Force”; or “The Renaissance in Kamtchatka, 1120 A.D.” You can always write a friend a gushing letter about poems or a novel, but there is no call on you to read them. Why you should be dragged on Show Sunday to see what will either be visible at the Academy or won’t, is beyond my comprehension. An outsider would imagine that an artist would be disconcerted if his picture were rejected after he had cackled over it to his friends! By no means! Acceptance covers him with glory but rejection puts him at once on the level of Turner and other misunderstood gentlemen of the brush, and he feels certain that Providence is raising a Ruskin for him, somewhere, somehow.

But I must admit that there are advantages in seeing a picture in the artist’s presence. I do not refer so much to the excellent exercise it affords in mastering your emotions, as to the fact that you are provided with a ready-made guide to the painter’s intentions, and that, without having the trouble of consulting a catalogue, you are able to learn whether the picture represents Amsterdam by Moonlight or the Rape of the Sabines.

When you find that the expression on a cardinal’s face is intended for agonised remorse, and when you further learn that the face in question is not a cardinal’s but an Egyptian mummy’s, you feel a rush of æsthetic rapture in the contemplation of the Lovely and the True, which you couldn’t feel when you were under

the impression that the mummy was a jolly old church dignitary. There is nothing so troublesome to remember as a classical legend. To this day I don't know whether Ulysses killed Æneas or Æneas killed Ulysses. I only know that one killed the other, or they both committed suicide, or were killed by somebody else, or ought to have been killed, or something of that sort, and that they were called "pious" for doing it. So it's quite a treat to go and see a fellow's "Atalanta and Pizarro," or his "Minerva's Farewell to Mazzini," and have him there to tell you the exact circumstances of the case. How often in an art gallery have I longed to be Dr. William Smith! I wonder, though, whether he knows his own classical dictionaries.

Mandeville Brown hummed applause. "Of course not," he interposed. "A man who has written a learned book is like a man who has taken a degree in art or medicine, or crammed up for the civil service. Once the book is published, or the examination past, he lets bygones be bygones. But what I have often wanted to know is why the Academy "Private View" is so called? Because it's not Private or because it's not a View? If it is both, what is Show-up Sunday?

"A private private view, of course," observed Fogson, M.D., B.Sc., rather querulously.

"Your private views are just what you must keep to yourself on these occasions," said Mandeville. "But how much people care about art is shown by the newspapers, which give more space to the description of the fashionable ladies at the private views than to the pictures."

"The fashionable ladies are often the notablest works of art in the galleries," said O'Roherty, "and the best painted."

"And the most deserving of hanging by the Academy they patronise by *not* paying the shilling

of the vulgar," said Mandeville, nettled at O'Roherty's taking the epigram out of his mouth. One does not lead up to jokes for the sake of one's friends. O'Roherty, unabashed, continued to recount his artistic experiences. He described the pictures of the Forty, most of whom it appeared were merely flattering themselves by imitating themselves. He also read us some statistics of the number of pinafores, wooden chairs, rivers, cows, Greek maidens, roses, dogs, buhl cabinets, snuff-boxes, sand-spades, buckets and other common objects of the sea-shore he had seen in his travels, together with an inventory of the wardrobe, and wound up with a breathless description of his visit to an unknown artist. "From the pretentious studios of Belgravia and the palaces of art of St. John's Wood," said he, "I took the 'bus to the Euston Road. Here in an attic I saw a poor struggling artist putting the last touches to a picture on which all his hopes were staked. He had not been trained in the schools—he knew naught of the conventionalities of academic art. His aged father leant over the oils and made them water-colours with his tears. Need I say the picture was atrocious? So, as I am certain it will be in the Academy, there is no need for me to expatiate on its beauties, as I should have done had there been any. But any one who wants to see pink sea-water and ultramarine cornfields may be recommended to buy it." This unexpected conclusion restored our good humour. Even M'Gullucuddy smiled. But Mandeville's smile was less genial.

"I will wager a sovereign you are colour-blind, O'Roherty," he said.

O'Roherty looked abashed. "Nonsense," he said. "How do you know?"

This made us roar and pacified Mandeville. We felt more convinced than ever that O'Roherty was an Irishman, though we dared not tell him so.

At this point M'Gullicuddy reminded us that we had again to face the problem of the falling-off in our membership, and he called upon the secretary to make a statement upon the situation.

Mandeville Brown arose with a twinkle in his eye, and a bundle of letters in his hand. "I have received a number of applications for membership," said he. We thumped applause and asked why we had not been told before dinner. Without replying, Mandeville continued, "For the first time in our history, ladies are asking to join the Bachelors' Club."

There was a dead silence. Then Moses asked: "Married or single?"

"Both. The married ladies base their claim upon the fact that they are bachelors of science, art, or music. The single ladies appear to argue that 'bachelor' embraces 'spinster,' just as 'man' notoriously embraces 'woman,' according to Acts of Parliament."

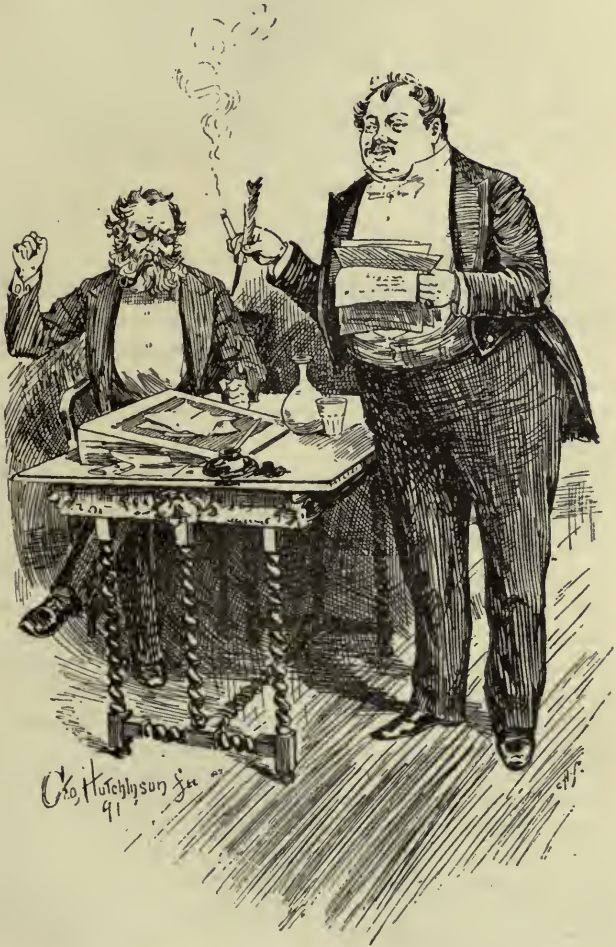
"Quibbles, quibbles!" I cried excitedly.

"Order, order, mon," said M'Gullicuddy. "When your house is on fire, you maun snatch up a petticoat if you canna find your breeks."

We were all aghast. Mandeville went on. "The list of applicants comprises (I take them as they come)—

MISS SOPHONISBA DE WALLACE,
HERR BLARNIUM,
MR. VANDYKE BROWNE,
THE MARCHIONESS OF MUDDLETON.

Here we all drew a long breath, and O'Roherty a champagne cork.



SIGNOR GAMMONIO,
 ESMERALDA GREEN,
 MR. BULLYVER BIDDLEBERRY,
 MR. WILLIAM OLDSORE,
 MISS PENTONVILLE,
 LADY ARAMINTA CHAPELTON,

—"one of Israfel Mondego's friends," interpolated the Secretary, taking pity on our open-mouthedness.

MR. OSWALD ODDLER,
 MR. JOSEF SPRINITKOFF,
 MR. TOM TALKEY.

The pessimistic Secretary resumed his seat, evidently in high spirits.

"I shall now, in accordance with custom," said the President, "call upon the Secretary to report upon the character of these candidates with a view to their being seconded, if satisfactory."

The plump little pessimist rose again, amid applause. "Mr. President and gentlemen, I have the honour of laying before you the usual packets of condensed essence of life, the result of careful inquiry through Stubbs and respectable married householders, supplemented by the *Peerage*, *The Gazette*, *The Review of Reviews*, Galton's *Genealogies*, and the *Newgate Calendar*.

"MISS SOPHONISBA DE WALLACE.—Married. Degree of Bachelor of Music from a Norwegian University. Latest lessee of the Novelty Theatre. Like Bismarck's decayed tooth, is of German extraction. Talent for the boards hereditary. Mother familiar with the plank-bed from girlhood. Managerial instinct derived from father, who was born with a cast in his eye. Began her stage career by playing Chambermaids and Old Harry. First engagement of importance was to Mr. Seymour Smith, a respectable solicitor. Marriage a failure. Miss de Wallace went back

to live with her mother, who had in the meantime been appointed oakum-selector to the queen. Age uncertain. Twenty-first birthday celebrated last Monday. In figure inclined to *embonpoint* and want of balance at her banker's. Complexion charming, and her colour comes and goes in a way that betokens the vivacity of her disposition and the contents of her toilette-table drawer. Plays all the chief parts in the plays she produces and collaborates with the most celebrated dramatic authors in writing them."

We thought we would not have Miss De Wallace for her mother's sake. We could easily fill up the four vacancies without her. If Henry Robinson had not left us, we might have voted for her for the sake of his manuscript plays. I determined not to fail to write to him of the chance he had missed by his folly. Mandeville Brown ran his pen through her name and resumed—

"HERR BLARNIUM.—Bachelor. Also a German. Something (not very particular) in the City. Prime mover in the recent corner in corner-men. A black business. Talent in finance inherited from his father, who was one of the earliest discoverers of kleptomania. Of Herculean strength, derived from his mother—an adept at shop-lifting. Speaks German detestably. French as well as his mother-tongue. A gourmand and loves all his accounts well cooked."

We thought we would not have Herr Blarnium for his father's sake. Mandeville Brown ran his pen through his name and resumed—

"MR. VANDYKE BROWNE.—Bachelor. Received his art education in the atelier of a Paris dentist, where he learnt to draw teeth, customers, and his salary. Afterwards served a term with an oilman in Camberwell, and completed his education by making the acquaintance of several models in the shady groves of the Evangelist. Greatest as a colourist. His nose, pipe, and statements of fact are *chefs d'œuvre*. First great picture exhibited in back drawing-room of intended father-in-law's lodgings in Stoke

Newington. Led to the breaking-off of the engagement. Promise of his early career has been carried out; so have some of those who have been privileged to view his pictures. Main works on exhibit in his studio—Classic: The Sneeze of the Serpent; Apollo on Olympus; Juno on Washing Day: Death of Mother Hubbard. Landscape: Under the Strawberry Trees; Sunset on Saffron Hill; Bathing-Machines by Moonlight. Genre: Study of an old Tin Pot; The Dustman's Daughter; Whisky and Water (a study of *Still Life*)."

We thought we would not have Mr. Vandyke Browne for the sake of his intended father-in-law. Browne's matrimonial escutcheon had been sullied. The Secretary drew his pen through the name and resumed—

"THE MARCHIONESS OF MUDDLETON.—Married. Bachelor of Arts. Diploma from Dublin. Just started millinery and linen drapery establishment. The Marquess strongly objected. Said she spent enough on dress already. Among the features of her bonnets are to be beaks of birds from her husband's *battues*. Will sell everything except underclothing, the sale of which she deems immoral and reprehensible. *Gazette* has her bankruptcy ready in type. Tall fierce-looking beauty with green spectacles. In conversation slow and stuttering, but what she does say is beneath contempt. Extremely musical giggle, but a warm human heart beats beneath her dainty lace and occasionally registers 32° Fahrenheit. Fond of Wagner and cough-drops."

We thought we would not have her ladyship for her husband's sake. We did not want scenes with him. He was too grand for us to kick downstairs if he came inquiring after her with a horse-whip. Mandeville ran his pen through her name and resumed—

"SIGNOR GAMMONIO.—Bachelor. Baritone. Very poor in early life—weaned at the age of six months. As an infant had a very musical cry, though no one appreciated the music of the future in it. Once took part in an opera in the Isle of Man. In conversation delightfully piquant; the slang dictionary toils after him in vain.

The Signor's favourite drink is water ; but from a spirit of self-denial he confines himself to whisky. Is a man of true artistic *bonhomie* and will borrow half-crowns even from the Philistines."

We thought we would not have Signor Gammonio for the sake of his creditors. Mandeville ran his pen through the name and resumed—

"MISS ESMERALDA GREEN.—Spinster. The popular authoress of *Boometh as a Bumble Bee* and other unreadable novels. Short stout spinster, with the languid, aristocratic manner of a Persian cat and the moustache of an English guardsman. An instance of precocious genius. Her distaste for grammar apparent even before she could speak plainly ; and when she could, she became an awful liar. Talent from side of father, one of the most inveterate advertisement canvassers that ever drew breath and the long-bow. Never writes except on paper. Her chief work is done at the British Museum, and nothing puts her out so much as the Librarian and his mercenaries at closing time. 'Esmey,' as her friends call her, is very fond of pastry, and they attribute her success to puffs. Takes little sleep, and even when sleeping protests against it through her nose."

We thought we would not have Miss Green for the sake of her readers. Mandeville ran his pen through her name and resumed—

"MR. BULLYVER BIDDLEBERRY.—Bachelor. Member of the Flamingo Club. Originally a collier's lad, he worked his way up to the top of the mine and ran off to London. Here he bought a bad half-crown to commence his career on and sold a publican. Soon after this his unequalled slogging powers were first demonstrated in the great city in a battle-royal with a woman. Talent like this could not go unheeded, and Biddleberry was immediately taken up by that generous patron of all that is elevated—the policeman. From the stone jug he passed to the prize-ring, where his claret-tapping capacities brought him fame, fortune, and a host of friends in the peerage. Purchased a stable and in his very first year carried off the blue ribbon of the turf by feeding the favourite with corn-plaster. Favourite occupations—figuring in divorce suits and

singing drivellishly dirty comic songs at the Flamingo champagne fights. Reason for applying—he is member of all the Clubs that will admit him.

“*N.B.*—Since writing his application he has died.”

“Alas!” said O’Roherty, “we are but as shadows in the hands of the reaper and even prize-fighters must melt away as gossamers before the breeze. May the earth lie as lightly on him as he lied on it.”

We said “Amen,” but thought we would not have Bullyver Biddleberry for the sake of his undertaker. Our Secretary drew his pen through the name and resumed—

“*Mr. WILLIAM OLDSORE.*—Composer. Widower, though representing himself as a bachelor——”

“Enough,” thundered M’Gullicuddy, turning as red as a turkey-cock in his indignation.

“Oh, let’s hear what further depths of villainy he has sunk to,” pleaded Fitz-Williams.

We did our best to pacify our outraged President, and the Secretary went on—

“No better example of hereditary musical genius could be adduced, for his mother was a wholesale dealer in organ-grinders’ monkeys and his deceased wife’s sister was music-mistress at a deaf and dumb home. Is still a young man, having been born in Newington Butts. In person is florid and stumpy, and his upper lip is prematurely bald, but the light of genius that shines in his glass eye atones for all. Tastes naïve and simple. He can sit listening to his own music for hours at a stretch.”

We thought we would not have Mr. William Oldscore for the sake of his deceased wife’s sister. Man-deville drew his pen through the name and resumed—

“*MISS PENTONVILLE.*—Spinster. Charming woman, with lovely hair and without a fine Roman nose, which she lost in a street

accident fifty-three years ago. An ardent patroness of masked balls. Is now forty-five and considerably in advance of her age. Is possessed of considerable debts in her own right; has the courage of her opinions, and a good opinion of her courage; and, having also an atrocious French accent and a fondness for underdone steaks, aspires to represent Cripplegate on the County Council."

We thought we would not have Miss Pentonville for the sake of her constituents. What a blessing it was that we had so many candidates to select our four from that we could waste them with royal carelessness and extravagance. Mandeville drew his pen through her name and resumed—

"LADY ARAMINTA CHAPELTON.—Spinster. Her 'At Homes' are among the most successful functions of the London season and would be more so if she were out. At these receptions all that is most famous in literary and art circles, all that is most beautiful and noble in London society, is conspicuous by its absence. Lady Araminta is herself a wonderful talker and has a heap of reminiscences at her finger-ends, where those familiar with the language of her afflicted class may read them. Although she is deaf, few things are more musical than her laugh. The scratch of a slate-pencil is, however, one of them. Chiefly employed in attending on an aged pug-dog. In politics has always sided warmly with her brother, the Hon. George Walters, whose premature decease before birth was a heavy blow to his country and the family 'Gamp.' Her ladyship is still on the right side of sixty and her buoyant vitality is only depressed by the dread that she is among those whom the gods love."

We thought we would rather not have Lady Araminta for the sake of her pug-dog. Mandeville shrugged his shoulders, and, drawing his pen through her name, resumed—

"OSWALD ODDLER.—Bachelor. Among the men about town, without whom no première is complete, he undoubtedly holds a first stall. He talks entirely in epigrams, of the species which he

has himself defined as 'pertinent impertinences.' Should you send him a private letter he will publish it in his paper and charge you with a craving for publicity and with the cost of setting it up in type. Is awfully smart because he is often made to by the victims of his epigrams or their authors. Boasts that he writes plays under *noms de plume* and managerial compulsion, but the statement, like the Indian juggler and the loafer's wife, is entirely unsupported. Is famous for championing the undivided skirt for gentlemen and has a sympathetic admiration for the human calf. In spite of his intellectual activity is physically weak, and is only kept going by overdoses of insect-powder. He will soon be quite gone. His death will leave a blank in journalism which it is to be hoped nobody will draw."

We thought we would rather not have Oswald for the sake of his physicians. Mandeville imperturbably drew his pen through the name and resumed—

"JOSEF SPRINITZKOFF.—Bachelor. Now living in retirement in a back bedroom in the Old Kent Road, but once regarded as the great European firebrand. Indeed, his impassioned articles in the *Magnominal Review* still serve to feed the flames of discontent and the domestic hearth. Has inherited his revolutionary tendencies from his mother, who was a famous waltzer. His very first entry into the world was characterised by a wail of discontent, and as his nurse was in the habit of mounting through the attic trap-door to sun herself on the tiles, he cried aloud from his housetop at a very early age. Josef was carefully educated as a conspirator. Is familiar with all branches of the profession, not excluding the gallows' tree, from which he has had many escapes wanting in breadth. His hair is a fiery red, of the exact hue of the sun seen through a November fog, though, as it was cut off in a fever, its present whereabouts are unknown. Kings call him a bald, bad man. His eyes are twins, and traces of a prehistoric smallpox cast a halo of holeyness over his martyr's countenance. The great disciple of Rousseau loves to return to the bosom of his mother earth and may often be seen rolling in the gutter. On such occasions he is visibly moved by the brutal Force of a priest-ridden plebs. Is only five feet high but dislikes wheelks."

We thought we would rather not have Josef Sprinkhoff for the sake of the police. The Secretary silently drew his pen through the name and resumed—

“MR. TOM TALKEY.—Bachelor. For many years director of Ananias’s Agency. He originally studied for the law and has taken silk. On the expiration of his sentence for this offence toured the country in a wig and a musical troupe. Is a staunch foe of Temperance and has pleaded the rights of Drink at many a bar. One of his legs is wooden but he has never written for the magazines. His head also is a chip of the old block. Nothing false ever comes from his lips except his teeth at bedtime. Only thing he earned honestly in his life was his father’s dying curse, which he invested in railway stock.”

We thought we would rather not have Tom Talkey for our own sakes. Then Mandeville Brown smiled sadly and sat down.

“Go on! go on!” we said encouragingly. We felt kindly towards Mandeville Brown. He had extracted the essence of the candidates’ histories very neatly indeed and by his skilful presentation of the facts had saved us the painful distractions of dubiety. We could not be too careful as to whom we admitted into the Bachelors’ Club.

“There are no more,” he said. We looked at each other.

“Nonsense! why, there must be dozens,” we replied incredulously.

“Look!” said the little pessimist laconically. He held up his list, a succession of black parallel lines. There was not one candidate in the running: they were all scratched.

We were intensely annoyed with our stupid Secretary and called him names by which he had not been

christened. We inquired why he had not told us we were being reduced to the extremities of the list, and stated that he had sacrificed Truth to Epigram. We also called his attention to the fact that the Devil was not so black as he was painted. Mandeville replied that the old gentleman had not presented himself as a candidate, though strictly eligible and a seasoned bachelor. M'Gullicuddy then called for silence and another lemon squash, and suggested that the names of the male candidates whose characters, as bachelors, were purest should be written on slips of paper, put in a High Hat (which, he remarked severely, was highly useful for such contingencies by virtue of its depth), and four should be drawn out by Moses Fitz-Williams. This being done, the following gentlemen were declared duly elected as candidates :—

MR. OSWALD ODDLER.

MR. VANDYKE BROWNE.

SIGNOR GAMMONIO.

MR. TOM TALKEY.

The Secretary was forthwith instructed to write to them, asking them to forward the usual non-marriage certificates, and enclosing a copy of the rules up to date.

* * * * *

After reading the minutes at the next formal meeting, Mandeville stated that he had received replies from the three first-named gentlemen, withdrawing their applications as they had been misled as to the nature of the assurance system in connection with the Club. As for Tom Talkey, he had in the interim again joined the Junior Convicts' Club at Portland.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FALL OF ISRAFEL.

“And the Angel Israfael whose heart-strings are a lute and who has the sweetest voice of all God’s creatures.”—*The Koran.*

THE Bachelors’ Club was crammed to its utmost capacity. There was a smoking-concert on, and every Bachelor had availed himself of the privilege of bringing two bachelors with him. Some had even broken the spirit of the by-law by going outside again to fetch in two more. There was always great curiosity to see us on these occasions, as Joseph Fogson, M.D., B.Sc., settled with the steward and the guests always felt there was a scientific flavour about the whisky he paid for. But this time on account of its being the May concert the crowd was greater than ever, as everybody could mention to his relatives that he was going to a May meeting.

In not a few instances I suspected that the bachelors introduced for these occasions only were no better than they should be. I did not see the fun of being wedged uncomfortably between two probably married men, or of having the room made unbearably hot by bachelors of questionable *bona fides*; for so crowded was the Club that smoking was going on even in the smoking-room. Still it was not my business to

expose my fellow-members or their guests; and I make it a rule to mind my own business. It is the only way of making it pay.

The main attraction of these smoking-concerts was the singing of Israfel Mondego.

Israfel Mondego was the greatest celebrity of whom the Club could boast. He was one of the most popular singers of the day. Thousands hung upon his lips and his eyebrows. His voice was nothing to speak of, still less to sing with; but it was well-trained and many ladies considered him the *primo tenore* of the world. He also wrote and composed most of his own songs—they were always in the minor. He was the most minor poet and musician ever known. The sale of these drawing-room ballads far surpassed that of Beethoven's works, and as he got a royalty on them as well as on those alien compositions he merely sang, Israfel made a good thing out of sweet sad nonsense. Israfel was sweetly pretty; he had dark and rolling eyes, a passionate moustache, and ineffably melancholic hair. Israfel's advent to our ranks was a great accession of strength to us and gave us a good advertisement. For a man who could have thrown his scented handkerchief where he would in the selectest circles of beauty and fashion to dedicate himself to the Higher Bachelorhood, was indeed a triumph for the cause. We gloried in Israfel's membership, and the only bitter in our cup (as distinct from our glass) was that he would sing at our smoking-concerts. It was not that we could not bear the burden of his song—Love, Love, Love; on the contrary, we welcomed Israfel Mondego's lyrics as a strong ally in our war against the tender emotion. But Israfel's singing imposed a strain upon our self-

command which marred the ease and abandon that are the essence of smoking-concerts. When he turned up the whites of his eyes to express hopeless yearning, or flew up the gamut on the wings of some screamingly serious emotion, we did not like to laugh and give away his dignity in the presence of our guests. They, too, I soon found, exercised an equal self-control for the sake of the hosts. It was really quite painful for both parties. This was why Mondego's singing was, as I have said, the main attraction of our smoking-concerts. The guests, who were pretty nearly always the same, came to see if the members would laugh first; the members came to see if their guests would laugh first. It was a highly exciting race; but the result was always a dead silence. The conclusion of Mondego's songs was always greeted with immense salvoes of applause; after which, at a decent interval of a minute, the audience always got immensely jocular and Homeric bursts of laughter, seemingly independent of one another, resounded through the two rooms.

To-night Israfel was in fine form. He sat himself down before the hired piano and ran his perfumed hand over the ivory keys by way of prelude. Then he sang his very latest success. None of us had heard it before. None of us had the slightest inkling of what was to come. It is well that fate stretches a veil before the future, well most of all for thee, O M'Gullicuddy!

Israfel sang—

THE ISLAND OF LOVE.

*O fly with me where amaranthine blossoms
 Are pale with passion's flame,
 Where larger moons and lither-limb'd opossums
 Know naught of sin and shame.
 Too long the world's cold teaching hath opprest us,
 My sweetest, sweet sweetheart.
 In vain we schooled our hearts to be asbestos,
 We cannot, may not, part.*

*God built an isle where mystic shadow hovers,
 Across the slumbrous seas,
 The dim, enchanted isle of love and lovers,
 And drowsy melodies.
 A dream of restful roses, poppies, lilies,
 And lips that lie on lips,
 And eyes that burn like purple daffodillies,
 While Time unnoted slips.*

*Come, sweet, where day and night are one with twilight,
 And breathing one with bliss,
 Where sun and moon and stars shall faint in thy light,
 And life be one long kiss —*

At this point a dreadful thing happened. As the "long kiss" died away up the ceiling, Israfael's eyes kept on ecstatically examining the chandelier, while his dainty tapering fingers mechanically played the accompaniment. Suddenly an awful roar shook the air—violent as the rattle of celestial artillery. I shall never forget the horror of the moment. Inextinguishable laughter had seized on the Bachelors' Club. The Club was one chaos of convulsive forms. The Bachelors were laughing, the bachelors were laughing, M'Gullucuddy was laughing, the dusky Hindoo steward was laughing, and even the waiters, who had been crowded on to the landing, were laughing. The worst of it was

that the race between the Bachelors and the bachelors had again ended in a dead heat. You couldn't tell which had begun first.

Who has not been in a solemn situation in which he wanted to laugh and dared not? You bite your lips, turn your head away, think of all the sacred or nasty things in the world, and at last almost forget you want to laugh. Then you begin to fear your neighbour has not equal self-control. The very air seems full of Mephistophilian gigglings. You hear or divine strange, suspicious gurgles all around you. A tickling electric current seems to run round and connect you with a battery of irreverence; your sides shake silently till they ache; you stuff your handkerchief into your mouth; you turn red and nearly burst your cheeks; your diaphragm feels contracted and your ribs seem distended. At last your neighbour explodes and you follow suit feeling that you must have your laugh, though you swing for it. Even so was the air of the Bachelors' Club heavily charged with laughing gas when Israfel sang.

Who broke down first will never be known, but as Mondego revelled in the "long kiss," ogling us meantime as though we were old women, the pent-up laughter of months broke forth, apparently from all points of the compass simultaneously. The Bachelors' Club was doubled up like a collapsible garden chair.

We were all so surprised at the long expected having happened at last, that it was some seconds before we could realise that it had happened. Then, as we all became simultaneously aware that we were laughing, we felt that we ought to feel ashamed and frozen with horror, but now the thought that we were laughing was so exquisitely funny that we could do nothing but roar

on. So irresistible was the wave of laughter that we were swept helplessly onwards for full five minutes, and even when we were left stranded on the shores of breathlessness, battered and shattered wrecks, rippling eddies and after-waves of merriment caught us in the sides and threatened to drag us back again into the great gulfs and raging torrents of cachinnation. But the force of the tide grew feebler and feebler, gradually the mirth subsided to a spent snigger. Then sadness fell on the scene, and to cover our embarrassment we picked up the broken glass and the pipes with which the floor was strewn; we looked shamefacedly at each other and realised what we had done; the charm of the smoking concerts was at an end; never again would we Bachelors and bachelors meet with the common consciousness and joy of our guilty secret. Even if Israfel remained in the Club after this deadly insult, it was doubtful if he would ever make us smile again.

But long before this stage Israfel Mondego had picked his way disdainfully through our writhing forms and left the Club. As he went through the door he looked back. The expression of his face was peculiar and extensive. Even I could not interpret it. It was a fine blend of assorted emotions. His face was like a composite photograph taken from persons in various stages of sorrow and scorn.

When I came to myself that look was haunting me.

It was, I thought, the look of a man who might go and do something desperate. We had wounded him deeply; who could say to what length he might carry his retaliation? Perhaps he would even pay his subscription and resign his membership of the Club. I felt that we ought not to have allowed him to go from

among us thus. Common decency demanded a word of apology, an expression of sympathy with him in his righteous indignation; but it was too late to overtake him now. And yet—the effort should be made. Perhaps he had driven off in a hansom; if so, I might ascertain the direction he had given; perhaps he had walked on towards Piccadilly, in which case I might yet come upon him. Besides, Moses Fitz-Williams was just going to recite, and when, in his tragic moments, Moses's eyes crossed over the bridge of his nose, the result was too tragic. I slipped downstairs, and muffling my throat with my false beard (for the night air was chill after the stifling heat of the Club) I looked around. With difficulty I suppressed a cry of astonishment. There, barely two yards from me, leaning against a lamp-post in the soft May night, was Israfel Mondego. I drew back into the passage. His arms were folded and the lamp-light falling full on his features disclosed a face working under deep and apparently painful thought. There he stood in tragic dignity, wrapped in his Inverness cape as in a toga, his dark eyebrows drawn together, his beautiful moustache drooping in sombre gloom, his lips twitching. Around him surged the bustling life of Leicester Square: 'Arry and 'Arriet, Henry and Henrietta, the meerschaum and the penny cigar, the clay and the cigarette, the journalist, the music-hall artiste, the policeman, the conspirator, the barber, the organ-grinder off duty, and the mere foreigner; but he heeded nothing. He stood silent like some better-executed and less grimy London statue. Small boys tendered him sanguinary evening papers; cripples armed with two boxes of matches invoked the blessing of Providence on his head; kind



THERE HE STOOD IN TRAGIC DIGNITY.

gentlemen with red noses offered to put their hansoms at his disposal; flower-girls pressed to decorate his button-hole; but he never looked up.

My bosom thrilled with pity! I dimly realised the tragedy going on in the breast of the curled darling of the drawing-room! Sneered at, derided in his own Club, he, before whom every head, I mean woman, bowed in adoration, what a terrible shock it must have been to him! What a blessing that, in spite of all his cantabile confessions, there was nothing wrong with his heart! How if he had fallen dead at our foolish feet!

I wondered what would be the result of his meditations under that street-lamp. Would he call us out one by one and shoot us down like dogs or married men? Little less seemed proportionate to his dignity and passionate romanticism. He was always so very un-English, even it was believed carrying this weakness so far as to be born in Brazil, of a family of old hidalgos. Yes, he would invite us to spend a day with him on the Continent—perhaps in the Island of Love where the police organisation did not appear to be very effective—and there he would despatch us with punctuality and speed, and waste our return tickets. That was the worst of Mondego. He had no sense of humour. A man with a sense of humour would have been tickled by the situation himself; no he wouldn't, he would never have sung that song. Mondego had a sense of honour instead—which is an appalling misfortune for a man, especially when it is of the foreign variety. His admirers called him a child of the sun; which appears to mean that he had had a sort of sun-stroke when a child, which left him crying for the moon all the rest of his unnatural

life. He was understood to be always asking for Love and the Beautiful in Art and Nature, and seeing that he got it. A morbid over-strung hyper-sensitive temperament like Israfel's was not the sort to make light of this laughing matter; oh, if he had only been like me who can see a joke in everything, except the English comic papers!

A fracas arising from the unceremonious exit of a gentleman from the Alhambra swept Mondego from his lamp-post and aroused him from his reverie. He looked round vaguely, then instinctively drew out his watch. It was safe; as he put it back he caught sight of the time. His eyes lit up as if with sudden resolution, he jumped into a passing hansom and acknowledged the polite attentions of the gamin with a charming smile and a sixpence. I could not tell which glittered more, the coin or Israfel's teeth. His smile reflected itself in my face. The cloud was dispelled—the worst was over. Mondego *had* a little sense of humour after all. He had been piqued and chagrined, but he was not such a silly romantic ass as he looked—this was what I thought in my blindness, as I turned to go back to the smoking-concert. Moses Fitz-Williams's recitation must be over by now.

“Whitechapel, sir? Yes, sir.” The words impinged weirdly on my ear and set my nerves thrilling afresh. Could it be Mondego's driver who had thus spoken? I looked out again. Yes, there was only one hansom within ear-shot.

What was Mondego going to do in Whitechapel? If he had given a ducal address in Belgravia, if he had even mentioned Marlborough House, I should not have been at all alarmed—but Whitechapel!

Obeying a sudden impulse and an instinct superior to reason, I followed the cab. But Mondego could not have told the driver he was in a hurry, for the hansom bowled along rapidly. I was quite breathless by the time I met another disengaged hansom.

My brain was whirling like the wheels of my vehicle as we pursued the flying tenor at a discreet distance. Whitechapel was alive and gay, and the pavements were crowded with an animated populace and picturesque with costermongers' illuminations, twinkling and fluttering like gigantic fireflies in the balmy air. A cheerful hubbub of voices floated towards the starry heavens, and cheap-jacks kept the bawl going merrily. I had never been in Whitechapel before, except under the cover of Besant's novels. I wondered if this was the dark city of joyless savages he had discovered, and determined to be my own Stanley in future—your professional explorer always discovers some one to rescue. And with the thought of Besant came another thought that set my lower lip between my teeth. The People's Palace! Yes, that was it! Mondego had been persuaded by a countess or a duchess to sing at the People's Palace! He was on his way now. He was a philanthropist and I was a fool.

Composing myself, I pushed up the trap-door with my umbrella and made inquiries of the driver. He informed me we had not yet reached the People's Palace, but that we should strike it (metaphorically speaking) in about six minutes. The six minutes crawled like hours.

We reached the popular palatial building at last, but our quarry gave no signs of slowing. When we were hopelessly past it I gave a great sigh of relief and lit a

cigarette. Two minutes after, the leading hansom diverged to the left, and we went rattling down a dark stony street, which looked rather more like Besant's streets, though quite as like to numerous by-ways in Bayswater. After several intricate windings, I was suddenly jerked forwards by the stoppage of my cab. Mondego had alighted before a patch of brightness fifty yards ahead and was paying his cabman. My heart thumped. I jumped out quickly, threw the driver half a sovereign, and without pausing to answer his inquiries as to what I called the coin, ran towards Israfel, fearing to lose sight of him for a moment. As I approached the patch of light, I was exposed to a cross-fire of strange sounds. From the rear came the quaint curses of the cabman, but they were almost drowned by the roar which burst upon me from in front. A number of masculine voices were intoning, some an octave higher than the rest, some an octave lower, the following mysterious chant—

*Dontcher do it, old feller, dontcher do it,
 Dontcher do it, old feller, dontcher do it,
 Just you bash 'is bloomin' 'at,
 And then arx 'im who's the flat,
 For 'e ain't a-goin' to do you,
 No 'e ain't,
 No 'e ain't,
 For e ain't a-goin' to do you,
 No 'e ain't.*

The last phrase was given with a demoniac yell of conscious supremacy, and culminated in a frenzied burst of hand-clapping, ululation, and foot-stamping.

My alarm for Israfel was now at fever heat. As I saw him disappear within the public-house whence these rowdy sounds proceeded, I sped forwards so

quickly that I reached the bar-door ere it had ceased vibrating. I pushed my way through the crowd of frowsy revellers of both sexes, rejoicing that unlike Mondego I was not in evening dress and attracted no special attention. I caught sight of Mondego's swallow-tail mounting a flight of stairs that led up from a room behind the bar. I followed him unhesitatingly. The choruses that descended to meet us convinced me of the nature of our destination. At the top of the stairs a janitor met Israfel with a deferential salutation, and me with a request for twopence. Israfel's entry was the signal for an uproarious burst of cheering, under cover of which I slipped into one of the few empty seats and called for a clay to smoke and a pewter-pot to bury my face in if Israfel should chance to look at me. But I was not very timorous of discovery. I had great faith in my beard, and would have sworn by it like any Turk by Mahomet's. With extreme astonishment I saw the idol of St James's Hall shake hands with several of the seedy-looking men who sat round the central long table, especially with the one-eyed man at the head of it, the hammer in whose hand completed his resemblance to a Cyclops.

The chairman's right-hand man gave up his distinguished seat to Mondego, who took it complacently and ordered several tankards of refreshment for himself and his immediate environment. I had never seen him so radiantly happy. He no longer looked like Werther and Lord Byron and the Cid rolled into one; his face had the beatitudes of Tartarin, Jack ashore, and the brothers Cheeryble. He looked every inch the king of this free-and-easy realm, festive with vulgar mirth, foggy with the vapours of rank tobacco, strident with the roar



G. H. Higgins del. Jan 91.

FORTY WINKS.

of undisciplined melody, and repellent with the glare of coloured sporting prints and the dinginess of discoloured walls.

The song with the refrain, "Don't you do it," was soon finished, several curious contingencies being described in it, in which refusal to fall in with your interlocutor's demand was tumultuously advised, supplemented by a recommendation to destroy his head-gear. Then the Cyclops rose, and stated in slightly ungrammatical language how pleased they were to see their old pal 'Arry Slapup among them once more. He trusted Mr. Slapup would not go without giving the company "Forty Winks." This did not seem to mean that he was to send them to sleep; for Mondego jumped up beaming, and declared that he would do it at once. When the table had ceased to rattle homage, he started—

*Did you ever observe the diversified ways
In which ocular winks may be wunk,
From the wink that's a lightning-like flash in your gaze,
To your long-drawn-out wink when you're drunk?*

*There's the wink of the hawk to his partner at whist,
There's the lawyer's when clients are gone;
The temperance lecturer's adds to the list,
And philanthropy carries it on!*

*There's the wink of the journalist writing a par,
And the wink of the reverend skunk,
But the wink of the girl at the Frivoli bar
Is the winkedest wink ever wunk.*

CHORUS.

*Forty winks! Forty winks!
Hear me link them, see me blink them!
Rorty winks! Rorty winks!
Winks at drinking, winks at clinking;*

*Naughty winks, naughty winks,
 Winks when rinking, rhino chinking,
 Winks for prinking, winks at slinking ;
 Who would think it, you could wink it
 Forty ways, forty winks ?*

It was an aspect of the question to which I had hitherto devoted no attention, but which was borne in upon me now with convincing comicality. Never have I heard a comic song lending itself so continuously to mimetic and gesticulatory illustration, or so transfigured by it ; never have I seen a comic singer turn his eye to better account. That the species of winks numbered two-score, Mondego proved to me by ocular demonstration. No buffoonery withal, but *vis comica* of a high order. Every phase of nictitation was reproduced with astonishing realism, while the body and the rest of the face were subtly and instantaneously transformed and charged with amazingly clever suggestions of character. The prating politician, the demagogue, the mock prude, the gay coquette, the swindling attorney, the cringing sycophant, the swaggering swag-bellied company promoter, the canting cleric, the rollicking tippler, the amorous dotard, the fuddled masher—all these figures of the eternal human comedy, comprehensible equally to the lettered and the unlettered, were hit off with daring strokes as by some French caricaturist. My umbrella was enthusiastic in his praise, and the king of the company had to rise again and again to give encore verses, expanding in affability each time he sat down. At last his *mauvais sujets* let him be ; and, after joining jovially in the choruses of “ She ’s a downy Donna,” and “ What a bloomin’ whopper,” he sauntered out, dispensing nods and becks and wreathed smiles to his riotous lieges. I

followed so close on his heels that I all but galled his kibe. He walked on, looking for a cab. He stopped to purchase some roasted chestnuts, the last of the season, and as he haggled with the vendor I determined to accost him. I unbearded myself and bearded him. That night he bought no chestnuts. He took me to his crowded chambers in Piccadilly instead, and there, surrounded by the choicest nick-nacks, waste-paper baskets crammed with signed photographs of pretty women, book-cases full of beautifully-worked slippers and nightcaps, card-racks crammed with coroneted invitations, abysmal arm-chairs heaped with dedicated music, and frail tables creaking under litters of unopened *billets doux* and books of (feminine) devotion, he told me the story of his life and I promised to respect his confidence. I cannot better show my respect than by publishing it—for it well deserves the honour.

“I was born in Whitechapel of rich but honest parents named Davis. My father was a tailor in a large way of business, possessing four shops strewn at intervals along the High Road and sprouting out another branch in distant Tottenham Court Road. I was an only child, and as I was considered handsome even by other boys’ mothers, you may imagine how my own idolised me. She said I was as beautiful as any of the dummies in our shop-windows, and she got me up to match, with stylish suits and long curls, and I believe her only regret was that she could not exhibit me behind the plate-glass of our West-end establishment. But if I could not be a show-child in that sense, I was in every other. I was put up to sing and recite at every party, till only my father’s sumptuous spreads

and excellent cigars reconciled his guests to the nuisance of having to make a fuss of me. The seeds thus scattered fell upon fertile soil, and my first visit to the pantomime completed my enchantment and sealed my future. At the age of six I had determined to be a clown. I communicated my intentions to my father, who laughed and gave me sixpence. In short, he spoilt me completely and blamed me for the sequel. At the age of sixteen I left the 'middle class' school at which I had received a 'sound commercial education,' and was set to keep my father's books. By this time I had achieved great reputation as an amateur comedian, having played the leading part in our annual school theatricals. I was also quick with my pen, and my lampoons on the head-master were inferior to no boy's. But my greatest accomplishment was this: I could sing, as you have seen to-night, a really good comic song. I always had the germs of the art in me, but I had learnt a great deal from surreptitious visits to the numerous concert-rooms in and about Whitechapel and Bow of the type we have just left. I was taken to them by an elder boy, who is now breaking stones in Portland. He was a jolly rollicking chap, was Dabchick, but beastly poor. I had plenty of pocket-money, and so between us we managed to have a good deal of fun. We dared not go to the more pretentious music-halls, of which there were one or two, because my sartorial pater sometimes relaxed from his perpetual 'Measure for Measure' to entertainment of a less classic order, and our meetings would not have been cordial. You may imagine, therefore, that I was not happy in a prosaic tailor's shop. It was the worst misfit my father had ever perpetrated. I spoke to the old man, and pointed

out that the human being did not grow to pattern, and that a ready-made environment would not suit me. I said my soul was not comfortable in a slop-work suit, that I wasn't a mere dummy to show off his handiwork. But he would not listen to reason, so one fine morning he was left childless, to solace himself as best he might with his wax models, and to extract consolation in his old age from this style fourteen-and-six. But I kept in touch with my mother, whose secret missives came to me blistered with tears and swollen with postal orders. My adventures were variegated. I toured the provinces with "Kingsley's Celebrated Comedy Company," which nobody had ever heard of, and which placarded the provinces with notices from the great London newspapers, which any one was at liberty to look for in the files. I took the name of Harry Slapup, which, to my puerile imagination, seemed a fine dashing name for a low comedian. It was the name under which I had sung comic songs at the Crown Concert Hall. There were many aspirants at the Crown; it was a half-way house to professional music-hall singing. It was good practice, and tradition told of two famous comic singers who had matriculated at the Crown. Several lesser lights had undoubtedly first found a hearing in that smoky alcoholic room. Well, under the name of Harry Slapup I saw a good deal of life behind the scenes, and found it was not all beer and skittles, though there was much more of the former than the latter. Happily, I was blessed with a strong sense of humour and a love of change, which reconciled me to the awful smells, the precipitous ladders, the death-trapdoors, and the piggish dressing-dens (when we hadn't to dress in draughty passages) and to the

fact that the ghost did not always walk, even when we played Hamlet. But for my mother's letters I should often have lacked decent food and shelter. I did not stay long with the Comedy Company, which burst up suddenly, as though it were a city company. It seemed a hard life at the time, playing three or four parts a week (though I was always a quick study), but I regretted it when I joined a company which took a comic opera on tour, and I had to play the same part every night all over Great Britain. It was awfully dull all day with no rehearsals to take up the time, and in some of the sleepy stupid boroughs of merry England on rainy winter days I should have died of ennui, if I had not suddenly remembered my literary gifts and covered reams of foolscap with burlesques and comic songs. I even wrote the music to my words, for I could always evolve an air with tolerable facility, though I had no idea of orchestration. I shall never forget my pride when I was allowed to introduce into a comic opera a humorous song written and composed by myself, the conductor of the orchestra undertaking to vamp up an accompaniment; and my pride was only slightly damped by its being a frost. I knew it was not my song that had fallen flat, but the orchestra. Later, I studied the pianoforte with zeal whenever I found one in my lodgings. To cut a long story short, I played for seven years in the provinces, never out of an engagement (for I was able to waive the question of screw), and never in a good one. I have played in everything from Hamlet to Carmen. I sang, and danced, and spouted, and once my childhood's dream was fulfilled, and I said 'Here we are again' for six weeks every night at Chichester. But that was the high-watermark of my success as a

comic mummer. All my other parts were as devoid of 'fat' as the kine of Pharaoh's first vision. At the end of seven years Harry Slapup was as obscure a name as it is now. But I still believed I was one of the few men in England who could sing a comic song. I had heard lots of men try to do it and I knew I only wanted my chance to go in and win. Then I got a wire from my mother to come to London. I had seen her once or twice during her annual fortnight at Ramsgate, where my father only came down for the week end, but I had never seen the man who thought his progenitorship gave him the right to trim and clip my life with his shears to the pattern admired in Whitechapel. Of course he had disinherited me. He had had a son and heir, he said, and he was not going to lose one and keep the other. This did not worry me. The original Adam was strong in me. I despised clothes. I abhorred the money that came out of the pockets of trousers, 'warranted to wear.' But this telegram altered matters and repaired the breaches. My father had gone bankrupt. How he had managed it with his safe, steady business puzzled me, as I flew homewards by the night express. I could not credit him with the requisite ingenuity. However I soon learnt the cause. He had tried the fatal experiment of applying the hire system to his business, forgetting that in case of default of payment it was an easier matter to strip people's rooms of furniture than their bodies of raiment. The calamity broke my father's heart; he died penniless, and I lent him the shilling with which to cut me off. I paid his insurance money to our creditors, and thus my mother and I were left alone in the world, with nothing to support us but a comic song that had yet to be sung.

“Well, come what might, I determined to sing it in London. There was neither gold nor glory to be won in the provinces. I had as little chance in London as in the country, so why wander from the centre again? I looked over my MSS., pieced together an entertainment and made up my mind to go in for something high class, and not over-crowded. In short, I resolved to become a society clown. You see the child is father to the man after all.”

He smiled a smile of infinite humour, and poked the fire. I opened a bottle of champagne that lay in a cooler and tossed off a glass. I was in a state of nervous excitement, and while Mondego was talking I was all ears, and so could not drink. He went on—

“It was in these extremities that I stumbled on my old friend, Dabchick, the companion of my schoolboy Bohemianism. I met him in York Road, where I had gone to pick up some wrinkles from the artistes who hang round the agents' doors, and to chaffer comic songs, for which I sometimes got a guinea—words and music. Some of the most popular comic songs of the day are from my pen, and I have often been disturbed in the night by hearing my early pot-boilers bellowed from the throats of tipsy revellers. Dabchick was exquisitely dressed and richly jewelled, and told me he was something in a bank. He did not tell me what he was in the bank, though judging from the amount of gold on his person he might have been a drawer in it. He did not cut me even when he found I had no connection whatever with banks. Ah, you will find many virtues in Portland! He told me he belonged to a number of swell clubs, and moved in the highest circles of the four-mile radius; this was rather imaginative, still

it was through his influence that I obtained an appearance at a 'ladies' night' of the Rovers' Club. The concert duly took place. The pretty little hall of the Club was crowded with fair women and gallant men. Joachim brought his fiddle, and Antoinette Sterling her organ, and 'Israfel Mondego' was the only unknown name on the daintily-printed programme. The name had been chosen after anxious consultations with Dabchick. Both of us felt that Harry Slapup was not a name to climb to fame on, especially as I had now determined to win it in the higher branches of the comic song. In any case it would never do for the Rovers' Club. I must have a high-class name, which might be an impulse to me and a safeguard against low foolery, which for the rest would never go down at the Rovers' except in a comedian who had shaken hands with the Prince of Wales. The name must also be striking and eccentric, for in spite of Shakespeare there is great virtue in a name. As Solomon says, 'A good name is better than riches'—especially to a 'professional.' The 'Israfel' was my discovery. I chanced on it in Poe's poems. We both agreed it was bizarre enough to make a reputation. 'Mondego' was invented by Dabchick, who also lent me a dress-suit, which made me regret my father, it squeezed me so tight. The item on the programme ran thus (it is burnt on my brain in letters of fire):—

BALLAD . . . "A Buried Hope" . . . *Israfel Mondego*

ISRAFEL MONDEGO.

"The words of this song you know. You have seen it on every drawing-room table, and heard it played from every barrel-organ."

“Yes,” I said, “I could repeat it in my sleep.” The words forced themselves half-involuntarily from my lips:—

A BURIED HOPE.

*Though winter winds are chilling,
The buried blossoms blow,
Though Doubt sweet Love is killing,
The Fates ordain it so.
We parted when the red-breasts
Sang loud mid roses lush,
Yet should our frozen dead-breasts
Refuse to thaw or gush?*

*Our Sadness is but Sorrow,
Our Joy is but Delight,
And what will be To-morrow
Can never be To-night.
Our truest Selves with screening
Are hid from friends and foes,
And what on Earth we're meaning
High Heaven only knows.*

“Vastly pretty words, indeed,” I added slyly. “They would be perfect if they had anything to do with the title.”

“Ah, that was my little secret,” said Israfel. “You of course grasp that this was intended as a skit on the ordinary drawing-room ballad. The first element of such a ballad is the complete divorce between the title and verses. But if the title had no meaning for the audience, there was no harm in its having a meaning for me. The ‘Buried Hope’ was my hidden trust that the reputation of a society clown lay enshrined in that song. Alas! it was a hope I soon had to bury in a graver sense.”

He paused, overcome with emotion.

“And yet, looking back on it, after all these years, I can honestly say it deserved a better fate. It was an excellent burlesque of the namby-pamby songs of the day, and the last quatrain with its double meaning is extremely clever. The music I wrote myself. I wrote it in the minor, and I surcharged it with subtle sarcasm. It was full of inarticulate longing, and sadness, and weariness, yet it whispered of some ineffable consolation in the far-away whatness of the unintelligible. I played my own accompaniment, which was limited to a few melancholy chords. As I came from behind the screen that hid the artistes' room from the audience my breath came thick and fast. Stage-fright held me in its throes, as though I were a beginner. So much to me and my poor mother depended on that night—my poor mother who had not even an evening dress to be present in. I gave a last touch to my white tie and my black hair, and stepped into the full blaze of two hundred pairs of polite eyes. There was a little perfunctory clapping, succeeded by a sudden rustling of ladies' dresses. A dazzling sea of white shirts and bosoms swam before me; I sank down on the music-stool with gratitude that I had to sit. I had intended to preface my song with the remark, 'Ladies and Gentlemen,—I beg to introduce to your notice a model specimen of the English drawing-room ballad.' I intended to accompany this with a look of dry humour, a sort of refined wink. But my fingers nervously started the prelude before I sat down, and I felt my courage oozing out of their ends. I felt that I could not make that little speech now, much less wink; besides, would it not be an insult to the intelligence of the audience? There

was no going back ; the weird, pathetic prelude was at an end and I dashed right away into the song—

Though winter winds are chilling—

“ It happened to be a seething night of early summer, but the inaccuracy of a vocal assertion is no bar to its impressiveness. I put a good deal of shiver and heart-break into that line, to contrast with the hopefulness of the next. It was a most artistic skit, but when I reached the end of the first verse there was a dead silence. Not a single snigger. My heart sank within me. My eyes had been turned up in passionate agony. I now rolled them cautiously towards the audience in search of a smile. No ; every face was blank and stony. There were tears of disappointment in my voice as I sang the second stanza, with its consoling hints of a far-away whatness. The silence throughout was painful. My voice was choking with disappointment as I sang of human effort and aspiration misinterpreted, misunderstood—

*And what on Earth we're meaning
High Heaven only knows.*

“ As the last notes trembled into silence I rose and dashed from the platform. To my amazement a thunderous roar pursued me. The hall seemed to rock with applause. I could hardly believe my ears. Could I have made a hit after all ? And was seriousness merely the fashionable method of expressing amusement ? Somebody pushed me back on the platform ; I bowed as if in a dream, and turned back dazed. But the enthusiasm continued. ‘ *Bravo, Bravissima, Bis, Encore,*’ resounded in a chorus from all sides, sweet

female voices taking up the treble. My heart was too full to speak. So I sang. I sang the last verse again, making it more maudlin than ever by my tears of joy. Then, still pursued by that tempest of enthusiasm, I tottered out of the artistes' room into a passage in search of air. In an instant Dabchick was by my side, wringing my hand in violent congratulation. As he pumped away, the tears continued to fall from my eyes.

"I say, dear boy, you've knocked 'em," he said; 'you'll have half-a-dozen offers to-morrow. But I thought you were going to do something comic.'

"I stared at him.

"Don't be funny, old man," I said. 'I'm awfully indebted to you, so don't spoil it. But I was afraid it was going to be a frost. They don't laugh up West, do they?'

"Oh, don't they? You try them.'

"But I *have* tried them. You don't mean to say you didn't know that was a refined comic song.'

"A comic song?" he repeated, staring at me as if suspecting I was chaffing him—"a comic song? Are you serious?'

"Never was more serious in my life!'

"That's what they all thought you were just now. Bai Jove! this is rich.' And he started laughing convulsively till his cheeks were as wet as mine. I stood there, waiting in much annoyance till his foolish mirth should have spent itself.

"Oh but, dear boy," he said at last, 'your reputation's made as a sweet, sad tenor! I never knew such a *furor*. Everybody was snivelling into his or her handkerchief; the ladies are all in love with you, and vowing that your singing is just too sweet and lovely

for anything, and too awfully exquisite; and you're charming and handsome and a darling! and they are raving about your eyebrows and your moustache! They were all asking who you were; and I heard Lady Desborough inquiring for your address from the secretary, and saying you must sing at her next "At Home." Your fortune is made, old man. You have stumbled into success. Stick to it. Oh, you dare not sing comic songs now. It would spoil everything.'

"My heart sank. 'Dare not sing comic songs?' I faltered.

"'No,' he answered emphatically; 'think of your poor old mother. You have found out where your real forte lies. Stick to it! It's a deuced job to make a hit in London, I can tell you. It's a terrible uphill battle in the throng of geniuses and charlatans. Don't you risk anything else. You'll only spoil your market. The public won't stand versatility. Sentimentality is your line; sentimental you must remain till the end of the chapter. Nobody knows you were Harry Slapup. Harry Slapup, the comic singer, is dead and Israfel Mondego, the drawing-room onion and passion-flower, reigns in his stead.'

"I did not give in without a struggle; but in the end I saw that Dabchick was wise. My mother's misery was a daily reproachful argument. I buried the hope of winning the laurels of comic singing, and I went forth into the battle of life cloaked in a mantle of hypocrisy. What my career has been I need not recapitulate. I have deluged a Puritan people with an ocean of false sentiment. It is largely through me that they have preferred moonshine to healthy sunlight. Young persons, who could not read Martin Tupper without a blush rising

to their cheeks, gloried in my voluptuous effusions. My waltzes were a caress and my verses a kiss. Detestable old dowagers, who had sold their daughters to wealthy husbands, and who in real life were as matter-of-fact as pillar-boxes, crowded to my concerts, languishing in the ardours of my poetry and revelling in the æsthetic raptures of my music."

"And your moustache!"

He smiled good-humouredly. "I won't deny it," he said.

"But how did you manage to write the music?"

"Didn't I tell you I had a lot of comic songs in stock from my old touring days? I took these tunes, transposed them into the minor, and slowed them down."

"And the orchestration?"

"Oh, there are so many starving musicians in London, who have taken degrees and all that. They will write you an accompaniment for a mere song—no pun intended. The words needed even less alteration. Later on, in the full tide of my success, I was pressed to accept an appointment at a musical college, and, in the hopes of learning something from my pupils, I took it. I picked up a good many hints from their singing, studied the harmony text-books *pari passu* with them, and completed my education by allowing them to orchestrate my compositions."

"Well, you've had the devil's own luck."

"In truth, the devil's," he repeated gloomily. "When the excitement of the first struggle was over, none could feel that more acutely than I. Paul, up to my London *début*, my conscience was pure. I joyed in my work, and the thorns on the road to honest success only gave

me the rapture of the fight. Now I felt my whole life was a sham and a disgrace."

"No, no!" I said, "you earned your money honestly."

"I did not," he said. "My life was a lie; I, who was brimming over with humour, had to wear the cramping folds of Romanticism. I wanted to sing 'Forty Winks'; my existence has been one long wink. Everything was sacrificed to my reputation."

"But suppose somebody had identified you as Harry Slapup?"

"Unfortunately that was impossible. How should those who knew the grub recognise the caterpillar?"

"Then your secret was safe?"

"Alas! yes. My mother knew of my comic aspirations, but the world at large took me quite seriously."

"What about Dabchick?"

"He was not at large. The only man in the world who knew my unhappy secret was confined in Portland for bank defalcations. Imagine then how choked and stifled my true self has been."

"I do not wonder you dropped into the Crown occasionally," I said.

"Thank you, thank you, Paul," he said, the tears coming into his eyes. "But for that I should have gone mad. It was the only vent. There I threw off the painful mask and revelled in my real self. They thought I had an engagement at some London music-hall, and were very proud of me. Often I have gone thither straight from a marchioness's reception and found relief and recreation."

"But there was consolation in this unreal life—the feminine devotion you have attracted"—

"D—n it, Paul," he said brutally, "surely *you* are not going to throw that up at me, too? Why do you think I joined the Bachelors' Club last year, if it was not that I was driven into misogyny by this same feminine devotion, by this undisguised admiration of silly young girls and sillier old women, by the shoals of scented notes, the wagon-loads of presents, the marriage proposals, and the dinner and elopement invitations received by the gross?"

"Forgive me," I said gently, "I thought you liked it."

"Liked it? Why, don't you know that I was so fond of singing at your concerts, only because it was one of the few occasions I could be sure of an audience of men? Can you not feel how wretched it was for me to stand up under the ogling gaze of five hundred women, varied at wide intervals by a solitary man or small boy? Oh the horror of it for a modest man!" He buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, but you had the satisfaction of supporting your aged mother in luxury."

"It was my sole consolation. And that brings me to the crux of the matter. I had gone on appeasing my conscience with this sop for years, when suddenly, six months ago, the excuse was taken from me. My poor old mother——" his voice broke, and he wiped away a tear.

"Died?"

"No, married. I kept her in such luxury that a young gentleman, of moderate means, mistook her for a rich widow and eloped with her. I have forgiven her; I hope he has. Anyway she is provided for. The pangs of conscience now became intolerable. Better, I

thought, an honest crust than a dishonest cream-tart. What was to be done? To become a comic singer was out of the question. I had gone too far for that. I could not undo the past. The only course left to me was to press on to the higher branches of serious music. I could make the transition gradually and imperceptibly, leaving behind my sentimentality as the nautilus moves from its early chambers. I could rise on stepping-stones of my dead self to higher things! By this time, what with teaching, what with composing and criticising, I had picked up a very fair knowledge of music. I could now harmonise my own airs. I took private lessons from a famous singing-master, and left no stone unturned to cultivate art earnestly and with dignity. One day I introduced some classical items from the great masters into my afternoon programme and I wrote a little cantata. The change had been well advertised; but, to my disgust, the audience remained unchanged,—an oasis of man in a desert of woman. Everywhere frocks, frocks, frocks, fans, lorgnettes, hand-glasses, scented handkerchiefs. Pah! it made me sick. My classical items were coldly received. My journalistic friends were eulogistic enough in the papers they were openly connected with. But how they took it out of me in those for which they wrote in secret. I, with my airs and graces, my lyrics and my female acolytes, had long been the butt of the comic papers, but my efforts to amend only brought down severer satire on my defenceless head! And how these epigrams stung! The chief sting lay in the fact that I could have written them myself. I knew, too, how they sneered at me in the Clubs behind my back, and how men said I made them ill, and expressed an amiable desire to kick me.

Paul, if I have seemed to wax fat by charlatanism, Heaven has not let me go unpunished. If I had earned a fortune, I had earned also the contempt of every honest heart, including my own."

"Don't talk so," I cried; "I, at least, do not despise you."

"You do, you do; you must. This must end. I cannot drag on this life of insincerity. I have read Ibsen, and I know honesty is the only policy. There is only one way to free my life from these clogs and shackles, these sneers and sarcasms—there is only one path to the higher life of art."

"And that is?"

"Marriage."

Another! I closed my eyes. A faintness overcame me. Israfel's voice sounded far away.

"The thought only came to me last Saturday. A casual newspaper sarcasm has illumined my life. This week's *Hornet* says:—'Mr. Mondego is the most single-minded devotee of art in the country. And to this single-mindedness he owes all his success. The lesson should be encouraging to musical aspirants.' What a flood of light this threw on my past! How blind I had been! That was it, that was the stumbling-block in the path of my progress! *I dared not marry*,—that was what the world was thinking. I had no artistic dignity; I had not even conceit enough to rely on the attractions of my music. My whole popularity depended on my remaining single, so as to keep alive the hopes of all my female admirers! Well, they should see. These thoughts have been agitating me for days. My reception at to-night's concert clinched my resolution. Even my fellow Bachelors

refused to take me seriously. Why should I trouble about my allegiance to their principles or let this stand in the way of the higher life?"

"And you have resolved finally——?" I breathed.

"Finally. Marriage will strike the key-note of my future, of my independence, of my artistic seriousness. It will show I am not a mere caterer for amorous admirers; that I supply music, not flirtation. Marriage will be the transition to the truer life; it alone can resolve the discord in my existence."

"Or prepare it," I murmured. "And don't you remember the definition of marriage as the common chord of two flats?"

"Japes cannot move me now," he replied. "I must lay this libellous imputation on my artistic life. Marriage is the only remedy. After the honeymoon I shall sing no more love-songs."

"That is extremely probable," I muttered.

"I shall write and sing only classical music; music to live, not music to live by."

"And what if you fail?"

"Then at least I fail in a good cause. I do not think I shall fail, once I have cut myself adrift from the network of petticoats; but if the worst come to the worst, I will emigrate to the Antipodes and under a new name try to live a new and honest life as a comic singer in a new land. As a Clown I can always get a living, and the performance of manhood may yet crown the expectation of infancy."

"And whom will you marry?"

"I have thought of that, too. I shall marry the woman who, of all women in the world, has the least soul for music and the worst ear."

“Why?”

“So that if I fail in my artistic aspirations, or if it is true that I am only accepted because I am a Bachelor, she may not regret it. Besides, one does not care to rehearse one’s songs before a trained ear. It must be so painful to it. Then you might both want to occupy the piano at the same time, and the ensuing duet might not be harmonious. The woman who cannot tell ‘God Save the Queen’ from Schubert’s ‘Serenade,’ except by seeing the people putting on their wraps and overcoats, is the musician’s fittest mate. If I have to turn to comic singing, she will not think it a fall. Your superior person is so unsuperior to prejudices, and cannot see that in the Kingdom of Art are many mansions, each as perfect in its way as the rest.”

“And have you such a person in your eye?”

“I have.”

“I am sorry.”

“Ah, perhaps some day there will be a beam in your own eye.”

“Never; but who is the mote in yours?”

“One of my pupils; she is not beautiful, but she is absolutely a clod in music. Unfortunately for herself, her people are rich and have as little ear as herself. So they think she is going to be a great singer, and don’t grudge the expense. She has been with me for fifteen terms, and if she knows a B from a bull’s foot or an F sharp, it is the extent of her musical acquirements. She cannot sing a phrase of three notes without flattening or sharpening. Other girls equally devoid of ear might develop one later, but hers is tried and untrue.”

“But suppose she refuses you?”

"Impossible. If she did not admire me she would not have the worst ear for music in the world."

"You are too hard on yourself. Well, good-night. I know the worst. Thanks for your confidence. Poor M'Gullicuddy! I have a hard task before me."

"I have confidence in your tact. And you will be secret?"

"As the cremation urn."

"Well, good-night. Another glass of champagne?"

"Thank you. Here's prosperity to the Society Clown. Good-night."

"Good-night."

* * * * *

The Bachelors had hardly recovered from the customary period of mourning when they learnt that Israfel had sailed for the Antipodes—alone. A week after the following paragraph appeared in *The Carrion Crow* :—

"Mr. Israfel Mondego, the popular tenor, whose marriage a fortnight ago excited so much heartburning, and who has probably dealt a severe blow to his reputation by his invidious choice, has left England on an Irish honeymoon—by himself. It is whispered that the lady who has led him to the altar was so romantically in love with him that she attended his lessons for fifteen terms—always marking time (not in a musical sense) rather than progress to the point at which she would have had no excuse for retaining the services of her fascinating music-master. Mrs. Israfel Mondego's first musical *matinée* at St. James's Hall next Thursday week should attract a large audience, for in addition to the natural interest centring in her, it is understood that she is a most accomplished pianist and vocalist. It is rumoured that Mr. Mondego intends trying the experiment of a series of vocal recitals, of an unaccustomed kind, in Sydney and Melbourne, and that he will as usual accompany himself, his wife having apparently refused to do so. . . ."

I do not understand how this last bit got into print. It is true I mentioned it in confidence when I was writing to my friend, the Editor, but I had no idea he would dare to print it. And why he should insult me by sending me a cheque for a guinea I do not understand. Still, one has to pocket so many insults in this world.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LOGIC OF LOVE.



ONE found the Club still suffering from the defection of Israfel. There was no member whose loss could have grieved us so much. In him the Club lost at once a butt and a buttress.

Take him for all in all, we felt we should not look upon his like again.

Joseph Fogson, M.D., B.Sc., had drowned his grief in medicine. He went practising in Bethnal Green, just to oblige an old and overworked hospital chum who was

knocked up—too frequently in the dead of night. Joseph Fogson had no need to practise on helpless invalids for a living, for he had a private fortune. It was left to him unexpectedly, after he had spent the best years of his youth in poring over miserable books and cutting up wretched dry-as-dust corpses. He was

a terrible toiler, and brilliant to boot, and had won all sorts of medals and scholarships, and had none of the virtues of the medical charlatan, and never dreamed of anything but a lifetime of mitigated poverty. So when the solicitor told him he was worth two thousand a year he was dreadfully annoyed. Remorse for his squandered youth set in severely. He wasted months in regretting the time he had wasted. Verily, a young man may sow his wild oats, but conscience will not digest the harvest without aches and agonies manifold. His repentance came too late to avail him; his youthful excesses of work had impoverished his system. The exuberance necessary to enjoyment was for ever vanished. It was a terrible sermon on the vanity of labour.

It was no less forcible a homily on the slavery of habit. Our old vices cannot be cast off like our old clothes and exchanged for new. We have inoculated ourselves with them, and they cannot be expelled from the blood. Thus it was that when Joseph Fogson, M.D., B.Sc., went to Bethnal Green as a substitute for his chum he worked shockingly hard, and did a frightful amount of good to the sickly residents of the dreary district.

And all for nothing, too; which hardly seemed fair. It was all very well for him to look after *my* health without fee, but what claim had these Bethnal Greenlanders upon him? I was glad to meet him in the Strand at last, and to divine from his presence there that his thankless task was over.

I held out my hand to him warmly, for it was almost a fortnight since I had seen him.

"How am I?" I said heartily.

He grasped my hand cordially, and placed his finger upon my wrist.

"You are seedy, old man," he said instantly. "You are queer."

I was so alarmed and surprised that my umbrella fell from my other hand, and my head began to ache. Evidently I had felt the loss of Israfel more deeply than I had imagined. Joseph rescued my umbrella from under the feet of a careless chorus girl, who was trampling on it with the haughtiness of a prima donna. Then he said—

"And how am I, Paul?"

"Not quite well, thank you," I said, for his face told a sad tale of late hours and late patients. It was a fine handsome sympathetic face at its best, with a noble forehead, a neat moustache, and dreamy blue-grey eyes.

"You are right," he said wearily. "I feel quite washed out. Strange how a week's work floors me. I shall never make old bones, though I may lecture on them."

His demeanour made me anxious. "And what do you advise me to take?" I inquired nervously.

"A holiday," he replied. "Go for a walking-tour."

"Oh, but it's only June," I said. "Only clerks leave town in June."

"You can't put off your seedy-time till a more fashionable month, can you?"

"No," I replied sadly. "It's a great nuisance, because I'm very fond of walking-tours. But if I go, will you come with me?"

He refused point-blank, but I persuaded him at last.

"We'll start to-day," he said resignedly. "June is a lovely month for walking-tours—the sun's not so scorching as later."

"Oh, but I'm not ready to start," I said.

"Nonsense. You just pack a satchel or knapsack with a few necessaries. This sort of thing, you know." He half drew out a cloth-bag from his coat-tail pocket, then shoved it back.

"You impostor!" I said. "You have trapped me. You were looking out for a companion for your own walking-tour."

He smiled frankly.

"I won't go with you," I said laughingly. "I don't see why I should go as companion to a gentleman for nothing."

"Oh, if that's all, I'll pay the exes."

I refused point-blank, but he persuaded me at last. After all it was a shame to see his money giving enjoyment to no one; and if I were with him, I might brighten him up a bit.

"But I prefer a walking-tour by bicycle," I urged. "Walking-tours on foot are so slow. You get over so little country."

"But I can't ride a bicycle," answered Joseph Fogson, M.D., B.Sc.

I could not either. That was why I wanted to, and said so with truth.

I grumbled so at having to make this fresh concession to Fogson's convenience, that by the time we started it was understood that I was placing him under a heavy obligation in allowing him to be responsible for my expenses. We made a bee-line, more or less, for Portsmouth, and, interrupting our walk, we sailed from South-sea across the crisping channel to the "Garden of England." We landed safely upon the right tight little island, secured at every point by a merciless battery

of pier-tolls against all danger of invasion by vagrom Ishmaels. The weather was glorious, the sky glittered like a sapphire, the sea sparkled like champagne, and I felt as if I had swallowed some. Even Fogson was slightly inebriated by the glow and freshness of an unreal English summer. As we struck across the flowering odorous isle, inhaling the ozone and watching the many beautifully-painted butterflies fluttering among the poppies, Fogson grew quite jolly and told me the names of everything in Latin. I paid no attention to him, but I remember not one of those butterflies had a plain double-jointed Christian name. Each had been christened as complexly as if it were a peer of the realm.

We did not follow the usual tourist's route, but explored the interior, which is a maze of loveliness, abounding in tempting perspectives. Every leafy avenue is rich in promise; such nestling farmhouses, such peeping spires, such quaint red-tiled cottages, such picturesque old-fashioned mullioned windows, such delicious wafts of perfume from the gardens and orchards, such bits of beautiful Old England, as are perhaps nowhere else so profusely scattered!

Suddenly Fogson heaved a sigh of content.

"What does this remind you of, Paul?" he said.

"Of Mandeville Brown," I answered immediately.

"Of Mandeville Brown?" he echoed incredulously.

"Yes," I said. "I keep thinking what a fool he is to say life is not worth living. I wish he was here."

"I don't," Fogson burst forth. "He would blight the deep peace of nature. He would be like the serpent in Paradise, bringing to it the knowledge of good and evil. Ah, what a fine old allegory was that! Oh this disease of thought! Thought about things was the primi-

tive curse; but thought about thought is the modern malison."

I was surprised to find this vein of sentiment in the man of science. But you can learn more of a man by living with him two days than by two years of superficial association spread over ten.

"But I did not use the word 'remind' in your sense," he went on, more calmly. "What this scene with its rustic beauty, its idyllic sweetness, its healthy freshness, reminds me of is the very antithesis of Mandeville Brown."

"Yes?" I said encouragingly, for I do not like to see a man hesitate on the edge of a revelation. "It reminds you of——"

"No matter, you don't know her."

Her? I grew pale. "Doesn't matter?" I said. "I should like to. It reminds you of——"

"It reminds me," he said, and his eyes filled with soft dreamy light,— "it reminds me of Barbara."

A swarm of gorgeous butterflies seemed whirling before my eyes but I walked on, keeping time with the sentimental Doctor of Medicine. Left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot—so we plod on in our dull mechanic tasks, though the universe lies exanimate at our feet.

"And who is Barbara?" I said at length.

"Barbara is——" and again his eyes wore the rapt ecstatic look of an anchorite beholding a heavenly vision, of a poet bodying forth the shapes of things unknown. "Barbara is—the incarnation of all that is most fair and pure and exquisite in sweet English girlhood. She is the warmth of the heart and the light of the eyes. Her instincts are pure as the white rose she wears at her bosom. She is healthy without coarseness and chaste

without consciousness or prudery, and she looks at you candidly with limpid blue eyes. She is joyous and debonair as a May morning. She dresses in spotless white with a simple hat of straw. She speaks no language but her mother-tongue, but oh how the sweet Saxon words ripple from between her pearly teeth in a flowing music of syllables. And when she sings some simple air, the soul of this fair motherland of ours seems to have entered into the song, and it breathes of new-mown hay, and harvest wains, and russet orchards, and snowy hawthorn, and calm lowing kine, and the white moon, and bowls of bubbly milk, rich and creamy, and the soft restfulness of nature, and the gentle ordered life of rustic generations, and the sweet sanctities of old household ways, and old-fashioned fireplaces ruddy with rough crackling logs, and wainscoted chambers, and huge smoking platters, and diamond panes, and jasmine and eglantine——”

He paused suddenly. He had forgotten himself. He remembered me. He stole a sidelong embarrassed look at me.

“So that is Barbara,” I said, mastering my emotion and the thought of M’Gullicuddy.

“Yes, that is Barbara.”

“Where does she live?”

“On a farm in the heart of rural England,” he answered readily. “She has never been to London. She does not play the piano. She has not been philistinised by a ‘refined education.’ She cuts bread and makes butter with her own white hands. She milks the cows in the morning.”

“A dairymaid,” I said.

“No, no. She is the farmer’s daughter.”

"Is she tall or short?"

"Medium. Her figure is lissom; the curves tremble upon womanhood. She moves as gracefully as a fawn, and her heart is as tender as it is true. She is a girl who will love once and deeply and for ever."

"How long have you known her?"

"Let me see—it was in my first year at the hospital. It must be—let me see, yes—it must be quite ten years now. Ten wasted years," he repeated and his eyes filled with tears and his mobile mouth trembled. "Ten years since then. Ah, how the time flies—and life passes away unemployéd, unenjoyed."

"But surely *you* ought not to complain. You are young yet and wealthy and have only to ask to have."

"My dear Paul," he said, smiling sadly and laying a gentle, trembling hand on my shoulder, "I am too much a spectator of life to seize the happiness that lies to my hand. But don't let us speak of this subject any more. It recalls too many bitter memories."

I made no demur; for a week he was mine as the wedding guest was the Ancient Mariner's. There was no hurry to extort the whole truth. He would return to Barbara of himself soon enough.

My insight was justified. He returned to her that very night.

We were located in a curious double-bedded room in a little inland inn. The Doctor of Medicine stood at the narrow casement, looking over the lovely moonlit landscape. The rich meadows stretched away peacefully and the air was drowsy with sweet country scents. The Doctor took his pipe from his mouth and pointed vaguely towards the horizon.

"Yonder," he said, half to me, half in reverie,—
"yonder lives Barbara."

So this was why he had come to the Isle of Wight.
Poor M'Gullicuddy!

"We shall probably be seeing her to-morrow, then?"
I said, with affected cheerfulness.

He shook his head. "I am afraid not," he said, turning towards me a full honest face, shadowed by a melancholy smile. He sighed, moved away from the casement, slid it half back, and commenced undressing. I followed suit and in another few minutes we were in our beds, with candles extinguished and the moonlight streaming upon the floor. Only one of us slept. It was Joseph Fogson, M.D., B.Sc. My brain was too busy to rest. In vain I tried to think of nothing. It went clicking away like a tape-machine, turning out thoughts as the machine turns out inches of news. There was a little wind in the trees about midnight and the hour was chimed from some neighbouring steeple at apparently uneven intervals. These were the only sounds that came to vary the monotony of my thoughts till about a quarter past one, when I heard a strange sound of muttering in the room. My pulse stood still. In another moment I was smiling at myself. The noise came from Fogson's bed. He was talking in his sleep. I strained my ears, but could not catch the words. I slipped noiselessly from between the sheets, and glided in my white night-shirt across the strip of moonlight that lay between our beds. I bent over his lips.

"Barbara!" he murmured. "Barbara!"

This time I felt only pity. My indignation was dead. If Barbara was all he painted her, his sufferings must indeed be poignant. Not to have culled this fresh and

fair young flower of English girlhood must needs make life bitter to any one who believed in love,—and to my surprise, Fogson was a recreant to the Club in theory if not in practice. I placed my hand gently upon the big forehead. It was burning. Light as my touch was, it awoke him. He stared at me wildly.

“It’s only me—Paul,” I said soothingly.

“Thank Heaven!” he said. “I took you for a ghost and was afraid——”

“Afraid?” I laughed gently. “You, a materialistic doctor afraid?”

“Not of the ghost,” he repeated. “I didn’t care a jot for that. My fear was that I should have to recast the psychological theories of a lifetime and eat spiritualistic humble-pie. But why are you out of bed?”

“You seemed restless and feverish,” I said.

“It is very good of you, Paul,” he said gratefully. “Yes, I suppose I was more knocked up than I imagined, and our long walk has overtaxed my strength. I suppose I was talking in my sleep.”

“You were,” I said, watching him narrowly as I probed him with the lancet. “You were talking about Barbara.”

“I do not wonder,” he replied without wincing. “Whenever I get among real English scenery like this—ivy-clad churches and granges and cows and the scent of the honeysuckle, my thoughts will go back to her; my brain conjures her up of itself. Great is the Law of Association and it will prevail.”

“Well, let it have its way,” I said. “Tell me about her again. It will ease your brain. The nervous currents will discharge themselves, then you will sleep quietly.”

"Bravo, Paul," said the Doctor. "You have translated the confessional into its physiological equivalents. You deserve to hear my little story. It will entertain you and ease me, as you say. But you are sure you don't want go to sleep?"

"I do. I haven't been able to. Perhaps your tale will make me."

"All right," laughed back the Doctor. "But go back to bed, old fellow, or you'll catch cold, and then ho! for gruel and physic. Ready! Well, here goes. . . . Ten years ago I was a student at Sebastian's Hospital in Glasgow, for I have the honour of being a countryman of our President. I had little money and less expectations. I studied day and night, and eked out my income by winning a few scholarships, which was easy enough, for I had taken unexpectedly to the profession and was considerably older than the average student of my year. I lived quite alone in a cheerless attic, with a skull, a box of bones, and a microscope for sole ornament. The district was shabby and gloomy, but it was near the hospital and cheap. The maid-of-all-work was slatternly and the table-linen was dirty. I spent the day listening to lectures, committing to memory dull catalogues of muscles and chemical formulæ, and dissecting one wizened old woman. Eight of us were at work upon her, like the dwarfs upon Gulliver—some at the arms, some at the head, some at the feet, till she was whittled out of all recognition. I mention these things to show you that everything combined to make existence a grey fog. I was working for the degree of B.Sc., at the same time as for the M.B., so that I babbled of molecules in my dreams, as I did to-night of Barbara. I had no

time nor thought but for my books and my specimens. The work was tedious to a degree, much more so to two degrees, though I had determined to master it. The treatises were written in an uncouth jargon, and unenlivened by a gleam of fancy or humour or literature, and I have always been a lover of the human and the living. When I said that my existence was a grey fog I forgot the rifts in it. My sense of humour now and then emitted a feeble radiance, which pierced the leaden vapours that were closing in on my soul. The students were such prigs and fools; the lines of demarcation between first year's and second year's, and third year's were so childishly rigid; the fellows had no sense of fun; Bob Allen and Tom Sawyer had grown staid and decorous; they cared so little for anything but the pecuniary side of the medical career. The lecturers were rather better, and I got a little amusement out of their idiosyncrasies. One used to throw open the door of the lecture-room punctually at 9 A.M., and ere his hand had relinquished its hold of the door-handle, he would be heard saying, 'The œsophagus, gentlemen,' and before he had reached his desk we knew quite a number of the curiosities of the œsophagus. Another would say, 'If you please, gentlemen, the functions of the medulla oblongata are, etc.,' as if we could alter the constitution of the microcosm at our own sweet will. I was often very tempted to say that I was *not* pleased with the sentience of the dental nerves, or that I derived no particular satisfaction from the percentage of white corpuscles in the blood, or that I strongly objected to the position of the pancreas, or to muscles being irritated. But I never succumbed to the temptation. Another old fellow, I

remember, had a trick of prefacing every sentence with the phrase, 'As a matter of fact, gentlemen.' I dubbed him the matter-of-fact professor, though, as a matter of fact, he was a very amusing and anecdotal lecturer, and often illumined his discourse by funny stories, which he admitted to be apocryphal, but which he invariably commenced with, 'As a matter of fact, gentlemen.'

"But even these humours soon palled and ceased to amuse me. They were not enough to counterbalance the gloom of all my surroundings. After I had got into the groove of the medical work, I began to take up the Logic and the Psychology which were necessary for the B.Sc. I began with the Psychology, as the more novel and difficult of the two to tackle. I flattered myself I had no lack of Logic. But what Psychology might be I knew not. I had heard vague and awful rumours that it was stiff, though I was not inclined to attach much importance to that. My predecessors from early school-boyhood had always called everything stiff. To me the adjective was chiefly associated with glasses of grog. I had no use for it in connection with study.

"I started one night at ten, and read on fascinated till daylight. A new world had opened before me, of which I had hitherto known nothing. I read on breathlessly, silent as Cortes upon that peak in Darien. But it was a world of gloom and horror, of Dis and the ebon shades, and I explored it with a curiosity that was morbid. From that day to this I have never had a thoroughly healthy thought. For introspection was born in my soul, and introspection is nothing more nor less than a mental affliction. Introspection is the highest and most intellectual form of lunacy. Physical

dissection had made me morbid enough. To see the springs of this vaunted life of ours laid bare, to magnify the grey matter of thought and love two thousand diameters under a microscope, to hack and cut the human form bestial till every nerve was tracked to its route, every fibre and filament forced to reveal its function,—all this had made human life seem to me a poor thing and a brutish. Isolated from all human relations as I was, the world became to me but a vast dissecting-room, where seemingly living beings strutted and fretted it by the reflex action of galvanised muscles. My eye undressed the people I met in the street, and stretched them cold and rigid upon deal boards, and turned up their muscles. They were but cunning collocations of cells, informed by an allotropic modification of electricity, and hastening to dissolution, disintegrating at the merest trifle. But over all was the mystery of the human soul; and now and then in moments of reaction the inadequacy of unconscious atoms to evolve their own analysers was flashed fitfully upon me.

“When I had hearkened to the message of the Psychologists the last vestige of interest in life died away. The last sparkle was taken from the cup of life, leaving a dull, insipid fluid. It was the extreme empirical school into whose hands I had fallen, and they stripped me of all my faculties and left me not a rag wherewith to cover my nakedness. I had lost faith in everything else; they robbed me of my faith in myself, and left me a battered wreck. I didn't mind knowing how my body worked, but I rebelled against my mind being picked to pieces. Nevertheless, in spite of all my inward revolts, I was carried along on a stream of remorseless logic. I lost

my Memory, on which I had hitherto prided myself; it was resolved into a bundle of associations, none of which existed till called for, though they were all waiting patiently outside the door of existence, ready to come in when wanted. I thought it was very good of them. Evidently they had been trained in a good school—empirical as it was. I learnt that there was no such thing as Personality (though real estate was unchallenged). I mourned over my lost Personality, till I discovered that I had several Personalities instead. But I was not used to my own society, and I felt rather awkward and shy. I did not like having so many Personalities. I was jealous of their being Me. I wanted a monopoly of myself. I had worked hard to train myself from earliest youth, and I didn't see why these other Personalities should romp in at this advanced hour. Kings and editors might express themselves in the first person plural if they liked, but I wanted the good old first person singular, which I had used from childhood. When I learnt that I *hadn't* used it from childhood, but had spoken of myself familiarly by the name of 'Joey,' I gave in with a groan. I had started with two Personalities, and I must have grown them like teeth. Perhaps I had thirty-two of them. I lost my Self in the crowd.

“By this time I was not sorry to discover that I did not exist. Life was, indeed, hardly worth having on those terms. It saved endless complications with my selves not to exist. It was rather a nuisance, though, to have to continue to live, all the same, for it was only my *I* that was put out. By a mistaken kindness I was reprieved and allowed to exist intermittently by a succession of unrelated pulses of consciousness, which

mistook themselves for unity. I was reduced to living from hand-to-mouth, so to speak. Since the publication of Professor Ward's article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, each student is allowed a transcendental Personality, as well as an empirical Personality—but that was before my time. The new generation is treated a good deal better than the old, and has all sorts of luxuries and facilities that were denied to us. But there, there, I mustn't envy the young people; the world progresses, and I shan't be the man to grudge them the luck of being born later.

"I had no sooner lost my I than, reading some Philosophy, I discovered that it was the all in all—the be-all and the end-all of existence. Without ME (or some of me) nothing could exist. It was only by virtue of their relation to my consciousness that things could have any being. This great universe with its suns and stars and anatomy lectures was dependent upon Me for bare existence. It was a sort of poor relation of my consciousness, which flourished when I shed the light of my countenance upon it and withered away to nothingness when I pitilessly shut my doors in its face. I was indescribably elated at the discovery, and cracked a bottle of Bass that night to celebrate it. I slept a drunken sleep of fourteen hours, and missed my morning lecture. I could not start for the hospital till eleven in the forenoon, and when I did I was considerably surprised to see nothing on the evening bills about 'Destruction of the Universe—full account by our own correspondent.' I felt sure that, with the competition in the newspaper world, they would not have missed such an important event. I had always wished to be alive when the world came to

an end as so long predicted by Mother Shipton and other prophets. Not because I desired to be in at the death, but because I had a strong curiosity to see what the newspapers would say the day after, especially to read the indignant letters to the *Times* and the leader in the *Daily Wire*. Anyhow, after this failure of my nihilistic attempt, I came to the conclusion that not the Universe but Philosophy was all my I. As for the assertion that out of our minds nothing could be, I decided that it was manifestly untrue, since the Philosophers were all out of theirs. The joke was that even the books themselves relaxed here, and inserted a flippant passage in the desert of dulness. They asked what was Mind, and they said 'No matter.' They asked what was Matter, and said 'Never mind.' On the other hand, when you inquired further what created Mind they said Matter, and when you asked what created Matter they said Mind—as if Matter and Mind were members of a sort of you-scratch-my-back-and-I'll-scratch-yours society. Their arguments were always going round in circles, so that the realm of philosophy appeared to me like an intellectual dancing academy. At last I gave up the attempt to eat my own head—which constitutes philosophy—but not before a universal scepticism had settled on my soul. I saw that we are automata, moved by heredity and hypnotism and what not—the playthings of blind forces. The idea of our arriving at absolute Truth, with a capital 'T,' savoured to me of grim humour. I became not only a Pyrrhonist but a Pessimist into the bargain. Picture to yourself, if you can, my soul starving among these arid surroundings, mental and material. Think of me cutting up bodies by day and minds by

night; imagine a being devoid of interest in life, who would go to weddings without joy and to funerals without sorrow, studying sedulously and unremittingly, because it was more trouble to depart from his rut than to go on in it; think of all this and you will have a dim idea of what I was in the first year of my student period at Sebastian's Hospital.

"It was while I was in this state that I first met Barbara."

The Doctor of Medicine paused and drew a long breath. The streak of moonlight had shifted and lit up his pale face like a glory. I gazed towards him in reverent silence. The radiant figure of Barbara seemed to hover in the wan light—the sweet, sunny English girl whom my friend had loved and lost. Outside the wind had risen, the casement clattered, and the yews rustled mournfully, as if in keeping with the tragedy that was being re-enacted in memory. A chill air penetrated through the embrasure. I shivered and drew the blanket closer around my shoulders. The Doctor continued—

"I had turned to my Logic at last, to find how mistaken I had been in imagining I had any. Not unlike M. Jourdain I found, after I had been through the mill, that I had been talking Syllogisms all my life without knowing it. This dissection of Reasoning was the last blow. Body and soul had been subjected to the scalpel, now my very thoughts were generalised and done up into neat little packets. It maddened me to think that I could not argue about anything but Aristotle had ticketed the form of reasoning twenty-two centuries before I was born. I hated Aristotle with a wild and bitter hatred, which even he could not have syllogised, because it was unreasoning. The outlook was not improved by

the incessant reminders of human mortality afforded by my logical text-books. They had only one text—"all men are mortal"—and they preached on it in season and out. Whatever they wanted to prove, they proved by means of that lively text. Did they want to show that a certain argumentative process was sound, they started by remarking that all men were mortal, adding that Caius was a man, etc. Did they want to show that the reasoning was unsound, again they trotted out this time-worn text. So far did they carry their homiletic harping that the most famous of all of them—Mill—built up a whole new theory of the Syllogism on the basis of man's mortality. The text-of-all-work did not frighten me off the course of logical study, for death was no bugbear to me. Still it did not contribute to lighten my gloom. Judge then of what a relief it was to me to come across Barbara. Never shall I forget that night. Outside a sooty fog had settled on the town. It was very cold. I crouched over my bleak cindery fire in my comfortless apartment, grinding away at my Logic. Then, in a moment, Barbara came into my life, and all was changed."

Again he paused and seemed to follow some hovering vision with dreamy upturned gaze. I, too, saw Barbara's gracious figure gliding into that lonely garret, where the pale, world-weary, prematurely-aged student bent over the dying fire, the fresh young presence filling the room with sunshine. I saw her stooping ever him with infinite tenderness, and laying her soft white hand upon his rounded shoulder, while from her rosebud mouth there rippled the music of a caressing syllable. I saw an electric thrill traverse his form. He looked up. His worn face met hers radiant with the joy of life. It was

Faust and Marguerite over again. Then I saw their lips pressed together, as they sailed away for Bohemia in a fairy bark over the syren-haunted waters.

How sad and bad and mad it was,
But oh! how it was sweet!

The Doctor's voice broke in on my musings.

"Suddenly, as I sat there poring over my book, I caught sight of something that made my whole being thrill. The book fell from my hand, and I gave myself over to a delicious reverie. I had seen Barbara."

"Where?" I asked, puzzled.

"In my book."

"What! In your Logic?"

"Yes; I thought you knew enough of the subject to understand what happened to me, and why Barbara should have been such a reviving influence upon my life."

"But who *is* Barbara?"

"Barbara is a Mnemonic Form—her figure is the first, and she is the first in it. She owes her life not to the father of logic but to some of his mediæval disciples. She was created to jog the memory of students. Her form is most symmetrical—she consists of three universal affirmative propositions, each of which is symbolised in logic by *A*, so that when divested of clothing she reads *A A A*. The ancient logicians, knowing that memory was treacherous, thought their pupils would forget her after the first meeting, so they dressed her elusive vowels with consonants, as thus:—*B A r b A r A*, and they linked her with other forms in a quatrain,

Barbara, Celarent, Darii, Ferioque, prioris, etc. etc.

From which you see that she is the only human member of the dreary group."

"What!" I cried in annoyance. "Your vaunted Barbara is only a logical symbol! The graceful young Figure you pictured is only a Mediæval Mnemonic—a middle-aged Form! I thought she was a reality!"

"To me she is," he said simply. "But if she had been so to others do you think I could have joined the Bachelors' Club?" He pointed proudly to the algæ which floated in the glass button-hole he wore. He always wore algæ or bacteria in his button-hole because they didn't marry. We unscientific members contented ourselves with "bachelor's buttons," a species of *ranunculus*.

"But you led me to believe that she was alive, that she lived on a farm somewhere about here, and that she wore——"

"O Paul," interrupted the Doctor of Medicine reproachfully, "I distinctly told you the moment you inquired about her that she was ideal—the incarnation of all that is most fair and pure and exquisite in sweet English girlhood. She is the warmth of the heart and the light of the eyes. Her instincts are pure as the white rose she wears at her bosom. She is healthy without——"

"Yes, yes, you did say so, Joseph," I cried conscience-stricken. "How could I ever have doubted your fidelity to the Club? Oh, how stupid I am!"

"Perhaps it is my fault," he said soothingly. "But the thing was so clear to me that I could not imagine anybody else looking at it in a different light. But now, I hope, you understand what Barbara has been to me from the moment she first lit up the pages of my Logic. She was the first human creature I had met in those stony solitudes. The name was like magic to

me—it was an electric spark kindling my romantic imagination into an instant flame that warmed the rest of my student life. The dry tinder I had been accumulating served only to add brilliancy to the flame. Coming to me in my pitiful state, those three sweet syllables flashed before me a vision of youth and hope and beauty. My world became transfigured. It was no longer a prison cell of rusted chains and mouldering prisoners, but a paradise full of life and light and loveliness; green spaces of meadow and water, and red-tiled cottages, and the song of larks, and the smell of hawthorn, and new-mown hay, and ruddy orchards, and waving leafage; a place of honest love and healthy labour. Barbara, in short, recalled to me the brighter side of existence, obscured by the disillusioning technicalities of knowledge and dulled by the *weltschmerz* of youth. If you have never known how a mere word can stir the pulses you will not understand me. It is the secret of all poetry. In youth the name of Barbara had been among those that set me dreaming. She stood in the sun, with her shining face and her white dress, and the corn rustled healthily at her feet. I fancy her idyllic character, her being of the essence of English rural life, came from Barbara Allen. There was even a touch about her as of Elia's Quakers, but her demure simplicity only set off her joyous activity the more. Such was the maiden whom Logic brought afresh into my life, to revive my stagnant soul, perishing with blight and drought. You may laugh, and, indeed, sometimes I ask myself whether it was not in a moment of madness, induced by overwork, that she made her impression upon me, whether I am not mad whenever I think of her, which is unfortunately only

now and again in my purposeless life. It may be so. Indeed, as a medical man, who has studied morbid psychology with curiosity, I believe it is so. But it is a sweet folly, and it were a greater to be wise. The thought that the world holds such beings as Barbara reconciles me to life."

I had read of *la folie lucide*. Surely Fogson was right in thinking himself mad. I tried to dispel the unhealthy air of sentiment that settled in the room.

"Well, if I had met a General Form called Barbara, I should have conjured up a Salvation Lass."

"She saved *me*," he said quietly. "I grew tenderer to my people—as I called my subjects—for her sake. If I got an isolated arm I used the scalpel more delicately. Perhaps that arm might be Barbara's. The result was that I carried off the medal for skilfullest surgery."

"Ah, that was a tangible advantage now," I said. "Did she ever make you jealous?"

"Never," he said good-humouredly, for the tenseness of his emotion was relaxing under my raillery. "I got her by heart instantly, and she has never quitted me since."

"Oh, of course, she could not say 'no,'" I rejoined, "being wholly composed of affirmative propositions. But did you never try to get hold of her in the flesh?"

"Never," he replied again. "There are so few girls named Barbara. I have never met one and——"

"But why not advertise in the agony column? 'BARBARA—If any girl so named will call at Sebastian's Hospital, with her certificate of birth, she will hear of something to her advantage.' Or, 'TO BARBARA—If the girl who visited me in my garret on a foggy night ten

years ago will return, all shall be forgotten and forgiven.'”

“Please, let it drop,” pleaded the Doctor of Medicine, taking a turn for the worse. “I have never gone out of my way to find a Barbara, because, as I told you this morning, I have never been able to take a single step in search of personal happiness. But if ever Fate threw in my path a girl so called, well-grounded as my principles are, I feel that I should drift into marrying her, and no power on earth could stay me. When I meditate upon this aspect of the case I grow certain that I am not sane upon this one point. My case is one of the myriad curiosities of pathology. We are all mad on something. This is my foible. Therefore I would rather not contemplate the contingency. It fevers me.” He ceased and turned upon his other side, and the wind again possessed the ear in undivided mastery. The moonlight still lay in a refulgent track across the floor.

“Paul,” said the Doctor suddenly, “I cannot sleep. Turn out the moonlight.”

I went to the window and pulled down the blind. The village clock struck “Two.”

* * * * *

We had hardly been walking for an hour the next morning, when the prophecy of the wind fulfilled itself. Large banks of clouds massed themselves in the sky and melted into swishing showers—the landscape became a water-colour. Fogson wanted me to put up my umbrella, though he had at first objected to my taking it with me; but I could not break through my rule. Besides it was very doubtful whether it would open, the wires were so stiff. But he had to acknowledge its usefulness later on, when the flood drove us to

take shelter in a farmhouse and it came in handy to baffle a bull-dog. A dear old creature received us beneath the dripping eaves—one of those old family servants who had ruined Twinkletop—and conducted us from the picturesque porch into an old-fashioned parlour, hung with Scriptural engravings. Here a still dearer and older creature received us with quaint courtesy. She wore a curiously-fashioned cap over her snow-white hair and her face was gentle and guileless and she wore horn spectacles and was evidently got up at all points, *cap-à-pie*, to look like pictures of grandmothers in the Sunday-school magazines. She had a fire lit by which to dry our clothes, though, as she seemed to think her presence necessary to the operation, it was not conducted so thoroughly as we could have wished. But by the time we were accoutred in wonderful coats that had belonged to her deceased husband and supplied with glasses of hot brandy and water, steaming in friendly rivalry with our garments, we began to feel quite friendly towards her.

“What are you doing in these parts?” she inquired kindly.

“Walking,” I said.

“What for?” said she.

“Walking,” said Fogson.

“You walk for the sake of walking?” she quavered in astonishment.

“We live merely for the sake of living. There is no other reason that will hold water. Why should we not walk for the sake of walking?” Thus the Doctor of Medicine.

That is the worst of Fogson, he will never adapt his conversation to the company.

“ Ah, you be a Lunnoner,” said she to Fogson.

“ We are,” we said.

“ Ah!” said she, and her wrinkled skin lit up. “ Then you know my son John—he went away to Lunnon this thirty year come Martinmas.”

We said that we probably knew him but could not recall him for the moment, as we had come across so many people in London.

“ Where does he live ?” we asked.

“ Oh, he’s dead this twenty year,” she said cheerfully. “ He was a gasfitter in Lunnon, but he went away to ’Merica after a year or two and died there.”

Our acquaintanceship with John wove a new bond between us and the good old grandame. She pressed us solicitously to stay to dinner, which would be ready at one o’clock, when her son and her daughter would be in, and she would take no refusal, though the unquenchable sun was shining again. She prattled to us with childish faith about Christianity and the parson’s sermons, and her comfort in the thought of joining her husband and John, though her children were very good to her, God bless them ; and in return, we gave her considerable information about the crops. Ten minutes before one she allowed us to go upstairs to a bedroom and wash. Apparently because it was the tidiest she let us use a room which had every appearance of femininity. The walls were hung with dresses and Biblical texts. The dressing-table was crowded with unmanly articles, including jewels, which made us regret that we were honest. Everything was dainty and neat, and faintly redolent of lavender. It was a large old room, with oaken beams in the ceiling and queer little windows through which the sun streamed with mote-laden rays.

Fogson threw open the folding-windows and looked at the landscape. He never loses an opportunity of looking at the landscape. His vision stretched across the farm-yard over a lovely expanse of rural scenery. The rain-drops were glistening like diamonds on the hedgerows. Honeysuckle and jasmine climbed up the wall to meet him. Everything was fresh and charming.

"This is the spot," he said at last, "in which Barbara lives."

He spoke calmly. I shivered.

"The sort of spot," I said with a forced laugh, "where your virgin in white would live if she existed. I agree with you."

"Well, do you know," he said, turning from the window and tucking up his shirt-sleeves for the wash, "I have a presentiment that Barbara is near."

I guffawed noisily.

As I was washing, I caught sight of something green projecting from under one of the laced pillows of the bed. I touched it. It was the edge of a book. Anxious to learn what literature was popular in these parts, and whether Eliot Dickray was read, or O'Roherty, I drew it out. It was one of Jane Austen's novels. I was placing it back when I unhappily bethought myself of the fly-leaf. I turned to it. The inscription dazed me. Fogson came and peered over my shoulder. I snapped the cover in haste. Too late. Fogson stuck his thumb in between and opened the book again. He stared at the inscription for a full minute.

"*Barbara Grey.*" So ran the fatal characters in a neat feminine handwriting.

The Doctor of Medicine's eyes filled with the old

ecstatic light. We looked at each other with a strange foreboding. Then a fit of trembling seized the Doctor. He dropped the book and fell back helplessly upon the bed.

"The old woman's name is Grey, isn't it?" he whispered, hoarse with emotion.

"Y-e-es," I faltered. "But on second thoughts, don't you think we'd better cut the dinner and get on with our walk? We've made no progress to-day at all."

"Her son—and daughter are coming to dinner," he whispered, half to himself. "I stay here. You can go on if you like."

Considering that I had only left town for his sake, and that he had been constituted Chancellor of the Exchequer, I thought his behaviour most inconsiderate. But I bottled up my spleen and prepared for the worst. In the dining-room the dear old creature introduced us to a stalwart and sheepish young farmer, who she said was her son. I was rejoiced to see no second woman in the room. The Doctor was boiling over with feverish anxiety.

"Where is your daughter?" he asked rudely.

"In the kitchen," quavered the grandame, beaming placidly from behind her horn spectacles. "She is cooking the dinner herself. It will give her an appetite."

Fogson nodded his head in satisfaction—he even saw her making butter. And lo! to my horror, in due course a gracious apparition tripped into the room, a dish of baked potatoes poised on her plump white arms. She curtseyed silently to the visitors, of whose presence she had evidently been warned, and shot a quick glance of rustic curiosity from under her long eye-lashes. She was a dainty little thing, with a complexion like red

roses smothered in cream, with dancing limpid eyes, and charming features. Her girlish figure was exquisite in contour. She was dressed in white, and a full-blown white rose heaved with her bosom. The Doctor devoured her with his eyes, and she spoilt his appetite for any other dish. As for me, the thought of M'Gullicuddy nearly choked me. I ate with the heartiness of despair. The meal passed off without much conversation. I tried to interest the young bucolic in cattle and the chances of the harvest, but he seemed unwilling to learn. I let the taciturn bumpkin be—secretly amused at the clumsy manner in which he plied his knife and fork—and tried to draw Barbara out.

“Do you think we shall have any more rain, Miss Grey?”

“Oh no!” she replied at once.

“You are very weather-wise,” I said.

“Oh yes,” she said, with a little laugh. “It never rains long unless I have a new hat, and my present hat is old enough to frighten the crows.”

Evidently Barbara was not logical. But it did not seem to distress the Doctor, who smiled with delight. I thought there was rather a cultured ring about Barbara's voice for a farmer's daughter, but the little attentions she paid to the old lady and the adroit manner in which she carried off the very primitive remarks of the dear old creature, left no doubt of the tender relationship between the twain. The gulf between the old generation and the new is often so pathetically great. Fogson spoke little, and hesitatingly; but embarrassed though he was, he could say nothing without revealing his simple, unselfish nature. Dinner over, the bucolic brother went back to the fields, and

after a few polite remarks about the route we were going to take, Barbara naïvely bade us "good-bye." I thought Fogson would never let her little hand go. After this, there seemed nothing for it but to offer the dear old creature our heartiest thanks and feel our way as to offering her more, and I was hastening to execute this delicate task, when Fogson expressed a reluctance to depart without seeing the kitchen. He said he loved these old-fashioned kitchens, with their immense grates and chimneys, and their hanging hams, and their rough old comfort. He stated that he made it a point to see the kitchen whenever he went to a farmhouse, and it would cut him to the heart to go away without seeing this one. The guilelessness of the dear old creature was ill-matched against the cunning of the madman, and she showed us downstairs, and there, sure enough! Barbara, in a great apron, was washing the dishes. She made a pretty grimace when she saw us again. The mad but harmless Doctor of Medicine plucked out his algæ aquarium from his button-hole and ground it under his heel. Then he went up to Barbara without more ado, and in pity I engaged the dear old creature in conversation at a point at which she could not hear, but I could. I thought the attack of insanity had better spend itself. Inwardly I raged at having been converted into a keeper.

"Miss Grey," said the Doctor in low, tremulous tones, "I cannot go away without telling you that I love you."

Barbara opened her blue eyes to their widest.

"That I have loved you all my life."

Barbara laughed low, but without displeasure.

"Were you born only just before dinner?" she said, with consummate self-possession.

“Do not jest with me,” he panted. “Ere seen I loved, and loved thee seen. I know you care nothing for money, but I am not poor, and it is not fortune only, but my whole heart that I would offer you. I will not go back without you. Come with me to the wider life of London. Leave these haunts of innocence, and come and shed fragrance and flavour on the jaded metropolis. Bring with you from Arcadia the freshness, and the restfulness, and the gentle ordered life, and the pure milk and butter, and the music of the brooks. Come to the London theatres and bring the scent of hay over the sweltering stalls. Beautiful as is your soul, in its statue-like simplicity, let it be mine to wake it to life and passion. Let me be your Pygmalion. Be my wife, and my life shall be devoted to you. Under my culture your soul shall effloresce into a higher beauty, without losing aught of its freshness. I will——”

A ringing crescendo of laughter filled the old-fashioned kitchen with music. Then the merry little minx had *her* monologue.

“Can’t you find a less stale way of proposing, Mr. Fogson? I’ve read and seen all that on the stage a hundred times. If I got married, it would certainly not be to have any more lessons. I had enough of them at Brussels. And as for the piano, I am sick of it, and am glad to use my fingers for peeling potatoes! Come back to London indeed! Why do you suppose I am here, except to get a breath of country air after the brick and mortar wilderness of London? It would be different if I could go out a lot, for I love waltzing and the opera and farcical comedies, but my married sister, with whom I live in London, has got such a large family now that her whole time is taken up with

household duties. She is very well off you know. That was her husband you met at dinner. He is down here on a visit with me and his youngest baby, which is in my charge, and my other brother and sister, who live here with mother on the farm, have gone to our London house instead. He is Stanton, the famous impressionist artist, who exhibits at the Dudley Gallery and the Salon. He fell in love with my eldest sister ten years ago, when he was down here sketching. And he has been good enough to educate me, too. So now, sir, you know all my history, and why Prince Charming's very kind offer does not tempt me, though it has dropped from the clouds."

"But you cannot, you must not dismiss me like this. Think of how long I have waited for you, Barbara."

Even the prosaic shearing away of so many of the attributes of the ideal had not assuaged his distempered longing.

"Why do you call me Barbara?"

"Oh, forgive me. I am mad. I know I have not the right. But I cannot lose you, Barbara. I have found you after such weary years of waiting,—can I go forth into the world again as though you were not? Have pity on me, Barbara, have pity."

"You are making some mistake," said the girl in a puzzled tone. "I am not Barbara."

"Not Barbara?" he echoed.

"No," she replied. "My name is Annie."

"But there *is* a Barbara here," he said desperately.

"Oh yes," said Annie, "I'll go and fetch her."

The poor monomaniac leaned against the kitchen mantel, faint with mortal suspense. It was a tragic moment.

Annie was back in a moment bearing a white bundle in her arms. On being opened, it proved to be a chubby-armed baby about eighteen months old, with a plump undecided face and sparse hair.

"This," said Annie, with a mischievous sparkle in her eye,—“this is Barbara, my sister Barbara's youngest. The baby I told you of.”

Fogson gazed at Barbara. All the pent-up passion of a lifetime was in that look.

Not even my conversational resources could keep the dear old creature from her granddaughter's side.

“Be careful of Barby!” she croaked. “Don't drop Barby! Oh my ickle booty! Come to your grandmother, come oo sweet ickle Barbbery!”

She caught the infant up in her arms and strained it to her bosom. Fogson's eye followed her jealously.

“There, what do you think of her?” she went on, dandling the baby in Fogson's face. “Isn't she a little beauty? Kiss the gentleman from London.”

Barbara turned coyly away and buried her head in her grandmother's bodice. But the Doctor's eager hands, trembling with emotion, were already round Barbara's neck. He pressed his white lips to hers.

That kiss, the hopeless dream of so many years, had come at last. The sight was too sacred for profane eyes. I turned away, my cheek moist and a lump in my throat. Barbara wept too.

In his wildest dreams the poor monomaniac could not have expected so easy a conquest.

“I love you, Barbara,” said Fogson passionately.

“Everybody does,” said the dear old creature, glowering with delight. “Hush, hush, my Barby.”



C. W. Hutchinson & Co.

AFTER WEARY YEARS.

"Yes, but I have loved her for years and years," said Fogson.

"Before she was born, I suppose," said Annie, a whit sharply. "Really, Mr. Fogson, you are original after all. Don't look so surprised, granny. The gentleman is only joking. He said the same thing to me."

"No, no, I was serious!" cried Fogson earnestly.

"You love us both," said Annie, her eyes quizzing him merrily.

"I love Barbara," he urged simply.

"Barbara is married. She was married to a relative of mine, my brother-in-law the artist, ten years ago."

Fogson smote his forehead. "When I first dreamt of her! But I will wait for this one."

"You will not be true to her for so many years."

"I *have* been true to her for so many years."

"Granny," said Annie sedately, "here is a suitor for Barbara. The gentleman wants to marry her."

"Annie," said granny severely, "how can you talk so? You make the gentleman blush."

"No, granny. His cheek is unblushing. He loves Barbara because she is a girl whose tastes are simple, who is not extravagant, who wears her clothes long (very long), who is not flighty, who doesn't gad about from ball to party, and who, above all, has an ingenuous heart that has never thought of love till he appeared in his beauty and might to call forth the new and undreamt-of emotion; who is frail and helpless without him. That is what men look for in girls, isn't it, Barbara?"

She flicked the baby's nose with her finger till it smiled.

"You're an awfully good match, aren't you, Barbara?"

You're a treasure-trove, Barbara; perfectly good, and innocent, and simple, and helpless, and stupid." A flick emphasised each adjective. "Ah me, Barbara, I am afraid my marrying days are over. Why don't the men ask us when we're younger? Oh, what a good girl I was in pinafores!"

"Annie!" said granny.

"Oh but I was, granny. Don't take away my character before the gentlemen. *Mais si, messieurs: j'étais affreusement bête, je vous en assure.*"

And with that Annie snatched Barbara from her grandmother's arms and fled unceremoniously from the kitchen. Fogson looked vacantly around, and I took advantage of this lucid interval to drag him away. Outside, our friend the bull-dog was waiting for us. While he was dancing round my umbrella with deep-mouthed bark, Annie ran out and boxed his ears till the thunder dwindled to a growl. It was like a story in the novelettes, only the other way round. I took the opportunity to whisper to her not to mind Fogson. He was a fine fellow, with a brilliant intellect, but he had a delusion that he could marry no one but a girl named Barbara.

"If I were with him as you are," she whispered rather contemptuously, "I'd soon cure him of that delusion."

Fogson caught the whisper. It sent a sanative electric shock through him.

"Oh, Miss Grey! If you only could! I should be eternally indebted to you. I know I am not sane on this point. I am a doctor myself. Couldn't I stay at the farm? A week's rest in this peaceful spot would cure me for ever."

She said it was quite impossible. And so he stayed. I knew the rest by letter, for I went home to prepare M'Gullicuddy for the cruel shock.

"Dearest one," said the Doctor of Medicine, as they walked in the rose-garden amid the shadows and scents of the rich summer night. "There is one last boon I would crave. When we are married, will you change your name?"

"Certainly," she said, looking up archly into his handsome pleading face. "It is the usual thing."

"No, no," he said, and drew her fluttering form closer to him. "Not that—I want you to call yourself Barbara."

"No. I cannot," she said. "It would be infringing my sister's birthright."

His poor pathetic mouth pleaded on in piteous silence. It came closer to hers. The moon flew behind a cloud.

"But *you* may call me Barbara if you like."

CHAPTER VIII.

A NOVEL ADVERTISEMENT.

THE President had fallen asleep in his official arm-chair, and O'Roherty was (saving my presence) alone. The other members had gone up the Square to study the accuracy of the archæological details of the new classical ballet. O'Roherty did not know I was in the room, for, as he seemed engrossed in thought, I did not venture to disturb him. M'Gullicuddy snored steadily.

O'Roherty was seated in front of the one writing-table of which the Club could boast, though it didn't; for the table was a plain mahogany thing, studded with black spots of ink which ought to have been in the usually parched pewter inkstand. The pens were generally cross and spluttering; at other times they were absent.

I saw at once that O'Roherty had got hold of a bad pen by the way his brow was puckered. At last he scribbled something in large letters. I could tell that by the wide sweep of his pen. By this time I was bending over him, but in spite of all my efforts not to disturb him, the intense sympathy I felt for him seemed to subtly communicate itself to him, and to make him aware—by some sacred psychical channel an irreverent world will learn to admit some day—of my proximity. In his delight at my unexpected presence

he at once abandoned whatever he was doing, and, covering his writing with a large sheet of blotting-paper, immediately turned his whole attention to me.

"Thought you were at 'Nero'?" he said affably.

"I thought you were?" I said amiably.

"No," he replied, "I have something to think out."

While he was talking his hand idly strayed under the blotting-paper, unconsciously drew out the sheet of paper, and mechanically placed it in his pocket.

"But what keeps you away?" he went on.

"I cannot stand ballets," I replied. "They involve too much mental exertion. The effort to invent a plot for them is too trying."

"Ah, invention of a plot—there is the difficulty. But it is not the worst, not the worst," he sighed.

"No; there is the music to listen to," I said.

"Music be blowed!" O'Roherty replied, as if deciding between wind-instruments and a string band. "I'm not talking of ballets, but of my books."

"Your books? Oh yes, they are the worst," I admitted cheerfully.

"Oh, I don't mind *your* saying that," said O'Roherty good-humouredly, "because you at least read them."

I have never seen O'Roherty in a real live passion. The nearest approach to that state he ever exhibits is when he is taken for an Irishman. He sternly insists that he is not one. He was born, it is true, in County Cork, but as the baby was rocked on the cradle of the deep within a fortnight of its birthday, and the boy lived for ten years in Tripoli before finally settling down in Holborn, the man fails to understand how an Irish infant can be construed into an Irishman. When

reminded that the child is the father of the man, he retorts that this only proves that the child, his father, was an Irishman. In spite of all temptations to be logically genealogical, he remains a Cockney, and glories in his country. Nevertheless, every fresh man he meets makes the old mistake. I fancy it is because he speaks without the slightest trace of brogue. When a man is named O'Roherty he cannot afford to do this. People think he is only posing as a Cockney.

If he would only learn some broguish words, such as "yez, avick, spalpeen, acushla, omadhaun, and Caed mille failthe," I should myself feel less strange with him. Not that I care two straws whether he was born in Cork or Cincinnati; only a man owes a certain duty to his neighbours when he is called O'Roherty. For the rest, O'Roherty was tall and thin and ruddy-whiskered, and wore spectacles and a high hat. His mutton-chops were so sanguineous that they seemed slightly underdone. His expression was nervous. He always had the air of awaiting the next man going to twit him with the secret of his birth. I knew he would not be angry at my chaffing his books so long as I left his nationality alone. "I object to being classed among brilliant Irish men of letters," he once informed me plumply. The constant irritation added to his constitutional melancholy.

"You at least read my books," said O'Roherty again.

It was evidently a sore topic.

"Look here." He drew out a scrap of newspaper, mounted on the well-known brown background of a popular press-cutting agency. "Read this," he said.

I read it.

From *The Dissenters' World*, July 5th.

"A SUMMER IDYLL.—Mr. O'Roherty's practised hand is seen to advantage in this pretty pastoral story of an idle summer. The love-scenes are exquisite in their union of purity and passion, while the descriptions of scenery are charming and recall Ruskin in his happiest moments. The tender grace of a holiday that is dead lives again in these felicitous silhouettes. *A Summer Idyll* may be safely recommended to parents and guardians. Though the author is an Irishman there is no theological bias in this simple idyll, which may be introduced without fear into the most Protestant families."

O'Roherty ground his teeth as I returned the critique. I knew why. It was not only the allusion to his race that galled him.

In saying that I read his books, O'Roherty did me an injustice. Still, I did skim them, and I had gleaned sufficient of *A Summer Idyll* to know that it was a terribly ironical title, and that the whole of the sordid tragi-comedy centred round Camberwell Green.

"Well, and what do you say to this criticism?" he said grimly.

"It is too bad," I replied.

"Yes," he said despondently. "It will sell some copies. The paper has an immense circulation all over the country among families that really buy books—especially those bad books which are called 'good books.'"

"What an ass the man must be!" I exclaimed.

"He is not an ass," he retorted indignantly. "He is my bitterest friend."

"Friend or no friend, he must be an ass to write like this about one of the most brutally realistic stories of modern times."

"He is not an ass," he repeated. "He simply didn't read the book."

“Oh, then he is certainly not an ass,” I admitted, “but an ingenious deducer of contents from title. It’s an economical way of reviewing, but you are bound to go and put your foot in it one day—by a fluke.”

“Yes, but I must say he isn’t entirely to blame,” said O’Roherty. “It’s my publisher’s fault partly.”

“Your publisher?”

“Yes; he will allow the sheets to be bound in such a way that you have to cut the sides to skim the book. Parker—that’s his name—doesn’t mind running his eye along two pages connected at the top, but, when their union is perpendicular, the thing is impossible.”

“But why doesn’t he cut the leaves?”

“What! and spoil the market-value of the book! Surely you know that reviewing is the least paying form of journalism, and that no man with brains would do it if it were not for the perquisites. But for the sale of the unread books, criticism in this country would become a lost art. No, Parker’s intentions were admirable. He saw *A Summer Idyll* lying about in *The Dissenters’ World* office, and he saw my name on the thing; so, of course, he asked the editor to let him do it.”

“And he has gone and done it!” I said. “Well, never mind, the parents and guardians who buy your book for their girls will never know of their fearful mistake. The girls will never tell them. They will——”

“Hush!” interrupted O’Roherty. “What’s that?”

We listened to the sudden silence which had caught the novelist’s acute ear. It was M’Gullicuddy not snoring. We waited anxiously. The president took up his nasal theme again and we resumed our conversation. O’Roherty did not care for everybody to know

that he was *the* celebrated O'Roherty. He was very sensitive on this point; and, knowing that people *will* always peep behind pen-names, he had hit upon the happy idea of effectually concealing himself by writing under his real name. I was the only member of the Club to whom the secret was open. Like most of us O'Roherty had to live; if he had not swallowed some of his convictions he would have had nothing to eat. Bitter experience had taught him that the British public will not read novels without a love-interest; and if there was one thing in this world in which O'Roherty did not believe (there was nothing in any other world in which he did) it was love. Having to write "true-till-death" moonlight scenes fretted him not only as a man but as a Bachelor. His only consolation was that their pathos afforded him so much amusement. But M'Gullicuddy on his sublime snow-clad mountain-peak of Bachelordom had little sympathy with the frailties of those that groped in the valley; that was why O'Roherty was in such trepidation on hearing the president cease to snore. The steward, who was behind the bar, listening, we never regarded as an obstacle to confidential conversation; he was not a human being like ourselves; he was a married man.

"Next to the inaccurate statements as to my nationality, what riles me most in this notice," went on O'Roherty, "is the eulogium of my descriptions of scenery. As a matter of fact there is not a single description of scenery in the book. Scenery was always my weak point. I can no more paint a landscape than a Royal Academician. I have sometimes stolen a meadow from Ruskin, and I have several skies strongly tinged with Black; most of my flowers are picked from the lady

novelists' back-gardens; while I get my birds from Richard Jefferies."

O'Roherty began to get quite doleful in tone.

"Don't be so down in the mouth about it, old fellow," I said. "Nobody knows."

"Yes, but what of my own conscience? Besides, my wholesale depredations are bound to be brought to light some day. Then again there's my antique furniture. I have always got that at Ouida's. But now the critics are beginning to say that her Louis Quinze boudoirs are a fraud, and her cinque cento medallions (I fancy they are medallions) are coined at the mint of her imagination. It's a nice thing when your supports give way under you in this fashion, and your antique easy-chair collapses and leaves you on the floor. Then, look what dreadful suspicions it brings into your mind; suppose your lady novelists' botany is a ghastly imposition—and you are left up a tree! and you don't even know the name of the tree! How if your chaffinches sing in England or your nightingales perform in London during the season of their foreign or provincial tours! How if your artichoke blooms in the autumn and your chrysanthemum chortles in the spring! How if——"

"Good heavens!" I interrupted with a cry of pain. "What is this?"

While O'Roherty was speaking I had unconsciously taken up the blotting-paper. There were heavy black marks upon it. Practice has made me able to read writing backwards or upside-down as quickly as forwards or normally. O'Roherty's face turned the colour of a sheet of note-paper, of the pink variety.

"What is this?" I repeated sternly, as I pointed

with my finger to those ghastly incriminating stains upon the pure fluffy surface of the blotting-paper.

Wanted a wife

"N—nothing," he stammered.

"O'Roherty!" I said, with a world of reproach in my tremulous tones. "On your honour as an Englishman!"

"Draw your own conclusions," he replied, visibly softened.

"There is no deduction necessary. The conclusion is on the premisses," I observed sadly, reading aloud the infamous inscription—

"WANTED A WIFE."

"Yes, I am advertising for a wife," he replied apologetically and with a meek pathos that went to my heart. "I can stand the strain no longer. I was just about to draw up the advertisement when you interrupted me."

"But how? why?" I inquired wildly.

"I have told you," he said, snatching the paper from me and rising in excitement. "Birds, beasts, and fishes."

Was his mind wandering? Birds, beasts, and fishes! What old schoolboy chords were struck by the phrase!

"Are you making game of marriage?" I said.

"No, no, I'm serious. I want birds, beasts, fishes, flowers, trees, furniture, bric-a-brac, and a thousand

odds and ends. I *must* have them. I *must* have them, I tell you." His voice rose to a maniacal scream. I grew seriously alarmed. Coming on the top of his



wish to marry, language like this seemed to clinch the evidence of his insanity. Was Fogson's monomania epidemic?

"Hush! you'll disturb M'Gullicuddy's snoring!" I said softly. "Cannot you get all these things as a Bachelor?"

"Impossible! Have I not already explained to you how my literary life has been one long fraud? No, I must have some one to supplement me, to supply all those ingredients of the novel which O'Roherty lacks: beasts, birds, fishes, flowers——"

"Spare me the catalogue," I cried severely, "I understand."

"I knew you would," he returned, a slight misapprehension of my meaning bringing a grateful look into his worried eyes. "You see, to a Cockney like myself Nature is utterly unknown. I lack that rural education without which the modern novelist has no chance. It was all very well for a Dr. Johnson to say, 'Sir, let us take a walk down Fleet Street!' In his day Nature had not been invented. There were certain stock adjectives which you had to get up—'azure sky,' 'russet leaves,' 'pearly cloud,' 'translucent brook.' Once you knew these married couples that went out together as invariably as Homer's Juno with her 'ox-eyed' cavalier, you were set up as a writer. That long catalogue of a poet's stock-in-trade which convinced Rasselas that it was useless for him to apprentice himself to the muse, was a mere flight of Johnson's imagination, intended to crack up the calling in which he was then an acknowledged master. To-day it is a sober reality, and is even more necessary for the novelist than for the poet, who can always veil himself in the obscurities of misty magnificence. Ah, it was a bad day for writers when those ancient couples were divorced; when for the marriages made in the classics were substituted

the laxer alliances of individual preference, and for the good old permanence of conjoint relation, the haphazard and transient associations of modern free selection. It is a flux and chaos of conjunctions at best, and in the looser literature of the French decadence it leads to the most extravagant matches of substantives and epithets. There is no adjective so degraded that it may not hope to mate with the most proper of nouns; no noun so common that it may not find itself in at least temporary association with the most aristocratic of adjectives. Nay, so far has this derangement of epithets gone, that I have known unprincipled writers wed words that belong to different castes, and talk of strawberry-coloured symphonies and symphonic strawberries."

He paused for want of breath, and I fetched him a pick-me-up.

"Where was I?" he asked, when he had gulped it down.

"Symphonic strawberries," I observed. But he had lost the thread.

"Well, anyhow, as I was saying, the modern novelist has a hard time of it. He is expected to know all things in heaven and earth and in the waters beneath the earth. The miserable impostors who were first in the field went and corrupted the reading public by showering down omniscience from a cornucopia. Of course it was all faked; they crammed up as much about hunting, and shooting, and fishing, and burgling, and will-making, and gardening, and painting, and sailing, and climbing, and banking, and bee-keeping; as much dialect, slang, idiom, proverb, local colour, history, tradition, and superstition, as was wanted for each book; and before the

book had gone to press it was all clean wiped off their memories, which had reverted to their original omniscience. (Excuse the neologism, but the language wants the word badly). By this sort of behaviour the beggars have set up a standard which is simply unattainable by an honest man; not to mention that they have snapped up all the best things of their successors. Analyse the average modern novel. What do you find?"

I made no effort to find anything, but he struggled with his waistcoat pocket and produced a scrap of paper, from which he read aloud :—

Scenery (including botany),	15	per cent.
Journeys, foreign phrases, manners and customs,	11	per cent.
Birds, beasts, and fishes,	10	per cent.
Scientific, musical, artistic, historical, and literary allusions or quotations,	10	per cent.
Descriptions of dress,	10	per cent.
Theology and ethics (new),	10	per cent.
Plot,	10	per cent.
Ordinary natural dialogue,	8	per cent.
Grammatical and other blunders,	6	per cent.
Portraits of hero and heroine,	4	per cent.
Character-drawing,	2	per cent.
Wit and humour,	0·008	per cent.
Unanalysable residua,	3·992	per cent.
<hr/>		
Total, Three Vols.,	100	per cent.

I was about to dispute the accuracy of this decomposition, but he went on :—

"This analysis is at once the cause and excuse of my marriage. Once I had arrived at these results I felt that I was a doomed man. You will perceive that nearly half a vol. of a modern novel must be

composed of scenery. In addition to my being unable to tell an oak from an acorn, or a gentian bush from a gillyflower, or a field of oats from a gorse-clad common, or an elder from Susannah, I am colour-blind. Moreover, I have no interest in the sunset, and am never up late enough to witness the sunrise. The sight of the sea is as sickening to me as if I were on it. What people can see to rave over in a magnified wash-hand basin I have never been able to understand. You smile. You remember my much-praised apostrophe to the ocean in *Betwixt the Gloaming and the Nether Sea*. I have no wish to disguise from you the pricks of conscience. But I must live. I tell my conscience so, and point out that if I were to die it would perish too. To keep my conscience alive, I steal."

"Steal?" I echoed, "steal what?"

"Haven't I told you?—trees, flowers, sunsets, birds, beasts—all 's fish that comes to my net," said O'Roherty. "What can a poor Cockney do? Take the second item. I recognise a horse, a dog, a sheep, a mackerel, a cow, a cock, an elephant, an earthworm, a sparrow, a donkey, a butterfly, an eel, a baby, and a few other animals. But even with dogs I can't tell a dachshund from a poodle, though I give my old maids poodles and my heroes dachshunds; I know that a Scotch terrier is the same fore and aft, but that is only because of Bright's famous comparison of it to the Fourth Party. Allusions I can manage fairly well with the help of encyclopædias. I dip at random into omniscience and garnish my dialogue with whatever comes up. I make pot-shots at a volume of poems and ornament my chapters with the spoils. As for dress, I am hopelessly lost. These superficial details are

infinitely wearisome to me; in real life my eye goes straight for the psychological essence of a situation, and I have a soul above buttons. Unfortunately the soul of the British public is beneath them. And sometimes I feel that there is something in frocks after all. When I create a nice heroine I don't like the girl to dress dowdily. It spoils her charm. When all is said, she is my own child and I don't want her to look gawky and blame the old man. I am not stingy, I want her to dress as magnificently as possible. But my own ignorance sets up sumptuary laws, and the poor thing comes off but scantily. I don't know what to put on her—muslins, silks, a sealskin jacket, my wardrobe contains little else. In the end I am reduced to stealing from the fashion-plates, and Myra alone knows what a mull I make of it. For you see I can use the descriptions but warily, the nomenclature has grown so beastly technical that I am afraid to venture. I can't tell a description of a costume from a dinner menu. What gold galloon, or blue broché, or jêt passementerie, or basques, or toreadore hats, or silk lisse, or moiré, or pink chiffon, or filoselle, or bengaline, or festooned skirts, may be, I haven't the faintest idea, but all my heroines wear them and look natty in them. I can only hope that they are not indecent. But I can't expect immunity for ever. Some day I shall introduce a half-clad virgin to a respectable dinner party and then the book will sell by tens of thousands."

His tones trembled sadly into silence. I could offer him but cold comfort. He went on :—

"I must learn these words if I would avoid such popularity. There's no such word as *faillie* in the dictionary of the male novelist. But he has got to admit it. *Faillie* is

becoming very prevalent. I see it in all the ladies' letters. Are *my* girls to be out of the fashion? No, it shall never be. I will do my duty by them. Oh, if I knew more of my girls' inner lives! They say Dickens detected George Eliot was a woman by the way Hetty Sorrel combed her hair. How am I to know how ladies comb their hair? The novelist must needs be a Peeping Tom, and if he is he is sent to Coventry.

"In journeys, etc., I am so and so. My first success, as you know, was due to my infantile recollections of Tripoli, and to the happy title of my first-born three-decker, *Tripoli Triplets*. You remember Tripoli carried me successfully through my second novel; and, through my third, in which the relics of my Tripolese recollections were hashed up and located in Patagonia. But my fourth, in which the foreign flavour was replaced by the scent of English hay, and where the heliotrope of the lady novelist was substituted for the palms and pomegranates of Barbary, was only a mild success. And now this last book, *A Summer Idyll*, in which I left off shamming and fell back upon the Cockney scenes and people I really know, is a regular frost, as you might expect of an English summer. The things I am really good in—plot, character-drawing, real human dialogue——"

"And unanalysable residua," I reminded him.

"And unanalysable residua, form only twenty-eight per cent. of the compound I have to turn out from my Holborn laboratory. I have tried to do right. I have done my best to learn the difference between maiden-hair fern and mangelwurzels. It's no use going to the country unless you have somebody skilled in plant-lore with you. And there are very few real savants in those branches, I can tell you."

"You ought to have gone walking with Fogson before he got engaged."

"What nonsense! He only knew the scientific names, not the real names. He knew a vegetable, I gave him one day when he was dining with me, was a *Lycopersicum esculentum*, but was surprised to learn it was a tomato. I spent a whole day once in Kew Gardens, where the trees are obliging enough to grow labelled, and I plucked a leaf from every tree and shrub and scratched its name on the back. Leaving the Gardens, I noticed a notice-board which informed me I was liable to prosecution if caught. I was too busy boiling down a classical botanical treatise into an edition for the use of schools to attend to my treasures for some months; when I did, they were a heap of withered leaves, like the fabled fairy gold. So perished my dream of knowledge. Can you wonder, then, that I must either marry or give up writing altogether and turn my hand to something——"

"Useful," I concluded. "But where does the necessity of marriage come in? You want a collaborator, not a wife."

"I want a wife, not a collaborator. I want some one to share the work, not the money or the reputation. Come, help me to draw up the advertisement."

"Very well," I said resignedly. Poor M'Gullicuddy snored on, in blissful unconsciousness of the coming blow.

"Wanted—a Wife," wrote O'Roherty again, in the boldest of letters, as if to give himself courage.

"Of course," he said pausing, "there are many other reasons why I should marry. You see it is now some six years since I set up in London as a genius. I have failed.

It is time I should now settle down into a steady popularity. Perhaps, too, when I have made all the money I want, I may get the reputation of genius after all by neglecting my wife. If I have none to neglect, this avenue of recognition is necessarily closed to me. Moreover, marriage itself is a considerable fillip to a man's reputation; you are bound to get pars in the papers. It is an immense advertisement. Besides, your readers like it. They are knit to you by fresh ties on discovering that romance is a reality with you, that you do not believe that the honeymoon is made of green cheese. Many a declining novelist has acquired a fresh lease of popularity by marriage. The wedding bells, which usher his characters into the Nirvana of the Finis, are to the novelist but the joy-bells of palingenesis."

I fetched him another pick-me-up and he resumed the concoction of his matrimonial advertisement, keeping up a commentatorial monologue as he went on.

Wanted—a Wife. Musical, Literary, Artistic, Scientific. The more she knows about sonatas in B flat, and the precise emotion that a soulful heroine must feel under the prelude to Parsifal, the better. I have always been in danger of letting my people polka to Masses in D minor. She will also save me from mis-regulating the movements of the planets or confounding Botticelli with a kind of hurdy-gurdy. *Mich-travelled in England and the universe generally.* That's for the foreign department. I don't know whether a Devonshire lass is blonde or brunette, and there's nothing like bringing local colour to the cheek of the young person. *Polyglot.* That's to keep the Italian and the French and the German in order.

Thoroughly familiar with Dress-making, Tailoring, Kitchen-Gardening, Botany, Mineralogy, Birds, Beasts, and Fishes, Antique and Modern Furniture, Prize-fighting, Manners and Customs of Good and Bad Society, and every other variety of useful or useless information."

"Why not put 'an encyclopædia in a petticoat'? It's shorter."

"The petticoat may be shorter, but at the cost of lucidity."

"Well, say a 'Universal Provider and a Genius.'"

"*A Genius not objected to,*" added O'Roherty. "Thank you. *Great imaginative power a recommendation.* There is no harm in her being good at plots and character-drawing while she is about it."

"Not the least," I assented.

"Is there anything else?" he asked, re-reading it critically.

"Cookery?"

"*Cookery.* Thank you."

"But geniuses can't cook."

"*Theoretical only.* Thank you, anything else?"

"Beautiful?"

"Oh, of course! I can study her attitudes and toilettes without impertinence or cribbing from the lady novelists. She shall sit to me—or to herself—as heroine. *Beautiful.* Anything else?"

We paused and racked our brains for five minutes. M'Gullicuddy snored on. The steward was all ears.

"Fool!" cried O'Roherty at last, smacking his brow. And he solemnly added "*No Irish need apply.*"

A loud suspicious gurgle burst from the steward's lips. It sounded like a strangled laugh. M'Gullicuddy

awoke and yawned. The next moment he learnt the news and all was dark to him again.

* * * * *

O'Roherty did not return from his honeymoon in Tripoli for a year. Then he came back to England and paid the expenses of publication of *Goeth Down as a Gossamer*, a three-volume novel by Mrs. O'Roherty (Pansy Sinclair). *He had married a Lady Novelist*. He wrote no more himself; he was pumped out, and his wife kept whatever knowledge and creative power she possessed for her own works.

"It was my own fault, Paul," he said, on the only occasion I met him, for he shunned the abodes of men and Bachelors, "I forgot to put that limitation in the advertisement."

"But did she really claim to fulfil all the other conditions?"

"She did."

"But does she?"

"Ah," said O'Roherty mysteriously, "she has a great imagination."

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW MATRIMONIAL RELATION.

AUGUST found the premises of the Bachelors' Club entirely given over to the orgies of the dusky steward, and of Willoughby Jones and the other waiters, for London became too hot to hold us. To escape the heat, Mandeville Browne fled to the Soudan; Moses Fitz-Williams went to Switzerland; M'Gullicuddy was understood to have pitched his tent somewhere amid his native heather; while Oliver Green told us that he had to stay at Brighton with his wealthy uncle, who had returned from India only last year. Poor Oliver! It was by no means the first time that he had been forced to endure the society of his old fogey of a relative. He said his uncle required a deal of looking after. Selfish old curmudgeon! I hated Oliver's uncle, with his parchment-coloured visage, and his gouty toe, and his disordered liver. You might call me prejudiced, for I had never met the man, but who could help disliking an apoplectic old egotist, who cooped his nephew up in scorching, stony Brighton, just because he had a few miserable lacs of rupees to leave behind him? If I were Oliver, I thought at first, I would rather die a pauper than live at the beck of a whimsical, capricious autocrat.

But there is one advantage I found in having a rich

old uncle ; he saves you the trouble of making up your mind. For nights I lay tossing on my bed, unable to settle where I should go. Even when I determined "Heads" should be the Continent, and "Tails" Great Britain, I always lost the toss, and was dissatisfied. I thought of Oliver's wealthy uncle frequently in my indecision, and at last began to wish he had been mine. Then the inspiration came ! I had only to fancy he *was* mine, and my doubts were at an end, my troubles were over. I, too, would go down to Brighton. The burden was lifted from my shoulders ; that night I slept like a top. Steaming down by the luxurious express, I felt happier than I had been for a long time. I should not be alone in Brighton. I should be bound to meet Oliver and his uncle, and then I could tell Oliver what I thought of his subjection to his yellow-gilded relative. Perhaps I might even induce him to enfranchise himself. I promised myself to put in a good word for him with his neglected relative after he should have shaken off the dust of Brighton in dudgeon. One owes these things to one's friends. The task of smoothing down another man's outraged uncle might not be agreeable, but I registered a mental vow to attempt it.

As soon as I had taken a hurried meal at my hotel I sallied forth in quest of Oliver ; but he was neither on the beach, nor the promenade, nor the pier. I looked into all the bath-chairs, half expecting to find him wheeling his uncle in one. After several wasted hours I returned to my hotel fatigued and dispirited. After several wasted days I returned to London unrefreshed and uneasy. Oliver was not in Brighton. An exhaustive study of all the visitors' lists for the past fortnight had made this well-nigh certain. Where could he be ? - Why spread

this false report of his movements? Could it be that he was rustivating perforce in London, and that false shame had made him cover up his poverty? Impossible! Oliver had always given proof of ample resources—much more so than myself. It was this that made his subservience to his uncle so annoying. No, there was some more occult reason behind. The mysteries of my brother-Bachelors had hitherto invariably ended in marriage. Is it to be wondered at that I instantly leapt at the truth in this case too? Alas, that I should have been a true prophet!

The discovery of Oliver's whereabouts came in this wise. I was cudgelling my brains to remember if he had ever given any signs of defection of the heart from us. As I pondered over the past I could not help being reminded of the young man's intense truthfulness. On such occasions as I had taken the trouble to test his autobiographical statements, I had always found fifty per cent. of truth in them. The conviction grew upon me that I had wronged him, that he *was* at Brighton after all, even if with a nearer relative than his uncle, for perchance he was spending his honeymoon there. I had but skimmed the faces of the bi-sexual couples, seeking only a male pair—an old man and a young. What if I had skipped Mr. and Mrs. Green?

I resolved to return to Brighton. I consulted an A B C railway guide. As I gazed, I gave a convulsive start. A name caught my eye—New Brighton. My instinct is seldom at fault. I started for Liverpool at once. The same afternoon I saw Oliver Green lying on the beach. A little dark-featured toddler, of about five or six, emptied buckets of sand upon his gently heaving waistcoat. Recumbent in a half-sitting posture by his

side, was a well-dressed lady, whose face I could not see, for it was shaded by a red parasol, but from the irritating way the little tyrant occasionally tugged with his tiny hands at the parasol I could see it was his mother's. It did not need a second glance to establish the child's relationship to Oliver. The likeness was unmistakable; I could see Green in his eye, and Oliver in his mouth, and father in the way he allowed the slimy-shoed bantling to dance on his breast. I kept cool with a great effort, for it was a broiling day. I was not so overwhelmed as I should have been six months before; bitter experience had schooled me. Still, this was the worst case of all. For some minutes I looked on in silence at the domestic idyll. I did not intrude upon it. I stole away, my breast in a tumult. This, then, was the meaning of Oliver's periodical visits to his uncle! He was such an inveterate evader of a lie that he might even have referred to the raising of money for surreptitious household expenses.

The next morning I met Oliver in the Atlantic. I swam up to him, and in a jocund tone gave him good-morning.

He was so startled that he imbibed a mouthful of sea-water, retired for a moment, and came up gurgling and spluttering.

In answer to his spasmodic syllables, I replied that my coming was fortuitous. I then wished him joy of his marriage, and remarked cheerfully that his name would be handed down to eternal execration.

He stared at me with a fishy eye from between the billows, then threw up his arms and sank. On his return he replied that he had been laughing like a submarine telephone. He was not married at all.

It was now my turn to feel for the bottom of the Atlantic. As I rose I felt that Oliver did not deserve to live. Oh the poor trusting woman with the red parasol! Oh the pocket-edition of Oliver with the spade and the sand-bucket!

We met outside our machines, but I turned away in disgust. Oliver was about to speak, when his little boy ran up, pursued by a fat, panting ayah. Oliver caught the little lad up in his arms and kissed him, and remarked "Oopsi-daisey," and dandled him over his head, after which he surrendered him to the lady with the red parasol, who had by this time toiled up.

"How did you like your bath, Oliver?" she asked, with a loving glance.

"Glorious!" he said; "I wish I could persuade you to try a dip."

She shook her head.

"But to-morrow the little man must——"

Again she shook her head. Her face was still half obscured by a veil, but nothing less opaque than corduroy could hide its harshness and irregularity. It was bronzed and bearded like a trooper's. Her figure was less uncomely, being plump and passable. Her age was certain; it was over half a century. I wondered at Oliver's taste. Still, she might have been beautiful in the far-off happy days.

He turned to me, as I stood glued to the spot.

"Paul," said he, "let me introduce you to Julia—I mean Miss Blossom."

I blushed for him, as he effected the introduction.

"You haven't introduced me to this little chap," I said genially, caressing the child's curls.

I was glad to see Oliver blush in his turn. His

embarrassment was most painful. He hummed and hawed and stammered.

“This—this—is little Oliver.”

I let a moment of severe silence pass by, then I said smiling, “And little Oliver is your——”

“Uncle!” he said desperately,—“precisely.”

If I had not been resting on a stick I should have sat down on the sand. Miss Blossom did so instead, and took out some crochet, while Oliver’s uncle went trapezing about the beach, pursued by the ayah.

“Your uncle from India?” I managed to ejaculate at last.

“The same! Be quiet, Oliver!” he snapped, as his uncle ran between his legs and nearly upset him. “Yes, that is he. He is an orphan, and was brought over last year by his aunt, Miss Blossom. I am his guardian and trustee under my grandfather’s will, and I feel it my duty to go and see the little beggar three or four times a year. As I told you before, he requires a lot of looking after. But please don’t tell anybody. It’s such an abnormal case. It makes me look so awfully ridiculous, and I try to keep the real fact dark. You know if there is one thing in the world I hate it’s being made ridiculous; especially when I’m not a whit to blame.”

“Oh, you may rely on me,” I said, gripping his hand sympathetically. “But is it possible that a mite of a lad like that should be your uncle?”

“I wish it wasn’t,” he said gloomily. “But it ciphers out very simply, extraordinary and unique as it all is. My grandfather married my grandmother out in India when she was fourteen. It’s the climate, you know. She had a daughter at fifteen, who was my mother. This daughter

also married young—at fifteen, and I was born before she was sixteen. Her mother—my grandmother—had gone on bearing children, and her latest success was won at the abnormal age of forty-eight, which is almost the extreme possible limit. But she died in the attempt, leaving little Oliver motherless. That was six years ago, and his father—my grandfather—dying last year, the orphan lad was bequeathed to the care of Miss Blossom (his aunt) and myself.”

“I understand,” I said mendaciously; “but would you mind putting it down on paper?”

Between us we got down the figures. While I was studying them a sudden thought flashed upon me that almost stopped my pulse.

“Why, Oliver!” I thundered, “this makes you only twenty-three!”

He turned sea-green, and his knees shook. His sin had found him out.

“O Paul!” he said, “don’t betray me. I know I have made and procured false declarations of age. But what does it matter? My Indian descent ripened me early. I had a thick beard at seventeen, almost as thick as I have now. There was curry in my blood, remember that, Paul. I may be twenty-three in the letter, but in the flesh and spirit I am thirty. Ah! let me be thirty-one still to Mandeville Brown and M’Gullicuddy. Is it not a sufficient counterweight that my mature appearance makes my avuncular relation all the more ridiculous? Ah, Paul, you will keep that secret too—at least till the child grows up?”

“Till death,” I replied solemnly.

Oliver thanked me with a look, then ran to disengage his uncle from the irate clutches of a little girl whom

he had playfully prodded in the nose with his spade. He carried his struggling and kicking relative back to



where I stood. Then he shook his uncle from India, and slapped his hands, and said, "Naughty, naughty."

His uncle from India yelled like a Cherokee on the war-path.

"And is he so rich?" I asked.

"Beastly rich," he said.

He seated his wealthy uncle from India on his shoulder, and tried to pacify him, but in vain. The avuncular yoke sat by no means lightly upon his shoulders. Aunt Julia had to get up and entreat the demon to leave off.

"Tan't leave off till you give me a penny," said the poor young uncle, sobbing hysterically.

"Where's the penny I gave you last night?" said Oliver.

"I spent it on seed-cake," said his wealthy uncle from India.

The nephew shook his head at his reprobate, profligate, prodigal young uncle.

"Well, well," he said sternly, "here you are, but not another penny do you get from me to-day."

The uncle received his nephew's bounties without gratitude. He grabbed the coin and climbed down from Oliver's shoulders. The next minute he was twenty yards up the beach dissipating his nephew's hoardings in the society of an apple-woman. O woman! woman!

"It's no small responsibility to be a nephew," sighed Oliver, "when one is saddled with a scapegrace young uncle. O Paul, I cannot describe how acutely I feel the absurdity of this relationship, and I hope *you* will not either."

Again I crushed his fingers between mine.

But he might just as well not have exacted a promise from me, for the whole story was in the *Porcupine*, a

Liverpool satirical paper, before the week was out. The port roared; and busy Liverpoolians went down to their watering-place, just to see the uncle and the nephew. The particulars were stated in the big Liverpool dailies, and the paragraphs were copied by the general press, and even formed the staple of an article in the *Daily Wire*, which considered the freak of genealogy in the light of the Bhagavad Gita, the folklore of Japan, the Œdipus of Sophocles, the careers of Charlemagne, Octavius Cæsar, Hamlet and Heinrich Heine, the habits of the Ornithorhynchus, Mr. Gladstone, and various other associated topics. That settled poor Oliver. After he had read the jokes in the local comic paper he never smiled again. But when the *Daily Wire* leader, with its elephantine humour, came within his ken, he was a ruined man. Within a week the banns were up in New Brighton for the marriage of Oliver Green and Henrietta Blossom.

I went to Oliver to point out the error of his ways.

"Go away, sir," he shouted, "you have made me the laughing-stock of the country."

"I?" I exclaimed indignantly.

"Yes, you. Who else sent the facts to the *Porcupine*?"

"I don't know," I said hotly, for I was exceedingly annoyed at having lost the opportunity. Since some one was to reap the reward of indiscretion, why not I as well as another?

"You are too modest," he sneered.

"Wring my withers as you will," I answered, remembering my high mission, "I have come to save you."

"Pray save yourself—the trouble," he said; "I know what I am about."

"I doubt it," I retorted.

"Do you insinuate that I am mad?"

"No; only headstrong."

"A euphemism for weak-headed, I suppose. However, you shall hear. Then you will judge me more leniently. Do you know why I am marrying Miss Blossom?"

"Assuming you are sane—no."

"Miss Blossom is little Oliver's aunt."

He paused impressively, as if he had revealed the secret of the universe. My doubts of his sanity vanished. They were changed into certainties.

"You don't seem to take it in."

"No wonder," I said, "I knew the fact long ago."

"Yes, but put two and two together, man. As Oliver's nephew I am the scoff and byword of the kingdom. By marrying his aunt I become his uncle. As his uncle I shall regain the respect which I have forfeited by your blabbing."

I allowed the libel to pass unchallenged. I could hardly utter a syllable for sheer blank astonishment. The floodgates of speech were checked by a dam.

"Swear away!" said Oliver. "Add insult to injury. Don't put yourself in my place. Don't remember how thin my skin is, and how it quivers under the lash of ridicule. Tell me that I ought to bear the flail, as if I were a rhinoceros. Oh, to drag on a wretched existence, the butt of all the witlings, pointed out by the digit of derisive Demos,—anything rather than that! anything rather than that!"

"Wretch! Coward!" I cried sternly. "And for mere petty personal considerations you would eclipse the gaiety of nations!"

"I would. I never set up as an altruist. There are

only two exits from this frightful situation. In only two ways can I cease to be my uncle's nephew. One is by murder. I can take him out bathing and lose him. But in this Philistine country that is not, I fear, a practicable exit. The other is marriage. Only by becoming my ward's uncle and making him his guardian's nephew can the normal rôles be restored. Then I shall be able to hold up my head again in the world. I shall be able to present my young ward without blushing. A new matrimonial relation will spring up between me and him. He will be the nephew and I shall be the uncle."

Murder or suicide! It was indeed a horny dilemma!

"But what does Miss Blossom say?" I asked.

"She is willing to sacrifice herself on the altar of my salvation," he said, in moved tones.

A world of unspoken emotion surged in my chest as I turned away.

Next day a gleam of hope visited me. In return I visited Miss Blossom in her private room. She lived on the Parade, locally known as the Hamanegg Terrace. I went straight to the point. I said, "I have come to warn you. Mr. Green cannot marry you."

She put her hand to her bosom.

"Why not?" she breathed.

"Because there is a secret in his life—something that you do not know."

"Oh my heart," she gasped, "I feared so; he is——"

"A Bachelor," I said unrelentingly, yet a tremor of sympathy in my voice.

She briefly informed me of the position of the door. I was prepared for discourtesy, so was not put out by it. I appealed to her to have some regard for Oliver's

relatives. She curled her moustache haughtily and asked what I meant.

"See here," I said; "if Oliver is Oliver's uncle, and Oliver is Oliver's nephew, then if Oliver marries you,



who are Oliver's aunt, Oliver will become Oliver's nephew, and Oliver will become Oliver's uncle, therefore Oliver becomes his own great-uncle, and Oliver——"

"Hold on," she said. "Which Oliver is Oliver's uncle, and which Oliver is Oliver's nephew?"

“Both are either, and each is the other,” I said. “It’s as plain as a pikestaff. If Oliver——”

“*Which* Oliver?” she said desperately.

In deference to her inferior intellect, I went out of my way to make it as childish as A, B, C.

“Well, let’s call old Oliver, Oliver the First, and little Oliver, Oliver the Second.”

“Yes, yes,” she said eagerly.

“Well, then, if Oliver the First, who is the nephew of Oliver the Second, becomes Oliver the Second’s uncle by marrying Oliver the Second’s aunt, then Oliver the First becomes his own mother’s uncle, as well as his own great-uncle and great-nephew to himself; and as his mother is his niece, he is his grandmother’s brother, and as he is both his uncle’s uncle and his nephew’s uncle, his uncle is plainly his nephew’s brother, and this uncle is therefore the son of his own sister (which is rank incest), while his mother becomes his grandmother, and as——”

“For Heaven’s sake, stop a moment!” Miss Blossom cried.

I did so, and she sprinkled her forehead with eau-de-Cologne.

Why she could not have waited to do so till she was in her own boudoir, I could not understand, but ladies will be ladies.

“Where was I?” I said, a little nettled, for it is so easy to lose the thread of the most babyish argument when you are dealing with the weaker-headed sex.

“Never mind, go on to Oliver the Second,” Miss Blossom murmured.

I smiled in triumph. Her spirit was crushed, her conscience weakened. The enormity of what she had

been about to do in pure lightheartedness was coming home to her.

"Well, it's worse with Oliver the Second," I said. "Because if Oliver the First becomes his uncle, and he is already the uncle of Oliver the First, then he becomes the son of his own great-grandfather at a bound, thus annihilating two generations—his grandfather and his father, for whose disappearance you are responsible in justice if not in law; and, further, by suppressing his father you make him illegitimate at one stroke, by which shameful act you not only make a pariah of him for life, but exclude him from the succession to the Somerville estate, which thus escheats to the Crown; furthermore, as Oliver the First——"

Miss Blossom uttered a groan and swayed helplessly forward. I caught her in my arms. Somebody knocked at the door, and came in without waiting for an answer. It was Oliver Green. We looked at each other.

"She has fainted," I said. The information gave him no concern. He made no effort to relieve me of the burden.

"How came you here?" he said. "And what have you been doing to her?"

"Through the door," I said curtly. "And telling her she mustn't marry you."

"Why not?"

"Because you are a Bachelor. Also because the marriage would be so mixed. She got a little mixed herself in following my line of thought."

"What do you mean by a mixed marriage?"

He glared at me as if ready to pounce upon me. I glared back at him across the lady from India. I held her to my breast like a shield. With her head pillowed

on my shoulder I felt a sweet sense of security from all pugilistic ills.

O woman, in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please ;
When anger threatens to wring the nose,
Thou guardest us from bullies' blows.

Oliver and I had split many a soda together in effusive amity, little dreaming of the day when a woman would come between us.

"What do you mean by mixed?" Oliver repeated with stern white lips.

I was about to relate afresh the catalogue of family complications. Suddenly a new solution made my heart thump like a steam-hammer cracking a nut.

"You cannot marry your uncle's aunt," I said. "You're collaterally consanguineous."

Oliver staggered back. His jaw fell.

"It's a lie!" cried Miss Blossom, extricating herself from my arms.

"It's the truth," I said, shifting my position to the other side of the table. "If you, Miss Blossom, are Oliver the Second's aunt, then you cannot avoid being related to Oliver the Second's nephew in the line of direct descent. It's a collateral anti-connubial consanguinity of the third degree, and unless it's of the fourth degree according to Roman law, you and Oliver the First cannot marry. By Oliver the First, I mean you," I explained to Green.

"I don't care," Oliver the First answered. "We shall see what the authorities will say."

"Archbishop Parker's *Table of Kindred and Affinity*, according to Leviticus, and the Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical of 1603, distinctly say——"

“And I distinctly say that there’s the door.”

“But will you imperil your position thus, Miss Blossom?” I pleaded. “Will you risk your marriage being null and void?”

Having said this, I picked myself up from the Hamanegg Terrace, bought some arnica, and lodged a protest with the officiating clergyman, stating that the bride was the bridegroom’s great-aunt. Yet, two days after, Oliver the First married his uncle’s aunt, and his uncle was the worst boy at the wedding. Oliver the Second actually made faces at the pew-opener. I wondered his nephew—I mean his uncle—did not give him away. I was in church, for my sympathy was not entirely extinguished by the careless manner in which I had been treated. Julia Blossom did not live up to her name even on her wedding-day, despite the tulle and the jasmine. She remained a prosaic cauliflower to the last. India was chosen for the honeymoon. The wedding-party drove straight to the station. It consisted of Oliver Green, Julia Green, their little nephew, and the native nurse. I was anxious to see the last of the detestable quartette, and was on the platform. To my surprise, the ayah and Oliver the Second were transferred to the care of an unknown lady. In a flash I saw through the whole idea. Oliver the First was determined to carry the comedy through to the bitter end. From the unknown lady—after the train was gone—I learnt that Julia Blossom was one of the greatest heiresses of Bombay. It was clear that nothing less would satisfy my poor friend than to *return from India* not only an uncle, but a wealthy uncle. Thus, and only thus, would the reversal be complete, and the sting of ridicule be entirely extracted.

I went the next day to the clergyman to inquire why he had gone on with this forbidden marriage. What he told me quite compensated for the annoyance I had experienced.

“Almost on your heels,” he said, “the late Miss Blossom called to see me. She said there was an idea about that she was related to her intended husband, but that this report was premature. Her husband, whom she called Oliver the First, believed that she was the aunt of his uncle, whom she entitled Oliver the Second. ‘But this,’ said she, and proved it by documents, ‘is a very natural false impression. *I am not Oliver the Second’s aunt at all.* I am related to him, but in a relationship not yet recognised in law. The fact is, Oliver the Second’s father, before he became Oliver the Second’s mother’s husband, asked *me* to be his wife. I said I could never think of him in that way but I would be a sister to him. So it was settled; I became his sister by refusal of marriage, and thus in due course I became Oliver the Second’s aunt by refusal of marriage. So you see, my relationship to Oliver the First’s parental stock was a purely moral and never a legal one. I often stayed at the house of my sister-in-law by refusal of marriage, and when she died she commended Oliver the Second to my care with her dying breath, her husband doing ditto last year with his.’ The explanation was quite satisfactory, and as the poor lady seemed quite distracted by the idea of the marriage being delayed even by a day, I made no unnecessary difficulties.”

Thus the clergyman to my sardonic satisfaction.

I saw it all now. The infatuated woman had traded upon her supposed relationship to Oliver the Second to

bring Oliver the First to her feet. It was she who had put the matrimonial idea into his head, and goaded him on by sending that paragraph to the *Porcupine*. My collateral consanguineous discovery had threatened to upset her amorous structure, and the woman who had become morally related to Oliver the Second by refusal of marriage, bade fair to be debarred from legal relationship by the same cause. But she had out-mancœuvred me.

I hugged the revenge which had fallen into my hands to my bosom, and kept it warm.

* * * * *

When Oliver Green, turned yellow, came back from India, I was on the landing-stage to meet him, and I had the satisfaction of informing him that he had wasted a liver complaint, and that the little seven-year-old fellow who climbed up his white flannel trousers to kiss him was his uncle still.

CHAPTER X.

MARRYING FOR MONEY.

HALFWAY up Mont Blanc two amateur mountaineers nearly came to blows with their alpenstocks. The guides' conception of the essential insanity of the English nature was strengthened. The necessity of attending to the ascent interfered at points with the amenities of the dialogue, but they set in severely and steadily during the halt at the next châlet. It was not the condition of Europe or of the mountain that made the travellers' angry passions rise; they were not contradicting each other on the rate at which they observed the glaciers moving, nor were they arguing whether it was the duty of the Canton Council to pave the crevasses. The point in dispute was financial; and Moses Fitz-Williams, as Treasurer of the Bachelors' Club, or Solicitor to the Treasury (as some of us facetiously styled the briefless barrister), evidently considered that his word was law. His disputant had even more self-respect. Tompas was neither a Bachelor nor a bachelor, but of the common or domestic variety of man. He had a wife and a villa at Camberwell, and four children called him papa. He was one of the myriad metropolitan taxpayers who are "something in the City," but nothing anywhere else. His life was as moral as a copybook. In politics the *Standard* agreed with him,

and in religion he belonged to the Sunday-school—the great sect which keeps its six days sacred to business. Once a year Tompas's wife and family went to the seaside; Tompas went with them or to the Continent alternately. Such men as Tompas are Britannia's Bulwarks. Their heads are the real wooden walls of Old England. As a confirmed family-man, Tompas looked down on single men, deeming their views on any subject beneath discussion. Bachelors had not imbedded themselves in the great framework of society, and their conclusions were vitiated by their aloofness from reality. Tompas spoke as if marriage were a furnisher or furnisher of intellect, and as if King Solomon had purchased his pre-eminence in wisdom by taking a quantity of it. The financial question between him and Moses Fitz-Williams having reference to matters domestic, Tompas's conversation naturally confined itself mainly to the reduplicated form of "Pooh"; while Moses bleated "Bah," like a cynical ram. Tompas told Moses quite frankly that the Treasurer of the Bachelors' Club was an ass; and the lawyer spoke his mind quite freely in reply, not even charging six and eightpence for the information that Tompas was a nincompoop. Throughout Tompas endeavoured to shrivel up Fitz-Williams with the lightning of his glance, himself exposed the while to a cross fire from Moses's inharmonious eyes.

All the pother arose from the Barrister's official position in the Bachelors' Club. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, Moses was preparing a paper for the next General Court upon "The Financial Aspects of Marriage." In this paper he intended to show how much money was annually wasted by people getting married. He had calculated the sums dissipated by

the inhabitants of the United Kingdom, and was ready to prove that if they had not entered it, they would have amassed sufficient to pay off the National Debt and unshackle the country. The minimum on which a man could marry was laid down by Fitz-Williams at five hundred a year; and he had investigated the whole literature of this evergreen subject in proof of his contention. There were to be other statistics in the Treasurer's paper, which, he did not conceal, bade fair to be a classical contribution to the economics of marriage. Not even from a casual co-climber like Tompas did his singularly candid nature make any effort to conceal this probability. But Tompas had a cantankerous carping disposition. Even though they were passing a nasty hole when Moses broached the subject, Tompas did not fall in with him, but made careless and violent gestures of disapproval of his estimates. It was sad that these two travellers could not learn from the Peace of Nature to be kind to each other. Overhead the sky shimmered lazily, as if it were painted on canvas, and had no work to do; above them was pillowed tranquilly the furrowed forehead of the mountain with its big bald head unpecked even by the eagle; at their feet the crevasses yawned sleepily. Alas! that man alone should mar the gneiss prospect! Tompas maintained obstinately that three hundred pounds a year was an ample income for a family man while five hundred pounds—Moses's matrimonial minimum—was enough to enable him, arithmetically not morally speaking, to support two wives and families. When the speculative financiers arrived at the top of Mont Blanc they quite forgot to look at the view. The wrangle continued down hill. Tompas was going on to

Rome and Moses to Rouen, but they altered their routes now so as to enjoy each other's society. Tompas wanted badly to go to Rome, and Moses had set his heart on Rouen ; but, as neither could sacrifice his own convenience to his companion's, they agreed to travel together to Berlin so as to thresh out this thing thoroughly. At an early stage of the duel Tompas had called in a second. He took it from his pocket-book. It was a slip of crumbling newspaper. This he unfolded lovingly and tenderly as one unwraps the face of an ancestral mummy, and, holding it firmly in his hand, he bade Fitz-Williams gaze upon it.

It was an old newspaper-cutting containing a table showing how a man with four children could live on two hundred and fifty pounds a year. The table was stated to be an extract from a recent book on *How to Live on Anything a Year*. In a short review of this book, the newspaper said that it was one of the ablest financial achievements of the year; that starting from nothing a year it gradually worked its way up to a ducal income, like a self-made millionaire. The titles of the chapters were—"How to Live on Nothing a Year," "How to Live on a Sovereign a Year," "How to Live on Ten Pounds a Year," and so on in an ascending scale. The tables were spread with equal hospitality for the rich and the poor. But the two hundred and fifty pounder had been selected for quotation by the critic as the most generally interesting to its readers.

"That table, sir," said Tompas, "was my salvation." He had been cravenly sniffing about the suburbs of matrimony, disengaged to the sweetest girl God ever made, when he came across it.

"It was a wonderful piece of constructive finance, sir,"



ON THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS.

said Tompas, "broad and sweeping in conception, minute and detailed in execution. It was like an elephant's trunk, sir, which, as you may be aware, uproots an oak or picks up a pin. The computer had put down that pin; nor had he forgotten the oak in his furniture. The moment I clapped my eyes on this paper I was a married man. For, understand, the man of this table had only two hundred and fifty a year. *I* had three hundred! If he was so happy with his two-fifty, what joys would not be mine with three hundred, which was fifty to the good!"

"To the bad, sir, to the bad," asseverated Moses solemnly, looking earnestly to the right and the left simultaneously. "Your logic is out. Even if a man with two-fifty *can* marry, it is quite impossible for a man with three hundred to do so. For the bachelor with the smaller sum is *ex-hypothesi* accustomed to grub along, and so it does not matter whether he is married or single; but the man with the higher income being more exigent towards life is unable to sacrifice himself to the interests of posterity."

"You are joking," Tompas said.

"That is news to me," said Moses politely. "You are so dull that you fancy you see a joke when you are bowled over. It is the last resource of little minds. No, sir, it is no joke, but a serious fact that the poor marry most nowadays. The higher a man's income, the less he can afford to marry on it. This is a main position of my forthcoming paper. Your reasoning, sir, as to the two-fifty and the three hundred, involves a fallacy of simple inspection. It is on a par with the argumentation of the schoolboy who demonstrates, by crude rule of three, that if one man can do a piece of work in

two days, two men can do it in one day. As a matter of fact, the two men will gossip or play nap, and the work will last four days."

"And with this silly wire-drawing you hope to impose on my common-sense."

"I have no such hope!"

"But confound it, sir, you must have, or you wouldn't talk such paradoxical drivel. It is an insult to my common-sense."

"I hope not, sir," said Moses with concern. "I never abuse the absent. How can any man of common-sense suppose that marriage could be undertaken on two-fifty or three hundred a year?"

"But d——n it, man," roared Tompas, "I *did* undertake it."

"Quite so. That is just my point, sir. If you had been a man of common-sense you would never have supposed it could be done."

"But my supposition was proved sound, sir," shrieked Tompas. "Have I not a wife and a family and fifty pounds to spare; all on two-fifty a year? For I regulate my expenses strictly according to this table, sir," he said, rapping it reverently. "We live in clover on two-fifty a year. We have not a single want ungratified—such was the genius of our unknown benefactor whom my little ones daily remember in their prayers. We are happy as the day is long. With the extra fifty we are enabled to purchase all those luxuries which are necessary to persons in our station—including a summer's holiday." Tompas ceased, but kept his look of conscious rectitude. He belonged to that class of persons who make a virtue out of the most unpromising materials.

"And so you and that sweet girl married on the strength of this computation?" said Moses huskily.

"Yes," replied Tompas, "though I was just a day late in getting the original sweet girl I mentioned before. If that book had only been reviewed a day earlier I should have been a different husband. She got engaged an hour before the notice appeared. But being then wrought up to marrying point, I asked another. And let me tell you, sir, I have never regretted it. I have lived in comfort, and brought up my children to be creditable citizens in the twentieth century, and all on an income which you, with your unpractical theories, declare to be utterly inadequate. Now, sir, what have you to say to that?"

"I say that what you have done is impossible, and I will prove it. You say you have gone exactly by that table. Now that table is the most ridiculous collocation of haphazard figures ever jumbled together!"

"But, sir, I have thriven by it. I have tested it. That's trumps."

Moses calmly swept off the trick.

"I drew it up."

"You? Nonsense!" said Tompas.

"You agree with me already," observed Moses sweetly. "Yes; I started life as a bookmaker you know, for I only ate my dinners in the Inner Temple to get into journalism. I had nothing to live upon. I had to answer the problem 'How to get on in life?' I wrote a book informing other people 'How to get on in life.' It did not succeed, and I had to try another way. There was a temporary rage for household accounts. I fell in with a publisher who gave me ten pounds to write the encheiridion that has guided your

life. I was a young unattached scapegrace, living in taverns and restaurants. My ideas of expense were as hazy as an heiress's. I had never lived much at home, and so had rarely been present at the domestic squabbles over expenses; as for babies, I had but scant recollection of the expenses of my own equipment in life. Imagine, therefore, the hash these calculations must have been: And how, if you had really taken a leaf out of my book, could you have managed to escape ruin? Marriage must, indeed, be a failure, financially speaking, when run on the basis I recommended in my inept handbook. No; model your etiquette on my 'Guide by a Member of the Aristocracy' if you will; ride the high horse on my 'Principles of Equitation' if you like; and prognosticate your future life by my 'Vaticination for the Household, or the Inoculation of Truth by Dreams,' if such be your humour; but do not, oh do not attempt to pilot the vessel of matrimony by the chart I drew up in my youth and turpitude."

"Out of the mouth of fools and sucklings cometh forth Wisdom," said Tompas sententiously. "You are wiser than you calculate. If you really are the inventor of these invaluable calculations, I long to be better versed in them. I only know the table I married on."

"Do you mean to say that you never bought the book?"

"How could I? I married immediately, and the expense of purchasing it was not allowed for in the estimate. So I have always felt an unappeased curiosity to know 'how to live on nothing a year.'"

"You will learn that secret from Thackeray and his Becky Sharp. A shorter way is to write the honest truth about any public man."

"How do you mean?"

"You will be sent to prison for inditing a false and malicious libel. If you play your cards well you will be a first-class misdemeanant. I have taken a first-class in journalism myself. It was the making of me."

Tompas looked suspicious.

"And how can you live on a sovereign a year?"

"By marrying her daughter."

"Oh, don't be so absurd!" cried Tompas pettishly.

"Reassure yourself. I have no such intention. But don't you go away with the idea that you have achieved the impossible. You have read Balzac's *Physiologie du mariage* of course?"

"No, sir," said Tompas hotly. "I never read French books."

"Oh, I forgot. There is no translation. I beg your pardon. Well, anyhow, in this book you will find that Balzac excludes the greater portion of womankind from the connotation of the term *Femme*. He sifts the fine flour from the bran, and finds that for the purposes of romantic love only one woman in fifteen is a woman."

"Don't talk to me of love, sir. I am a married man."

"Have patience. I was leaving love and coming to marriage. In the same way as Balzac refused to call most women women, I refuse to call most marriages marriages. Certainly yours was no marriage."

"Sir!"

"Only in a platonic sense, of course, it was no marriage. A union in which beggarly economies are the order of the day is no marriage. It is but book-keeping by double entry. The wedded spirit, sir, must expatiate at large in the atmosphere of art and luxury. To make both ends meet is a tawdry occupation for

immortal souls. I account no marriage such in the higher sense, which is contracted on less than five hundred. Your defence of half that amount, sir, is a disgraceful retrogression to lower ideals. Why, sir, a hundred and fifty years ago some anonymous philanthropist, an ancestor in the spirit to M'Gullicuddy" (the speaker bared his head reverently as he spoke the President's name) "published a broad-sheet entitled *Forewarn'd, Fore-arm'd; or the Bachelors' Monitor: Being a Modest Estimate of the Expenses attending the Married Life*. And even in those primitive times, when luxury had not attained a tithe of its present stature, a decent marriage was valued as an annual charge of £594. So well was this acknowledged, alike by friends and foes of the holy estate, that even the Counterblast to it, which appeared in the same year under the name of *The Ladies' Advocate; or an Apology for Matrimony*, did not attempt to eschew this liability, but only essayed to prove that whereas the first author had appraised the 'expenses' of the Bachelor life at £87, they would really be £238, so that the *additional* cost of matrimony would only be £356. A sum, mark you, sir, in excess of *your* entire allowance. Nay more!"

Moses paused impressively, and drew out a note-book in which he had jotted down miscellaneous materials for his great effort, and continued:—

"The author of the monition to Bachelors says that his estimate 'supposes that the marry'd man actually receives £2000 with his first wife; and has, in the Compass of Fifteen Years Eight Children, Four of which die, and Four only are alive at one time.' £2000, sir, to start on, besides a moderate allowance of children, and then £594 a year! I wish I had the allegorical tableau

here, sir, which accompanied this profound calculation, and demonstrated the cheapness of celibacy through the medium of figures, with or without clothes or wings. I wish I could show you the feeble pictorial reply in which Cupids with hymeneal torches vainly endeavoured to confute the original figures."

"If there be such a pamphlet it is transparently absurd. One hundred and fifty years ago the purchasing power of £594 was much greater than now; and besides, as you rightly observe, there were not so many solicitations to expenditure. Who can take up the colossal catalogue of any self-respecting Store without feeling that our facilities for spending money have kept pace with our improved methods of making it?"

"Which strengthens my argument. If £594 was the minimum for elegant living in 1741, this should be double as much now. In fixing it at £500 I have yielded unduly to the contentions of the superficial. The Bachelor minimum I take to be £200. Even the *Ladies' Advocate* could not make it more than £238, though he made his Bachelor a paragon of extravagance, and made him spend no less than £5 a year upon Brushes, Brooms, Mops, and Turners' and Chandlers' Articles. But, sir, judge of the weakness of the case of the *Ladies' Advocate* when he cants to the jury of marriage as 'the Law of Heaven and the Land, the Purpose of Life, the End of Nature, a Debt to the Commonwealth and to Posterity, and a *Justification of One's Own Parents?*' The *Batchelors' Monitor* keeps a far higher level of debate, never descending to ethical considerations. He falls short of the mark rather than overshoots it, for he assumes far too much moderation in the expenditure of the household. Imagine that

Essences, Powder, Hungary and Lavender water, Elder Flowers, Pomatums, Washes, Snuff, etc., only come to £3 a year! Or that the Christmas Donations of Paterfamilias are only £3 heavier than those of the Bachelor! And what do you say to the generosity of a Controversialist who expressly leaves out of account the following 'Probable Expenses' (probable, save the mark!)? 'Country House or Lodgings; perhaps journeys to Bath, Tunbridge, Scarborough; Chaise and Pair, or one Horse; possibly Saddle-Horse for little Excursions, Riding Habits, etc.; Card-playing, an amusement that has banished the Needle and many useful Employments out of the Modern Education for Ladies; Presents as Watch and Equipage, Jewels, Rings, etc. Perhaps Lap-Dogs, Parrots, Canary Birds, etc.!' To-day wives don't tell their husbands to go to Bath, they want them to go much further. Our half-hearted *Monitor* also admittedly says 'nothing of the Chance of Extravagance and other too common Incidents which we forbear to mention out of *Tenderness* to the Ladies?' Tenderness to the ladies, forsooth! What has a scientific economist to do with Tenderness—or even with Ladies?"

"He is dry as dust enough by now," observed Tompas with satisfaction. "The ignorant incompetent idiot! If he said a man couldn't marry on less than £594 a year, he was either a liar or an ignoramus."

"He knew more about domestic economy than you. Can you tell me what your babies cost you a year?"

"Do you think I post up my babies separately?"

"Of course not," said Moses contemptuously. "You must go to a Bachelor to know the cost of a baby. Lookers-on always see most of the game. Our glorious Pioneer, the warning beacon-fire that saved so many

lives from social wreckage, was a specialist in babies, perhaps the most technical and mysterious branch of domestic economy. He compiled the immortal '*Baby Catalogue* for Eight children of a year old or under, often recruited, and Numbers of most of the Particulars.' Do you know, sir, what a baby involves? In 1741, sir (and it probably involves twice as much now), it involved 'Child-bed basket, and Pin-cushion, and Pins, and Chimney-line; fine Satten Mantle and Sleeves for the Christening, Cradle and its Furniture, Biggins, Headbands, Caps, Short-Stays, Long-Stays, Shirts, Wastecoats, Clouts, Beds, Blankets, Rollers, Mantles, Sleeves, Neckcloths, Shoes, Stockens, Coats, Stays, Frocks, Bibs, Quarter-Caps laced, Coral, Ribbands, Cap and Feather, Cloak, First Coat and Second, Dozens for the Nurse, Anodyne Necklace, etc.' And how much, Mr. Tompas, do you think this cost a year?"

"A hundred pounds!" replied Tompas faintly.

"Ten guineas! Did I not say he handicapped himself too much? And yet he won hands down."

Tompas was overwhelmed by this voice from the dead—this cry from the cradle of an earlier civilisation. Though a father himself, his heart was not petrified, and as his eye conjured up that ancient baby-face swathed in biggins, he turned away and blew his nose. That day they wrangled no more.

Magnum fuit to tell the tale of their internecine campaign, or to chronicle their bickerings. On the way to Berlin Moses had occupied himself in carpentering a series of financial tables, which were to be henceforth indispensable additions to household furniture. They were intended to supersede his former jejune attempts. This time he laid down the chart of

expense on the basis of observation and from practical experience of the reefs and shoals, instead of evolving it from his inner unconsciousness. Tompas was the first to have sight of The New Finance, for the initial expenses in the necessarily interminable series were made manifest to him in Berlin, in a beer-garden. He perused Fitz-Williams's formulæ with gathering bewilderment, but with the air of superiority which he would have preserved even in the presence of Fluxions.

Tompas would have sat on the Canonical Forms themselves, if they had been fashioned by a friend of his. The New Finance ran as follows :—

HOW TO LIVE ON

Annual Income	£80		£100		£150		£200		£250		£500		£750		£1000	
	£	s. d.	£	s. d.	£	s. d.	£	s. d.	£	s. d.	£	s. d.	£	s. d.	£	s. d.
Rent and Taxes,	25	0 0	-80	0 0	60	0 0	..	..	30	0 0	70	0 0	100	0 0	250	0 0
Court-Plaster and Flowers,	3	0 0	..	..	2	0 0	..	..	10	0 0	..	..	7	10 0	20	0 0
Wife, . . . . .	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	25	0 0	1	17 6
Crape, Tomb-stones, etc., . . . . .	..	..	..	..	5	0 0	..	..	..	..	3	0 0	6	0 0	18	0 0
Children, . . . . .	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6	0 0	18	0 0
Meat and Walking-sticks,	10	0 0	10	0 0	12	0 0	..	..	5	0 0	30	0 0	150	0 0	200	0 0
Water, . . . . .	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	4	0 0	7	0 0	9	0 0
Whisky,	8	0 0	5	0 0	..	..	..	..	..	..	1	0 0	2	0 0	..	..
Omnibuses and Railways, . . . . .	..	..	4	0 0	5	0 0	..	..	10	0 0	20	0 0	50	0 0	75	0 0
Hansons and Tooth-powder,	10	0 0	8	0 0	8	0 0	..	..	15	0 0	1	0 0	1	0 0	1	0 0
Tailors,	80	0 0	60	0 0	..	..	..	..	50	0 0	30	0 0	40	0 0	200	0 0
Epic of Hades, Half-Calf,	5	0 0	4	0 0	0	0 1	..	..	0	10 6	..	..	..	..	..	..
Charity, . . . . .	..	..	..	..	3	0 0	..	..	..	..	5	0 0	4	0 0	3	3 0
Dinner-Parties,	15	0 0	2	0 0	2	0 0	..	..	..	..	10	0 0	30	0 0	200	0 0
Stationery, Sealing-wax, etc., . . . . .	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	150	0 0
Furniture, . . . . .	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	300	0 0	..	..	..	..	..	..
Beat-race Ribbons,	0	2 6	0	0 2½	0	5 0	..	..	..	..	5	0 0	10	0 0	..	..
Automatic Chocolates, etc., . . . . .	..	..	..	..	15	0 0	..	..	52	10 0	..	..	..	..	..	..
Theatres,	5	0 0	5	0 0	10	0 0	..	..	2	0 0	..	..	..	..	..	..
Tobacco, . . . . .	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Servants,	5	0 0	2	0 0	50	0 0	..	..	..	..	14	0 0	1	0 0	100	0 0
Actresses' Portraits, . . . . .	..	..	..	..	6	0 0	..	..	..	..	1	0 0	1	0 0	1	0 0
Dentists and Nut-crackers,	2	0 0	1	0 0	..	..	..	..	3	0 0	2	0 0	3	0 0	7	0 0
Trouser-stretchers, Corkscrews, and Boot-trees,	0	10 0	..	..	..	..	..	..	5	0 0	0	0 6	0	0 0	0	2 6
Flutes, . . . . .	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Liquorice,	50	0 0	10	0 0	0	0 0½	..	..	..	..	37	0 0	..	..	..	..
Damages for Breach of Promise,	4	5 5	100	7 2	25	16 0	..	..	9	3 0½	400	0 0	332	7 0	0	6 8½
Mouse-traps and Miscellaneous,	222	17 11	131	7 4½	5204	1 1½	..	..	505	3 6½	784	0 6	877	17 6	1336	9 8½
Total Annual Expenditure,	80	0 0	100	0 0	150	0 0	200	0 0	250	0 0	500	0 0	750	0 0	1000	0 0
Total Annual Income,	142	17 11	31	7 4½	5054	1 1½	0	0 0½	255	3 6½	284	0 6	127	17 6	336	9 8½

“Well, what do you think of them?” said Moses jauntily, as Tompas silently let the paper droop. “Will they do?”

“Instead of the certificate of two doctors. Sir, you are stark, staring mad.”

“Hurrah!” shouted Moses, “now I know I have made a great discovery.” He ordered some more lager in his exultation. “Drink,” said he, “to the New Napier and the New Finance. What are logarithms to my batch of budgets!”

“Budgets? They are simply numbers scattered from a lotto-bag.”

“Aha! I thought you did not understand the inner and interconnected beauties of this architectonic arithmetical achievement. There is nothing attenuated, naught set down in malice. Every number bristles with significance, every line is pregnant with meaning. It is not only a triumph of inductive reasoning and a lesson in finance, it is full of sermons on the text of numbers. If you knew how to pull the strings the figures would work out; the sweepings of the lotto-bag would become kaleidoscopic figures if your eye brought the needed symmetry. The——”

The lager beer arrived, and as Tompas was fond of lager beer, he drank to the New Napier, and, a little mollified thereby, asked for an explanation.

“As well ask for an explanation of the Universe. Tell me one item you do not understand.”

“How can a man spend £222, 17s. 11d. when he has only an income of £80, and——”

“My table is empirical. It is a real table—a real live table—none of your moonshiny, airy, unpractical *à priori* theories, such as you have lived by all these years.”

"But effect a saving?"

"Empiricism again. Isn't it obvious that if a man spends £222, 17s. 11d., and has only £80, he *must* save £142, 17s. 11d.? If he had had it, wouldn't he have spent it? You admit that. Very well, then. But he *didn't* spend it. Therefore he saved it. That is the value of my system. It teaches the *uneconomical* to save. The ordinary tables address themselves to the frugal and the thrifty, who don't require teaching. Anything else?"

"But how can your £200 man spend nothing?"

"How can you say that when he pays £200 damages annually? He is a collector, and like all collectors spends his entire fortune on his pet fad. He has the greatest collection of *fiancées* in the kingdom. True, he abstains from meat, rent, flutes, tooth-powder, and other more conventional luxuries, but that is because he is a vegetarian, a care-taker, a teetotaller, and, since he lives opposite a cigar-shop, an anti-tobacconist."

"But has he left off clothes, too?"

"Yes, he has left-off clothes given him."

"But what—what does he spend that farthing on? Mouse-traps?"

"He does not spend it. He drops it down a hole. The law of averages requires that every man shall lose at least a farthing once a year. Your ordinary Utopian table coolly passes over this item."

"Well, perhaps you will explain the vagaries of your £250 man. Why should he spend £300 on furniture?"

"Blind! blind!" muttered Moses' pityingly. "Do you not see that he has ceased to purchase actresses' portraits, that he spends £10 on flowers and court-plaster, that he is extravagant in dress, that he wastes

£8 in writing letters, and purchases inordinate chocolates. Man, man, were you not yourself engaged once? On my system a man may betroth himself at 250, as is plainly written in the tables, though he may not marry before 500."

"Rather old, isn't it?" queried Tompas, with a sickly smile. But he was not to be crushed so easily.

"But why should the £300 man spend £37 on liquorice? That at least is inexplicable."

"You forget," replied Moses, with a sweet smile, "that he is a sweet-stuff dealer."

"But you can't mix that up with his domestic expenses."

"Why blame me? He deceives his wife that way. It is not for the scientific observer to praise or blame him; it is his duty simply to record the facts."

"Hum! But if I understand your symbols, the hundred-pounder saves £80 a year by paying his rent and taxes. A pretty paradox, forsooth!"

"A sober fact! The rent of chambers in the central district is so extortionate that he is compelled to rent a whole house in the district. He pays £100 for the house, lets himself extensive chambers for £120, and the rest of the house for £60, and thus effects a sheer saving of £80 per annum."

Tompas was so obfuscated that he flew to the other extreme to cover his confusion.

"But what of the man who, blessed with a thousand a year, allows his wife a scurvy £1, 17s. 6d.?"

"Really, Tompas, one would think you were born yesterday. As if a man with a thousand a year would marry a wife without an income of her own! The more man has the more he wants. That £1, 17s. 6d. is

simply the two-guinea present he gives his wife on her birthday—trade price.”

“But do you mean to say such a man spends nothing on whisky?”

“Yes, he has only fine wines.”

“But you don't mention wines?”

“They're included in the Miscellanea.”

“And he gives dinners without cheese?”

“That's in the Mouse-traps.”

“And without cigars? I see so much—that he is all show. But surely he must give his friends cigars.”

“He does—out of the boxes they have given him. A man blessed with a thousand a year and a number of poor friends never need buy cigars.”

“But surely he would not spend £250 on rent and taxes?”

“He spends only £100 in rent. The rest goes in taxes—especially Income Tax. The assessors happen to be friends of his, so, as you have acutely noticed, he has to make a good show. No man likes to be underrated—by his friends.”

“Well, there is something in that,” replied Tompas, with more respect for the table than he had yet shown. “And your eighty-pounder seems to me to act very naturally.”

“Ah,” said Moses with satisfaction, “you are beginning to enter into the spirit of the calculation.”

“But why does he spend £15 on correspondence?”

“How else could a man save £142, 17s. 11d. a year? He has so many promises to pay to write to his creditors, so many appeals for loans to make to his friends and relatives.”

“But the moment a man gets £500 a year he ceases to write letters?”

“You are hopeless. He writes them from his Club.”

Tompas began to look dead-beat. “But your third column! Nothing on tailors, £15 on chocolate, £50 on actresses’ portraits! The creature is utterly unreasonable.”

“Of course. It is a woman.”

“A woman?”

“Yes, why should you imagine it was a man? The usual masculine assumption that the earth is man’s and the tables thereof. Why, everything points to the sex.”

“But she must dress?”

“Of course she must, but she goes to a dressmaker, not a tailor. I should have thought the outlay of £25 on Mouse-traps, etc., would have opened the eyes of the blindest. And who but the most myopic could miss the point of the $\frac{1}{4}$ d. breach of promise damages? What *man* ever gets let off with a farthing?”

“Granted. But how can a half-calf edition of the Epic of Hades be got for 1d.?”

“Good heavens, Tompas! you don’t mean to say you don’t understand that! She has a guinea subscription at Mudie’s, and the penny represents the proportional cost of reading this book. No one buys books in England now, except the two-fifty pounder, who purchases the poem as a present to his sweetheart. Don’t you see that he has also got to spend lots on the theatre, while all the others can afford to wait till the ‘gigantic successes’ come along, and the orders are flowing freely?”

“All the others—when No. 3 spends £5000 on theatres!”

“Oh, that is another story. She spends it partly as lessee, partly on her salary as *tragédienne* at leading theatres.”

But how in the d——l can it be done on £150 a year?”

“Gently, sir!” said Moses reproachfully. “Remember you are speaking of a lady.”

Tompas apologised instantly, but still ventured to point out that an actress would be the last person in the world to waste £50 a year on actresses' portraits.

“Most moderate, sir,” Moses rejoined suavely. “Many actresses spend much more than that on their portraits. Think of the infinite poses, postures, dresses, and faces an actress has to be taken in. All I have told you, sir, is not a tithe of the manifold meanings and beauties of this table. Alps rise beyond Alps in a perspective of boundless glory. The pickaxes of science would be years mining in their bowels. The morality is stern, almost puritanical. Each figure is so chock-full of ‘criticism of life’ as to verge on the poetic. The ordinary calculations are so elaborately useless. They go wrong with such logical precision. Real life laughs them to scorn. Your table allows you, say, a sovereign for a dog, and seven and six for his licence; it does not warn you that that dog will go biting the legs of the legal-minded. Beware of that dog! Your table permits you to spend five pounds on a midsummer holiday at the seaside, and works it out to a farthing, but it meanly omits to state that you will want sandshoes, that your hat will be blown over the pier, that you will lose the return-half of your ticket, and that a female cousin will be staying down there who will expect to be seasick at your expense. So, more lager,

waiter ; let us drink again to The New Finance and the New Napier."

They drank so often to them that they almost came to blows. They were still brawling and squabbling on the Channel steamer, and they had no sooner set foot in London than they called upon me and told me the whole story and asked me to arbitrate. Tompas argued that a man could marry on two-fifty, much more on three hundred, and proved it by his life. Fitz-Williams argued that a man could not marry even on the higher amount, and proved it by his tables. After abysmally deep reflection I said there was only one way for me to decide between them. If I consented to put up for a week at Tompas's villa in Camberwell, and to watch his expenditure carefully, I could settle this thing once for all. Any week taken at random would do. *Ex pede Herculem*. From that I could gauge whether he was really living on three hundred pounds or not. Tompas was so cocksure of himself that he assented eagerly, and after some reluctance I agreed to put up with the old bore for the ensuing week. It was an ideal week for me, for I learned a great deal, and though Mrs. Tompas received me affably and boarded me well, the language I overheard her use to her husband about me in their bedroom was libellous, and the names she called him bordered on scurrility. At the end of the week the three of us assembled in the Bachelors' Club and I gave my decision. It was in favour of Moses Fitz-Williams. Tompas swore—that I was prejudiced. But I proved conclusively that the household expenses for the week argued an annual outlay of nearly four hundred. I said that he consumed a frightful amount of gas, and kept a table far in advance of his income. The wine

alone which he had supplied to me at dinner would run away with eighty a year. Tompas bridled up, and said you could not treat a visitor like your own family, and besides my expenses must be deducted from the calculation. This I could not allow, and Moses explained violently that this was just one of the contingencies which the stock tables did not foresee, and which real life was fond of springing upon a man. If a man with three hundred a year had to entertain another man for a week, just to show that he only spent three hundred a year, he must provide for this expense out of his three hundred. Tompas shrieked "No!" I said it was a difficult casuistical question, but that all the best Jesuits and Talmudists were dead, and it would probably never be settled now. M'Gullicuddy had to interfere to disentangle the disputants.

Next day Moses wired for me. I went to his rooms. They were luxurious. There were flowers in vases, and court-plaster on his face. "More than I allowed for!" he said, groaning.

"Paul," he said, when I had lit one of his cigars, "there is only one way out of this."

"Yes?" I said, my heart beating ominously. "What is it?"

"You must marry."

My heart stood still. "I?" I gasped.

"Yes, you. I want to show that a man cannot marry on three hundred a year. A man in whose integrity both parties can rely must be the object of the experiment. Now you have more than that, I believe; but if you just sequester three hundred for this purpose, and come a cropper in the Bankruptcy Court, my thesis will be demonstrated to an unbelieving Tompas."

“But why should I marry to support *you*?”

“Paul, I know it is a great sacrifice I am asking, and but for the depth of our friendship I would never dare to ask it. But we are speaking now soul to soul. You are the only friend I have in the world. *I* cannot marry because I am an honorary official of the Bachelors' Club. *You* are only a private member; the blow would fall gentlier on M'Gullicuddy. It is for *his* sake I ask it, my dear old Paul. You worship him no less than I. Besides, I have only the bare sum—just the three hundred a year. *I* cannot risk matrimony. True, I might be mistaken. The income *might* be adequate. But what if my marriage were a success? What if Tompas were refuted? I should be ruined. And I am certain that my marriage will *not* be a failure, and that I *shall* be ruined. Come, do not deny me this favour. Remember you agreed to arbitrate.”

“Moses,” I said sternly, “this is the one thing in the world no man has a right to ask of another. Ask him to sacrifice fame, fortune, limb—nay, life! but not his celibacy, Moses, not his celibacy! If I *am* arbitrator, I say it is *you* who should marry, not I.”

“Well, if *you* think so, *as* arbitrator,” said Moses readily, “I suppose I must. Do you know any one who would be suitable?”

“For the purposes of the experiment she must be an average woman,” I said; “not too extravagant, and not too parsimonious. For the rest you must please yourself.”

So Moses Fitz-Williams married, with the consent of Tompas and the curse of M'Gullicuddy. And he furnished his house on the hire system, so that the expense might be distributed evenly over a term of

years. And he gave his wife whatever she asked of him, without stint, but without overplus. And at the end of the first year, one sweet September evening, I audited the accounts and drew up the balance-sheet, and gave my decision.

It was in favour of Tompas.

Moses swore—that I was prejudiced. He observed violently that the amount on the debit side must be colossal, that his wife and he had wallowed in luxury. It soon transpired that she was an heiress, who, wishing to be wooed for herself alone, had concealed the fact, and was paying three-quarters of the bills out of her privy purse. Poor creature! She will carry to the grave with her the delusion that Moses had married her for love. Wild horses will not tear it from her, nor is there any likelihood of their trying.

Tompas, with his Philistine mind, once hinted to me that Moses had known she was an heiress all along, but I knew that Moses's motives were as pure as the new-fallen snow, that he married merely for the experiment, and would have done nothing consciously to vitiate it. He fell a victim to his love of figures, and drew his assurance money with regret.

But fate was against a settlement, and he still argues the point with Tompas, and there is no M'Gullicuddy to disentangle them.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ORIGINAL SINNER.

TIME hung heavy on my hands now that the Bachelors' Club had almost melted away. I could not steel myself to sit for any length of time within those walls which had so often echoed with single-hearted laughter. Every sight brought back old memories. I could hardly look the steward in the face ; nor rid myself of the feeling that Willoughby Jones spent his day in gloating. Determined as the remaining three of us were to run the Club, and remain single till death did us part, we yet rather shrank from meeting one another there. We had given up the hope of filling up the vacancies left by the miscreants whose names adorned the funereal fresco ; the vacancies in men's crania needed filling up first. The only person who benefited by our losses was jolly little Mandeville Brown, for they so upset his mind that he published a volume of verse at his own expense. It was called *Poems of Pessimism*. I was never more surprised in my life than to find the sale spreading like wildfire. I suppose the title was so happy. Not being able to write poetry, I took to watching M'Gullicuddy from an unreasonable and insulting but irrepressible fear that HE might go and get married next. One fine October evening as we were walking together down Pimlico way in Indian file, he suddenly

turned upon me and suggested in broad Doric that I should start a paper. I jumped at the sudden suggestion. He said that such talents as Heaven had blessed me with ought not to be wasted. In a moment I saw the idea. The new journalism had invented interviewing; but interviews were always so short—on paper. A “new” journal which interviewed the man of the week in each number, and in all the number, would hit the public between wind and water. No sooner conceived than begun. I registered the title of *At Home Every Monday*, and called upon Mandeville Brown, thanking the stars that had made an old friend famous just in time to be useful. I was determined to look after Number One well.

The Pessimist was practising a step-dance when I arrived, but he graciously desisted and flung himself upon an ottoman. A faint smell of attar of roses pervaded his artistic apartments, decorated with plaques, colour symphonies, busts of Schopenhauer and Leopardi, French comic papers, pendent guitars and violas, flowers, photographs from the nude, old porcelain, proof etchings, and favourable reviews of *Poems of Pessimism*.

“Then you wish to interview me about my *Poems of Pessimism*,” he said, lighting an aromatic Turkish cigarette, and leaving me to help myself.

“I do; I want to know what they mean.”

“Have you not read them?”

“Yes; that is why I want to know. I do not speak for myself alone. They have made such a sensation, and sold so tremendously, that the public wants to know what they mean.”

"My dear Paul, I cannot tell you. I have written the poems. It is for the commentators to provide a meaning for them."

"Well, at any rate the public wants to know what *you* mean."

"Ah! that is different. Here is your interview with me. Kindly let me see a proof."

He took out of his drawer a very bulky manuscript neatly typographed, and handed it to me.

I looked at him inquiringly.

"Don't you understand?" he said. "I have no time to be interviewed now that I am famous. While I was unknown I could have afforded numerous facilities to interviewers. They did not seize those opportunities. Foreseeing that my time would be valuable the moment fame came to me, I devoted some of my numerous hours of obscure leisure to interviewing myself. I never put off till to-morrow what I can do to-day, and I congratulate myself on the saving of time thus effected. The interview is divided into three parts. The first part is taken up with your impressions, the third with mine. In the second you will find full particulars of my ancestors, birth, training, early genius, rise and progress, trousers and times of writing, manners and income-tax, and my list of the best hundred books, pictures, and musical compositions. This part is extremely interesting. I cannot imagine anything more so, though *you* are at liberty to do so if you please. You have *carte blanche* to do with me as you will—make a new man of me, if you can. There is really no more reason for my taking up your time. You will find my remarks a good deal more artistically unpolished than if I had to formulate my ideas about everything, etc., impromptu. Good-bye,

Paul. Wish you luck—and don't forget to send me a proof."

As soon as I was outside, I turned into a restaurant and feverishly opened the manuscript. I was extremely curious to know how he had impressed me. The manuscript was headed in capital letters

THE PRINCE OF PESSIMISTS.

MANDEVILLE BROWN INTERVIEWED.

I was glad to see that my impressions were completely creditable. My observations betokened a ready eye and a pungent pen. But as I feel some modesty in obtruding my own impressions upon the reader, I shall omit this portion of the interview, and reproduce only Part III.

* * * * *

"You have always been known as a Pessimist?"

"Yes; that is the worst of it. I can never enjoy myself without being called upon to explain that it is not that I am inconsistent, but that the inquirer is a fool."

"What is the formula of Pessimism?"

"That this is the best of all possible worlds."

"But that is the formula of Optimism!"

"I cannot help it. I do not believe that any better world than this is possible. That is the awful pity and pathos of it. Nothing is possible but what *is*."

"And what, then, is the formula of Optimism?"

"The badge of Optimism is the mourning-band; and its supreme expression pity for the dead."

"Your poems have a good deal to say about Fate."

"Fate willed it so."

"You don't believe in Free Will then?"

“No; we can do as we like, of course, but we can't like as we like. Free Will is refuted by figures. Kismet has been translated into mathematical curves. Life is an hereditary disease. It is transmitted from father to son. The persistent immigration of pauper infants must be checked, or one day there will be an epidemic of parenticide. At present every well-regulated homicidal mind shrinks from it. In China, when a man signalises himself they ennoble his ancestors; on the same principle, when a man commits a crime, we ought to punish his parents. That would put the brake on parentage. Every one can help being a parent: no one can help being a child.”

“Then the criminal is——”

“The criminal's parent. If we studied the criminal instead of his comfort we should know this. The criminal is the legacy-duty we have to pay on the civilisation bequeathed to us. Crime is as hereditary as gout, insanity, or a seat in the House of Lords.”

“Then you don't think ‘life is serious after all,’ as a popular dramatist hath it. You think it is a mistake.”

“I combine both views. Life is a serious mistake.”

“Is that why you are a Socialist?”

“Yes; why should we not divide the evil? But I am none the less an Individualist. I am as self-contradictory as Existence itself. It is intolerable that the fittest should survive; it is equally intolerable that we should have to be looked after by our neighbours.”

“Then how would you describe yourself politically?”

“Like all reasonable men I am a Democrat with a profound distrust of the People. Politics is a see-saw. Conservatism creates Radicals by irritating the ill-to-

do ; Radicalism creates Conservatives by contenting them."

"Then Progress is a fiction ?"

"Fortunately—yes. We never progress ; we 'mark time,' and, because we have left the past behind us, think we are in advance of it. The Brotherhood of Man is a confidence trick. If War is to be killed, it will be only by the Gospel of Smokeless Powder *et hoc genus omne*. When the scarlet fever can no longer be cured by blood-letting, because we can't get at the enemy, the race will pride itself on its civilisation. No ; Progress is fortunately impossible."

"But why fortunately ? Why should you rejoice if the coming of justice on earth is impossible ?"

"Because it would be so unjust. Why should some future generation be beastly comfortable, merely through coming late ? It is a most disgusting ideal."

"It is the ideal of all Social Reformers, of all religions."

"If they realised what their ideal meant they would abandon it. Ideals are the result of weak visualisation. It is only by not defining your ideal that you get the strength to pursue it."

"But idealists are the salt of the earth, the saving remnant."

"Idealists are too heavenly for earth, and too earthly for heaven. They are like Mahomet's coffin—out of touch with either sphere. The one thing these unselfish dreamers will never understand is that unselfishness is a physical impossibility, that all human action must be in the middle voice of the Greeks—with reference to self. No more surely do we see the world through I-glasses than we do everything to please ourselves. Oh, if the idealists would only realise this, they would be at once

better philanthropists and worse men. It is idealists who are responsible for the current panacea of Culture. The race will educate itself away. Self-culture is an unhealthy hothouse experiment, but it is not so mischievous as universal gardening. Oh, what terrible riddles the Modern Sphinx sets us,—none of the childish conundrums which Œdipus plumed himself on answering.”

“But surely you would not return to the days when the vulgar could not read or write, and there was no Free Press to represent and mould their aspirations!”

“‘Free Press!’ O shade of Milton! Gagged by Mrs. Grundy and supported by advertisers. Your pill-vendor or soap-boiler regards himself as the patron saint of journalism. O the advertiser! He is the true king of our century. At every turn he sternly commands us to wash with his soap, smoke his tobacco, or intoxicate ourselves with his brandy. He would willingly purchase the sunset to paint on the clouds the name of his nostrum. He would have liked to contract for the writing on the wall that mystified Belshazzar. Letters of fire on the firmament would no longer terrify us; we should divine a connection with hair-dye or tooth-powder. Ah, the ‘Free Press’ is in a parlous state when it has to be kept alive by patent medicines! For the rest, the less freely we ‘examine the works’ of the Free Press the better. Your average journalist has his bread buttered literally on both sides; and it is a mere fluke which opinions he is paid to denounce. As for the People he caters for, its chief reading is scraps, and it prefers life-insurance to literature. When it reads that if 2,368,759 post-cards were piled one on top of another,

you could only read the last one; or that 830,251 *h's* were dropped in Seven Dials last Monday, it is happy. Lotteryture rules the roast, and letters are smothered beneath prize packets. The genius who divined what the age wanted deserved the fortune he made. The age of folios is past. The dear old folios, without which Charles Lamb found even heaven incomplete, are left to the book-worms—philological or entomological. Parasitic literature—books about books, reviews of reviews—is the only thing that pays. Intellectual laziness and the hurry of the age have produced a craving for literary 'nips.' The torpid brain requires but a lively fillip; it has grown too weak for sustained thought. Brevity must be the soul of everything; the wit can take care of itself. Even novels and plays must be short and not to the point. The book-worm has developed into the butterfly. The other great journalistic achievements of the age are *The Evening Eavesdropper*, *The Society Scandalmonger*, and *The Financial Filibuster*."

"How one-sided you are! The number of persons interested in literature has been immensely raised in the last half century."

"True; there never was an age in which so many people were able to write badly. And to think there is a man who wants to turn out writers like chartered accountants, and to grant poetical licences at a training-school for authors. Oh this modern eruption of black spots on white paper! The age needs to be taught to read, not to write. And it needs most of all to be taught not to write, especially not to write Recollections. Everybody sets about writing his Recollections, though nobody will recollect his writings. The sense of Art,

too, is dying. Novel-writing has become a branch of pamphleteering. The characters make talk in lieu of love or scenes. We have lady-writers more theological than logical, and romances which provoke rejoinders. Imagine a rejoinder to *Vanity Fair*, the overture to *Lohengrin*, or Millet's 'Angelus.' No, we are not an artistic people, the free glory of art is not for us. Not one man in a thousand understands technique in music or painting, or has a soul responsive to beauty, though all are willing to criticise freely in that exchange of ideas which between equals alone is no robbery. We English are always striving to reduce art to a science; it is the foible of all Philistine peoples. You have only to look at our dresses, our streets, our houses, our public buildings and statues, to see that as a people we have not a breath of artistic impulse. If that does not convince you, look at our art galleries."

"Still, at any rate, the stage is advancing."

"It is 'getting on.' So much so that it has been taken up by the Church—always a sign of material prosperity. But it is not advancing. Art is sunk in the artist or the tradesman. Actors are measured for their parts, even when they are not mere dummies. The 'star' system and the milky ways of burlesque are the most prominent objects in the dramatic heavens. Beauty, as Rossetti said, is genius—on the stage. The modern Marguerite is an actress, the jewels she craves are newspaper notices. 'Faust up to Date' is the man who can write or buy them for her. Alas for the Marguerite who lacks beauty! Not for her the furores of the footlights. Of her, though gold be showered like water, the princeliest Faust can but make a fashionable beauty."

"But look at the amount of good poetry written every year!"

"Granted. The poets are still with us. But they read one another. Poetry has always been a drug in the market."

"What! when Tennyson is worth a guinea a box—I mean a word!"

"A drug! a drug still! But having the Government stamp it sells like a patent medicine. Still, England must awake to art soon, for art will be the religion of the future, as religion was the art of the past."

"Art to be religion! When the Salvation Army is the biggest boom of the epoch!"

"The singing of comic psalms by the army will develop a sense of humour that will gradually kill it. The profits of the Salvation Stores will fall off, and the business will be turned into a joint-stock company. The Millennium will then be put on the market in one pound shares, and if it only promises to return a good percentage, it will be laid on quicker than by the combined efforts of all the preachers since Abraham. To be serious, the Church of the future will be Catholic—not that Catholicism which has yet to learn that open confession is bad for the soul (which comes to take it as expiation), but the Universal Church which teaches people not to save their souls but to use them."

"Ah, then, you hope for such a Church?"

"A little before the next glacial epoch. Human nature has so much to unlearn, and is cursed with such a good memory! Man has come to be a parasite on his own machinery. He is the slave of the ecclesiastical and political mechanism he has himself constructed. He cannot shake off the fetters of his past."

“That is nonsense. There are always great men who rise superior to machinery.”

“And construct new. But do you still share the belief in ‘The Great Man Myth’? The world is really old enough by now to know better. Some men may be born great, and some may achieve greatness, but most people thrust greatness on other people. The ‘great men’ themselves know better than to join the ranks of their admirers; if they don’t, they are little men. While the hero-worshippers never think of the object of their adoration except in his great aspects, the mind of the hero is chiefly occupied with the consciousness of his little weaknesses. If he is proud at all, it is usually but self-conceit; for the object of his pride is some ability which he does not possess. The great painter is puffed up with the thought that he smokes the most judiciously chosen tobacco; the great musician fancies that he can skate very ornamentally; the great statesman imagines he can guess the plot of a sensational novel by reading the last page. The thing the great man can do consummately is of little concern to him; it is the air he breathes, and awakens no admiration in his own mind. The blind man wonders how any one can see; the street urchin sees, and does not marvel. The hero-worshipper stands outside and admires; the hero stands inside himself, and is indifferent or disgusted.

“One day, through some sudden loophole, the worshipper, too, gets a glimpse into the interior, and turns away to pick up some mud. To the ex-worshipper he is a monster; to himself he is the same man that he always was. He finds it hard to understand the change. What makes it harder in some instances is that by this

time the fumes of the censers may have got into his brain, and persuaded him into the popular belief that he is not a mere man, with human passions and absurdities, but the peer of the gods. Unshaken by centuries of exposure, the great man myth still flourishes, and the educators of the public nourish the delusion which they may themselves profit by some day. There are men with great qualities; there are no great men."

"For all that I still believe in you."

"That is, you don't believe in what I say."

"Carlyle believed in great men."

"Because he believed in himself. He showed the air is always full of dust; dust of putrefying creeds and prejudices and decaying forms, and dust which a million hirelings throw daily into the eyes of Truth, and he taught that the universe is swept clean by a succession of scavengers, one or two a century; which is about the saddest theory of life ever formed. No, there are no great men; there are only famous men. And my Lady Fame is a Titania. The men at the top are too often Bottoms."

"Frankly, Mr. Brown, this is all the craziest paradox, and you contradict yourself consumedly."

"Paradox is platitude in the making; and self-contradiction is the essence of candour."

"Then your jaundiced vision sees nothing to praise, no nascent movement to encourage?"

"None; too many others see the rose-colour; for me, the yellow side of the shield!"

"Then you think there is use, as well as abuse, in the cynic?"

"Understand me. The cynic does not disbelieve in genuine things, only in the genuineness of things. He

is the acid that corrodes things foul and of good report. As such he is indispensable."

"The world were happier without him."

"Happily him. Nature her children

"And is

"None, books telling it so."

"Thank you for your courtesy. I understand imperfectly.

I am sorry to find you have such a poor opinion of the Universe. For my part, I fancy it is all right when you know it, but you've got to know it first. Good-bye, and may you be happy."

"Thank you," said my victim, with emotion, "I shall be when you're gone."

* * *

Two weeks after that I met Mandeville in the *Chesham* street. He was laughing heartily over a Punch and Judy show. When Punch whacked Judy the Pessimist's plump sides quivered,



the world does not listen to is a Realist, but fortunately are Romanticists."

there no hope for humanity?" unless it purchases my



and tears of delight trickled down his cheeks. He greeted me effusively, and asked me to come up the river with him. The clerk of the weather had imported an Indian summer, and October was as pleasant as July had failed to be. We took the train to Kew and rowed up to Richmond, I pulling stroke and he bow, and *vice versa* too frequently to be enjoyable. I had never seen him quite so boyish before; the success of his *Poems of Pessimism* had made a new boy of him; half a dozen times he insisted on changing seats in mid-stream. He was so light-hearted that I felt sure we should be captured. He asked how my *At Home Every Monday* was going; I told him I had dropped it after the second number.

"But I'm sure everybody I saw had a copy of the first number," he replied in astonishment.

"I don't doubt you saw everybody had a copy," I replied; "but it is not because the thing wouldn't pay that I relinquished it; it was because I felt myself unable to grapple with the correspondence it involved. I was besieged with applications from all parts of the country from strangers who assured me they were celebrities. Every post brought me a furlong of interviews. What's the matter?"

Mandeville had dropped his oar in the river and fallen back mortally pale.

"Wh—a—a—t!" he stammered, "other people also had ready-made interviews!"

"Hundreds of people," I replied.

Mandeville groaned. "Another illusion gone!" He sat up slowly.

"What do you mean?"

"I thought I was original," he said in a low tone, his eyes seeking the planks of the boat.

"Well, what matters?" I said, as I rowed vigorously towards the drifting oar, and captured it.

"What matters!" he repeated, "when I have been all my life in quest of the original!"

"That's not an original attitude," I replied.

"No," he said sadly. "The chase is not original, but the capture—ah!" he sighed deeply. "Take both the oars, old man. I will do all the work. I will entertain you by laying myself bare to you."

"What! going to have a swim? Well, be careful how you jump off."

"Don't be an ass! I refer to my psychical nudity. I need not say that I did not strip for my interview. But now I will be naked and not ashamed. Know then that every instant of time I can spare from the duties and pleasures of life is spent in fretting at the unelastic boundaries of existence. I hate this web of conventionality with which I am enmeshed. To be born, to suckle at the breast, to get the measles and the whooping cough, to become a boy, to develop a moustache and adolescent emotions, to grow from a youth into a man, and from a man to an old man—to have one's whole life marked out for you from the start without your leave or consent,—ugh! it is so conventional! My soul sickens at it. And then every day is a life in little. To get up and wash and dress and feed at intervals and go to sleep again—to have one's soul fettered and chained within the same narrow boundaries, to move in the same rigid rut as everybody else—it is abominable. Oh the horror of the natural conventional! The artificial conventional can be broken through, whatever

the cost; but the natural conventional! It holds us remorselessly in its deadening grip, it squeezes us in its all-embracing folds, from the initial conventionality of our birth to the supreme conventionality—Death. We are all fashioned alike in our beginning, and we are run into the same mould at the end. My life has been one long effort to leave the path chalked out for me by the protoplasmic atoms. It has also been one long failure. To-day you have trampled upon another hope of originality; my patent interview has been done before.”

He took out his note-book. “One more must be added to the list of burst bubbles,” he said. “The figure runs into hundreds. One day I strung some of them into verse. Would you like to hear it?”

I replied that nothing would give me greater satisfaction, unless he could combine the recitation with a little attention to the tiller. Pulling the ropes lazily around him, the poet commenced:—

DONE BEFORE.

*Sick of commonplace mortality, I have sought originality
By all ways I thought untrodden of a predecessor's feet;
I have always left the highway for the undiscovered by-way,
Haunted only by the terror lest a footprint I should meet.
When a boy I used to utter mild requests for bread and butter,
Although jam and cake were present in a freely-offered store;
And myself on this I flattered, till my first fond dream was shattered
When I read in Sunday-school books it had oft been done before.*

*I've been rich without frugality, I've been poor without formality,
I've been oft at home to bore and dun, and out to love and friend,
I have travelled in the first-class with a ticket for the worst class,
And the difference have tendered at the journey's other end.*

*I've assured a deputation I deserved its gratulation,
 I've accompanied De Reszke or La Diva with a snore ;
 I have stayed the year in London, in my search for something undone,
 Quite forgetting those odd million folks by whom 'twas done before.*

*I have practised immorality to the verge of illegality,
 Yet have never been a member of a Puritanic league ;
 I have walked down Piccadilly, a perambulating lily,
 Without boring my companion with my network of intrigue.
 To its mother smiling smugly I have called a baby ugly ;
 I've admitted being sick before the vessel reached the Nore,
 Though exact Returns of Income will at last to seem a sin come,
 When you find that e'en the Revenue has not been "done" before.*

*Then with what I thought finality I have bid for immortality,
 By reviewing learned books without the hope they'd be revised,
 And poetical collections without setting my affections
 On the things therefrom omitted, over those therein comprised.
 I've expressed my satisfaction, nor discovered lack of action,
 In a drama by an author known in letters from of yore ;
 But although I've sent back proxies for a row of stalls and boxes.
 Honest criticism even had been sometimes done before.*

*I have given hospitality with severe impartiality
 To ideas congruous only in their being all my own ;
 I have tried to write down motherhood and to found a White Rose
 Brotherhood
 (With the object of replacing the stray Stuarts on the throne),
 Plus ten ultra-modern isms and two neo-Paganisms,
 And in analytic diary to strip me to the core ;
 But what use my feigned brutality—all my pseudo-bestiality,
 Since mendacious self-exposure had been often done before ?*

*I have painted Unreality, and composed without tonality,
 I have lectured on the Beautiful in trousers, rugs, and hair,*

*And my Individuality I've developed by rascality,
 And I've never lacked a genius (unknown) by whom to swear.
 But in vain my comicality flashed in mad conviviality,
 When against the bourgeois virtues I led off the tables' roar ;
 Anti-Decalogicality, both in jest and actuality,
 Had with vigorous vitality been too often done before.*

*Thus I've chased originality, though as if by some fatality,
 With unfailing punctuality the thing has been a frost.
 Did I sink to criminality, did I rise to high morality,
 My "Love's Labour" always turned out most monotonously "Lost."
 I could not escape banality though I shifted my locality
 And made search from Pole to centre for a yet untrodden shore.
 Should I boil my spirit-kettle up on Popocatepetl,
 I should find within a week the spot had oft been "done" before.*

The Pessimist's candid confession shocked me greatly, for I was so enthralled by it that I allowed the boat to bump into another. Fortunately both sides came off with nothing beyond the first syllable of damage. We moored our vessel below the *Star and Garter*, and the Pessimist ate a hearty lunch. My rowing had given him an appetite; and he enjoyed his Porterhouse steak none the less because it had been underdone before. After he had swallowed three-parts of the Porterhouse, he grew even more expansive, and showed me some sheets of his forthcoming book; his latest snap at the tantalising *Fata Morgana* of originality.

"The year is drawing to its end," he said. "For the new year I am preparing a work called *The Cynic's Calendar*. Here is the proof for January." He displayed it on the tablecloth, reading it aloud:—

THE CYNIC'S CALENDAR.

BEING THE CALENDAR FOR JANUARY 1891, WITH MOTTOES FOR PIOUS REFLECTION.

1	Th.	New Year resolutions commence to be broken. <i>Youth is the season for enjoyment; old age for remorse that we did not enjoy ourselves more.</i>	17	S.	Benjamin Franklin born, 1706. <i>Poor Richard says, "The worst of having your bread buttered on both sides is, that if you drop it, it is sure to fall on the buttered side."</i>
2	F.	Jan. 1st resolutions finally abandoned. <i>Jan. 2nd thoughts are best.</i>	18	S.	Second Sunday after Epiphany. <i>There is a chamber in the heart to which even one's nearest and dearest are not admitted. It is the unholy of unholies.</i>
3	S.	Gretna Green marriages abolished, 1857. <i>Marriage is the primitive mutual admiration society.</i>	19	M.	John Wilkes expelled House of Commons, 1764. <i>No man has the right to bring into the world propositions which he is unable to maintain.</i>
4	S.	Lord Tomnoddy born, 1863. <i>It is better to be healthy and wealthy than wise; but if you cannot be any of the three, the next best thing is to be an English peer.</i>	20	Tu.	David Garrick died, 1779. <i>Fools follow rules; wise men precede them.</i>
5	M.	Execution of Fagin. <i>Honesty is the best policy for a man with a bad reputation.</i>	21	W.	Cleopatra's Needle arrived, 1878. <i>Beauty is but skin-deep; but, as humanity doesn't sit in its bones, that is no drawback.</i>
6	Tu.	Dividend on Consols due. <i>An honest man is good company, but nobody would take shares in him. He wouldn't pay—because he would.</i>	22	Th.	Annual Dinner of the Society for Promoting Charity Advertisements. <i>Better a nominal sum in charity than an anonymous million.</i>
7	W.	St. Distaff. <i>Spinsterhood is an honourable estate, till the proprietress commences to rail at wedlock.</i>	23	F.	William Pitt died, 1806. <i>We all love virtue; but few of us hope to possess her. We forgive ourselves for erring, for that is human; and for forgiving ourselves, for that is divine.</i>
8	Th.	Galileo died, 1642. <i>The wisest man is happy sometimes.</i>	24	S.	Dynamite outrage in London, 1885. <i>Hypocrisy is the last infirmity of a scoundrel.</i>
9	F.	Napoleon III. died, 1873. <i>For success in life two qualities are required—a strong will and a weak conscience.</i>	25	S.	Burns born, 1759. <i>The Poet is born. Who ever maintained that he was a made man!</i>
10	S.	Penny Postage established, 1840. <i>If truth did not live at the bottom of a well, all social communion would be impossible.</i>	26	M.	Great Famine in China, 1878. <i>A good dinner is the best joy of the hour that is; a good digestion of the hour that will be.</i>
11	S.	Cagliostro born. <i>The youth's bashfulness arises from his knowledge of his own ignorance; the man's assurance from his knowledge of other people's.</i>	27	Tu.	Emperor of Germany born, 1859. <i>Self-contempt is the one quality that raises man above the angels.</i>
12	M.	Hilary Term begins. <i>Law and journalism are the masculine substitutes for prostitution.</i>	28	W.	Paris capitulated, 1871. <i>Few men have courage enough to be cowards.</i>
13	Tu.	Dinas colliery explosion, 1879. <i>A sympathetic heart is the most terrible of congenital misfortunes.</i>	29	Th.	George III. died, 1820. <i>The idol that had only feet of clay was indeed divine.</i>
14	W.	Oxford Lent Term begins. <i>Let us all cultivate ourselves, as the wise Goethe teaches. And first of all the dung for manure!</i>	30	F.	Charles I. beheaded, 1649. <i>Let him whom the cap fits wear somebody else's.</i>
15	Th.	British Museum opened, 1759. <i>Every question is like a sheet of paper—much may be said on both sides. But for journalistic purposes it may only be said on one side.</i>	31	S.	Hilary Law Term ends. <i>Make the best of a bad bargain. Let it be bad for the other party.</i>
16	F.	Saturn sets. <i>Procrastination is the thief of time, and steals many an idle hour for us. Put off death or duty till to-morrow.</i>			

"Underneath each page," he continued, "will be meteorological prophecies, with the proviso 'Wind and weather. permitting.'"

"But this has been done before!" I exclaimed.

"Where?" gasped the Pessimist.

"In one of the comic papers," I replied.

"And I thought it was a funny idea!" he groaned, throwing the sheet into the fireplace, whence I extracted it for future use.

On the way back to Kew, whom should we meet but a trio of pretty girls, rowed by a tall young man, whom



I afterwards discovered to be unfortunate enough to be their brother. To my alarm the girls hailed Mandeville Brown laughingly, and he roused himself from his brooding, and responded with stentorian joviality. The tall young man and I kept the boats side by side, while

the introductions were going on. The way Mandeville flirted across the strait with those three girls at the same time could only be compared to the achievement of a juggler who keeps three balls going at once. My alarm was soon, however, replaced by joy. I reflected that Mandeville was for ever debarred from marrying by the fact that it had been done before his birth. Besides, there was safety in numbers. No, the Bachelors' Club had crumbled, but the last three atoms were of adamant.

Our course was lively, for the girls chattered like magpies, while their brother broke in every now and again with some satirical remark at their expense. They were very affectionate though, for they went out of their way to call him a nice brother every time. Mandeville, too, was not silent; he has no talent in that direction; but effervesced with quips and cranks and wreathed smiles. I bore my share of the conversation patiently, and in silence; for Mandeville was never the man to spare a friend and save a joke.

Before we parted with the boat-load of fair maidens, Mandeville and I had promised to drop in the same evening for an "informal dance" in their house at Bayswater. He did not want us to go; but I intimated to him that I would not let my personal feelings be an obstacle. Informality, we found, meant an awning outside and a motley package of long-invited guests inside. I kept an eye on Mandeville, secure as I felt. He danced with a whole bouquet of wall-flowers; the bebies of beauty he left to others. To the guests this seemed generosity; to me his motive was as plain as his partners. For myself, having nothing to fear, I danced freely with youth and beauty, especially with the

nymphs of the river. Their names were Alice, Maud, and Kitty, but I christened them for short The Three Graces. Presumably they were not triplets, but I could not tell the eldest from the youngest. I told one of them so, thinking how fortunate it was that truth and compliment should coincide. She tossed her head pertly, and I saw that she was the youngest. But I was not discomfited. I told her that I meant judging from their knowledge of the world, and was rewarded by a sunny smile. Most girls tell you they are not pretty, and etiquette demands you should call them liars. Kitty was not like that. She was a vivacious little thing, sprightly as a jackdaw, and innocent as a dove. She had violet eyes and pale gold hair, and a lovely blonde complexion, and danced with enthusiasm, tempered by science. She floated round among the congested human teetotums like a gossamer in petticoats. Almost for the first time I thrilled with the secret of dancing, and felt in my blood the voluptuous ecstasy of rhythmic movement. I took her down to supper out of gratitude. She did not seem hungry. She supped entirely off Mandeville Brown, washed down by claret cup. I saw that she was in love with the little man. It made me heartsick with annoyance. Brown was lost.

The dance became gayer after supper, the stiffness relaxing as the collars became limper. I took another Grace after the meal, and heard further praises of Mandeville, and learnt that he had presented each of the Graces with a volume of the *Poems of Pessimism* bound in morocco. I blushed for Mandeville, tarnishing these blithe and bonny specimens of English girlhood with his nauseous whinings, and defiling their air

with his sickly unsentimentality. Why should they be told that existence was a curse, when they were living in such happy ignorance of the fact? I asked my partner, who was Maud, what they thought of his poems, and she replied that they all considered them awfully sweet and quite too lovely. I gained further fuel for suspicion from Alice's lips. I trembled like an aspen. Brown would marry Kitty, so as to prove to her that existence *was* a curse. Some men would rather abandon a tooth than a theory, and Brown was one of them. I went to the house of the Graces often to watch him. Most frequently he was not there, and I was relieved. Brown could be staunch after all. But, alas for human anticipation! Before the month was over Mandeville Brown, the Secretary to the Bachelors' Club, the forger of the weapons of our arsenal, the contemner of woman and man, the Poet of Pessimism, had been united in the bonds of unholy wedlock! He spent his wedding night at the Bachelors' Club, chatting with M'Gullicuddy and myself about its prospects. When morning dawned, he informed us he had been married the day before.

Horror congealed our blood. I was the first to speak.

"You old sinner!" I cried.

"Yes, but an original sinner, eh?" he said, with a happy smile.

"Who is she?" I breathed huskily.

"Oh, some emancipated young woman or other, *née* Matilda Crock I believe. But don't take this from me—I only met her the other day."

I turned away to hide my emotion. The President took up the cue.

"And whar is she, mon?" he said, in low ominous tones.

"Am I my wife's keeper?" demanded the Secretary in amaze.

"She needs one if she married you," I said hotly. "Where have you left her?"

"At the Registrar's door of course. Where else should a man leave his wife? She only married me to achieve independence. Why it should be more respectable for her to trollop about alone now than before I do not understand. However, that is Society's business, not mine."

M'Gullicuddy was too angry to speak. He shook his snuff-box, and his jaws quivered, but no sound came from them. I continued the conversation.

"You have told us why she married you. Why did you marry her?"

"Why?"

"Yes, why? Why this divorce from your past?"

Mandeville's plump sides trembled like a jelly.

"Ho! Ho!" he roared. "Did you really expect a cynic to believe his own maxims?"

"And so precipitately too!" I murmured, abashed at my own simplicity. "There was not even an engagement."

"Of course not. That is part of the originality; though not in itself quite uncopyrighted. I hate engagements. They are a failure. Oh the green-sickness of the betrothed! The sheep-eyed male, the trimanous female! I was married straight off the reel."

"But wharfor, mon, wharfor?" shrieked M'Gullicuddy, getting his breath at last.

"Cannot you guess?"

"No, *you* had nothing to gain. I can see no reason in the world," I said.

"Thank heaven!" said Mandeville fervently, "then I have done it at last!"

"Done what?" we said in a duet.

"Broken the bonds of predestination. I have married for no reason in the world.

All the philosophers will tell you that man cannot act without a motive. It is a lie. I made up my mind to cheat the fates that have from the moment of my birth stifled me in the swaddling clothes of cause and effect. I determined at some great crisis to act without any reason whatever. There are, as O'Roherty once put it, only three great crises in a man's life—birth, marriage,

and death. My birth had happened—it was too late to influence that now. To commit suicide without reason would meet the case; but then I should not have the satisfaction of conscious success. One last opportunity remained—marriage. I took it."

M'Gullicuddy fixed him with a mocking eye. "There are evidently more reasons in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy, Mandeville. You married so as to take some great step without a reason—is that so?"

"That is so."



THE TRIMANOUS FEMALE.

“ *Well, wasna that a reason?* ”

Willoughby Jones rushed forwards and caught the fainting Secretary in his arms. But Brown battled bravely with the dizziness that overcame him and freed himself from the clasp of his brother in misfortune.

“ At least it is the best of all reasons,” he said, with a pathetic smile. “ And if my marriage was a failure after all, at any rate I can recall my wife now. I have her address. She will be able to visit us here, too. She is a married woman, you know. Strictly according to by-law, you see.”

“ Visit *us?* ” The President’s snuff-box dropped to the floor.

“ Yes, of course I shall continue a member.”

“ Continue a member, mon, when you are married ! ” shrieked the President.

“ Yes,” shrieked back the Secretary, as an exultant gleam shot across his cherubic features. “ *I shall be original after all.* ”

“ But we shall expel you ! ” I thundered.

“ Indeed ! ” thundered back the Secretary. “ You forget the by-laws I drew up. *It takes three to make a quorum.* ”

Willoughby Jones rushed forwards and caught the fainting President in his arms. But M’Gullicuddy battled bravely with the dizziness that overcame him and freed himself from the polluting touch of the lower caste.

“ There is yet one argument left, mon,” said M’Gullicuddy, drawing himself up to his full height.

“ Indeed ? ” said the little Pessimist mockingly.

The President of the Bachelors’ Club took the Secretary by the scruff of the neck, carried him into the

room adorned by his own texts, dropped him down the six stairs on to the landing, and locked the door.

A minute after the Pessimist beat clamorously at it.

"No admission," I said tauntingly.

"I am not going to make any," yelled the Secretary outside; or, to use the conventional phrase, the ex-secretary. "Bar your doors to me henceforward, as you will, have not I, a married man, spent a whole night as a member of the Bachelors' Club?"

"You have," I said feebly.

"*Then I am original after all!*"

"No!" thundered the President. "The thing has been done before."

"Done before?" I echoed.

"Done before?" came feebly from behind the paneling.

"Yes," said the President, taking triumphant snuff.

"A shameless being has preceded you in this."

His voice sank and trembled at the recollection of the blasphemy. "Nay, more, he had the audacity to *become* a member although married, and for some time no one suspected him. I alone knew it, and I have hitherto covered up the scandal in my own aching bosom. He was a member before your time, Paul, and even to you the real truth was never known, Mandevill—ain!" he concluded suddenly with a burst of righteous indignation.

"Will you swear it?" came in a hoarse despairing whisper through the keyhole.

"I swear it," said the President solemnly. "By my immortal soul, I swear it. He was a gey clever knave, the member by whom the Club has been done before."

A strange muffled rumble penetrated the woodwork:

Terrified, I turned the key and opened the door. Mandeville Brown had rolled down the six stairs in a fit.

* * * * *

He lives peacefully at Bedlam now, and indites epigrams for the magazines and poems for the Mandeville Brown Societies. The poems are not so obscure as before; the epigrams he turns out automatically with the old topsy-turvy trick, only occasionally blundering into sense. Here are a dozen assorted specimens, which were printed in a leading monthly with stars twinkling between them. For price per gross apply to the maker.

“The English are the most un-English of peoples.”
 “For illiberalism you must go to the Liberals.”
 “Criticisms of works of imagination are the only realities.” “The best memory is that which soonest forgets.” “Science is systematised ignorance, and the naturalist is the man who knows nature least.”
 “Charity is a cloak that disguises many sins.” “None so blind as those who *will* see.” “Goodness is the talent of fools; spell Duty with a big, big D.” “No man waits for time or tide.” “The villain lives in a villa.” “Your thief is the only honest man; the rest of the population are dissemblers.” “The worse the artist, the better the work of art.”

He had one lucid interval, though unfortunately he did not write in it. It occurred in the train that was bearing him to his new home.

“Where are you taking me?” he asked.

“To Bedlam,” replied his companions.

“It’s no use calling me lamb, for I’m not going to bed,” he said decisively.

They explained his real destination.

“But why there?” he queried querulously.

“Because you have lost your reason,” they answered indiscreetly.

Mandeville Brown rose in spite of all their efforts and danced a jig on the foot-warmer.

“Heaven be thanked!” he cried. “The fates are foiled at last. *I am going to Bedlam without reason.*”

CHAPTER XII.

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE.

It was a miserable evening about the middle of November. All day the sun had been shining brightly, and had been doing so since the beginning of the month. This wretched perversity in the weather had unsettled everybody. People were afraid to go out at night for fear of losing their way in the coming fog. But the sky remained beautifully blue and starry.

Since the unreasonable behaviour of Mandeville Brown, M'Gullicuddy and myself had been constant in our attendance at the Bachelors' Club. There was a considerable sum of money in the exchequer, owing to the working of the New Insurance System, and it had been swollen recently by one or two anonymous subscriptions from married ladies who lamented that their husbands had not had the benefit of a similar institution while they were yet celibates. If only the idea that we were a charitable organisation should spread abroad among the uninquiring, the reversion of the treasuryship would be worth having. Mandeville Brown had uncomplainingly added the post to his secretariat when Moses Fitz-Williams departed this life of ours; but now that Brown, too, had gone over to the majority, it became a serious question which of the remaining members should assume the weighty respon-

sibility. It spoke well for the tenacity of purpose still inherent in the Bachelors' Club, that each and all of the members were anxious for the burden. We were ranged in two parties,—one in favour of the candidature of the President, the other of mine. There seemed no chance of settling the thing, for each side was unwavering in its unity. That was why, in spite of the attractions of the house of the Graces to which I was frequently invited, I went to the Club regularly, for fear M'Gullicuddy should pass illegal measures in my absence. M'Gullicuddy almost lived at the Club for a similar reason. The nuisance was that, though we were always together, we could get "no forrarder"; for not only were both parties evenly balanced, and so perfectly generalled that they moved as one man, but it was impossible for us to muster sufficient members to form a quorum. We compromised it at last by agreeing to divide the duties and other things, and to check each other's accounts and expenditure. Then the white wings of peace hovered once more over the Bachelors' Club, and all was bliss and brotherhood.

It was while doing our best to supply Nature's deficiencies in the way of November fog, by creating one in the inner sanctum of the Bachelors' Club, that the President and I heard a strange feminine voice in the smoking-room.

M'Gullicuddy's glass fell, like a barometer before a storm. I, too, was agitated by the novelty of a visitor.

"You must go out again," we heard the faithful Willoughby remark.

"We'll see about that," came the reply, in slow acidulated drops of sound. "Stand aside, or I'll send for a policeman."

At the mention of a policeman M'Gullicuddy started to his feet as if shot up by a spring. A policeman in the Bachelors' Club! The indignity was beyond forbearance.

"Only married ladies are admitted," said Willoughby in deprecatory tones.

"Aha!" hissed the lady, "then look at my marriage certificate."

From this "open sesame" there was no appeal.

"Very well, Mrs O'Flanagan," Willoughby was heard to say respectfully, "who is it you wish to see?"

"Mr. Andrew M'Gullicuddy," came the answer in clear vibrant accents.

"No! no!" gasped the President. He rushed to the door of communication and barricaded it with his back. I looked at my co-secretary in surprise. His face was ashen as his cigar-tip.

Willoughby Jones rattled the door, surprised at its unwonted refusal to comply with his wishes. "Mr. M'Gullicuddy," he called out, "here's a lady to see you—married,—Mrs. Patrick O'Flanagan."

"Say I'm not here," the President whispered to me.

Really, the calm way in which people ask you to imperil your immortal soul by telling lies for them is quite wonderful. Besides, I did not wish my friend to be found out by this woman, whoever she was; so I whispered to him that it was useless, for Willoughby had admitted that he was in by admitting the visitor.

"Say I'm not in," gestured the President to the dusky steward.

He was evidently bent on self-denial; but I do not believe in any form of that virtue.

"M'Gullicuddy," I said, "can you show any cause of just impediment to this lady's entry by by-law?"

"She is not married," M'Gullicuddy whispered hoarsely.

"How do you know?"

M'Gullicuddy was silent.

"Canna ye believe me, mon?" he said. "I ken her history."

I could see how excited he was by his dropping into his native Scotch. I sympathised with him deeply.

"Paul," he went on, "ye are a braw good fellow; tak' the lass away."

The shaking of the door continued.

"Open the door, M'Gullicuddy," said the lady in withering tones. "You won't slip through my fingers any more, I warrant."

At the word warrant the President trembled like a pet spaniel. Obeying an agonised sign from him I placed my back against the door. M'Gullicuddy then ran to the window, lifted the sash, and threw his left leg over the sill. I feared he meant suicide. The thought of the nocturnal fall of the President of the Bachelors' Club upon the pavement of Leicester Square filled me with horror. I rushed forward and caught him by the remaining leg, before I remembered the few inches of balcony on which he had meditated taking refuge. The door flew open behind me. The lady rushed in. I let go the President's writhing limb which hastened out upon the ledge; then I slammed the window down violently and turned round. Mrs. Patrick O'Flanagan and I were face to face.

"Stand aside, sir," said the tall, plump lady, waving

her marriage certificate. "I saw the calf. I recognised it. I would know it among a herd of calves."

"What calf?" I said ingenuously.

"Oh, you are all leagued together!" she cried. "Stand aside, sir. I saw the leg."

"What leg?" I repeated.

"My leg," she answered. "Mine, if there is law in England."

"Excuse me, madam," said I, suspecting I had to do with a mad woman, "so far as I can see, you appear to me to have the usual quantity already."

"How dare you insult me, sir?" said the lady, flashing a small lightning-storm from her eyes, and drawing her skirts closer around her. "How dare you stand between husband and wife?"

"Husband and wife!" I said. "My dear lady, you have come to the wrong shop. This is a Bachelors' Club—we keep no husbands on these premises."

"No, indeed," she said, "they are off. Look there." I turned in the direction of her finger. The President's white face was pressed in agony against the glass; his head was hoary with snow, which had suddenly commenced to fall. I remembered that the ledge was short and narrow, and that it was dangerous to move hand or foot out there. Without assistance the President could not even get in again.

"That," I said, "is Mr. Andrew M'Gullicuddy."

"That," said she, "is Mr. Patrick O'Flanagan, my husband."

"It's a dom'd lee," shrieked the President, his voice coming dim and faint through the panes. "As I hope for salvation, I am not this woman's husband."

“ You wretch ! ” shrieked the lady. “ Whose portrait is this, then ? ”

I turned to look at the photo, and banged my head against several other heads. They were the waiters' and the stewards' all bending down eagerly at the same instant. All the relics of the Bachelors' Club were gathered to watch this fateful scene. Things had, indeed, come to a pretty pass when the waiters were all awake together. I felt quite sore over it, and, with as much dignity as I could command, ordered them to withdraw. I was left in the room with the alleged wife of the President. I was determined that our underlings should not witness this crowning humiliation except through the keyhole.

The photo was not a bit like M'Gullicuddy, and underneath were the words, “ Ever thine, Patrick O'Flanagan.”

This was enough. The photo was evidently the work of an artistic photographer, and the handwriting was plainly M'Gullicuddy's, sloped to the left. Some men have such poverty of resources.

I opened the window indignantly and assisted his wife in haling him into the room.

“ Paul, I am innocent,” shrieked M'Gullicuddy in his broadest Scotch, as we deposited him on the writing table, where the blotting-paper thirstily drank up his coat of snow.

“ Ah, you are a gentleman,” Mrs. O'Flanagan said to me with fine discernment. “ You, sir, shall judge between us. About eighteen months ago this man came down to Long Stanton, in Cambridgeshire, where I dwelt in my youth and innocence, and wooed and won my trusting heart.”

She wiped away a tear with the marriage certificate

which she still held in her hand. There was something confiding and candid about the very name of the



place which added to the heinousness of M'Gullicuddy's offence. Long Stanton in Cambridgeshire!

"It's a dom'd lee," repeated the ungentlemanly person on the dripping writing-table.

"It's gospel truth," said Mrs. O'Flanagan. "My heart went out to the breezy Irishman with his bright spirits and his lovable brogue. Up till that date, sir, I had been a confirmed opponent of marriage. I had a younger sister who had married three times within four years; her husbands all dying within a year of marriage. I was afraid it might run in the family, and so I scrupulously refrained from being asked in marriage, for the sake of my husbands. But when Patrick O'Flanagan came through the door, my scruples flew out of the window. On a fair summer morning, no brighter than my heart, I placed my hand within his, and we were wed before the Registrar, for he would not go to church."

"It's a dom'd lee," said the President.

"Sit down," I said to the poor victim, as I wheeled her an arm-chair. "Go on."

"On leaving the Registrar's office, we took the train to Harwich *en route* for Holland, where we had located our honeymoon. On the way we chatted freely, for the train was crowded. All at once, as I was talking, Patrick turned pale. I asked what was the matter. He said he felt a little sick, the carriage was so stuffy. Shortly afterwards we arrived at a junction. The train stopped for five minutes for refreshment. Patrick got out to get a drop of brandy to put him right. The five minutes passed, the bell rang; I rushed to the window in case my husband had forgotten the carriage. I looked wildly up and down. Men were jumping in all along the station. 'Stand away there!' shouted the guard. He waved his flag, the station slid backwards, and

we were off. Anxiety gnawing at my bosom, I comforted myself with the thought that he had just had time to pop into another carriage. But soon I learned the bitter truth. That junction was the parting of our lives. Like a true Irishman my husband preferred to spend his honeymoon alone. I never set eyes on him from that day to this. But my search has been successful at last, thanks to my having means and spending them freely in the search. By the aid of a private detective agency I learned that my husband passed under the name of M'Gullicuddy, and that this Club was his favourite resort." She turned to the President who still lay huddled together on the writing-table, his face as white as the driven snow outside.

"Now, Patrick," she said, "will you come away quietly with me to Holland for our honeymoon?"

The question made him sit up. But he did nothing but stare at her.

"Come, Patrick," she said, "come away, and all shall be forgotten and forgiven. Drink that glass of brandy and rejoin me in the train." She drew a gold watch from her bodice. "It leaves Liverpool St. Station for Harwich in eighty-five minutes. At 9 A.M. to-morrow we shall be in Rotterdam."

"How do you know?" gasped M'Gullicuddy.

"How do I know?" said Mrs. O'Flanagan, her voice breaking with infinite pathos and tenderness. "Have I not waited weary months for this hour? Have I not had ample leisure to study my Bradshaw? It has been the one relaxation in my misery. What has buoyed me up and kept me well and strong? Only the thought that some day, somewhere, you and I would meet again, Patrick; that some day, somewhere, again you

would place your hand in mine, love; that some day, somewhere, you and I would walk to the booking-office together, and again I would take the tickets for Holland; that some day, dear, whether *viâ* Doncaster or Rugby, *viâ* Bradford or Glasgow, we should arrive at Parkeston Quay together, and together board the 9.50 Dutch boat, as if our honeymoon had never been interrupted, and the interim were an evil dream. When my search was weariest, and my courage lowest, and the horizon darkest, I turned to my Bradshaw and read for the thousandth time the message of hope and peace, and found therein comfort and courage. The pages are bedewed with my tears; but they are the tears of hope—not of despair.”

My own eyes were wet as I listened. Oh the sublime patience and fortitude of woman!

“Come, darling,” said Mrs. O’Flanagan. “The Harwich express starts in one hour twenty-one minutes.”

“It’s a dom’d lee,” said M’Gullicuddy automatically.

“Come, darling,” repeated the poor, wronged lady, and every syllable was a caress and a pardon.

“Go away!” shouted M’Gullicuddy.

“Yes, that’s just what I mean,—go away,” she said, “by the 8 P.M.”

M’Gullicuddy got off the table and stood facing us.

“Paul,” he said pleadingly, “tak the creature awa’! See her into the 8 P.M. express.”

“My dear fellow,” I said, “that is expressly your duty.”

“What!” he cried in anguish. “Surely *you* don’t believe I am this woman’s husband.”

“I do.”

“But, Paul, my dear old friend, on my word of

honour as President of the Bachelors' Club, she is no wife of mine. Don't you believe me? Yes, surely you believe me, Paul?"

I was silent. I remembered his vanishing leg. I remembered the photo. Decidedly appearances were against him.

"I cannot believe you," I said, groaning.

M'Gullicuddy echoed the groan and covered his spectacles with his hands. Mrs. O'Flanagan laid her hand tenderly on his head. He shook it off (the hand) and faced us again. A light, as of truth, gleamed from his eyes.

"Some day, Paul," he said, "you will recognise the injustice you are doing me. I am not this woman's husband. I swear it by all that I hold dear."

This was an awful oath; for there were few things which the economical Scotsman did not hold dear.

"Will you come by the 8 P.M.?" said Mrs. O'Flanagan imperturbably. "Come. By 9 A.M. we shall be in Rotter——"

The President finished the sentence, and continued resolutely: "Even if I am your husband I am not bound to live with you. That has been settled by law."

"Pardon me," said Mrs. O'Flanagan, "the decision to which you refer merely frees the wife from conjugal bonds. The husband has no such freedom."

"Then the sooner a Men's Rights Party is formed the better," said the President.

"The sooner men do what is right the better," retorted the lady. "Patrick O'Flanagan, I remind you once again that you have taken upon yourself the solemn obligation to be loved, honoured, and obeyed by me,

Isabella Fallowsmith, till death us do part. Come, Patrick, let us catch the 9.50 Dutch boat."

"Paul," said the poor President, "you believe this strange woman rather than your own colleague? What if I could prove her mistaken?"

"Then you may send for a strait waistcoat for me," said the lady impulsively.

"Will you go away, as my friend asks you, if he proves you are not his wife?" I said.

"I will. If he is not my husband, I will obey his wishes."

"Good," said M'Gullicuddy. "Look at me, Miss Fallowsmith; do you recognise me as Patrick O'Flanagan?"

"I do," she answered in a clear steady voice.

"You would identify me anywhere?"

"Anywhere."

M'Gullicuddy passed his hand over his face like a conjurer.

"*Now* do you recognise me as Patrick O'Flanagan?"

A cry of surprise burst from our four lips. The President had put quite a new face and complexion on the matter. His spectacles lay on the floor and woe-begone wisps of beard and wig were fluttering towards them. The President had stripped his face to the skin. I no longer knew him. Joy overcame my astonishment. I turned triumphantly towards Mrs. O'Flanagan. The honour of the Club was safe.

"*Now* do you recognise him," I repeated sternly, "as Patrick O'Flanagan?"

"Ah, Patrick! Patrick!" sobbed Mrs. O'Flanagan, throwing herself passionately on the President's bosom. "Now at last I recognise you. Oh, why did you hide yourself so long from your poor Isabella?"

With one hand she encompassed his neck, with the other she tendered me the photo afresh. I scanned it again. Yes, it had not been taken by an artist after all. M'Gullicuddy had not counted on that photo when he played his little game of brag with the woman who had circumvented him at it. The expression on his new countenance alone belied the smirking photo.

"I felt sure it was you, dear," sobbed his wife, "by your getting out of the window for refreshments when I came along. I did not recognise you in the least but I had faith in you, and went on appealing to the old memories, thinking that if you were you I should find a soft spot in your heart at last."

She *had* found a soft spot—only it was in his head. I was disgusted with his stupidity. To have been double-faced to so little purpose!

M'Gullicuddy disentangled himself from Mrs. O'Flanagan.

"Well, now you recognise me, Miss Fallowsmith," he said, "I had best tell the truth; but not unless you swear to keep what I say secret."

We swore. "Good," said M'Gullicuddy. "Now I can speak."

At this Ibsenite commencement I prepared for the worst.

"Remember," he said. "You have promised me the privilege of the confessional! I am speaking not to phonographs but to priests."

We were awed by his manner. I stole to the door, threw it open suddenly, and allowed Willoughby Jones to fall forward into the inner room, the other married men coming tumbling after. Eavesdroppers never hear any good of others—nor want to. I

spurned the squirming heap with my foot, and swept it outside. I then gave it a holiday for half an hour, and it scampered down-stairs. I locked the outer portal of the Bachelors' Club, and the apartments were converted into a sanctuary. I returned to the inner chamber.

"Now," said I, "we are alone. Now let us have the promised truth."

"I will do my best," he replied modestly. "The truth about me is very simple. I am not Mr. O'Flanagan, and I am not the husband of this lady."

"But if that's the truth, you've told us it before!" I cried, a wild hope resurgent in my breast.

"Yes, I could not help it," he said deprecatingly. "Please don't interrupt me, Paul. I cannot be this lady's husband because I married another lady a year before she claims my hand. Don't interrupt me, Miss Fallow-smith. You see, Paul, you wouldn't have confidence in my innocence under this cruel charge," he said plaintively. "Such is friendship. My name is not O'Flanagan at all. It is Parker—Peter Parker. My marriage took place at Macclesfield. The circumstances of the wedding were rather out of the way. I regret I was not one of them at the time. But a mocking Fate overrules our destinies.

"All my misfortunes in life have arisen from the unfortunate age at which my father died. If he had died a little later I should never have been married; if he had died a little earlier, I should never have been born. Not having had time to discover his vices, my mother cherished the memory of his virtues. She thought him a paragon among men, and believed even in his epitaph. She wore black for him all the days of her life. Her mourning habit became a second nature to her. She

was beautiful, as you may judge, and was often pressed to marry again. But her constancy was proof against all solicitations. She told her suitors that she had vowed to wear widow's weeds for her first husband while life

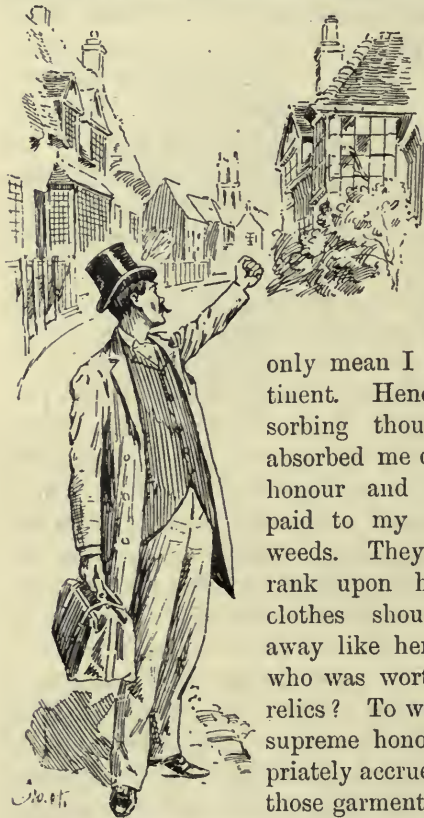


lasted; and so they went their ways. But at last a young Scotsman from St. Andrews University came along and fell in love with her, and wrote sonnets on her eyebrow and other inconvenient places. He asked her hand and she pointed to her bonnet. He re-

lected that it would be very economical to have a wife who always dressed in black, and so they were married. The bride went to church in a mourning coach, and wore a long crape veil and a black silk gown, trimmed with sprays of yew, for she was not one who took her grief in lightening shades. My step-father did not effect the saving he had reckoned, for his wife indulged in all the luxuries of woe, and dealt only at the most artistic establishments. People used to call him the widower till my dear mother died; then in self-defence, they were forced to call him the Bachelor. My mother's death affected me deeply—it seemed as if the light and joy of the house had departed when her sable robes ceased to trail and rustle about the rooms. From earliest childhood those funereal garments had been part of my consciousness. All my infant associations were

entwined round those widow's weeds. My heart's tendrils wound themselves about her crape-wreathed bonnets. Her touching devotion to my father, while life pulsed in her veins, consecrated our home life with a halo of purity and poetry, to which even my step-father was not insensible. I felt I was not as other children. That high example of steadfast pursuit of an ideal amid all the sordid pettinesses of existence made life a deeper and a nobler thing for me than for my playmates, and I always selected black marbles and tops, and manifested an early preference for blackberries. My mother was the only woman I ever cared for. *Please* don't interrupt, Miss Fallowsmith. Her death left me heart-broken. The only consolation was her wardrobe. I wandered amid the black hangings with which all the cupboards were thickly lined, as some pensive poet wanders in the sombre glades of a pine-forest. But I had reckoned without my step-father. He promptly sold off my mother's leavings, and it was only with difficulty that I could secure the wedding-ropes and the other appurtenances of a widow's outfit. The care of these henceforth became the solemn charge of my life. I wrestled with the moths and did battle with the rust. As from her grave my gentle mother's influence was still upon me; I owed to her still an ennobling ideal and a sanctifying mission. Her weeds saved me from suicide. They kept me straight in the tangles of temptation. My step-father married again. Unmoved by that high example of fidelity to the dead afforded him by my mother, he took another wife to his bosom. To see my step-step-mother flaunting in white jarred upon a vision habituated to sable of the deepest dye. My deepest emotions were outraged. I left the

house almost immediately after the wedding breakfast. Bearing with me only my mother's drapings and trappings of woe in a Gladstone bag, and leaving behind me

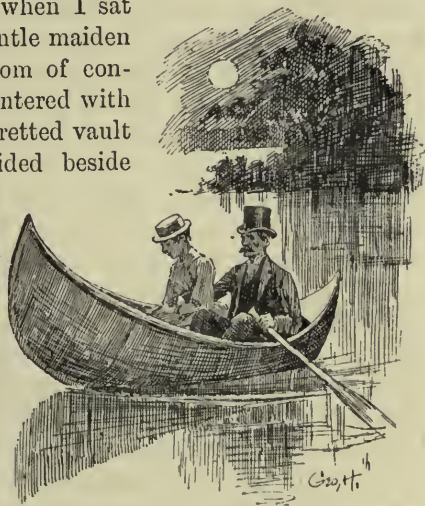


nothing but a curse, I shook the rice of the threshold off my patent leather shoes and went forth into the wide, wide world. Not that I had not been in the world before—I

only mean I went to the Continent. Henceforward the absorbing thought of my life absorbed me deeper still. Due honour and respect must be paid to my mother's widow's weeds. They should not grow rank upon her grave. Her clothes should not moulder away like her dear self. But who was worthy to wear those relics? To whom would those supreme honours most appropriately accrue? Whom would those garments fit?

“There was only one possible answer. My mother's mourning could only be worn by her son's widow. Those hallowed relics and heirlooms could enshroud no woman less sacred. None but her son's widow could

step into her shoes. They must be kept in the family. Hitherto I had been a confirmed bachelor. I had wished no woman's face to come between me and my mother's. But now it was borne in on me that it was my sacred duty to marry. It behoved me to take a wife. How otherwise could I create a widow to be a background to those dresses? The model widow for those weeds must be my own. I obeyed the voice of conscience; I looked out for a widow. Often I thought I had found a fitting wearer for those precious garments; often I was on the point of proposing to lovely virgins, on whom they would have looked beautiful; often when I sat with some fair gentle maiden in the green gloom of conservatories, or sauntered with her beneath the fretted vault of heaven or glided beside her on the quiet moonlit lake, or watched with her to see the sun set in serene splendour behind the everlasting hills—often have I measured her waist with my circumambient



arm to see if she were the fitting bride for me. In five cases the dimensions were suitable. I measured again and again till there could be no possibility of mistake. Only three maidens stood this more

searching test. These I was within an ace of selecting. Flushed with the emotions of the moment, enraptured by the perfection of the measurements, overwhelmed by the glories of sunset or moonlight, I have three times been on the point of asking some lovely damsel to be my widow; to link her life with my death; to be mine in the heart's beat, mine in the breath, and follow me to the world's end in the next carriage to mine. But I always restrained myself. In the supreme crisis one thought always arrived with a respite. How did I know that this beautiful girl, whom I was on the point of rashly asking to be my widow, would outlive me? Suppose I took her to my hearth and home, and then she died before me, leaving me with my mother's mourning on my hands again! No, I must be prudent. True, each of these beautiful girls was radiant with life and happiness, overflowing with buoyancy and freshness like a spring morning. But we have it on authority that all flesh is grass, and we are cut down in a moment as by a reaper's sickle.

"No, marriage is at best a lottery. What if I found myself saddled with a woman who would not be able to fulfil the functions of widowhood? I should be unable to get the marriage set aside, for the stupid law had not provided for the contingency. No, I would not take a leap in the dark. If I married, I must choose my widow wisely and well. My marriage must not be a failure.

"Now you understand why I sought the hand of Mrs. Carcanet. After months of misery at Paris and Monaco, I returned to England. Fate took me to Macclesfield and introduced me to Mrs. Carcanet. —*Please* be silent, Miss Fallowsmith.

“Mrs. Carcanet was at that time the talk of the town. She was a professional widow—not a raw and inexperienced widow like my mother, for she had been bereaved three times. There was nothing particularly attractive about her, yet she changed her name as frequently as a stage-adventuress. Nor was there the slightest breath of scandal against her, for though her three husbands had perished, they had done so under circumstances beyond her control. One had been attacked with cramp while swimming, another had succumbed to measles, and the third had won a thousand pounds in a railway accident.

“The curious part of it was that all three had died within a year of marriage. Yes, yes, sit down, Miss, I know exactly what you’re thinking about. When I have finished, you shall speak. The third man was warned by all his relatives, and the local insurance branch wanted a higher annual premium, but he laughed at their superstitions. When the crash came and his dead body was identified in the mortuary, few had sympathy with the blasphemer. His death was felt to be a judgment, as his living over the twelve-month would have been considered a want of it on the part of the higher powers.

“I felt at once this was the woman for my matrimony. She at least would make a true widow for me. I thought of her as more literally ‘The Mourning Bride’ than Congreve’s heroine; she was always just wed or just widowed. Her life was like the first column of *The Times*—nothing but Births, Marriages, and Deaths. If I married her, I should die within a twelvemonth, and my marriage would be consummated. The claims of filial piety would be satisfied, for I was

confident that with the opportunity of quietly talking things over, afforded by the honeymoon, I should be able to induce my wife to mourn for me in the same sacred clothes in which my mother had mourned for my father.

“It was no easy task to secure the hand I coveted, for after she had saved the thousand pounds from the crash to which her third husband had fallen a victim, Mrs. Carcanet became again the cynosure of all neighbouring bachelors' eyes. There was a morbid fascination about her which impelled men to throw themselves at her feet, as though they had been moths and her toes luminous.

“But none had so much at stake as I; the thought of my mother's ebon clothes lent me eloquence, and filial devotion carried the day. When our engagement leaked out, the stonemasons of Macclesfield touched their caps respectfully when I passed.

“For nine months I lived in perfect happiness with my intended widow. Everything had been arranged for my decease; the woman who had plighted her troth to me, to become my widow when death did us part, had engaged to lament me in the hereditary weeds of the family. My will was made. Everything had been left to my future widow on that understanding.

“During the tenth month I began to get uneasy. No signs of sickness had appeared. I felt as strong as a drayhorse and as healthy as a hippopotamus. The eleventh month passed; still not a shade of a shadow of a symptom of bodily derangement. I could not feel unwell though I tried. I read all the quack medicine advertisements. I pored over the properties of the patent pills, which no family should be without. I

studied the records of the supernatural syrups. Not even thus could I experience any unpleasant sensation. My head was not dizzy, nor were my loins heavy, nor was my digestion sluggish. Little black spots did not dance before my eyes. My pulse was methodical, my respiration easy, and my tongue did not wear a morning coat. I began to get seriously alarmed. The days slipped by slowly; but at last the twelfth month arrived. The townsfolk stared after me now when I walked in the street, and necks were craned out of windows, as though I were a condemned criminal *en route* to the scaffold. The notoriety became disagreeable, and during the last month of my existence, I determined to be a celebrity at home. In the third week an old school-fellow named Eaveson called on me. He asked me how I felt. I said I was sorry to say I had been feeling far from ill lately. He inquired what were the prospects of my dissolution. I said that death from natural causes seemed improbable, but I was looking confidently forward to an accident, and hoped, by care and attention, to meet with one within a few days. He warned me not to build too much on that chance, for accidents would happen even in the best calculated schemes. I replied that if I stopped at home, as I intended to, I had every right to rely on the accident coming off. I reminded him of what the *Lancet* told us every week of the perils that bestrewed our paths, the poison that lurked in the pot, and the disease that dribbled from the kettle; of the contagion that clung to bootlaces, and the arsenic that was wafted from the wall-paper; I recalled to him the dangers of fires and gas explosions and armed burglars and overtopping mirrors and falling chandeliers; and I read out

to him a graphic account of the germs and insidious particles that were fooling around in the domestic atmosphere, and which could only be foiled by Badberry's Cocoa, from the use of which I carefully abstained. But he shook his head sceptically and went off, leaving me forlorn and discomforted. Next day he returned and inquired after my health again. His face brightened when I told him my condition was unchanged. He said I must not mind if he came to inquire every day, and even twice a day, because he felt very anxious about my health. I told him it was very good of him, and pressed his hand affectionately, and said that I had never believed in friendship before, but now I should carry to my grave the memory of his disinterested anxiety.

“‘Never say die!’ he replied cheerily. ‘I always said you would weather the marriage. And what’s more, I don’t mind telling you now, I’ve backed my opinion heavily. I have ten thousand pounds on you.’

“‘What do you mean?’ I gasped.

“‘Why, I’ve made wagers amounting in all to ten thousand pounds, partly with natives, partly outside, that you will live beyond the usual twelvemonth. At first I got large odds, for the starting-price was whatever I pleased, as I stood almost alone in my belief in you. Then the betting became level, while now that you have only a few days to die, the tide has turned and I have had to give three to two. Yes, my boy, I have stood by you all along,’ he said, slapping me cheerily on the back; ‘I am none of your fair-weather friends to fire salute guns only when you get into port. When every one spoke ill of you, and speculated on your death, I alone was your friend for life. When things looked

blackest and most funereal, I alone believed in you and defended your life against all odds.'

"I said with emotion that I would remember him in my will, and that he might look for a legacy in a few days. He answered warmly that he preferred my life to any legacy I could leave him. Again I pressed his hand, and the faithful fellow took his leave.

"But he left me food for reflection, which I was not slow to digest. When Eaveson called the next day, I asked him if he was sure to get his ten thousand if I remained alive. He said that the losers were all reliable persons, and in any case he could recover these debts legally, as the transaction was not a gambling one but a form of life assurance. I then informed him that unless he went halves with me I should die. He grew pale, and besought me to reconsider my determination. I said I had always lived to please myself, I was not going to live to please him now. He said he would leave no stone unturned to save my life. I said that if it were saved in mere consols it would tot up to nearly £300 a year; and that unless I could save half my life for myself, I would have none of it. The only way to prevent my death was to give me the £5000. I pointed out that if I lived, Eaveson would get all the meat and I all the bones; that he would net £10,000 while I should be left married to an unattractive and faded widow who was not even *my* widow. I wanted to know what there was for *me* to live for?

"In the end it was agreed to split my life fairly between us both, Eaveson trying in the meantime to increase its value. And now all my thoughts changed as by magic. The will to live took the place of the readiness to die. The chance of realising £5000 comes

but rarely in a lifetime ; the chance of dying is always to be had. There was plenty of time yet to provide a widow to wear my mother's clothes ; they should be shelved but not forgotten. I had perhaps been needlessly precipitate. The revived will to live brought with it all the anxieties of which Stoics, Quietists, and Buddhists warn us. To wish to live is to fear to die. Now that I craved for life, a terror that I should die within the week whelmed my soul. Was I really destined to escape my wife's baneful spell ? Why should I be luckier than the three men who had gone before ? I communicated my fears to Eaveson. The panic seized him too. What was to be done ?

“The solution flashed upon me suddenly. The mortal peril that threatened me arose from my marital relation to the fatal widow. If I ceased to be her husband, the spell would probably not work. But unfortunately a divorce in this unhappy country takes time, and the end of my year was bearing down upon me like some grim express. A divorce was out of the question ; I must be content with the next best thing. To cease being Mrs. Carcanet's husband I must become somebody else's. That, if not a legal divorce, would, at least, be a moral one. I told Eaveson the idea. He said that it was bigamy. I said that that didn't matter. Even bigamy ceased to be a crime when one's life was in danger. Crimes committed in self-defence, to save one's life, were whitewashed by the codes of all countries. Desperate evils required desperate remedies. In my situation, I said, bigamy would be quite laudable. The only trouble was to find a fresh bride to be my widow. I dared not look for her in Macclesfield, because she would know of the existing wife, which would

probably set her against the match. But if I left the town, then, as Eaveson pointed out, there would be some difficulty in proving that I was alive. True I might return temporarily to Macclesfield just to be identified, but then my first wife might get hold of me, and I could not bear the idea of living any longer with the insipid partner I had selected only to die by. It was, indeed, a dilemma. This time Eaveson came to the rescue. I was to leave Macclesfield on a pretext to my wife, who was unaware of the dead-and-alive gossip that circled round us. The gossips would think I had crawled off like a wounded snake to die alone. After the honeymoon, which would be also after the magic twelvemonth, I was to return to Macclesfield on a pretext to my wife (number two), but only to visit my lawyer and other reputable citizens on pretended matters of business. I was also to be casually photographed; so that after I had gone, the developed negatives might be positive evidences to my identity. Then, before the news of my coming had spread to my wife, I was to fly again, returning to my second wife or not as inclination prompted.

“Trembling for my life, I put into execution the plan so hurriedly sketched out. I told my wife a relative had died, and I had to go and see about some property he had left me. The dwelling-place of my second wife I ascertained by sortilege. I opened my Bradshaw at hazard, and stuck a pin into the leaf. It made a hole in Long Stanton. I was in Long Stanton next day with my mother’s weeds in a Gladstone bag, and barely a week to spare. My life trembled in the balance. Only a second marriage could save me from the maleficent baleful magnetism radiating from my first wife, who

seemed to hypnotise her husbands away. Could I find another wife in a week? On that question hinged my whole existence. I adopted the name of O'Flanagan with brogue and beard to match. I met an old, I mean, I met Miss Fallowsmith, and married her before the Registrar, as she has told you. *Will* you sit down and let me finish my story? Now you shall hear why I left you. Oh, but of course you have guessed it by now, Miss Fallowsmith. You are Mrs. Carcanet's sister, you had quarrelled years ago, and lived apart, and without corresponding with each other. When on our first wedding journey you blundered into saying something which revealed to me the fatal truth, I felt that death were, indeed, better. It was horrible, nefarious beyond the dreams of a Caligula or a Cenci. *I had married my undeceased wife's sister.* At the first stopping-place after that awful revelation I jumped out and left you. You will admit it was the most honourable course. Don't sob on my breast, please, I only did my duty. Do sit down, there's a good creature. From the moment I left you my life has been one long haunting terror. I had contemplated merely bigamy, but I had committed the unpardonable sin, for which there can be no forgiveness in earth or heaven. If to marry one's deceased wife's sister is so revolting an offence, what must it be to marry one's *undeceased* wife's sister? It is iniquity so dire and unspeakable that the very law has neglected to provide against it. The awfulness of this form of bigamy is increased by the fact that there is no repairing the evil. If your first wife dies, you cannot patch up the past, for you cannot legitimise your second wife, since she is your deceased wife's sister. If, on the other hand, your second wife dies, the case is worse, for

you remain actually married to your deceased wife's sister, having moreover inveigled the law into solemnising a marriage it prohibits. No, no, my dear Miss Fallowsmith, let me finish. Can you wonder that I dared not return to Macclesfield lest my sin should find me out? How Eaveson fared I have never learnt. I trembled at my own shadow, thinking it a policeman on my track. My day was one long bolt from the blue-coated officials. I dared not leave the country lest my perturbation should excite suspicion. There are always so many detectives about the docks. The one safe place for me was London, the great wilderness of London; the one safe disguise that of a Scotchman. I had been an Irishman. I am an Englishman. As a Scotchman I should be comparatively secure. I bought a pair of goggles with



plain glasses (for my sight is excellent), a snuff-box, and a coloured handkerchief, and took the name of Andrew M'Gullicuddy. But it was too much trouble to speak like an anglicised Scotchman all day long. Besides, there was always the danger that I would forget the accent when my temper was ruffled. I hit upon the happy idea of speaking Scotch (so-called) only when I was in a passion or excited. Not only would the strain be less, but the genuineness so much more convincing. The most cultured speaker of a foreign tongue slips into his native idiom under excitement. With a little care I trained myself to talk Scotch whenever I felt angry or otherwise moved. The dodge succeeded perfectly. Not even you, Paul, have ever suspected me of being a Birmingham man, plain Peter Parker. But I was yet far from easy. The fear of detection still made life a nightmare. My disguise was not yet impenetrable. Something more novel and audacious was necessary to cover up my trail. What fresh red-herring could I draw across my track? The idea was long in coming, but it came at last. *I invented the Bachelors' Club.* If I founded a society based on celibacy and misogyny, my guilt would be buried beyond the fear of exhumation. Who would ever dream of identifying Andrew M'Gullicuddy, President and Founder of the Bachelors' Club, with Peter Parker *alias* Patrick O'Flanagan, bigamist, married to his undeceased wife's sister?"

"You double-disguised villain!" I burst out, for I could contain myself no longer. "So this was your pretty design, eh?" I rushed wildly at the epigrammatic tapestry, and clawed at it in my rage. "Out upon you, foul Chimera, compact of perjury and

falsehood! So you have used your friends and abused your office but to cover up your trail. While I was trembling to acquaint you with a secession, you were yourself a marital monster, a double-dyed husband. There is not a single law or by-law of the Club but you have trampled upon it."

"Pardon me, Paul," replied the President, his voice quivering with emotion. "This is too much. Call me a bigamist if you will, but do not say I have trampled upon the code of the Club, for it is a meanness I would shrink from. Am I not over thirty years of age? I am. Have I ever had a disappointment in love? I have not, for I have never loved. At first we used to ask of the candidate 'Has he ever been married?' and as I, the President, was more than married, my conscience used to wince a little. But I took advantage of your weak-minded striving for epigram to suggest the later form 'Has he ever had a disappointment in love?' You all snapped greedily at the bait, forgetting that the formula did not exhaust all the possibilities, but allowed a man who had married, but not for love, to slip through. Besides, you forget *I* was never a candidate."

The President's arguments left me breathless.

"But at first—at the foundation?" I gasped.

"Well, what of that?" inquired M'Gullicuddy. "Did I ever tell a single syllable of untruth about it? Did any one ever ask whether *I* was married? No; it was I who organised this Club; it was I who broached the idea to Mandeville Brown, and he jumped at it eagerly, for it fell in with his humour. But I told him I would not allow him to co-operate with me unless he could satisfy my most searching inquiries as to the

integrity of his bachelorhood and the wholeness of his heart. He submitted willingly to my examination, and I passed him with honours. It never struck him to examine his examiner. (Even when I crushed his claim to originality by assuring him that another married man had previously remained in the Club, it never struck him that it was I.) We two sought out a third and so on. My inquiries into each neophyte's antecedents were so minute and detailed that they never dreamt of asking for mine. My criticism was so severe, my scorn for the Benedict so unconcealed, that my power and position were never once questioned in the whole history of the Bachelors' Club. I never evaded the tests, for I was never tried by them. Do me the justice, Paul, to admit that I have always striven with veritable single-hearted zeal to uphold the dignity and the laws of our Society, now, alas! moribund, and that I have been an impeccable President of the Bachelors' Club."

I saw that he was right. How I had wronged this great and good man! Remorse rent my over-charged bosom. I fell at his feet and craved his pardon and his blessing.

"Rise, Paul," said the kindly President, in tremulous accents, "you are forgiven."

"And *you* are forgiven, my dear, good Patrick!" came suddenly from the lips of the woman, whom we had both forgotten in the last exciting moments of M'Gullicuddy's monologue. "I may speak now?"

"Yes, Miss Fallowsmith, you may speak now," said the President wearily.

"Then, Patrick, there is yet time to catch the Harwich boat."

"Eh, lass?" said Peter Parker, so startled that he slipped perforce into M'Gullicuddy.

"Yes, you are my husband now, if not when you married me. I was right after all when I claimed you as mine."

"I canna be your husband."

"You can, and are. My sister is dead. She died soon after your leaving her. Your disappearance, taken in conjunction with the deaths of her three other husbands, excited suspicion. She was alleged to have made away with you. The investigation conducted in consequence so upset her that she died."

"False deceptive creature!" cried the President. "Then she will never wear my mother's weeds after all! I had intended leaving her a dying confession and these clothes, with fresh testamentary adjurations to wear them. But that is over now." He wept silently.

"Do not take on so, Patrick," said Miss Fallowsmith, with infinite tenderness, as she passed a gentle hand over the remains of his hair. "There is yet balm in Gilead. Is not your own Isabella here to bear your burdens and to soothe your sorrows? Come, love, remember that if you have lost your first widow you have still a widow left to you. I will wear those garments for you when you are no more, oh how gladly!"

Peter Parker looked up. The tear in his eye was blent with a sunny gleam of hope. Then the rainbow faded away again into mist.

"But they do not fit you."

"Oh yes, love, measure me, measure me," she cried eagerly, placing his arm round her waist.

"Your diameter is too extensive," he said sadly. "You will burst your cerements—I mean my mother's mourning."

"No, no!" she cried ecstatically. "If that is all,

Patrick, do not spurn me as unfit to be your mate and widow. I can reduce my weight, dear; I will take daily exercise, darling; I will use anti-fat, love; anything to make me worthy to be your widow. Oh, if there is no other way, Patrick, I would willingly starve to make you happier, dearest. Only give me leave to try, and you shall see that I will fit them, my darling, my own and only love." Her eyes lit up in sublime abnegation. Her look was that of a saint. Oh the mirific workings of love, transforming the most prosaic clay to the similitude of an angel!

"But you are my deceased wife's sister," faltered the President.

"What is that, love? Come, let us catch the Dutch boat. Other countries are not so cruel as ours. Let us continue our interrupted honeymoon to Holland. There we shall be made one."

"But it's such an unco awfu' nicht for the passage!" pleaded M'Gullicuddy excitedly.

"The night will be all right," she replied optimistically.

"Tell Willoughby to fetch me a cab," groaned the President helplessly.

Deeply moved by the pathetic scene I darted out, unlocked the outer door, and looked down the stairs. Neither Willoughby Jones nor any of the waiters was to be seen. I ran down into the twinkling square; the snow was still falling, and in tremendous flakes. I hailed a four-wheeler myself. The bridal pair were close on my heels. They jumped in.

"Liverpool Street, *viâ* Brunswick Square," called out the President. "I must get the Gladstone bag with my mother's weeds," he explained to his intended widow.

"Drive for your life," said Mrs. M'Gullicuddy, *alias*

O'Flanagan, *alias* Parker. "A sovereign if you catch the 8 P.M."

I closed the door of the cab.

"Here, Paul," said the President, holding out something to me. For a moment I thought he had mistaken me, in his perturbation, for the usual loafer, and was handing me a copper. But it was a bulkier object that my palm closed upon.

"My snuff-box, Paul," said M'Gullicuddy with emotion, "I shall not want it now. Keep it as a memento."

"A memento marry," I said sadly.

"Yes," said M'Gullicuddy. "It is the common fate. No man can escape. All right, Isabella, we're off now. Well, good-bye, Paul. To think that my first wife was dead all along, and that if I had only read *The Macclesfield Courier* the Bachelors' Club would never have been! It was founded all in vain."

"All in vain!" I echoed with a sigh.

The driver clucked, the horse advanced his foreleg, and the President of the Bachelors' Club was whirled off towards Holland to marry his deceased wife's sister.

The snow fell. The cab became a frosted wedding-cake as it fled from my ken.

CHAPTER XIII.

LADY-DAY.

I DON'T think I mentioned what a charming woman the mother of the Graces is. She belongs, in a sense, to what plain, honest, mice-fearing ladies call the shrieking sisterhood, for she is a Blue Ribbonite, and speaks in public. This is not so bad as a Bluestocking, for although it seems to be agreed that a woman cannot know anything and yet be beautiful, there appears to be nothing in Temperance that is noxious to feminine charms. Charis, so I in my own mind think of the mother of the Graces, is a Juno-like woman, with a neck like one of the same goddess's swans. Her beautiful features are alive with intelligence and kindness; her voice is soft and musical; her manners are sweet and perfect. She is the incarnation of all that is most adorable in woman. Her husband is a stockbroker. His only pleasure is in his wine-cellar, which is stocked with the finest vintages.

Daily contact with this charming lady had matured an idea engendered in my mind already at our second meeting. Charis could be made a force to raise and purify the standard of English humour. Her sweet and gracious life had hitherto illumined but a narrow circle; what if I made its beams co-extensive with the country? What nobler mission could a woman ask to be born for

than to do such needed service to our decadent comic literature?

After the death of *At Home Every Monday* I had been gratified to receive from an old friend the offer of the editorship of a new comic paper he was projecting. It was to have an entirely original feature in the shape of jokes. This was the only condition the proprietor made; the rest was to be left entirely to my discretion. I had long ago analysed modern English humour, even as O'Roherty had analysed the modern English novel, though with more accuracy. Twenty per cent. of the stuff is of complex composition, embracing numerous ingredients, some of which would make even blue litmus-paper blush. The rest resolves itself simply into two great genera, technically called "Drunks" and "Mother-in-laws." There are sixty per cent. "Drunks" to twenty per cent. "Mother-in-laws," although the division is rather cross. Under "Drunks" are comprised numerous species, involving latchkeys, cabmen, lamp-posts, stair-cases, vigil-keeping wives, gutters, etc. Under "Mother-in-laws" are embraced every variety of connubial kill-joy, including even other women. It was obvious that in my comic paper these elements must be eschewed. But could I entirely eliminate them? They are so easily invented. I might be so easily tempted to put in one or the other as a fill-up. Besides, what rigid watchfulness would be required to keep them out of the contributors' copy! The thought of the Herculean task before me unnerved me. I was on the point of declining. Then I met Charis.

If I could prevail upon Charis to be my mother-in-law, I could edit this paper with a cheerful self-reliance. This pure and precious thing in mothers-in-law—this

combination of the Temperance Oratress with the Angel —would effectually drive off all “Drunks” and “Mother-in-laws,” as by centrifugal force. Apart from her dread criticism of such imbecilities after the fact, the thought of her sweet and gracious ways would inevitably keep them out in the first instance. I should be driven to insert real wit and humour. To have the conventional fatuities about mothers-in-law would not only be a libel on the kind, it would be an insult to my own. Considering that every man’s mother is a potential mother-in-law, there seems to be something verging on filial disrespect in this constant cheyving of legal maternity.

As for “Drunks,” there can be no doubt that the good-humoured rollicking treatment of a bestial subject does much to perpetuate the evil. The drunkard is pictured as a comic personage instead of a disgusting animal. Charis was great on this. She said that the “Drunks,” whatever disagreeable difficulties they depicted the drunkard in, never served as a moral deterrent to any one. No comic paper had ever lured one single bibulous being from the paths of adulterated alcohol. “Drunks,” she had said from the platform, were like the intoxicated blackguard whom the good son of the Talmud, taking his father for a constitutional, pointed out to his vinous parent, as a scarecrow and a warning. The good-for-nothing Hebrew prodded the refuse of the roadway with his foot till the miserable creature rolled on his back and gaped. Then the father asked him where he got such good wine from.

Evidently, then, the salvation of English humour lay in securing Charis for a mother-in-law. Such an opportunity occurs but once in a generation. This god-send to *belles lettres* had fallen at my feet; was I to



Geo. Hutchinson, Sc.

ASKED HIM WHERE HE GOT SUCH GOOD WINE FROM.

turn away impiously? In my hands Charis had been appointed an instrument for the renaissance of English comic writing. Should I approve myself too weak to wield it? No, the hour had come, and the mother-in-law. The man should not lag behind.

The one drop of bitter in my cup was that this great thing—like all great things—could not be achieved without sacrifice. I should have to marry. And with me the President, Treasurer, and Secretary, the Committee, and all the members of the Bachelors' Club would have to marry. It was not a mere sacrifice that was demanded by the interests of art, but a holocaust. I could martyr myself with pleasure, but was I justified in sacrificing the Bachelors' Club on the altar of marriage? Did it not behove me to be all the stronger that the yoke had been left on my unaided neck? Should I not stand like a rocky pillar against the whole Atlantic of matrimony? Were it not better that there should be written on my tombstone:—

Impavidum ferient ruinae?

Let English humour perish. The Bachelors' Club must be saved!

And yet there were other sides to this perplexing polygon. Why should the Bachelors' Club be wound up, even if I married? Could I not keep it up till such time as new candidates appeared? There was only the rent to pay—the waiters had sacked themselves like rats deserting a sinking ship. They never returned since I put them out on that memorable night when the great snow—which has been falling ever since—commenced to fall. And even if no fresh members ever appeared, the impression that it was a charity, perhaps

a refuge for poor creatures who could not get wives, might gain ground. More donations might accrue, especially if the institution were judiciously advertised by misleading paragraphs in the newspapers, sanctimonious circulars and broadcast publication of the names of donors. Were there not many instances of similar charities? And do they not play a noble part in the economy of existence, fostering the higher feelings of our nature, and bringing opportunities for abnegation to our very doors? But for false beggars there would be little true charity in this world. The Bachelors' Club was a going concern; it would be sheer extravagance to wind it up if I married, especially as I should then want money. It might still go on of itself, and if it got good endowments it might loom large in men's eyes and make a brave show, though it had not a single member in the world. No, the Bachelors' Club need be no obstacle to my securing Charis. This settled, the advantages of matrimony rushed upon me in a cohort. I had always felt it hard to give away costly wedding-presents and get only miserable bits of wedding-cake. If I married I should reverse the sides of the bargain, and get the better of it. The money expended on presents would then only have been lying out at compound interest. It is so provoking to be fleeced by one's best friends. Lifelong celibacy would mean the entire loss of all these investments. It would never occur to these cooing couples to say: "Paul is going on a month's holiday; let us club together and give him a good send-off;" or, "Paul has cut a new tooth, let us give him a new umbrella, his present one is so bad and bulging." No, they would stick to my money and never say a word about it, unless I made a

wedding-feast and invited them to send it back. If for nothing else but to annoy his friends, a man ought to marry.

Again, I am very fond of walking-tours in the country. But, as I have remarked before, done on foot they are tiresome and tedious. I have always envied the man who flew along on a bicycle while I was toiling footsore towards the mocking mile-post. But I have never ventured to bestride a bicycle. It is an animal that I hold in suspicion. It has no discipline, no steadiness; it reels to the right or the left, as though it were drunk, and lurches towards the gutter. It is a machine that can only be recommended to suicides. A tandem I consider an unmanly and cowardly substitute. But if I could combine safety with temerity by using a sociable, one of the dearest dreams of my life would be realised, and walking-tours would be robbed of their thorn. Now you cannot divide a sociable with a man, because, like a tandem, it is so obvious a mask of cowardice. Two men might just as well ride two bicycles. No, it is only with a woman that one can share a sociable, for then it is a concession to her weakness, and the mark of a nature solicitous for others. Such a partner on protracted walking-tours can only be obtained by marriage.

Then there was the great snow. The downfall that had started in November, and had continued for three weeks, and was still going on, had been unprecedented. The oldest inhabitants of the English workhouses could not remember anything like it, though this may have been the fault of their ailing aged memories. The snow stood in heaps like the congealed waters of the

Red Sea; while the traffic passed through the middle, like the army of the Israelites. Millions of men found employment in shunting the snow towards the gutters and side-walks as soon as it fell. Architecture was reduced to a dead level of amorphous white, and the tons of snow on the roofs caved in numerous buildings. The world was one wide whirl of fleecy flakes, waltzing round to the music of the winds. It was a hard time for the poor, and for widows and orphans, whose mourning was quite blanched by the ceaseless snow. But everybody was happy though avalanches slid down the chimneys and put out the fires, and fountains percolated through the ceilings, and cascades poured from the tiles. Such a snow-storm had never happened before; the like of it had never been seen in the memory of Englishmen. Perhaps it was turned on for this occasion only. It might never happen again in the whole history of England; and if it did, every one had a chance of being the oldest inhabitant by that time. What a tale to tell in the dim years of the future, when posterity boasted of its snow-storms! How we would annihilate the miserable pretensions of our descendants when they boasted of the rigour of *their* winters! How we should recount it to our grandsons again and again; how we should freeze their young blood with the tale of the great snow! Why should I be debarred from this supreme enjoyment, in itself enough to counterpoise years of suffering? I had no grandchildren, nor was likely to have any at the rate I was going on. Decidedly I must marry and have grandchildren to whom to tell the tale of the great snow. And I must marry quickly, or else I might have to leave without seeing them.

Moreover, unless I married shortly I should probably never marry at all. A few days after I had concluded that my retirement need make no difference to the existence and prosperity of the Bachelors' Club, I received a lucrative offer for the transfer of our rooms. This decided me to drop the idea of keeping up the Club, especially as I was anxious to utilise my experiences of it in book-form, and the charity could always be continued under another name, and count even the readers of these lines among its donors. So I closed with the offer, though there was more in it than I bargained for. Too late I discovered that the Club apartments were to be converted into a newspaper office. In due course the editor of the *Matrimonial Noose* was installed in our sanctum; while the pernicious paper itself was published in the smoking-room, and the contents bills were posted over our maxims. But this by the way. To return to my marriage. If I published *The Bachelors' Club*, necessarily embodying so much misogyny and such fell high-treason to the Queen of Hearts, the odds were I should never get a wife. I did not want one at present, but who knew that I might not want one some day? Wives have many uses, as Bacon has pointed out. Was it wise, was it prudent to cut myself off from all chance of getting one? No; if I was ever to marry, it must be before the publication of *The Bachelors' Club*. And there was another consideration which limited my time of single blessedness still more straitly. Christmas was coming. If I married on Christmas Day a great economy of enjoyment would be effected. The Christmas party would do as the wedding party. It is such a bore to be jolly, and if you can kill two birds with one stone, proverbial sagacity

recommends the massacre. The Christmas dinner would do for the wedding dinner also. Instead of the dietary fal-lals we should have wholesome roast beef and plum pudding. There was no time to lose. It is a matter of common remark that Christmas comes but once a year. By next Christmas my book would be published. Then the gate of matrimony would for ever be shut in my bachelor face, and to me, as to the equally foolish virgins, a voice would wail—

“Too late, too late, you cannot enter now.”

Besides, unless I married I should never be able to utilise that witty wedding-speech which I found among Mandeville Brown's manuscripts. The date of the wedding settled, the only problem now left was by which of Charis's daughters to become her son-in-law and save English humour. Maud, Alice, or Kitty,—each was as good as the other. Was there any way by which I could choose among them? It is always unpleasant to marry one out of several daughters, because it makes such invidious distinctions. This shows the advantages of polygamy over monogamy. The unpleasantness was increased for me by the fact that there was no reason why I should make any distinction at all. Tossing up suggested itself to me. But I am averse from gambling. For hours I was racked by doubt. Then I bethought myself that if I *was* to be martyred, I might as well make as good a thing out of it as any other martyr. Why not choose the girl who was best adopted to my idiosyncrasies?

The reader may have gathered from these records that I am one of those unfortunate persons who find it difficult to leave a room. When I pay a visit I never

know when to go. The personal magnetism of the company draws me like a bit of steel. I cannot tear myself away. I sit listening and looking about me till I fancy my entertainers get annoyed. Half-a-dozen times I get up awkwardly to go away, but I sit down again without success. As a visitor, I have too much staying-power. Now if I could go out visiting with a companion who would always give me the cue when to go, who would take me away despite all my uneasy efforts to remain, this shadow on my life would be lifted. As I *was* to marry, I might as well marry a woman who would do this. I set myself to watch the three Graces carefully so as to ascertain which could leave a room quickest. It did not take me long to discover that it was Kitty. When I came into any room and she was there, she always left it quicker than any one else of the company. Kitty then must be my future mother-in-law's first married daughter.

I took an early opportunity of informing Kitty of the fact. I waylaid the bright, violet-eyed creature with the sunny hair and the dainty figure and the saucy tongue in a curtained niche of the ball-room, for no niveous deluge could give pause to the pleasures of Bayswater. She did not seem at all surprised, which surprised me; and she declined, which surprised me still more. She made the usual sororal protestations; but if she became my sister, Charis would have become my mother. And it was not a mother I was marrying for, but a mother-in-law. I had a mother. I had had one from my earliest infancy. I pressed Kitty for reasons, and she confessed with a pretty blush and a sigh that her heart was seared. I saw that she still cherished the memory of Mandeville Brown. I took her soft

tiny hand and pressed it and my suit hard. As she stood there in all the flush of youth and insolent loveliness, with her heart beating quickly beneath her gauzy ball-dress, and the voluptuous music of the waltz swinging dreamily to and fro, I felt quite piqued by her refusal. As I looked into her beautiful eyes, I felt that I had been right in deciding upon marriage. It was well that English humour should be purified and elevated. High ideals in life and literature seemed easy to discern and to follow by the light of those violet orbs. All things fair and noble seemed fairer and nobler while I held her gentle fingers. It seemed to me as if the world would grow dark and my new paper would not contain jokes, if she took those dainty digits away. I felt that I should not even need to run a charity, if she only consented to become my mother-in-law's daughter. What mattered to me that she still thought of Mandeville Brown; that she loved the Bedlamite? I did not want her love, any more than she could have mine. She did not love me, true, but then I did not love her. Surely two negatives like that should result in an affirmative, when I made my proposal! But she still shook her head in a silence that was not consent. Her obstinacy was maddening me. The waltz swang on.

"And you are determined to ruin my life?" I whispered hoarsely, as I thought of the coming comic paper with its "drunks" and its "mother-in-laws."

"It is not my fault," she said plaintively, "I am sure I am very sorry. Please, let me go, the waltz is half over and my partner must be looking for me everywhere."

"Your partner stands here," I answered her, gripping her hand more fiercely. "Your partner for life."

"No, I cannot give you the whole programme," she rejoined resolutely.

"There must be some reason behind this—something you are hiding from me," I said bitterly. "You led me on to believe that you did not love me, and now you are throwing me over, as if that were a sufficient excuse. No, there is something else. Till you tell me what it is I will not let you go."

"Then I will tell you," she said. "You offer me your name and fortune. I do not object to the fortune. But the name I can never take. I do not mind the Paul—that is nice enough. But Pry! Become Mrs. Paul Pry, indeed! Ugh!"

"What is the matter with the name?" I asked hotly. "It is a lovely alliterative name, and this is the first time I have heard any one find fault with it."

"That may be," said the beautiful little minx, tossing her golden hair. "But I prefer my own."

"Oh, Kitty, that is such a nominal difficulty!" I cried.

"It is fatal," she said decisively. "So now you know. Cheer up. You'll get over it."

"Never," I cried, as I thought of poor English humour.

"No?" she said, her violet eyes overbrimming with saucy light. "What will you do then?"

Her question restored me to myself. My duty faced me, cold and stern.

"I shall marry Maud or Alice," I said quietly.

Kitty flushed. "None of my sisters shall be Mrs. Pry," she said hotly and impulsively.

"Indeed?" I sneered. "We shall see." Her selfish indifference to the interests of English humour braced me to suffer and be strong

"Yes, we shall see," she flashed back, her lovely lips twitching. "It shall never be."

"Why, who will prevent it?" I said indignantly.

"I will," she said defiantly.

I laughed scornfully.

"You?" I said. "And how, pray?"

"I will become Mrs. Pry myself."

The ball-room swayed round me, as though it had joined in the waltz. The dreamy music sounded far-off, like the strains of some celestial melody. The blood coursed in delicious delirium through my veins. I caught the bewitching little beauty in my arms and kissed her. English humour would be safe after all. For the love of letters I kissed her thankfully again and again. My lips were grateful to her.

* * * * *

The proprietor of the proposed comic paper insisted on sitting next to us at supper, much to our annoyance, and told me he had given up the idea. All his friends had warned him that it would never do to give the public new jokes. That they would never recognise them. That they liked to see old friends, and never tired of "drunks" and "mother-in-laws." That if a man made a joke that tickled the public, he could make his fortune by repeating that joke for the rest of his life. That they would not let him do anything else; and that if he made another joke, his reputation as a humourist would be gone. That new jokes were like new men, it took them a long time to achieve recognition. That it was better to stick to the old jokes. And that he preferred dropping the idea to dropping a lot of coin over it. "Even this *Bachelors' Club* of yours," he said, "will fall flat."

I said I would go through the manuscript carefully and cut out all the jokes, so that the critics might praise my artistic restraint, and the public buy my book. I also pointed out that, like many a greater fool, I relied largely on my title and that a book with such a title ought to go, even if it were worth reading; for it could not fail to excite the liveliest interest in matrimonial circles. I said that a faithful prosaic chronicle of facts always had a charm for the public as might be seen from the success of the *Police News* and the *Stock Exchange Quotations*. I admitted that the reasons which had induced my fellow-members to marry were rather commonplace. None of the Bachelors had a spark of the wild originality of the gentleman who advertised recently in a Mauritius paper as follows:—"A Stamp-collector, the possessor of a collection of 12,544 stamps, wishes to marry a lady who is an ardent collector, and the possessor of the blue penny stamp of Mauritius, issued in 1847." Still I ventured to think that ordinary as were the stories I had to tell, something was gained by sticking close to Truth in all its naked and unenamelled beauty.

And, pressing Kitty's hand to reassure myself that I did not intend to back out and blight her life now that English humour could not be saved after all, I added that I didn't care if *The Bachelors' Club* was a failure.

* * * * *

And now, as I sit on the last night of this strange and mournful year and gaze from the window of the Bournemouth hotel towards the sea that moans beneath, a phantasmagoria of recollections hovers in the cold starlight. My eyes fill with tears and Kitty's living face grows dim as those wed faces of my

comrades gleam in the spectral air. One short year ago we sat all together in the Bachelors' Club, speeding the parting year with careless carousal and cynic chat—and now, we are scattered as leaves before the blast. How fast has brother followed brother from sunshine to the honeymoon land! Twelve brief months ago, all gay and healthy, in the pride of single life, and the flower of celibacy, and now we lie wed and married in the four corners of the earth—Henry Robinson in the snow-clad Sierras of South America, and Oliver Green in the torrid plains of India, and Israfel Mondego in the droughty deserts of Australia, and M'Gullicuddy beneath the red sunsets of Rotterdam. Poor President—thee I pity most, for surely no man was ever so sorely circumstanced as thou, M'Gullicuddy, with thy Macclesfield marriage.

All, all are gone, the old familiar faces—gone to that bourne whence no bachelor returns. At this solemn season of the year I think of you all with forbearance, my anger softened by your end. Of thee, O Fogson, in thy farmhouse, with thy pseudo-Barbara; and thee, O'Roherty, with thy lady-novelist; and thee, O Little Bethel, with thy play-loving partner; and thee, O Dickray, with thy Jenny, ghostliest of brides and counsellors. Nor shall the throb of pity be denied to thee, O Fitz-Williams, with thy rich consort; nor to thee, O Twinkletop, with thy cook; least of all to thee, O epigrammatic Bedlamite, Mandeville Brown. I extend amnesty to you all. By my pious hand have ye all been preserved in memory on the funereal fresco, though for me there was none to perform the last sad offices. Yea, even to thee, Willoughby Jones, and to thee, O dusky steward, my soul goes out in silent

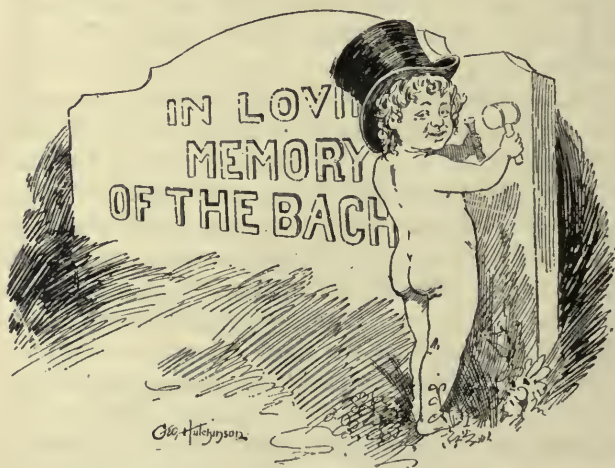
sympathy. *Requiescat in pace.* Towards the Club-rooms, too, I raise my hand in peaceful benediction, though they likewise are married, so to speak, and subserve base matrimonial operations.

All gone—vanished like last year's great snow.

Clash! clash! Ding! dong! The joy-bells usher in the New Year. Kitty's face is close to mine. Our tears mingle.

Farewell, farewell, O boon companions, farewell—a last, sad farewell.

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