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# COOEEVILLE

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**COOEEVILLE**



# COOEEVILLE

*A NOVEL*

BY  
ALLEN GILFILLAN

ANDREW MELROSE, LTD.  
LONDON & NEW YORK

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~~Annex~~

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TO THE MEMORY OF A DEAD FRIEND  
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# COOEVILLE

## SECTION I

### CHAPTER I

DOTTED over the habitable parts of Australia, and in some instances over the uninhabitable parts, are communities of men ranging from the roaring city to the all-but deserted diggings. The cities are few; the lonely relics of bygone golden greatness unimportant; to many of the human kind of Australia it falls to pass their lives in some inland township, remote from the coast, without hills, without streams, with little verdure or timber, oftentimes a mere group of box-like wooden houses on a dusty flat, where life passes with its conversation of gossip, its literature of newspapers, its week-days of money making, its Sundays of heavy dinners and sleepy afternoons.

Victoria, the smallest subdivision of the great southern continent, is mountainous in the east, but towards the north and west the hills lessen in number and size, till across the north-west corner the ranges disappear altogether and a vast undulating plain spreads north and west to the boundaries of New South Wales and South Australia.

On the last of the rises which edge and overlook this great stretch there has grown by slow degrees a township, fighting ceaselessly against stern Nature's hard conditions, hot summers, cold winters, dry winds, a spare rainfall, distance from city and port, arid tracts running through the few more fertile portions, with never river nor lake nor spring to bless it with perennial supply. Encircled by primeval bush it lies on the ultimate ranges overlooking the enormous rolling plain of the north-west; not a place named in history nor famed in song, but a small, and dry, and dusty, Australian, inland township.

They call it Cooeville.

### CHAPTER II

"AND we couldn't make anyone hear at the front," said Mrs. Malintop to Mrs. Thriggerley—it was Mrs. Malintop's afternoon at home, but so far only one visitor had arrived—"though we rang and rang. So we went round to the back. You know how dirty the shop is, so you can guess what the backyard was like"—a knock at the front door called the

hostess away in the midst of her praise of an absent friend. She bustled back with Mrs. Limmering and her daughter Minnie. "I was telling about the Geoghegans," Mrs. Malintop resumed. "You know how untidy Mrs. Geoghegan is — oh! —" Mrs. Malintop drew a deep breath through parted lips. This exclamation was well known of all the lady's acquaintance; when the brilliant smile appeared, when the eyebrows rose, and the emphatic "Oh!" was heard, followed by the breath drawn between the lips, like one taking a long sip of air, her audience realized that the last touch had been added to the matter in hand; and her hearers were seldom inattentive; for the sprightly widow offered to all truth and falsehood dexterously mingled, flavoured with her own bitter herbs, spiced with malice, and garnished with suggestion.

"Oh, I think Mrs. Geoghegan's nice, you know," replied Mrs. Limmering heavily. She usually spoke but little at afternoon tea, or indeed at any other time of refreshment, for she had then to consider matters of importance.

"I think Mrs. Geoghegan is just stupid," observed Miss Limmering. "Don't you think so, Jean?" she asked as Mrs. Malintop's niece entered with the afternoon tea.

"She has a kind heart," answered Miss Malintop with her pleasant deliberation of manner.

"When anyone's too stupid to do anything wrong she's always called nice or good or kind," said Miss Limmering, who possessed a tongue that could cut, though it left no poison in the wound.

"I think a kind heart goes a long way," said the mother. "Yes, Jean, I'll take a scone, put two together. It'll save me coming back."

Mrs. Thridderley yawned in a manner which could not be called delicate, yet avoided being obvious. She had every right to yawn, for her husband was the chief storekeeper of the township, and the richest man in the district.

"Yes," admitted Miss Limmering grimly, "Ma believes in a kind heart all right. At home now, look at the things she would do for Mr. Cherral if I let her! I think it's absurd. One of the best rooms in the house given him to begin with——"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Mrs. Malintop eagerly, "Mr. Cherral. I haven't met him yet though he's been here three weeks. Of course I've seen him in the street. He looks a very different man to that horrid old Mr. Steggs. Though what he bought Mr. Steggs' practice for I don't know, there can't have been any practice to buy. Tell us about him and then perhaps I'll give you a surprise."

This was a fresh topic. The assembled ladies brightened visibly.

Mrs. Thriggerley sat up and became her animated self. Mrs. Limmering hastily deposited the last of her bit of scone—all of it—in her mouth, brushed down the front of her dress, and, taking a piece of cake, held it for emergencies. Mrs. Malintop leant forward with her well-known smile. Miss Limmering objected to a gathering of five ladies showing such interest in a man, even though a new man. She tossed her head slightly and remained silent.

"Oh, you tell us then." Mrs. Malintop appealed to Mrs. Limmering.

Mrs. Limmering shook her head. Speech was not easy to her at that moment.

"They're all waiting for you, Minnie dear," said Jean Malintop.

Miss Limmering relented slightly. It was Jean who asked her, and there is an undoubted pleasure in observing four others waiting breathlessly for your next words.

"I don't know much about him," she began with ungracious compliance. "He seems quiet enough."

Mrs. Limmering swallowed her scone with audible celerity. "But quite the gentleman," she hastened to add. "You should see his hair brushes! Ebony backs, and his initials in silver!"

"Really!" exclaimed Mrs. Thriggerley, making a mental note to consider the question of asking the owner of such brushes to her next evening.

"Yes," continued Miss Limmering, "he's got a lot of clothes too. Too many for a man, I think."

"They all seem very good," added her mother, "his underclothing is beautiful. The very best. And his suits are good cloth. Very good."

"I noticed," interrupted Mrs. Malintop, "that he always dressed well."

"Three dozen white shirts," continued Mrs. Limmering, interested in her subject by now. "Good linen. He doesn't seem to wear anything but a white shirt——" Mrs. Limmering intended nothing suggestive, and no one observed what she expressed so exactly.

"He must think a lot of himself for all his quiet ways," continued Miss Limmering, gradually warming, for competition stirs one. "He's got manicure things, all silver handles."

"Really!" exclaimed Mrs. Malintop.

"And two things for keeping his trousers pressed. Just imagine! The vanity of the man!"

Mrs. Thriggerley was now quite decided. Evidently Mr. Cherral was a safe man to ask, even to the most exclusive circle.

"Is he well off?" demanded Mrs. Malintop.

A pause fell on the company.

"He's got about half a dozen sets of sleeve links and studs, all gold," asserted Mrs. Limmering, beginning to feel she had not taken sufficient notice of her guest. "And a lovely gold watch with something on it."

"Then you think he's rich?" asked Mrs. Malintop.

"Rich?" repeated Mrs. Limmering interrogatively, "I don't know. I hope so. It's so nice to be rich——"

"He's not rich, Ma," broke in Miss Limmering crisply. "What would he be trying to make money as a lawyer for if he was rich? But I think"—she paused.

"Minnie," said Mrs. Malintop severely, "tell us all you know at once."

"Well, I think he's seen better days. I don't pretend to admire Mr. Cherral, or any man, but you can't help noticing a lot of little things."

"Poor Mr. Cherral," said Miss Malintop sympathetically.

"What sort of little things?" asked Mrs. Thridderley, with eager indifference.

"Minnie, you must tell us," Mrs. Malintop spoke firmly.

"Go on, you know you can trust us."

"Well, it peeps out in a lot of ways. He doesn't seem to know anything about money for one thing. He never asked Ma what he had to pay, he just took the room. And another thing——"

"Well, go on," urged Mrs. Malintop.

"Well, when washing day came round he had four white shirts in the wash and a dozen handkerchiefs at least, and I had to tell him that if he used four white shirts every week he'd have to pay washing extra, and he said—You'd never guess what he said."

"Four white shirts a week!" exclaimed Mrs. Thridderley.

"Why, Mr. Thridderley——" she pulled up hastily.

"Very extravagant," said Mrs. Limmering, shaking her head.

Miss Malintop said nothing, but looked out of the window.

"Did he say he wouldn't pay anything extra?" demanded Mrs. Malintop.

"He looked quite startled," answered Miss Limmering, "and said—just fancy—'I leave domestic details to you.' And I said, 'What do you mean?' I was nearly going to ask him if he wanted *me* to tell him how many shirts a week to wear. Great booby! And he explained I was always to say how much he was to pay each week. Extras and all. And I do, and he never checks it. Just pays me."

"He doesn't eat much," added Mrs. Limmering somewhat irrelevantly. "A poor feeder I call him. But easy to please. The first few days I asked him about everything. 'I hope you're quite satisfied with this, Mr. Cherral.' And he always said he was."

"And there's the funny way he speaks and the funny things he does," continued Miss Limmering. "Have you heard him talk yet?"

Mrs. Thridderley admitted she had not. Mrs. Malintop smiled and said nothing.

"Oh, well, I can't describe it. It's quite different to us. I must say it sounds rather nice too. You can hear every word, though sometimes he says a word in a way you're not used to."

"Oh, copy him for us, Minnie."

"I really can't, Jean. You'll hear him yourself fast enough, though he talks very little. But I don't say you'll like him. He treats Ma and me just as if we were great ladies. Always gets up when we come into the room, and used to get up and open the door for us whenever we went out of it. Ma had to speak to him about it, it was getting on me nerves. Oh, he's always very stiff and high—politeful. Stuckup rubbish I call it," wound up Miss Limmering, stirred by the recital of her grievances.

"Is that all you can tell us about him?" asked Mrs. Malintop, who had absorbed all these details easily. Her voice showed exultation as she repeated, "Is that all?"

"I think it's quite enough," asserted Miss Limmering. "How pleased the man would be if he knew we were all talking about him."

"Perhaps it's not quite fair to Mr. Cherral," suggested Jean diffidently, but no one heeded her.

"I'll have another cup of tea, Jean. I like this tea," said Mrs. Limmering.

"Would you like to know all about him?" asked Mrs. Malintop, glancing round with undisguised triumph. "Oh, you need me here to find out things for you."

The others, except Jean, who was attending to Mrs. Limmering's wants, gave diligent heed.

"To begin with, he's not rich," said Mrs. Malintop, glancing round.

"Ah," said Mrs. Limmering. And feeling the need of support, she reached out for food.

"But how do you know this?" demanded Miss Limmering sharply.

Mrs. Thridderley seconded the question with her eyes.

Mrs. Malintop put the question by. "Oh, I have a lot of little birds, Minnie," she answered airily. "Melbourne people can't come here after they've thrown away all their money and try to be unknown to *all* of us. No thank you."

Miss Limmering stopped the query on her lips and forbore to probe further.

"But though he's not rich now," continued the narrator, "he was once, and not so long ago either. As rich as—ah!—"

The others were properly impressed.

"But now he hasn't a penny. Everything's gone."

Mrs. Limmering sighed heavily, shook her head lugubriously, and sought comfort in her cake.

"But young men *will* be rash and make ducks and drakes of their money and sow their wild oats, I suppose," continued Mrs. Malintop with a bright smile.

"Do you think he's wild still?" asked Mrs. Limmering, perturbed by this hint of her new paying guest possessing a lurid past.

Miss Limmering, perhaps to show that no man could frighten her, sniffed, but said nothing.

"Of course one can't expect him to change all at once," admitted Mrs. Malintop, "but now that he's got rid of his fortune I suppose he'll quieten down."

"He never told me he'd been a gambler," remarked Mrs. Limmering in pained surprise.

"Don't be silly, Ma," said Miss Limmering sharply. "Mrs. Malintop didn't say he played cards, and anyhow——" she eyed her hostess suspiciously. The refusal of that lady to reveal the source of her information dissatisfied Miss Limmering, and her own commonsense told her that Mr. Cherral's behaviour hardly pointed to a vicious period in his past.

Mrs. Thridderley was reconsidering her decision to invite this notorious spendthrift to her house; perhaps he might lead Mr. Thridderley into those same evils which had brought him, a broken rake and prodigal, to their township.

Mrs. Limmering suddenly made up her mind and asked the question which was troubling both Mrs. Thridderley and herself. "Do you think he's dangerous?"

"Well, there's a lot to consider——"

A knock at the door interrupted Mrs. Malintop in her recital—"You go, Jean"—she paused to listen for the voice at the front door with raised eyebrow and attentive ear. "It's Mrs. Wemby."

Mrs. Wemby entered hastily and greeted the company with her accustomed flow. "So glad to find you all here. I said to myself as I came along, *Well*, if I've time after seeing Mrs. Malintop I *must* see Mrs. Thridderley. And here you all are, and Mrs. Limmering too, providential, really, I call it. And I've got news for you too. As I came along I said to myself, *Well*, dear Mrs. Malintop likes a bit of news now and then and it's not often I can give it, but to-day—Oh, thank you, Jean. Yes, it's just right——"

The essential remarks having been made by the appropriate persons, the new arrival subsided from the position of a newcomer to that of one of the circle.

"We were just talking about Mr. Cherral," explained Mrs. Thridderley.

Mrs. Wemby became obviously excited. "Mr. Cherral? Of course. I was saying to myself as I came along, Now, there's Mr. Cherral, and no one's heard much about him yet, but *I* know——"

Mrs. Malintop, aware that her friend was one who multiplied words exceedingly, hastened to continue her narration.

"But though he's not rich *now*——"

"He used to be," exclaimed Mrs. Wemby dramatically. "Very rich. And he lived in Melbourne. In the very best part of it——"

The others regarded her with amazement, and Mrs. Malintop herself, astonished and annoyed, cut in with a hard smile, "Really, Mrs. Wemby, you're very interesting to-day."

But Mrs. Wemby, too accustomed to snubs from her present hostess to notice a little rap on the knuckles, and much elated for the moment at the thought of holding private information, sat bomb-proof against the dangerous lady of the house. "Oh, I told you I had a bit of news to-day, and Mr. Cherral——"

Mrs. Malintop yawned, then smiled. "I thought you had some *news*, Mrs. Wemby," she suggested.

Mrs. Wemby, disarmed at a blow, sat with round eyes and open mouth. "Of course," she said feebly, "news soon gets about, but I didn't think this had reached you yet. It can't have. You can't know that Mr. Cherral was rich? So rich? Oh, excessive!——"

Mrs. Malintop yawned again. "Ask them,"—she indicated her other visitors.

"Of course we all know that Mr. Cherral was well off before he came here," said Mrs. Thriggerley gently.

"Mrs. Malintop's just told us so," explained Mrs. Limmering.

The lack of tact shown in this observation annoyed both Mrs. Malintop and Mrs. Thriggerley.

"Was this all your news, Mrs. Wemby?" asked Mrs. Malintop.

"Yes, only about Mr. Cherral. I can't think how you came to know it." Mrs. Wemby, much dashed by the manner in which her cherished morsel had been received, made a last rally before sinking from her unwonted post of leadership to that of an admiring and instructed listener. "Perhaps you don't know that he belongs to nice people, really nice people——"

"I was just going to tell them," interrupted Mrs. Malintop.

Mrs. Wemby revived instantly: the circle did not know all. In the excitement of the moment she pitted herself against one whom she had hitherto regarded with extorted admiration and subservient dread. All born historians of their

neighbours' affairs will agree that the highest art lies somewhat in selection, but chiefly in suggestion. Mrs. Malintop herself believed that one should tell news by casting forth, at judicious intervals, trifles conforming in various degrees to the truth, rising slowly by artistic selection, arrangement, and invention, from small to greater, the interstices, so to say, of the creation being filled in with suggestion, criticism and innuendo. Only the true artist can understand the feelings of this wronged lady when she found her tale of their township's newcomer, launched on principles laid down by the highest authorities, interrupted before well under way by one who knew nothing save the true facts. The Mistress of Debate smiled pityingly at her most backward pupil, one hopelessly ignorant of picking, choosing, and working up to a climax; one whose invention was non-existent, who knew nought of the delicious skill and deadly effect of invidious hint and apt comment, whose method of retailing personal information, in fact, consisted in blurting out a disconnected and unsatisfying agglomeration of crude particulars.

"Mr. Cherral," volunteered Mrs. Malintop lazily, "comes of an excellent family."

"Oh, very good people," exclaimed Mrs. Wemby in a voice that for her was assertive, if not quarrelsome. "Very good people."

The duel had begun.

"Who are they?" demanded Mrs. Limmering, looking puzzled.

Mrs. Wemby gasped for breath preparatory to replying in full, but Mrs. Malintop delicately forestalled her. "He really is well connected," she admitted.

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Thriggerley, with that vigilant suspicion of any claim to gentle birth which all leaders of exclusive society are compelled to exercise. "Well connected?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Mrs. Wemby. "Oh, quite! And as I was going to say, but really one doesn't seem to have a chance this afternoon, there's always a chance to talk when you've nothing to say, isn't there now? But when there's something really important——"

"But what do you mean?" asked Mrs. Thriggerley, as the narrator paused for another supply of air. "Do you know his people? Are they squatters or what? And well-connected?"

Mrs. Malintop fired another shot. "With people at Home," she observed, with an air of studious detachment.

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Wemby. "I was just going to say that. With people in England." She met Mrs. Malintop's mocking glance and corrected herself hastily. "I mean at Home."



"Oh," said Mrs. Thridderley in a relieved voice. "At Home?" This statement, she felt, might satisfy her rigid censorship of the credentials of all who aspired to climb to the heights of the society where she ruled.

Mrs. Malintop, spurred by the necessity of outdoing the erring Mrs. Wemby, added carelessly, "A title somewhere in the background, I fancy."

Mrs. Wemby stared at her.

"A title?" said Mrs. Limmering in the hushed tone of a democrat pronouncing this word of mystery, charm, and power. "Will he be a Lord?"

To be taken literally annoys the imaginatively artistic temperament.

"How absurd!" Mrs. Malintop's tone was sharp. "Mr. Cherral has nothing to do with the title though related to it, as I happen to know. And apart from that, of course, *any* well-connected people at Home are *some* relation to titled people."

Mrs. Limmering, obviously disappointed, returned with silent dignity to her cake.

"Well," said Mrs. Wemby weakly, "I didn't know about his going to be a Lord some day. But," she continued, screwing her courage up and once more joining battle, "he lived very quietly. Just his father and him. Though they had such a house. Beautiful!"

"A fine mansion in the most expensive and exclusive part of St. Kilda," Mrs. Malintop interpreted.

The battle grew hotter.

"They had such a lot of servants too. Crowds! And——"

"Six," explained Mrs. Malintop, "including a groom and a gardener."

"But they didn't entertain much. Oh, hardly at all. Only the best people. The very best. They were very particular. Oh, quite! Really you know when——"

"The Cherrals," said Mrs. Malintop, speaking as an old friend of the family, "were certainly very exclusive."

"Oh, excessive!" corroborated Mrs. Wemby.

"But," continued Mrs. Malintop, ignoring the support offered to her, "I don't know that we should blame them for that."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Thridderley. "Very proper, I think."

"In these days too," added Mrs. Limmering vaguely.

"I'm very glad to hear it, I'm sure."

"Judges and Government House," continued Mrs. Wemby, "they knew them both. And were there often too."

In her happy ignorance she deemed Mrs. Malintop defeated.

"And I can tell you why he came here too. He——"

"Of course," said Mrs. Malintop, "the reason is very well known."

"I don't know," observed Mrs. Limmering, "but I suppose he came here to be a lawyer."

"Oh, do tell us, Mrs. Wemby," said Jean.

"Yes, yes, Jean. Of course I'm going to. Well, it seems Mr. Cherral, the father I mean, not the young Mr. Cherral *we* know, the father's dead now, I'll tell you all about him directly, he had so much money, the father I mean, that he didn't bother looking after it himself. He left it all to his lawyer. And so—and so——"

"Probably Mrs. Wemby means what I was going to tell you before she came," suggested Mrs. Malintop. "Old Mr. Cherral, it seems, was too high and mighty to do anything for himself and left all his business affairs to his solicitor."

"Yes, yes," chimed in Mrs. Wemby eagerly, "that's it, his solicitor, he left his business, as Mrs. Malintop says, to him, and the solicitor put it all into banks and things, so extraordinary that a bank shouldn't be quite safe, I think, who can we trust if not a bank? I always say you know we talk about as safe as a bank and——"

"This is very entertaining," said Mrs. Malintop brightly.

"No, no," exclaimed Mrs. Wemby, "never mind banks. I want to tell you about Mr. Cherral."

"Why don't you then?" demanded Miss Limmering.

"I'll tell you now," said Mrs. Wemby, beginning to be somewhat flustered, a state of mind unfavourable to coherency of speech, "if you'll only let me. But you all interrupt so. So upsetting. Dear me, where was I? Oh, yes, about the banks. Yes, and then when the boom burst the year before last and everybody was ruined, all Mr. Cherral's money, the father I mean, all his money was lost, every penny, and the banks took his lovely house. I don't know why. But she said they did——"

"Who said they did?" asked Miss Limmering sharply.

Mrs. Malintop sat up suddenly.

"Oh, don't interrupt," exclaimed the agitated Mrs. Wemby. "I'll tell you directly. But really you put me out so. Wasn't I talking about the banks selling his house, Jean? Yes, a shame I call it, I don't see when they kept all his money how they could take his house too, but they did, and old Mr. Cherral, the father you know, it killed him, he just lay down and died——"

This was too direct for Mrs. Malintop. There would be nothing to tell soon. "I don't mind you saying anything you like, of course, Mrs. Wemby, but remember young Mr. Cherral lives in our town now, and we shouldn't say anything about him that's not *quite* correct."

Mrs. Wemby paused in her tale, and grew more confused. "What was it, Mrs. Malintop? Really, there's something the matter this afternoon I think, everything seems to be going wrong. And I have it on the best authority and——"

Mrs. Thridderley realized that she must, as the social leader of the others present, make a stand against such idle words, and incidently obtain the desired news. She turned to Mrs. Malintop. "I wish you would tell us what you were going to just before Mrs. Wemby came in."

But Mrs. Malintop realized that most of the main available facts were made common property, and the afternoon was spoiled. "Mrs. Wemby seems to know all about it," she said carelessly. "I hope she's not misleading you. It doesn't seem to agree with what I know, but of course we can't say where she's picked it up."

"But it's quite true," cried Mrs. Wemby despairingly. "Every word. She told me about Mr. Cherral's lawyer too; he committed suicide though he was a rich man, and often used to be out at Mr. Cherral's, and they were great friends; he was an Englishman too. They wouldn't let anybody except English people come to their house. I can't think of his name though she mentioned it this morning. Who was it again? I find names so confusing."

"But what about Mr. Cherral?" asked Mrs. Thridderley.

"Mrs. Wemby's telling you in her own way," answered Mrs. Malintop coolly.

Mrs. Wemby, pierced by her enemy's mocking expression and badly crippled by her last gibe, displayed much agitation, which the others regarded with cold eyes. "Where was I, Jean? I never could remember names. Really I never could, but I know it's all true because Jenny told me herself when she came round with the fruit this morning."

"Who's Jenny?" asked every eye save that of Mrs. Malintop, which spoke of a feeling other than curiosity. Miss Limmering translated the general expression into words.

"Oh, Jenny?" Mrs. Wemby answered. "Mrs. Allsop, you know; she lives out at Sandy Creek, she married a farmer there, and he has an orchard, and I often get fruit from her; it's cheaper than the shops, you know, and it's often better too, and——"

"But how can she know anything about Mr. Cherral?" asked Miss Limmering.

"Oh, her young sister's with her now and she used to be one of the servants at old Mr. Cherral's, housemaid I think, and when they had to give up all their servants she stayed with them to the very last, and she couldn't find a place so she came up to stay with Jenny for a while and——"

"Oh, yes, Aunt," said Jean. "Of course I remember. That must be the woman who was here this morning, and you gave her a cup of tea in the kitchen though we were all so busy."

Mrs. Malintop, with lifted brows and prim smile, gazed out of the window.

## CHAPTER III

NORWOOD CHERRAL had lived in England till he was fifteen, then, at the stern order of a celebrated physician, father and son had removed to the sunnier climate of Australia. But Mr. Cherral, believing that all good was centred in England and the English, resented his exile bitterly, and held a deep contempt for everything colonial. Norwood, an only child deprived of his mother at birth, accepted these sentiments readily, and the father's frequent words, "Never forget that you are an Englishman and a Cherral," sounded in the ears of the son as an almost sacred charge. No warning against such an upbringing ever came from the small, exclusive, and English circle who found admission to the Cherral home, and Mr. Cherral's ample means enabled him, by engaging private tutors wherever possible, to complete his son's education without subjecting him overmuch to the tainting influences of association with Colonials. In due course Norwood graduated as Bachelor of Arts at the Melbourne University, and thereafter, as the tradition of the Cherral family ran that the eldest son of each generation should be called to the Bar, he secured the degree of Bachelor of Laws, though of course without any intention of practising.

Hardly had he completed his University career when that financial panic known as the bursting of the land boom swept over Victoria. Many people of wealth found themselves beggared. In one short but terrible period of time, Norwood endured the loss of his father's fortune, then the loss of that father himself, and then the disappearance one by one of his father's friends as ruin spread wider; finally he saw the spectre of actual want advancing swiftly upon him.

Scornfully ignorant of business matters, he accepted without question the advice of the legal firm that had attended to his father's affairs: for Norwood to earn a living in Melbourne just then, they said, was impossible, but they had heard through business sources of a solicitor at a distant place called Cooeville, who was anxious to sell his connection: they recommended Norwood to inspect on the spot, and, if at all satisfied, to purchase and commence practice at once.

All places outside Melbourne were alike to Norwood: as soon as possible he had started on his first journey into inland Victoria to this unknown township. And when after a slow and tiring railway journey of ten hours, and a restless night at the Cooeville Hotel, he called next morning upon Mr. Steggs, the solicitor desiring to sell, Norwood had found him worse than anything he could have imagined. Short, grossly

fat, his round red face never varying in its expression of anxious vacuity; his small grey eyes never meeting his companion's, but always staring fixedly over one's shoulder, the tweed suit frayed round the ankles, spotted and stained in front, faded, dusty and ill-fitting all over; the dust-white boots; the never-removed hat—a square-topped boxer, once black, now grey by use and dust, and so deeply stained in front as to make one think the wearer exuded oil; all these things, together with the undying fragrance of stale drink, which appeared to embalm the man against all change, roused in Norwood a strong feeling of disgust.

Mr. Steggs at first had haggled for impossible and always altering prices and conditions: at last he had given way with a gust of irritation, had accepted the modest offer made, and Norwood found himself settled at Cooeville, the possessor of a practice of microscopic proportions, with Mr. Steggs, under contract to remain with him for two months without pay, and an office boy of tender years, as the companions of his official hours.

#### CHAPTER IV

THE Cooeville climate was not doing its best to please its new resident, the spring rains had failed and summer set in fiercely on poorly grassed land, on thin and stunted crops, and on sheep and cattle impoverished by scanty herbage. Farmers, gazing on their undeveloped harvest, talked about "the drought" and decided that much of the cropped land was not worth stripping. On farm after farm, instead of the happy owner shouting to his horses as he drove the reaper and binder, cutting the tall sheaves of hay, or as the stripper and winnower snatched heavy, well-filled heads from bending stalks, one could see thin stock fed over paddocks that had been sown in confident hope, then watched with eyes that grew each week more anxious.

The rough country round Cooeville became a stony desert, grass there was none, shade there was little, the eucalyptus scrub kept alive but put forth no new growth, the scorched earth whitened with pain, the dusty trees grew grey with sudden age, and it was still only January.

So far Norwood had avoided meeting people as much as possible: his predecessor, who had covenanted to introduce and recommend him to all clients, had apparently no clients left. The last few weeks of solitude at the office, broken only by the husky note of Mr. Steggs and the cheerful treble of the office boy, had allowed him to emerge from the dazed condition of mind that had oppressed him for many months.

He commenced to adjust his ideas again and to look into the future. It surely could not be true that he was to live for the rest of his life in this wretched dusty little village, with its absence of all the benefits of civilization, nor could he of course associate on friendly terms with the inhabitants, an unpleasant collection apparently, of tradespeople, publicans, and labourers. To him, plunged in thought, came Mr. Steggs. "Look here," he said, gazing at the wall behind Norwood, "this won't do. Nobody been in at all?"

"No."

Mr. Steggs shook his head. "All busy finishing up harvesting—if there's anything to harvest—or they'll be carting water. They'll come with a rush directly. Look here, you know that cheque of yours?"

"Yes."

"Well, it was on the Melbourne office of the Wales."

"Yes."

"Have you opened an account at the bank here?"

"No."

"Well," said Mr. Steggs, shifting his gaze to another part of the wall, "it put me to some trouble; and delay and I had to pay exchange and—er—look here," said Mr. Steggs, with almost an expression appearing on his face, "have you five bob in cash about you? I'll pay you back to-morrow. First thing to-morrow. Thanks. Thanks. I'll see you to-morrow—just now—little matter of business"—and Mr. Steggs, ascertaining that his hat was jammed on tightly, left hurriedly to attend to the little matter of business aforesaid at the Cooeville Hotel.

Mr. Steggs' hat was never removed from his head save in court, and, though this was disputed, in bed; when other men, stirred by emotion, sprang to their feet, waved their arms, or shook their fists, Mr. Steggs grasped his hat with both hands and settled it more firmly on his head.

It occurred to Norwood that he would do well to accept Mr. Steggs' advice concerning his bank account. He had to call that morning at the hairdresser's, he would go to the bank immediately after.

The barber, engaged in shaving a customer, remarked, "You're next," and stropped his razor briskly. A well-built man of fair complexion, sitting in the saloon with legs stretched out, hands in pockets and hat tilted over his eyes, glanced up at Norwood through thick rimless eyeglasses and said, "Good morning."

Norwood had always resented being addressed by strangers, and this fellow was obviously objectionable; his attitude was sprawling, negligent, and improper; to keep one's hands in one's pockets was giving way to an ill-bred habit; to wear one's hat over one's eyes was as bad as to wear it on the back

of one's head; obviously he was a mere barber's saloon lounge. Norwood answered stiffly, "I have not the pleasure," and turned away, thereby missing the expressions, first of astonishment, then of anger, finally of amusement, which flitted across the face of the lounge, who, without changing his attitude, said simply, "No, the pleasure is mine."

Norwood looked round in surprise. Could this man have met him somewhere? Several strangers had been introduced to him by Steggs in the street, surely he had not been discourteous.

"Er—how?" he asked. "Do you know me?"

"No," answered the other as simply as before. "That is my pleasure."

The barber coughed. The man in the operating chair chuckled and remarked. "Oh, my God! Steady, Doc."

Norwood flushed hotly. He felt that he would be losing caste to retort upon such a fellow. "I shall come back when you are disengaged," he said sharply to the barber, and, without looking again at the insulting lounge, he left the shop.

At the Cooeville branch of the Bank of New South Wales, always referred to locally simply as "the Wales," he found to his surprise that the teller, to whom he mentioned his wish to transfer his account from Melbourne to Cooeville, knew him at once.

"Very glad to have you, Mr. Cherral. Very glad indeed. You'd better see the Manager, Mr. Cherral. He'd like to see you. He's disengaged now, Mr. Cherral."

He knocked at the door of the Manager's room and bade Norwood go in.

The Manager, Mr. Allingham, looked up with stern interrogation.

"I merely wish to open an account here," said Norwood, "but the clerk referred me to you."

The Manager also recognized Norwood at once.

"You're coming to us, Mr. Cherral? Ah, I knew it. As soon as I saw you something made me say. 'He's mine.' Sit down."

Mr. Allingham, of middle age and medium build, bore himself with that gravity of carriage belonging of right to the member of a great financial corporation: though physically unbowed by the burden of his office he realized its responsibilities and met each day's duties with a resolute and pre-determined earnestness which nothing save one of his own rare jests could dissolve into the flippancy of laughter. When he discovered in answer to pertinent enquiries that Norwood had a reasonable sum to transfer to his credit, had a three years' lease of Steggs' office, and intended to remain at Cooeville for the present, he shook Norwood's hesitating hand

and opened out, " You'll make six hundred a year in no time. Have you met the other solicitors yet ? "

Norwood admitted that he had not.

" Ah, you soon will. Dobbsleigh banks at the Victoria. I don't like him, careless, lazy. Can't trust him. But I don't like Lambton either. He's worse than Dobbsleigh. He banks at the Colonial. You must win. I'll think plans over. Leave it to me." Norwood, answering unwillingly and briefly his banker's searching questions, completed his business at last, but Mr. Allingham, accompanying him to the outer office to introduce him to the teller, Mr. Tinner, escorted him to the door, and congratulated him on his choosing to deal with the Bank of New South Wales, " which, as you know, Mr. Cherral, of all the banks and great financial institutions of Australia, is absolutely *the* greatest."

## CHAPTER V

COOEEVILLE offers, to the Cooeville man, several claims for admiring consideration. The population approaches three thousand, and this alone makes it a place of might in political matters; furthermore, the township itself has been constituted into a borough, and can therefore look down with a just complacency on neighbouring townships, which are merely the population centres of shires, a most countrified thing, and so inferior to a borough. As to the actual acreage over the face of the land, Cooeville does not pretend to be a second London, and shops are admittedly as gregarious as human beings, that is why they have all collected together in one street. There really are cross and other streets, with some houses in them, and plenty of vacant blocks ready to be built on when Cooeville grows.

The main street may be rather narrow, and perhaps dusty for five or six months of the year, and the gutters on each side may lack repair or even construction, but, after all, these trifles can be easily explained away. This thoroughfare is not unadorned with the homes of local commerce; a prominent position is taken by the Imperial Emporium: here Mr. Thridderley rules over three kingdoms, he wears the crown, he carries the orb, he sways the sceptre, as Cooeville's chief grocer, ironmonger and timber merchant. Throughout Australia these three callings are frequently combined, the happy owner styling himself a merchant, everyone else calling him a storekeeper. Not far away from the Emporium, Mr. Sackell's roomy but unpretentious shop lifts its rival head and fearlessly, and in trade terms, challenges its great opponent to mortal combat in each of its three divisions.

Cooeville of course requires many other shops, and if you



are curious enough to go up and down the street, you will find them; two more grocers, one of whom, Mr. Trewella, while attending strictly to the grocery business himself, conducts through a manager an undertaking establishment wherein is carried on, in addition to legitimate trade, a little carpentering, paperhanging, painting, and general odd-jobbery; four drapers, all holding clearing sales at alarming sacrifices, among these Manchester House (Sol. Lee & Co.) stands eminent not only for size and display, but, so Mr. Sol Lee frequently asserts, for stock, quality, and cheapness; a little further on is the small but necessary establishment of the chemist (Mr. Geoghegan); past the next corner are the two butchers, the stationer's, and two bootmakers—in fact, so many other shops that they almost fill up both sides of the street for no less than two blocks.

So much for trade and commerce. If you seek for Government buildings you will find them all together on one block at the south end; for municipal buildings, look at the Town Hall—not too critically, however; for private offices in the heart of the town you have the somewhat dingy rooms of the two auctioneers, and the quite dingy rooms of the three solicitors, apparently a certain amount of dust and cobwebs must attach to legal matters; for pleasure, the Tennis Court and the Bowling Green; for literature and learning there is in a side street the Mechanics' Institute and Free Library (with a hall for concerts and dances)—never spoken of save as the Mechanics—and in another side street at the northern end of the town an extremely ramshackle building, modestly concealing the mighty power it represents, is the office of the *Cooeeville Chronicle* appearing every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, Charles Michael Goff, Printer and Proprietor; to the financially inclined and thrifty withal three banks extend a welcome; while, to provide for the inevitable reaction towards genial extravagance, nine hotels stock only the best brands.

A stretch a mile or two broad of poor country, quartz gravel and clay, carrying a sparse growth of eucalyptus scrub, rings in the township; but travel from the town through this in any direction and you come to better land, and farmhouses scattered widely apart. In the rocky stretch beside the town lies to the north-east the one mine that pays a dividend—the Ruby; and some two miles to the north-west of Cooeeville itself, Nature, before sinking to the plain beyond, has flung up a hill crowned with twin and stony peaks, known as The Rocks.

Thus does the district warm the heart and call forth the praise of him who considers it physically as a land flowing with the milk and honey of variety, as a land of hill and plain, of arable land and pasture and rock, of arid hill-tops and

fertile flats; and these call, each one to his own, for the miner, the farmer, the grazier, the fruit grower, the vigneron. And whatever of wealth or of reward Nature may give to these for their toil and for their skill, Cooeeville, lying in the sun at the centre of it all, takes due and strengthening toll.

## CHAPTER VI

SATURDAY evening is the night of the week at Cooeeville, all places of business keep open till ten, therefore have the housewives put off all shopping till after tea; the streets are bright with lighted and decorated shop-windows, and though so many of the population are busy behind counters, enough wives and husbands and children and young men and maidens are left free to throng the street, infecting the air with gaiety and keeping Romance alive. The narrow footpaths, hot and dusty under their low verandah roofs, and crowded with perambulators and children and mothers shopping, are not in favour with the young men, in the road it is cooler, the lights shine less garishly, and straight down the main street from Thridderley's corner to the Post Office and back is, on Saturday night, a pleasant stroll. It is more. It is the thing. No young lady would go below the Post Office nor above Thridderley's for anything.

But it must not be assumed that the sense of class distinction so necessary to the higher life is absent in Cooeeville. This important convention has decided, *inter alia*, that though the aristocracy and the lower orders of Cooeeville both stroll at a certain hour of a certain day in a certain portion of a certain street, yet there must be a different starting point for the two classes. The youth of the upper circles do not say to each other, "See yer Saturdee night at the Post Office." The Other People do that. But the young lady of Cooeeville on Saturday night says, "Ma, I think I'll go down to the Mechanics and change the books." There are others changing books, and quite possibly some of the young gentlemen of Cooeeville will be at the Mechanics' Institute or not far from it.

Thus, by one of those unwritten laws graven on the mind instead of printed on the Statute roll, Bill picks up Cis at the Post Office, but Miss Jones, on stepping out of the brilliantly lit Mechanics with a new book, almost runs into Mr. Smith in the gloom outside. Cis would be surprised, and would say so, if Bill did not pick her up, but Miss Jones is naturally, and very properly, astonished at meeting Mr. Smith.

"Is that you, Mr. Smith? I was just changing a book. I must be going home now."

"Going up the main street way?" asks Mr. Smith.

"Well, I could, you know. I think it looks so nice with all the lights, you know."

And the essential proprieties having been observed they go up the main street, and down again, and up again, engaged in eager talk, passing Bill and Cis, who walk together silently, but not less happily.

Through this lamplit tide of youth and passion Norwood was steered by the insistent Allingham, who, bearing an invitation to ten o'clock supper from Mr. Wemby, the postmaster, had pooh-poohed Norwood's refusal and finally argued him into acceptance by pointing out he had informed Mr. Wemby that Mr. Cherral had accepted with pleasure.

"Ah," said he, "here's Wemby. And there's Railthorpe too, you ought to know him. He's Mr. Thridderley's book-keeper." He pulled Norwood round a corner into a side street and introduced him to Mr. Wemby, tall and heavy-bodied, and to Railthorpe, a slightly-built young man with a delicate eager face. Then, alleging that at the bank work was waiting for him, Mr. Allingham left at once.

"And what do you think of this, Mr. Cherral?" asked Mr. Wemby, glancing at the crowded street.

"It is excessively dusty," answered Norwood coldly.

Railthorpe looked at the passing throng and laughed. He had a clear and happy laugh that many people found infectious. "Dusty? Clean mother earth, sterilized by sunshine, impregnated with eucalyptic suggestion, raised by the feet of manhood and the skirt of beauty treading the pathway of civilization."

Mr. Wemby gave a short puzzled laugh. Norwood looked severe. What was this wild talk? Really he could not understand it. He felt relieved when this Mr. Railthorpe, after chatting for a few minutes, left for his work at Mr. Thridderley's.

At the Post Office Norwood was introduced to Mr. Jessington, the Clerk of Courts, to Mrs. Wemby, and to the daughter of the house, the plump and happy-natured Miss Annie.

Mrs. Wemby welcomed Norwood in her own style and with genuine pleasure, while her daughter confided to him at once, "I'm so glad you've taken Mr. Steggs' place. We poor girls want more nice young men here, and, of course, Mr. Steggs!——"

"Yes, indeed," corroborated the mother. "Though you are a lawyer and I'm sorry to see it, Mr. Cherral, yet I must say that Mr. Steggs is not——"

But Miss Wemby thought her mother had other duties, and should not monopolize the new young man. "Now, Ma, you get supper and I'll look after Mr. Cherral. Oh," she added, as a visitor entered, "here's one of my gentlemen friends. It's Mr. Tinner. He's such a dear."

Norwood sat up in his chair with amazement.

"Oh, come now," Mr. Tinner protested, "don't go on like that in front of your Ma, or she might give me my walking ticket. And I know Mr. Cherral well enough, we're old friends, aren't we, Mr. Cherral? Ha, ha!" He shook hands for what seemed to Norwood an extended period and added, "I must look in at your shop"—Norwood could hardly credit his hearing—"next time I'm up the street and have a yarn."

Norwood made no reply.

"All in for supper," called Mr. Wemby. Norwood rose, intending to take Mrs. Wemby in. He waited in vain, and to avoid being left behind followed the others to the dining-room. He glanced, as they sat down, at those present: the host, smiling happily on his guests, then frowning heavily as he tested the edge of the carving knife with his thumb; his wife looking over the table carefully lest anything should have been forgotten; Miss Wemby gazing across the table at the mirror which backed the sideboard, adjusting the neck of her demi-toilet blouse; Mr. Tinner talking rapidly; Mr. Jessington serenely busy drawing corks.

Not yet informed of all matters of local import, Norwood did not know that Mr. Wemby was celebrated for his Saturday night supper. It was the event of the week to him, he delighted in guests old and new, and in seeing his friends at his table, on which, for that evening's refreshment, there lay a ham, a huge cold roast of beef, cheese, a large bowl of lettuce salad, two bottles of pickles, bread and butter, and a large array of bottles of beer.

A rapping at the front door called Mrs. Wemby away, she returned with two new guests, Mrs. Malintop and Mr. Cunder.

"So glad to find you all at home, dear," declared Mrs. Malintop to Mrs. Wemby. "I came to-night because I felt sure you'd be in. No, no, Mr. Wemby. If I'm late I don't deserve to sit near the head of the table, with you. This'll do for little me," and she pulled up a chair and seated herself beside Norwood.

Mrs. Wemby glanced helplessly at her husband. Mr. Wemby, in awe of Mrs. Malintop's powers, smiled anxiously and feebly in reply. Mr. Jessington, catching his host's eye, coughed solemnly, and observing, "In these times of stress, Wemby"—placed a glass of sparkling lager in his friend's hand. Mr. Wemby declared that he would drink Mr. Jessington's health, and did so.

Mr. Cunder's reply to Norwood's brief greeting was the abrupt demand, "Want to make a fortune?" Mr. Cunder made up for a small figure by his big voice, his remarkably upright carriage, and his dominating manner.

"I beg your pardon?" said Norwood.

"I say. Do you want to make a fortune? Then buy

Rubies at eighty-four." Mr. Cunder spoke with a shortness which verged on ferocity.

"It's the mine, Mr. Cherral," explained Mr. Wemby. "Our big mine here. The Ruby. You could buy shares four years ago at ten shillings, and now you can't get one under four pounds."

"Guineas," asserted Mr. Cunder loudly. "Sold at four guineas to-day." And according to his wont he stared with bold challenging at his audience, gave his neat and grey and waxed moustache a quick twist, and added, with a dark significance of manner, "You wait."

Norwood, though unused to heavy suppers, had taken some beef to save comment. The talk became general and louder. The three ladies were deep in discussion over their lemon squashes and cake, Mrs. Malintop occasionally making some laughing remark to Norwood. Presently she began to give him more attention. "I haven't seen you at any evenings, Mr. Cherral, you don't seem to go out much, but I suppose that's because you've been—oh"—the long drawn breath, accompanied by the raised eyebrows and sparkling smile, gave Norwood a feeling of strong aversion—"ever so busy at the office since you came."

"I did not say that," replied Norwood stiffly.

"But you bought Mr. Steggs' practice, didn't you?"

Norwood admitted that was so.

"Poor Mr. Steggs. He's been going down hill for—oh—ever so long. Perhaps he didn't have much business left."

"Mr. Cherral," interrupted Mr. Tinner, "if you've done flirting with Mrs. Malintop"—Norwood started angrily, the maturity of the lady's years, the unbecoming youthfulness of her manner and dress, and her frequent and expressive smile filled him with dislike and mistrust. And to be spoken of as flirting with her! And by a mere acquaintance! He gazed severely at Mr. Tinner who smiled in reply, and winked with exquisite knowingness.

"Be quiet, Mr. Tinner, and don't interrupt," commanded Mrs. Malintop.

The obedient Tinner, casting another glance of great significance at Norwood, turned his attention and interest to a second help of cold roast beef and ham. But before Mrs. Malintop had time to proceed much further in such ways as Nature directed her, Mrs. Wemby claimed her attention, and Mr. Tinner seized his chance and returned to the attack.

"You come from the metropolis, Mr. Cherral?"

Norwood admitted this, and Mr. Wemby, turning from a harangue by Mr. Cunder with dazed relief, kindly confirmed Norwood's answer.

"I suppose," continued Mr. Tinner, putting down the jar of pickled onions in which he had been spearing, "you've

been accustomed to something better than cold beef for supper?"

Mr. Wemby appeared to find nothing offensive in this query, and waited with anxious eye for his new guest's verdict.

"If you say there's anything better than cold roast beef," said Mr. Jessington, "I, speaking as the Full Court"—Mr. Wemby after some thought enjoyed this greatly—"dismiss your application to be considered an Englishman. With costs."

"I confess," said Norwood, "that I am not an authority on suppers."

"I am," asserted Mr. Cunder. "Do you say cakes and tarts? Rubbish. Fit for ladies. I speak as a man of the world. Beef."

"What I like about cold roast beef and pickles," said Mr. Wemby, frowning anxiously, as was his custom when in the throes of thought, "is that it goes so well with beer."

Norwood made no reply, and under cover of the general conversation on the topic of beef with beer, Mrs. Malintop turned to him again. "I used to know Mr. Steggs very well once, but of course of late years no one could have anything to do with him."

"Indeed!"

"They say Mr. Dobbsleigh's been getting all his clients?" She paused so determinedly for an answer that Norwood bestirred himself to give one.

"Indeed!" he repeated.

"Yes, indeed. Do you know Mr. Dobbsleigh?"

"We have not met yet."

"Oh, Mr. Dobbsleigh's the chief lawyer here. But of course he's not without faults. You'll be glad to know that, won't you?"

Norwood said nothing.

"Of course Mr. Dobbsleigh would have got more of Mr. Steggs' clients, but you know how careless he is." She paused. "Don't you?"

"I really cannot say."

"When you meet him I'm sure you'll like him. So good-natured. No one's enemy but his own."

Supper was over now, and Norwood was wondering whether he might go when he observed Mr. Wemby rising heavily, while the others, to his surprise, rapped on the table with their glasses and gave an occasional "Hear, hear."

Mr. Wemby smiled upon his guests. He then fixed his eye vacantly on Norwood, scowled horribly in the agonies of thought, and began, "Ladies and gentlemen. As this is the first table"—he paused.

"Hear. Ha, ha!" observed Mr. Tinner.

"I mean," the orator continued, "the first time Mr. Cherral"

—Norwood, beneath his impassive exterior felt astonishment and dismay seize upon him—"has—ah—graced our board—"

"Hear," repeated Mr. Tinner.

"How nice, Pa!" said Miss Wemby with a luxurious sigh, and she gazed fondly at her father and at Norwood alternately.

Mr. Wemby considered his last flight worthy of repetition.—"Has graced the board, our board, I mean—and I'm proud to think we are the first he has honoured—I think it only right, ladies and gentlemen, to assure him of his welcome among us, and—ah—to extend to him the hand of—of—the welcome hand in fact." He paused again and lengthily. "And—and to wish him long life and prosperity in our town. I call on you," said Mr. Wemby, breathing freely as he saw the end in sight, "to drink to our new fellow-townsmen. Long life and happiness to our new fellow-townsmen, Mr. Cherral."

A medley of table-pounding, and cries of "Hear, hear," "Mr. Cherral," "Our new fellow-townsmen," greeted the conclusion of the speech, then all but the ladies rose, Mr. Wemby, oozing gratification and coy pride at every pore, glanced round and asked, "What is he?" whereupon the others, fixing their gaze on the startled Norwood, burst into song—"For he's a jolly good fellow," they chanted.

Norwood had mechanically risen when the others did, but was at once pressed down by Mr. Cunder who remarked, "Not yet." Ominous words! What did they mean? Norwood had never made a speech in his life. Did they expect him to? It was monstrous of Mr. Wemby to behave so. Proposing toasts at a private table!

"Which nobody can deny," shouted the others. As they drank and seated themselves the rappings broke out again with cries of "Mr. Cherral," "Speech, speech."

Norwood, vigorously assisted by Mr. Cunder, rose, and stood with palpitating heart, empty mind and choked voice. Mr. Tinner quite unintentionally came to the rescue. "Now for a little metropolitan eloquence," he observed, and sat back to listen at ease. The absurdity of the remark steadied Norwood; he heard himself say quietly, "I think what you call metropolitan eloquence, if I possessed it, would be very much out of place this evening, but I thank you all for your—er—kindness." He sat, down and a hearty "Hear, hear," from the head of the table rounded off his reply.

"Short and sweet," said Miss Wemby, casting an admiring glance at Norwood, while Mrs. Malintop remarked with a smile not quite so pleasant, "You're too modest, Mr. Cherral, you had the chance to make a big speech and a good impression."

Mr. Cunder here coughed importantly. Mr. Wemby hastily glanced round the table. "Glasses charged, gentlemen?"

There was a hasty filling of tumblers and sitting back comfortably, while Mr. Cunder fired impressive half-minute coughs with an air of holding so much wisdom within him that he would infallibly burst if not allowed to let some out.

"All ready, Mr. Cunder," hinted the host.

Mr. Cunder rose stiffly, not from years, though he was of middle age, but partly from a normal dignity, and partly from a true conception of his duties to the world.

"Ladies"—he paused and regarded sternly Miss Wemby, who was smiling at Norwood. Miss Wemby hastily turned her attention to the right quarter. "Mr. Cherral, Gentlemen," Mr. Cunder's manner in conversation was abrupt, if not dictatorial, his delivery when speech-making was staccato—indeed, occasionally menacing. He flung out each sentence as he would have flung a stone at a dog. "The important toast. Committed to my charge to-night. 'Success to Cooeville'" (Mr. Wemby, "Hear, hear"; Mr. Cunder, "Order"), "I say. This important toast." He glanced defiantly at his audience and tweaked his moustache. "You all know me here. I stand to what I say. You can't be in my place and not know all the business of Cooeville. There's a big drought on. Well, what about it? It'll send some men under. I could tell you who. I know. I could tell you things. Make you open your eyes. But I learn them in confidence. In confidence. I can't tell you. No, I can't tell you. But they'll come true. Some day. And then you'll see. You wait," he tweaked his moustache again with an air of profound mystery. "You wait. We've only one mine paying dividends here now. How many will we have in ten years? In five years? You wait." Here Miss Wemby yawned and smiled at Mr. Tinner, who responded in kind. Mr. Cunder stiffened his already military bearing, gazed with intense indignation, first at Miss Wemby and then at his host, jerked out, "Success to Cooeville," and sat down rigid with amazement, with anger, with importance, and with the knowledge of those profound secrets which he could hint at but not reveal.

Mr. Wemby soothed the speaker's feelings with hearty applause, and leaving his place at the head of the table he sat beside him and was engaging him in converse when the back door leading into the kitchen was burst open, and a gentlemen unknown to Norwood entered somewhat noisily. "Ha, ha!" laughed the newcomer, stumbling over a chair in his road. "Ha, ha! How do, Mrs. Wemby. 'Scuse me coming this way, but the back door was nearer and I knew the party wouldn't be finished yet. Wemby, old man, how goes it?"

"Why, Hoip," said Mr. Wemby, rising with manifest



pleasure, "I hunted you up, but Mrs. Hoip said you were away on a Land Board and wouldn't be back till late."

"Correct, old boy," declared Mr. Hoip, hanging up his hat by putting it on Mr. Wemby's head. "Just back now and thought I'd look in here. How are you, Annie? Good evening, Mrs. Malintop. My word, Annie, you're got up to kill all right. Who're you after now?"

Fate chose this moment for Mr. Wemby to introduce Norwood and the visitor. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Cherral," said Mr. Hoip, shaking hands vigorously though Norwood had merely bowed. "I hope you're one of us. Eh, Jessington, is he one of us? Is he, Wemby?"

"Well—er——" Mr. Wemby was evidently much disconcerted—er—really, Hoip, old man—er——"

"Have a drink," said Mr. Cunder with loud abruptness.

"Well, I don't mind if I do," declared Mr. Hoip laughing, and making a place for himself at the table beside Miss Wemby. "Don't move, Annie. Dear me," said Mr. Hoip, regarding a spreading stain on the tablecloth and Miss Wemby's skirt. "Did I upset that glass of beer?"

"It wouldn't be Mr. Hoip if he didn't knock something over, would it, Mrs. Wemby?" asked the smiling Mrs. Malintop.

"It doesn't matter, Mr. Hoip," Miss Wemby assured him. "There, my dress is all right now. Sit a little more that way and I'll come too. Ma, give me a clean glass for Mr. Hoip, will you?"

Mrs. Wemby, with smiling forgiveness, mopped up the mess on the tablecloth, produced a glass, and filled it. It was evident that Mr. Hoip was a favourite in the Wemby household; why, Norwood could not imagine. But if Mr. Hoip, viewed from Norwood's standpoint, was a hopeless offender, he remained delightfully unaware of it. Accepting with voluble gratitude a full plate of beef and ham from Mr. Wemby and the pickles from Mr. Jessington, he set to work in business-like fashion, a proceeding which in no way interrupted his talk. "Just back from a thirty-mile drive, Mrs. Wemby. I suppose the wind fanned that cinder to life again, eh, Wemby? Let's see if I can put it out." He emptied his glass, cocked his head on one side, listened intently, and declared, "I can hear it sizzling."

"Try a little more," suggested Mr. Wemby, passing a bottle. Mr. Hoip, protesting in words and acquiescing in action, turned his attention once more to the solids.

"Mr. Hoip," said Mr. Wemby addressing Norwood, and making every preparation for a hearty laugh, "always says when he wants a drink that he's got a cinder inside him. Then he tries to put it out."

Mr. Wemby, Mr. Hoip, and Mr. Tinner honoured this joke

to a degree that Norwood thought excessive. Mr. Cunder, apparently engaged in converse with himself, frowned solemnly. Mr. Jessington, asking permission from the ladies, lit a cigar. As soon as Mr. Hoip, who was no dilatory trencher-man, had finished, Norwood rose to go. Mr. Wemby, greatly perturbed, protested warmly; the evening, it appeared, was just about to begin, "a little music, Mr. Cherral, surely you care for music? I—I—really I don't know what we'd do without music. Annie's fond of it too, and as Mr. Jessington sings tenor it's fortunate I'm a bass."

"What about me, old man?" demanded Mr. Hoip.

Mr. Wemby in reply patted him on the back. "In some things, Hoip, you—you excel, really you do. But in singing"—Mr. Wemby failing to find words sufficiently innocent patted Mr. Hoip's back again, and besought him to have a little more lager.

"If you care for music at all," said Mr. Jessington to Norwood, abandoning his usual humorous gravity and speaking with friendly heartiness, "you'll stay. Wemby's almost a genius at it. I hope you're a music lover and can sing. Can you take a part by any chance?"

Norwood returned a brief and negative reply and advanced to Mrs. Wemby to say good-bye. Mrs. Malintop made a move at the same time. "You needn't trouble to see me home, Mr. Cherral, it's out of your way I'm afraid." Norwood felt that, after this, courtesy compelled him to volunteer for escort service that he had not even thought of before, but his feelings towards the lady were not sweetened, and when Mr. Tinner, shaking his head at them, remarked that Melbourne men could certainly go the pace, Norwood's manner, cold before, became frigid.

His replies to the lady's queries during the moonlit walk home together were brief, bald, and uninforming.

## CHAPTER VII

MR. THRIDDERLEY thoroughly realized, as a good business man, his own importance in this world: indeed, the statement need not be limited to this world only, for Mr. Thridderley paid for two sittings at the Church of England, sent his wife to it once every Sunday, and allowed himself to be elected a vestryman. Having thus treated the Unseen Power with financial liberality and with proxy courtesy, he felt that his claim for proper recognition by that Power was almost strong enough to be legally enforceable.

Naturally Mr. Thridderley carried what he deemed sound commercial principles into his business life. To merely buy groceries, ironmongery, and timber, at wholesale prices,

and sell them at retail, was, he considered, to manifest a painful incompetence: the true secret lay in selling on credit, taking risks, and getting men into one's power. The task was not difficult, for Cooeville was an agricultural district, and the farmers as a class paid their store bills once a year—when the wheat cheque came in. Often the payment was just something on account, so that certainly for eleven months of the year, perhaps for whole years in succession, a decent man with a farm behind him was not out of his storekeeper's debt.

The born General, according to Mr. Thriddlerley's views, should make no move till farmer Brown's account is more than he can possibly pay on demand. That day arrives. It is the appointed hour. To have the opportunity is, with the Born General, to seize it.

"'Morning, Mr. Brown," said the Born General, "have spuds gone down at all? No, I'm afraid they'll go up instead, they're very scarce. By the way there's something I want to see you about, step into the office, will you?" And in a little room partitioned off at the back of the shop is explained to Farmer Brown the fact that the General has himself to pay cash to his wholesale men; at present he owes his bank a lot, money just now is tight, the bank will advance him no more, he needs it badly, he's compelled to call in a great many accounts—he pauses. Brown protests, Brown explains he can do nothing till harvest, the Born General has by bad luck picked the very worst time of the year to ask for the money, is there no way——?

The General shakes his head. Things are very bad, bad seasons, he thinks, are coming, he must have money or—and after further talk, long and impressive, or curt and threatening, according to the nature and standing of the debtor, the debtor offers such security as he can give, a second mortgage over his land, in bad cases even a lien on his crop or on his wool. "It's only fair you should give me security," explains the General, "I have to give it to the Bank. And as to interest, well, I pay the Bank seven, I'll let you down as light as I can, but we can fill in the security at say ten per cent, and let the account run on."

The documents are signed, farmer Brown breathes thanks at finding himself so well out of a bad scrape, and has ten per cent compound interest with half yearly rests added to his account. He now gives all his custom to the General. He has to. He is supplied with all goods at credit prices, which appear to differ considerably from the advertised cash prices. The General buys Brown's wheat and oats as soon as harvested, though Brown would fain hold till prices rise. It annoys Brown to see himself selling his wheat at two shillings and twopence a bushel and the General getting three shillings

and eightpence for it soon after. But this does not annoy Mr. Thriddlerley, for he is a good business man.

Even with dwellers in the township Mr. Thriddlerley thought the handling of a matter properly should lead to profit. Smith, a struggling man, but sober and hardworking, with a township allotment wants to build a house but can't afford it. The General knows this. It is his duty to know such things. He suggests to Smith that Smith could mortgage the land to him and build a house, the General to supply the timber on credit, and to insure the place, Smith to pay off by degrees. The plan appeals to Smith, he cheerfully signs the fateful documents, builds his house, finds timber has gone up, pays high interest on high prices for years, and finally is compelled to sell the house to the General, though, unfortunately, owing to a slump in the value of house properties just at that time, the General cannot afford to give Smith anything like the amount it cost Smith to build.

Thus does Mr. Thriddlerley, handling various matters properly, fulfil the scriptural statement that unto him that hath shall be given, enlarging his material possessions, and increasing the admiration and respect felt for him by all those who reverence success and all who worship wealth—a not inconsiderable portion of Cooeville's population.

## CHAPTER VIII

AT Mrs. Bowyer's, where he was the sole boarder, Dr. Rafe sat on the edge of the verandah in pleasant late afternoon reverie, his thoughts, entirely professional and wordly, being eminently unsuited to the Sabbatic calm of the first day of the week which lay over Cooeville around him: that typhoid complicated with a heart was turning out a light case after all, the two little domestic events at which he had recently assisted were progressing properly, all his unpaid accounts for the year just over had been sent out a week ago, and cash was coming in well; tea would soon be in, and his chief friend was coming to share it: he sighed happily, at peace with all men.

The distant thump-thump of a big drum and the somewhat quavering notes of a cornet announced to Doctor Rafe that the Salvation Army open-air meeting for that day was concluding. He yawned. Sunday afternoon in Cooeville conduced to intellectual lethargy; the gate clicked and Rafe looked up. His visitor was Mr. Allingham. "'Day, Doctor, don't get up. I'm not sick. Just looked in. You can't object to Sunday visitors because you never go to church.'" He sat down beside Rafe. "I know you like anyone to come straight to the point, Doctor, and so do I. Eh? Even if it

is Sunday, business is sacred to some extent, and we're both sensible men. Eh?"

"Whatever you like," answered the complaisant Rafe.

"So with no shilly-shally I ask you straight—who's your solicitor here?"

"I don't need a solicitor, thank God," replied Rafe, with sincerity apparent in face and voice.

"Quite so. Quite so," replied Mr. Allingham, in a tone that contradicted his words. "You're not very friendly with either of them, are you? Dobbsleigh for instance? Eh?"

"Never mind him, what's the point? What are you driving at?"

"Well, if you don't like Dobbsleigh, what about Lambton? Eh?"

Rafe's feeling of being at peace with all the world began to depart.

"Nice fellow, Lambton. Eh?" persisted Mr. Allingham.

Doctor Rafe's patience vanished, he condemned both Mr. Lambton and Mr. Allingham in strong terms.

Mr. Allingham merely chuckled. "Well, that leaves Mr. Cherral."

"Is that what you came to see me about," demanded Rafe, looking Mr. Allingham squarely in the face.

"Partly, partly that. You're bound to meet Mr. Cherral soon. He's a friend of mine, and anything you can do for him I'll take as a favour. Hullo, here's Mr. Railthorpe coming in; good-day Mr. Railthorpe, come on. I've just finished talking business—think over what I've said, Doctor—good-bye, I know you two want to talk—he'll be an ornament to the town yet, Doctor, help him if you can—Ah, there's Mrs. Bowyer, your tea's in; beautiful evening, Mrs. Bowyer—"

As Mr. Allingham walked away from Mrs. Bowyer's, he congratulated himself on his diplomacy. "Funny fellow Doctor Rafe, grumpy sort of man. He'd never do as a banker," Mr. Allingham shook his head emphatically. "Quite out of place in a position like that, demanding tact—he's no tact at all—a certain amount of ability—he may have a little of that, you can never tell—a diplomatic way of handling delicate matters—fancy the Doctor in a position requiring diplomacy, dear me, how he'd plunge about—a bull in a china shop nothing to it—and, above all, a good manner, a manner to inspire confidence, win respect, and keep it—a good manner, the first essential. Now the Doctor's manner—a genuine sort of fellow Doctor Rafe I dare say, but as to manners—as a banker he'd be a hopeless failure. Quite hopeless. Well, I suppose I'd better write that special letter—"

In Mrs. Bowyer's garden the two friends later that evening were enjoying themselves in different fashion, Doctor Rafe on a garden seat, his hands in his pockets, Railthorpe, who

had just returned from church, lying on the grass in mood still quiet and reverent; they spoke only now and then with long silences between. At last Railthorpe sat up, "I say—you're not asleep are you, Rafe?—I saw Mr. Cherral to-night at a distance."

"He'll make you keep it," answered Rafe.

"Well, that's just it, Rafe. I met him last night with Mr. Wemby, and," continued Railthorpe hesitatingly, "I thought that in his manner to me there was——"

"Well, go on, what was there? A humorous urbanity or a nervous effusiveness?"

Railthorpe had to laugh. "You haven't met him, that's evident. No, but he behaved towards me as though—as though perhaps he objected to me."

"Bosh," said Rafe roughly.

"Well, according to books he would look down on me. He's English you see. And I work in a shop."

"If I bothered to argue against such rot," answered Rafe irascibly. "I'd say you were the son of a professional man, and that you didn't work in a shop. You're in Thriddlerley's office, clerical work, not counter."

"I wish you had been there to tell me if my idea's wrong," replied Railthorpe. He added softly, "It hurts me."

"Look here"—Rafe spoke angrily—"you'll get enough knocks in this world without imagining them. If you were an old lady or a millionaire I'd wrap up the truth a bit for you, and put it professionally and politely and talk about a highly strung nervous system, or a hypersensitive nature, or a tendency to a temperament, or some damn rubbish like that, but speaking to you as a friend——"

"Thank you, Rafe," said Railthorpe gratefully.

"—Wait till I finish—speaking as your senior, I say don't be such a damn fool. That's all that's wrong with you; you're a damn fool, and the sooner you get over it the better."

Railthorpe did not repeat his thanks but laughed nervously.

"All very fine," growled Rafe, "but I mean it. You ease off, and go slow, and cool down, and harden up. Don't be all prickle and flutter and fuss, don't feel things so much, don't imagine so much, don't think so much, don't read so much, don't dream so much. People say there's no fool like an old fool, but I say there's no fool like a damn fool, and you're as big a——"

"All right, Rafe." Railthorpe laughed again, this time with enjoyment and lay back again. "Do you know, Rafe," he began presently, "if Mr. Cherral's the sort of character I think him he must be terribly lonely, he must feel absolutely isolated here and——"

"By Jove, forgot to look in at Nurse Ryan's." Rafe

rose suddenly. "Wait here for a while, will you, Railthorpe? Back later on."

Railthorpe was used to Rafe's rapid departures; he lay dreaming on the grass; through the quiet of the night came the grating noise of a Willie-wag-tail, followed by his cry "Sweet pretty pretty creecher": a Superb Warbler in the hedge gave his little song in reply to assure his wives and the world in general that he was awake and all was well: from the sky above and far away fell the desolate short call of the mopeke. No human sounds mingled in the voices of night. Cooeville had long since gone to bed.

## CHAPTER IX

"ARE YOU there, Mr. Cherral?" asked Mrs. Limmering, knocking at his door. "Afternoon tea's just in."

By afternoon tea for her paying guests did Mrs. Limmering distinguish for them Sunday from the other days of the week. Norwood found in the dining-room three visitors, Miss Seamond, and her nieces, Miss Frettle (christened Eliza, but known to all her friends by an appalling contraction of a stately name as "Lize") and Miss Lily Frettle. Miss Seamond, a badly-dressed elderly little woman with faded hair, faded eyes, and indistinguishable individuality, showed some alarm when a new man, and a lawyer at that, came into Mrs. Limmering's dining-room, and in her confusion upset her cup of tea.

"Oh, Auntie," said Miss Lily, with a glance at Norwood which, in a girl less pretty, might have been called languishing, "what will Mr. Cherral think of us if you go on like that?" Her sister, without saying anything, moved her chair to cover the spilled tea and passed her Aunt's cup to be re-filled. Miss Seamond, too flustered to look up, smoothed the knees of her dress and murmured. "So clumsy too. I don't know how I managed it."

"Have a scone, Lize," said Mrs. Limmering, taking one herself as a guarantee. "Minnie made them this morning."

"Where's Min to-day?" asked Miss Lily.

"She's gone over to see Miss Yarnley. Do you know Miss Yarnley yet, Mr. Cherral?"

Norwood replied in the negative.

"You ought to know her," continued Mrs. Limmering; "she's very well liked, always about too. I don't know how she does it."

"Auntie and I were at church this morning, while Lize got the dinner," observed Miss Lily. "We didn't see you there, Mr. Cherral, but perhaps you're not a Presbyterian?"

"I am a churchman," answered Norwood.

"A churchman?" echoed Miss Lily Frettle. "What does that mean, you're not a minister, are you, as well as a lawyer?"

Norwood's definition of a churchman for Miss Lily's benefit called forth lively comment from her, but her voice and her confiding manner as she appealed to him for his authoritative statement on any matter in dispute throughout the next hour possibly affected Norwood's judgment of this extraordinary—er—young lady, who thought a churchman and a clergyman the same thing.

But the climax of his successive surprises came when Miss Seamond and her nieces rose to go, and Norwood rose too.

"Oh, are you coming out with us?" asked Miss Lilly. "Do. I'd love a walk."

"If you won't have another cup of tea, Mr. Cherral, take a walk, it'll do you good!" said Mrs. Limmering in kind and motherly fashion. "It'll give you an appetite for your tea to-night, and I'm sure the girls will be very glad to have you. Very nice of Mr. Cherral to suggest it, I'm sure."

"Oh, go on," said Miss Lily, with the smiling impatience of one used to young men hasting to obey her behest. "Auntie, tell him to come."

"I'm sure, Lily, we'd be very glad if Mr. Cherral would come with us, but if he's got something else to do——"

Norwood, who had concealed his amazement with difficulty, hesitated, he disliked making new acquaintances, but if he went out with these extraordinary people he could leave them soon, and to go would be the quickest way of ending a discussion that was growing awkward. "I shall be very glad to come for a short distance."

But if Norwood thought to end his difficulties by a compromise, he soon learnt his error. Before they had walked a hundred yards he discovered that walking four abreast on a narrow footpath was both difficult and uncomfortable. Miss Lily, less unskilled than he in these matters, and perhaps less circumscribed by training, was the first to call attention to the obvious remedy.

"Oh, Lize, there's no room for Mr. Cherral this way, I'm afraid of pushing him into the gutter. You and Auntie walk in front."

The obedient elders went forward and, walking rather faster than Miss Lily, were soon out of sight round a corner, but Miss Lily, when Norwood pointed this out, bore it tranquilly.

"Have you been out to the Rocks yet, Mr. Cherral?"

"I have not been anywhere out of the town."

"Well, there's no north wind or dust to-day. It's not often we get such a nice day for Sunday in summer. I'll take you out to the Rocks now."



"But what about Miss Seamond and your sister?" suggested the staggered Norwood.

"Oh, they've gone home."

"But," protested Norwood, "would it—I mean we must call for them then."

"Oh, they're all right. Auntie couldn't walk as far as the Rocks and Lize has to get the tea."

Norwood, feeling singularly helpless, made one further stand.

"But you, Miss Frettle, they will be anxious about you."

"They know I'm safe with you," replied Miss Lily.

"You won't hurt me, Mr. Cherral, will you?" she glanced up under the brim of her most becoming hat with a shyness which Norwood in spite of his annoyance and astonishment found charming.

"It's been a nice afternoon, Mr. Cherral," said Mrs. Limmering, when he returned to his lodgings some hours later. "You'd have a pleasant walk unless you tired yourself out. Did you go too far?"

This was precisely the question that Norwood, astonished at what he had said and done and permitted during the afternoon, was asking himself.

## CHAPTER X

THE calm evening had deepened into dusk: over the peaceful land lay warm night, inviting men to forget care, moving human hearts to open and flower in relieving and treasured confidences. The white moonlight patched out in black, irregular splashes the trees and shrubs in Mrs. Bowyer's garden. From the seat behind the large clump of pampas grass rose the murmur of voices, one lowered, hesitating, shy, another deeper, louder, and frequently abrupt.

"Do you remember some time ago, Rafe, when I talked to you about—about getting you to help me?"

"Eh? The time you talked to me? What time? You're always talking, dammit." Doctor Rafe lay at full length upon the bench, and apparently the lazy posture of the body favoured mental inertia.

"I—I don't know whether it will make you laugh, but sometimes I feel as if I must take the cork out and bubble over a little—must write a little, I mean."

"Well, do you suppose you're the first man to write anything? Poetry, I suppose. Do you think I didn't know you'd been scribbling. Where's your packet of manuscript? Pull it out."

Railthorpe felt that he need not have hesitated so long nor need he have dreaded the interview so much. Pull it out! Here was a bluntness indeed! Did Rafe really

think he could calmly hand over the few sheets of paper in his breast pocket and watch him reading them by the light of a match? Railthorpe's face grew hot at the vision. "I can't give them to you just now, Rafe, I'll post them to you."

"Post be hanged. If you're too shy about your firstborn, heave the stuff into the surgery as you go home and perhaps I'll look at it to-morrow."

"You mustn't expect too much," said the writer.

"I don't expect anything," replied the future reader. Truly some friendships have their corrective and repressive uses.

"Verses of course," continued Rafe sitting up. "If you must write, why not write something decent while you're about it. I hear the *Bulletin* pays well for the yarns it prints. Why not try your stuff on the dog, so to say?"

"Do you really think, Rafe, that all writing's the same. That if a man can write verse he can write stories too?"

"Stick to your case. To write verse a chap must have some facility with words, and you often say you're fond of imagining things, why not turn this word-business and imagination into knocking off a short story and there you are—with perhaps a fiver in your flipper."

"Why do you think a man tries to put the poetry of his feelings into words? Why do you think a man writes at all?"

"Too lazy to work I suppose," growled Rafe, rapidly tiring of questions.

"Oh, Rafe!" Railthorpe laughed delightedly. "What an old Goth you are! A Philistine of the first water!"

"Better a Philistine than a fathead," suggested Doctor Rafe.

The great secret was out, and Railthorpe, excited by his confession and lightened of a load long and secretly borne, effervesced with high spirits. He chaffed Rafe, he tipped him off the garden bench and made him swear, he talked on a score of subjects, nor did he leave till almost midnight.

Rafe, still sitting in the garden, watched his friend look into the surgery, pass out through the gate, and go down the gravelly road with quick tread: he listened in the stillness till he could hear the footsteps no longer, then went inside himself and opened the pathetically slim packet of manuscript lying on his desk. "What's all this about?" said Doctor Rafe, pulling up his chair. The first sheet was headed—

"WIND POEM."

Out beneath the open sky,  
 All alone,  
 Bending on against the thrashing wind,  
 Almost overthrown,  
 Buffeting on against the lashing wind,  
 The sense of pleasant strife  
 Touches the cheek to life.

At the shallow long lagoon,  
 Dull roaring in the air,  
 When all the reeds are racing to the wind  
 To battle on straight-facing to the wind,  
 No other there,  
 Now with the blast its hardest blowing,  
 A triumphing god within us glowing,  
 Against the striving wind, the driving wind, that  
 clears away our sin,  
 To laugh and struggle on—and win !

On the sea, th' unresting sea,  
 That rolls before us round the world,  
 Across the stinging wind, the singing wind,  
 To rush close furled !  
 And careening over, each one leaning over,  
 Death on every wave, life on an instant grave,  
 Free life, full life, braced body, glorying soul,  
 Forcing with our human skill  
 Sea and wind, and all things to our will,  
 We reach the goal !

On the mount, the lonely mount,  
 Where only can the soul be free,  
 With the solitary wind that sighs and calls,  
 It calls to me  
 With voices from an heavenly choir,  
 And on heart and mind there falls  
 A peace, a largeness, and a high desire,  
 Amen, so let it be.

Rafe read it through and rubbed his head : he read it again, carefully : he tilted his chair back and gazed at the ceiling, finally he turned to the next page.

“TO NANCY.”

Ah well, proud Nancy, go thy way.  
 I will go mine.  
 My life will be more firm and earnest thus  
 Apart from thine.  
 But yesterday too much with thee  
 My mind was filled :  
 I only spoke, and thought, and moved, and lived,  
 As thou hadst willed.  
 And now—now am I free once more,  
 Truth serve I now,  
 Ne'er comes thy face between my book and me  
 Again, I vow.  
 Wisdom my mistress ! Happy change  
 From Love and thee !  
 No more an amorous boy am I, to bow  
 To tyranny.

She turns—she stands with dewy eyes  
 And rising breast !  
 Nancy, dear sweetheart, without thee I live  
 Sad and opprest.

Thy shy sweet kiss is worth all books  
 And learning old,  
 Thy soft warm arms' embrace ranks far above  
 Hard Wisdom cold.

Rather—I learn beneath thy power,  
 Thy benison—  
 Love, Learning, Wisdom, cannot be opposed,  
 For all are one.

Rafe grunted at the last verse. He sat back and drummed on the table, at last he pushed that leaf aside ; the next was headed, " A Flashlight of a Funeral."

Rafe read it, and, shoving it away with an angry growl, took up the following page which bore the title, " The Two Voices."

When he had finished this longer piece, the first voice glorying, the second mourning, Rafe glanced again at those he had read. "' Wind Poem' and then this bit of mental depression, eh ?" A sudden thought struck him, he laughed heartily and thumped his desk, then, mirth departing, he settled to his perusing once more.

#### " EVENING."

With day ends striving. The departing sun,  
 Pronouncing benediction ere he fall,  
 Flashes to light heaven's towers. And having run  
 His ordered course, he sinks. Evening holds all.

Home bends the step. The cheery fire burns bright,  
 Straight the smoke rises in the tranquil air,  
 The twilight closes ; glances now the light  
 From th' opening door. Rest after toil is there.

Peace, peace profound, most holy, innocent,  
 The hush of nature ere her Queen appear,  
 Lies on the land. The light of the stars is lent  
 To grace her coming. And the sky grows clear.

The eager-eating heart ; the vivid mind,  
 Quick youth ; hard age ; the weak ; th' oppressed with wrong ;  
 Those pedestaled apart ; the poor, confined  
 To existing, pause. Heaven hears the evensong.

\* \* \* \* \*

The late hours chime. The anxious busy day  
 Has died, it seems for ever. Through the soft air  
 The murmuring rain drifts lightly. The budded spray  
 Gives fragrant thanks. Far off be pain and care.

Let us forget mortality. Too rare,  
 Too brief the hour when the heart wakes and beats  
 In unison with God's ; filled with that prayer  
 Impossible for words. It answer meets.

Rafe's sole comment was a grunt, he re-read it, grunted again, and turned to the last poem which bore the title "Morn," but read to Rafe as an exultant shout in praise of the powers of man. When he had finished, "Well, I'm damned," said Dr. Rafe, unable to contain himself any longer.

## CHAPTER XI

MR. HOIP returned from his office that afternoon to find his wife in thoughtful mood.

"There are no Land Boards or things to take you away next week, are there, Will?"

"No, my dear, all plain sailing at the office till next month."

"I've been thinking, Will, that we ought to give an evening. There are a lot of visitors up and Mrs. Thridderley has a friend stopping with her, and there's the new solicitor."

Mr. Hoip hid a sinking heart behind a boisterous approval. "Of course, Tiny, the very thing, of course. When do you think you would like it? Very pleased."

"I don't know why you should be," answered Mrs. Hoip gloomily. "It's all very well for you——"

"That's just where you're wrong, Tiny," protested the eager husband. "I know what will happen, you've had these things before, working like a horse—I mean like a slave, all day at cakes and so on, and when friends arrive in the evening you're too dead beat to enjoy it, and next day you're as tired and——" Mr. Hoip pulled himself up hastily—"You feel the effects of it next day, you know you do, Tiny. Do you think I don't feel it, I mean do you think I don't notice it?" Mr. Hoip felt that he was on the right track at last, and proceeded to show his understanding and his sympathy. "And haven't you noticed, Tiny, that whenever you tackle a big job like this, something goes wrong and knocks you up?"

"If you don't wish me to give an evening, Will, I wish you'd say so instead of hinting at it."

"My dear," exclaimed Mr. Hoip, "you're quite wrong. I didn't mean to hint at anything, and you know, Tiny, when you gave that party for Mrs. Malintop's visitor, the jelly wouldn't set, and the time after—when you asked so many here you know—you remember the trouble you had with the cakes, the icing went wrong or something, and what a headache you had next day!" Mr. Hoip, anxiously sympathetic, beamed upon his wife with interrogative eyebrows. "And

that other time—with the home-made sweets you know, the fondong, or whatever you call the stuff, wouldn't come right, you know; you scalded your hand and——”

“I think that is enough, Will,” interrupted Mrs. Hoip. “I didn't know you kept a diary of every trifle that goes wrong in the house. Really, of all the things!”

Mr. Hoip, making a gallant effort to recover, fell headlong. “My dear, I was only pitying you with all these——”

“That will do, Will. If you say another word, I'll know you mean to insult me.”

“But, my dear, really you know——”

“You heard what I said?” Mrs. Hoip rose to enforce her meaning. “Another word!”

Mr. Hoip, filled almost to bursting with explanation and apology, waved his hands at his wife, who, satisfied with the effect of her threat, resumed her seat. Mr. Hoip, still speechless, retired to the back verandah; for a space he roamed dejectedly up and down, then he stumbled over his bicycle, then he remembered that it required cleaning, then he set to work thereupon, still overcome with gloom; in five minutes he was whistling merrily, and in half an hour the cycle cleaned, polished, oiled, greased, blown up, leant against the wall, and the owner, removing all traces of his late occupation in the bathroom—omitting however to shut either door or window, both of which, according to a sub-regulation of one of the two or three extra decalogues his wife had imparted to him, he should have closed—once more sought the society of his spouse in the dining-room. There appeared to be, however, a certain amount of electricity still in the atmosphere.

“Er—Tiny—er”—he began.

“Yes,” Mrs. Hoip answered, lying back wearily in her armchair and sighing resignedly.

Mr. Hoip found he had nothing to say, which increased his restlessness. A certain springiness in legs and arms pertained to Mr. Hoip, while frequently an effervescence of energy appeared in his marking time with a high lift and a swing of the arms up and down from the elbow, as in a pedestrian walking furiously. “When will tea be ready?” asked the master of the house, glancing at the clock which stood at five minutes past six.

“Whenever Sarah chooses to bring it,” replied his wife coldly.

“Oh, come, Tiny, the girl's not so bad as that surely, she looks after me very well, when you're away. I always get on very well with her.”

“You make friends easily with servants and low-class people, don't you, Will?”

Mr. Hoip felt that this last remark called for more than defence. “Well,” he said, pausing at the door, “I don't

know about that, but anyway I don't believe in nag-nagging at a girl."

"Thank you, Will. And, when you go, please don't bang the door as you usually do."

Mr. Hoip closed the door softly, slammed on his hat with feverish energy, and made for the bowling green in indignant haste. "I don't make a friend of Sarah," said Mr. Hoip, explanatory even to himself, "but she's a good girl and looks after the house well, and why shouldn't I say so. Though, of course, Tiny's right in a way. Yes, I believe she's right in a way, I *do* make friends easily, but why shouldn't I? I believe, yes, really, I believe it's a good thing to make friends. A man should be popular." Mr. Hoip filled out his chest a little, "and if I *am* popular I'm not ashamed of it. But," continued Mr. Hoip, his chest measurement shrinking to normal, "I wish I hadn't said that to Tiny. Fact is, it's hot; fact is, I suppose she's tired; fact is, I suppose I should go back; fact is—hullo, there's Wemby, hurray!—Hey, Wemby, old man——!"

"The place looks very well," said Mr. Wemby as they twisted in through the bowling green gate, "we must have it at its best for Wednesday week."

Mr. Hoip, completely restored in spirit, either by the presence of his friend or the absence of his wife, surveyed the scene with his head on one side, whistling softly through his teeth and jingling some coins in his pocket. "It looks jolly well O.K." he answered, at last. "A bit too early to play yet, eh? Let's sit down over there in the shade."

"Have you had tea yet, Hoip? I told Mrs. Wemby I'd have something any time this evening, I mayn't go in till it's dark, but you've got to be sharp——" Mr. Wemby pulled up, and paused to think. "I know," he concluded, "that you—that you like to have your meals punctually."

Mr. Hoip appreciated the delicacy of his friend's way of putting the notorious fact that he was strictly forbidden ever to be late for meals; a good housekeeper or an excellent cook or an affectionate wife—and Mrs. Hoip was all these things—naturally objects to irregular hours and spoiled dishes. Mr. Hoip, his thoughts being thus turned wife-ward, became once more immersed in gloom. "Thanks, old man, I know what you mean, but—er—I shan't go home for tea to-night."

Mr. Wemby understood and tactfully looked away, striving with heavy eagerness to think of a new subject wherewith to distract his friend's attention from affairs domestic. He could think of nothing, and in desperation waved his hand vaguely and began, "Er—Hoip——" then came to a full stop.

"Fact is," exclaimed Mr. Hoip suddenly, endeavouring to hide his wound even from Wemby, "I've no appetite

to-night. Couldn't eat if I tried, must be a bit off colour. So I came out for a stroll."

Mr. Wemby breathed heavily with relief. "Just so, I'll tell you what, Hoip, we can sit here till some others turn up, then have a good evening's game, and when we both feel peckish you can come home with me. Mrs. Wemby will soon find something. \*I know you don't mind pot-luck."

Mr. Hoip welcomed this suggestion joyfully, his gloom departed, his spirits rose. "The very thing, by Gee, we might get the bowls out and knock 'em about a bit, eh? Just as well to be ready, some of 'em are sure to be down directly and we can make up a game."

"I wonder they aren't here now," said Wemby. "Ah, there's Mr. Cherral," he hailed the passer-by, and, going to the gate, brought him across to the little roughly-built room, where Mr. Hoip was engaged in pulling out his own and his friend's shoes and bowls. "You ought to join the Bowling Club," suggested Mr. Wemby, sitting down again on the sloping side of the green. "What do you say, Hoip?"

"Rather," replied Mr. Hoip joining them.

"I'm sure," pursued Mr. Wemby, "that you'd enjoy it, and the other members would appreciate having you. Don't you think so, Hoip?"

Mr. Hoip, hesitating for a bare moment, gave answer with great emphasis that he was sure of it.

"I know nothing of bowling," said Norwood.

"Well, it's not exactly the game—though we have some great goes here——"

"You bet," declared Mr. Hoip.

"—but it's the—the *society*,"

Norwood suppressed a contemptuous smile.

"On these hot evenings," continued Mr. Wemby, "you meet all the best fellows. Don't you, Hoip?"

"Every time," asserted Mr. Hoip.

"And we play a few games, sometimes we have really exciting evenings, or"—Mr. Wemby loved the bowling green and everything connected with it and grew fluent on his theme—"we can sit down and chat if it's too hot to play—and—and—it's the prettiest spot in the town, look at that grass, quite green, though we can't get any water till after nine o'clock at night still we manage to give it a good sprinkling, it's the only green spot in the district—lovely—it's a pleasure to be here, and—" Mr. Wemby hastened to wind up before ideas ran dry, "and we'd like you to share it."

"That's it, old man," declared Mr. Hoip with enthusiasm. "When you've got a good thing, share it."

Mr. Wemby sat back and smiled happily; he was in his favourite spot, he spoke on his favourite theme, even modestly



admitted he had spoken well, conscience approved, and Hoip, his dearest friend, applauded. Could the heart of man desire more? He overflowed with good humour, and Mr. Hoip, overflowing too from sympathy, sprang to his feet, marked time vigorously, and swung his arms.

A new thought gradually occupied Mr. Wemby's mind. "Now, Mr. Cherral, if you want a—a delightful afternoon and an introduction to the Club, next Wednesday week——"

"That's it, that's it," cried Mr. Hoip, unable to contain himself any longer, "Wednesday week, half-holiday, everybody off the chain, the pick of 'em here, ladies, girls, nice girls, tea, scones, cakes, and things"—Mr. Hoip waved his hands descriptively.

"Yes, Mr. Cherral," explained Wemby beaming, "we've just had a new fence put round those two sides of the green, and Mr. Labby——"

"President," explained Mr. Hoip, "John Labby, Esquire, President; George Wemby, Esquire, Secretary, consistent player and a lot of other things, and William Johnson Hoip, Esquire, your humble servant, Treasurer."

"That's so, Mr. Cherral," Mr. Wemby turned an admiring gaze upon Hoip, who was now busy with a bowl in each hand, knocking them together and obtaining therefrom some noise and much pleasure. "Mr. Hoip is quite right. Mr. Labby is President, and he suggested celebrating the new fence——"

"It's a fine fence," asserted Mr. Hoip; "helps to make the green a credit to the town."

"It is a fine fence," admitted Mr. Wemby. "I'll take you over to it and explain it to you directly, Mr. Cherral—Labby's giving an afternoon tea, at least of course Mrs. Labby's helping him——"

"There'll be more than tea there," declared Mr. Hoip joyously. Mr. Wemby laughed and once more looked admiringly at Mr. Hoip, who was now trying to walk on his bowls, after the manner of a circus globe-trundler. "Yes, Mr. Cherral," Mr. Wemby laughed again, "I daresay there'll be more than tea there, and we've invited the Tennis Club to come so there'll be all the young people here too. It will be——" Mr. Wemby paused to select a word which would at once explain and adorn, "it will be a—a Function."

"It's a fact," corroborated Mr. Hoip.

"As Secretary, Mr. Cherral, I extend a hearty welcome. I hope you'll come."

"I'm obliged to you," began Norwood, "but——"

"Hullo," exclaimed Mr. Hoip, "there's Jessington. Ahoy, Jessington. What ho. Hullo, there's Trewhella too, and there's some one else behind 'em, now we can have a game, Wemby, and it's nice and cool too. By Gee, we'll have a

great game, will you join us, Mr. Cherral? We'll show you all the points."

"Thank you, no. I must go now."

"I believe," said Mr. Wemby, looking at the departing Norwood, "we'll be able to make a player of him in time."

"Rather," assented Mr. Hoip, dancing about and then marking time, "by Gee, we'll make a man of him."

## CHAPTER XII

THE end of February is a busy time for storekeepers and their clerks, but Railthorpe finished his office work at Mr. Thridderley's by ten o'clock that evening, and hastened eagerly to Mrs. Bowyer's. Since he had left the first-fruits of his writing with Rafe he had been longing to call and hear the critical verdict. And night after night his heart had failed him. He had walked to that gate surmounted by the red lamp many times, to be seized by a panic of shyness which carried him hastily away, treading softly, that his friend, should he be sitting outside, might not hear him. He half hoped that Rafe, realizing the importance of the matter, might write a criticism, more or less elaborate, and post it. At last, unable to bear waiting, expecting, hoping, dreading, any longer, Railthorpe, screwing his courage up and his shyness down, had decided to visit Rafe that evening come what might. He walked into the surgery with his heart pounding thickly.

"Hullo," said Rafe, who was hastily scribbling in his diary. "Where the blazes have you been all this time?"

"He doesn't feel shy and upset when we meet," thought Railthorpe; "what a fool I must be!" And this idea in no way help to calm his emotions.

"Take a pew," said Railthorpe's host, gazing at him with unseeing eyes and scratching his head with the butt-end of his pen as he reckoned up the number of patients visited that day. "Is that the lot? I must have seen more than that."

"I'll wait in the garden. I don't want to disturb you, if you're busy."

"Take a pew, dammit. Done in a minute."

Railthorpe silently and obediently subsided on to the surgery couch.

"There," said Rafe directly, flinging his pen down, "that job's done. Let's go out to the garden. Full moon outside. This place stinks of iodoform."

"Been busy?" asked Rafe, as he fell into his favourite seat by the pampas grass. "You haven't been up lately."

"Yes—No—I started to come here often enough, but—but I never got here."

"Why not?"

"I—I—I just couldn't, Rafe."

"Paralysis, I suppose," suggested Rafe dryly.

"Well, you can give it that name if you like; in fact, I think you've found the true reason."

"I suppose what you really mean"—Doctor Rafe spoke with some violence—"is, you were ashamed to look me in the face after writing that stuff you left with me. And I don't blame you, dammy."

"Oh, Rafe, is it—is it as bad as that?"

The genuine pain in Railthorpe's query touched his friend. "Look here, you mustn't lie down to every man's verdict like that."

"Not every man," said Railthorpe. "But this is different. Besides, you're my—my—I trust your judgment."

"More fool you," replied the candid Rafe.

"Well, you're all I've got to help me, Rafe. I haven't a relative in the world except the aunt, and, of course, she knows nothing of this. I keep it locked up at home. And as for friends, well, there's Goff of course, but somehow—perhaps I haven't known him long enough—no, Rafe, you're all I've got here. If I could get out of Cooeville, it might be different."

"It might be worse. Don't you always be wanting to get away from here. It's a good job for you your aunt declines to shift." Rafe lay back and grunted comfortably. "So you want me to advise you, eh?"

Railthorpe nodded, gazing eagerly at his mentor and nearly choking with excitement.

Rafe rumbled up his hair. "How the devil can I? If it were only a professional matter now, it would be easy. I'd prescribe a carminative for your "Wind Poem," and from your "Two Voices" I'd say you needed mag. sulph. with a tonic to follow, and, by Jove, when you get one of those fits that made you turn out your little effort called "Morn," I should say at once, Bromide! Dammy." And once more Rafe loudly appreciated his own humour. "However," he added, "you seem to know something about verse, so why not try your hand at something better?"

"Oh, Rafe, do you think I don't feel that too? It sounds absurd to say that what I've shown you is my best. While I'm writing it, and when I read it over the moment after, I think for once I've hit it, but no——"

"You're off the track. I mean something people might care to read"—Railthorpe winced—"and something you could sell."

"Sell? Think of making money when I'm writing? I couldn't, Rafe. I just glow, I——" he broke off abashed. Not even to Rafe could such matters be told.

"No harm in being happy, but you could be sensible too.

What's the good of grinding out verses nobody'll read, when a fellow with your knack could knock off light verse, humorous stuff that you might get into the *Bulletin*, and give fellows who like that kind of thing a laugh, and you a half guinea. If you don't want to sell and be read, why the devil do you write?"

"To ease my pain," murmured Railthorpe, then sat up in sudden fright, the reply was a quotation from one of his own poems no one had seen. If Rafe had heard it!—

"What's that?"

Railthorpe sat back with a sigh of relief. "Nothing, old man. I was just thinking aloud."

"You might answer my question aloud while you're about it. Are you too damn superior to take filthy fivers—if you can get 'em? Poetic poverty? Is that the idea?"

"I haven't thought about it," Railthorpe was striving hard to hide his hurt.

"Well, think about it now. And when you feel like scribbling, knock out some good old jingle-jingle, and fire it at the *Bulletin*. They'll print and pay well if it hits them."

"Good-night," said Railthorpe, leaving hastily.

### CHAPTER XIII

MR. HOIP entered the bedroom clothed in evening dress and an air composed of equal parts of hangdog fright and jaunty explanatoriness. His wife, herself engaged in completing full toilet for her evening party, gave no heed to him till he, swelling out his chest and exaggerating the conflicting emotions depicted on his face, coughed a cough that spoke many things to her trained ear; giving up for the moment the endeavour to find the eye for that particular hook, she turned to learn the worst. "Yes, Will, what is it?"

"Nothing, my dear, nothing at all. Oh, ah, by the way, yes," said Mr. Hoip, going through an elaborate process of recollection, "a little accident seems to have happened in—er—the drawing-room."

"Never mind trying to hide it, Will," said Mrs. Hoip, showing some agitation. "What have you done now?"

Mr. Hoip, somewhat taken aback at this direct accusation, coughed again. "Well, you see, Tiny—you know the big vase on the mantelpiece?"

"I think I should know it, it's the only decent vase I have in the house."

"Well—er——" continued Mr. Hoip, the hangdog air getting considerably the better of the jauntiness—"er—fact is, Tiny, you put long trailers of rose branches in it, and

—er—fact is, one of them caught my shoulder, and—er——” Mr. Hoip said no more but moved his feet restlessly.

“Do you mean to say you’ve broken it?” screamed Mrs. Hoip.

“Well—er, Tiny, when you put it in that way do you know you really—ha, ha!—just describe it. Very smart of you, Tiny. Look here—I—I——” but Mrs. Hoip, regarding not the fact that she was not fully dressed, rushed out to the drawing-room. She had better stayed away. Mr. Hoip’s method of breaking the news, gentle and thoughtful in itself, avoided exaggerating the evil, and omitted to mention that the large vase in falling over had flooded the mantelpiece, dripped into the newly polished fender, and even as the horror-struck Mrs. Hoip stood gazing at it, the water was soaking out at one end staining the light-coloured drawing-room carpet with the red ochre from the hearth. Mr. Hoip, more nervous than ever in his legs and arms, moved about the room behind his wife.

“Look at the fender!” said Mrs. Hoip in icy, even tones. “Look at the carpet!”

Mr. Hoip dashed forward, and drawing his handkerchief from the front of his evening vest fell on his knees and frantically sopped up the ochred water.

“Oh!” gasped the overwrought Mrs. Hoip. “Stop! For goodness sake stop! Stop! You’re making it worse. Look how you’re messing the fender, look at your handkerchief! Your best silk one!”

Mr. Hoip forebore; rising, he faced his wife with explanations radiating from him. “Look here, Tiny, awfully sorry, old girl, I didn’t know you cared for the vase so much. I was just fixing my tie in front of the overmantel and as I moved away the damn thing—excuse me, Tiny—I mean the infernal thing, fell over. Crack! Smash!” Mr. Hoip illustrated with hands and arms the suddenness of the catastrophe. “And the water—that vase seems to hold a bathful, Tiny—went all over the place. Slop! Whoosh!”—once more action aided speech. “And—er—don’t look like that, Tiny, old girl, I was only touching up my tie——”

“You always *would* dress all over the house,” said Mrs. Hoip, in the same frozen tone. “How like you to do your tie in the drawing-room! And, oh! Look! Look!”—her voice rose in shrill anguish. “Look at your handkerchief, dropping that red stuff all over the carpet!”

Mr. Hoip, aghast at this fresh trouble, hastily restored the offending article to its place in front of his waistcoat. Immediately the glossy expanse of shirt front coloured as though he had committed hari—kari. Mrs. Hoip, in stony silence, pointed with levelled hand and accusing eye at the spreading stain. A knock fell on the front door. Mrs. Hoip glanced

at the ornate timepiece on the wall, wound up and set for the evening, "Eight o'clock! There's the first of my party!" her eye travelled from the accumulated havoc wrought on the room at which she had worked so to the shirt front she had so carefully ironed and polished. "Will! Oh! Oh!" She sank into a chair, and burst into tears.

Mr. Norwood Cherral arrived late. He found the front door open and a somewhat flustered maid without a cap led him to a small room, and, remarking, "This is the gent's cloak-room," disappeared. Norwood waited for some one to come and take him to the drawing-room. At last he realized that he might wait indefinitely, and walked to a room near the front, through whose open door came brilliant light and much laughter. Norwood entered without diffidence, seeking his hostess: he found the room occupied by three young ladies and one who, obviously much maturer in years, was equally youthful in dress and slightly more so in conduct.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed this last, "here's Mr. Cherral, and none of us know him. Dear me!" she flirted her fan about in agitated fashion and rose. "I can't bear to see you standin' there all alone and these nice girls waitin' for you."

"Pardon me," said Norwood, "but I am looking for Mrs. Hoip. Have I the pleasure of addressing her now?"—he gazed with some alarm at one of the other ladies who fell back on the couch with a scream; discovering with contempt that she was merely manifesting her amusement at his question, he confined his attention to the one he had addressed; she too gave every appearance of being overcome with emotion. "Oh, dear me, girls," she made play with her fan and assumed an expression coy in the extreme, "What do you think of this? Me a married lady! Oh, dear me!" She laughed again. "No, Mr. Cherral, I don't know where Mrs. Hoip is, she'll be along directly. I suppose till she comes I'd better—eh, girls?"

None of the others spoke, save the one who had laughed so at Norwood's query; she, with a snickering giggle that Norwood mentally described as the most execrable sound he had ever heard, exclaimed, "Oh, hurry up, Kit, or I'll take charge of Mr. Cherral meself."

"I suppose I'll have to do the introducin', Mr. Cherral," said the senior lady. "I'm Miss Yarnley," she smiled. Norwood bowed gravely without speaking. "You needn't tell me who you are, everybody knows Mr. Cherral, the new lawyer. And now come along to these girls, they're all dyin' to meet you. This is Miss Geoghegan, and next is Jean Malintop, and this"—she spoke of the one who had roused Norwood's distaste—"is Miss Moll Tandy."

Norwood bowed with stiff solemnity to each of the trio,

remained standing and addressed himself to Miss Yarnley. "Since Mrs. Hoip is not here perhaps you would be good enough to tell me where I can find her."

"Oh, Tiny? Haven't you seen her yet? Poor Tiny, she's bustlin' about all over everywhere." This statement reduced Miss Tandy to a condition of helpless mirth. The entrance of a stout young man, not in itself a humorous incident, Norwood thought, increased her merriment.

"Hullo!" said the newcomer to Miss Tandy, "I've been looking for you all over the shop, Moll, you told me you were going to play cards."

"That's where your toes turn in, ducky," returned Miss Tandy with spirit.

"Mick," interrupted Miss Yarnley, once more taking charge, "this is Mr. Cherral."

"I know that," answered Mick. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Cherral." He insisted on shaking hands. "How do. Like a flutter at cards, or are you putting in your time with the girls?"

"Mr. Cherral," said Miss Malintop, speaking for the first time, "this is Mr. Hannaford, he may know you but I don't think you know him."

"Oh, that's all right," said Mr. Hannaford easily. "If he don't know me now he soon will. Always knocking up against each other in this little place, Mr. Cherral." Mr. Hannaford, with hands in pockets, assumed an air of tolerant ease. "Small place, Cooeville," he explained to Norwood with some condescension, "but lively. We keep the ball rolling here I might tell you. You might be in a worse place."

Norwood, whose opinion of Cooeville was as unpublishable as his opinion of Mr. Hannaford or of the four ladies present, confined his reply to the word "Really?" His pronunciation of this word differed markedly from what Miss Tandy was accustomed to, and she, in consequence, was once more overcome with mirth.

Miss Malintop rose. "Mrs. Hoip's probably in the dining-room, Mr. Cherral; let me show you."

As Miss Malintop and Norwood walked down the passage, Miss Tandy's voice, uplifted in mirth, demanded of the company, "Isn't he a cure?" and Miss Yarnley's shrill voice gave answer that he was a case, while Mr. Hannaford's deeper notes, burlesquing Norwood's accent, put the question, "Haw! Reahly!—I'm a duke, deah girls, don't-cher know?" This sally produced upon Miss Tandy the inevitable result, and next day, when relating the matter to her dearest friend, she was guilty of no exaggeration when she said, "Oh, Mag, you should hear Mick taking Mr. Cherral off. It simply made me *shriek*. I thought I should *die*."

Though Mrs. Hoip was not in the dining-room her husband was. Mr. Hoip, at all times liable to be infected with good spirits, was hard put to it to contain himself when, in his own house, he looked round and saw himself surrounded by friends; his legs, his arms, his eyebrows, assisted his tongue in expressing his emotional upheaval and his intense gratification. He wrung Norwood's hand with fervour. "We'd given you up, old man. Jean, like an angel, trot along and find the wife. Hullo, there's Wemby and the Doctor," he hailed two guests in the hall. "Mr. Cherral, you know Mr. Wemby of course, and Doctor Rafe?"

"I have not yet met Doctor Rafe," said Norwood. Glancing from Mr. Wemby to the other arrival, he wondered where he had seen that fair, fresh-coloured face with the aquiline nose, surmounted by thick rimless eyeglasses. It was, Norwood conceded to himself, a fine face, suggesting intellectual power and physical vigour, marked too with a certain air of distinction; certainly a handsome face, though disfigured at present by grossly obvious boredom, even as the athletic body, which properly carried would have been worthy of the head, was spoiled by the careless and lounging gait.

"Mr. Cherral, Doctor Rafe," said Mr. Hoip.

Doctor Rafe lent against the doorpost with his hands in his pockets—ah—recollection came back to Norwood—the barber's saloon lounge. He bowed stiffly. Though, in Mr. Hoip's house, he could not refuse to meet this Doctor Rafe, he could show him that he forbade the slightest approach to intimacy. Doctor Rafe, still leaning against the door with his hands in his pockets, nodded to Norwood looked more bored than ever, then lounged away.

"Wemby, old man," said Mr. Hoip, as his wife entered and took Norwood away to the drawing-room, "what we should have done to-night if you and your good lady hadn't come a bit early I don't know."

"Mrs. Wemby thought she might be able to help," explained her husband.

Mr. Hoip shook the husband's hand heartily. "When you knocked at the door, by Gee, it broke the wife up, she thought it might be anybody. And there was the drawing-room all messed up, while as for my shirt front—ha, ha! it did look a sight. Eh? Never mind, you and I soon put things right, eh?"

Mr. Wemby laughed with pleasure.

"Wemby, old man," continued Mr. Hoip, "my wife—no better wife in Cooeville—she's still a bit upset. Fact is, I'm a bit in disgrace still, that's why she didn't stay here with Mr. Cherral; fact is, she blames me; fact is—in confidence, old man—she may be right. But still ladies are—well, you know what they are."



"Ladies," said Mr. Wemby wrestling mentally, "are—are—are *ladies*, Hoip."

Mr. Hoip, in an excess of admiration, smote his friend heavily on the back. Mr. Wemby coughed.

"Well, everything's ready for them here"—Mr. Hoip glanced at the supper spread before them—"and we'd better go and look after the girls. But that cinder of mine is—er—is *there*, and—that's a nasty cough you've got old man," broke off Mr. Hoip, suddenly discovering another reason, "don't you think that just one——?"

Touched by a common impulse, the two friends moved over to the sideboard.

Mrs. Hoip introduced Norwood to several ladies: he was surprised to find that one of these, Mrs. Labby, was quite well-bred in manner and speech, and possessed in addition a certain motherliness that was as pleasant to him as it was novel. He was by no means pleased when Miss Yarnley appeared with a companion whom she introduced. "Oh, here's somebody you *must* know, Mr. Cherral. It's Mr. Goff. A charmin' man. He only came to Cooeville about a year ago. Mr. Cherral—Mr. Goff, you ought to know each other. You'll be such friends, both bein' English and everythin'."

Mr. Goff's large, heavily-lashed grey eyes twinkled, the clean shaven face, pallid by nature and by contrast with the black hair, lit up with an appreciative smile. "Flatterer!" he said to Miss Yarnley after bowing to Norwood. "Describing me as an Englishman!"

It appeared to Norwood that this Mr. Goff was the first man he had met since coming to Cooeville whose dress was proper, whose tie was as it should be, whose voice and accent were correct; and on Mrs. Labby leaving he agreed readily enough to Mr. Goff's suggestion that they should look for a seat on the verandah.

"Miss Yarnley, I believe," said Norwood, as Goff and he found deck chairs in a quiet corner, "referred to us both as Englishmen?"

"She over-estimated me," answered Goff with a delicate inflection on the adverb. "I am only an Irishman."

"Ah!" Norwood showed by his tone that he recognized the distinction and agreed with the speaker's apparent valuation. "But at least," he added more cordially, "you are not a colonial."

"No, but I hope to grow into one."

"Ah, I see. Of course you are joking. Your countrymen are famous for—er—humour, are they not?"

"They'd need to be," answered Mr. Goff sadly.

The door beside them opened violently, and Miss Tandy, Miss Yarnley, Mr. Mick Hannaford, and Mr. Tinner,

precipitated themselves across the verandah out to the garden. Miss Tandy with something allied to a squeal, Miss Yarnley with loud laughter, and the young gentlemen with boisterous shouts.

Mrs. Hoip, fearing the evening might be hot, had provided many chairs and seats outside, but Mr. Hannaford, bringing the party to a halt within the hearing of Norwood and his companion, was moved to insist that Miss Tandy and he should occupy the same chair. Miss Tandy liked his cheek; she said so, but somewhat weakened the force of her chaste rebuke by adding, "I'd like to see meself sitting on your knee, in front of Kit and Mr. Tinner too!"

"Hear, hear," said Mr. Tinner. "We can't allow it, can we Miss Yarnley?"

"Shockin'," commented Miss Yarnley.

"Now if it was Charley Tinner's knee," continued Miss Tandy. "Ow!" she squealed again at the thought.

"Oh, come," protested Mr. Hannaford, "we'd better be going off. Eh, Miss Yarnley?"

"Time, isn't it?" assented Miss Yarnley, making no move.

"Well you know, it's not a bad idea to shift," suggested Mr. Tinner; "it wasn't a hot day, ha, ha! and it's jolly cool to-night, a bit too cool out here."

"Oh, I think it's lurvely out here," declared Miss Tandy, "just lurvely, and if we go in it'll be cards or games, and who wants that?"

"You do not admire the Colonial type?" suggested Goff, looking at Norwood sitting upright with severe disapprobation in his face patent for all to see.

"Do you ask me to?"

"Yes," replied Goff, adding mischievously. "Why not?"

"There is your answer," said Norwood, as a loud mixture of giggling and squealing came from the neighbouring gathering, Miss Tandy leading easily in each department.

The group just off the verandah, hidden from it by laurestinus bushes, were making too much noise to hear anyone else, Mr. Tinner, as they all moved to the house again, affirming amid much laughter that he felt he'd caught a chill, and might die if somebody didn't come along to nurse him, and hold his hand. Ha, ha!

"That?" asked Goff. "Pooh, you might as well judge the English race by a third-rate chorus girl."

"So this is where you've hidden yourselves," said Mrs. Labby, coming along the verandah. "Supper's nearly over, and Mrs. Hoip wants Mr. Goff. Mr. Cherral can take care of me unless he'd rather be in charge of someone younger."

"Ah, now," said Mr. Goff, looking at Norwood with a smile, "that's the point. Mr. Cherral was just going to show me some of the differences between his English girls

and our Victorian darlings, and, do you know, I believe he'd have more to say about the Cooeville girl than the English," and Mr. Goff left hurriedly.

"That's very nice of you, Mr. Cherral," said Mrs. Labby, as they went in. "I'm afraid you're rather a flatterer though. The supper table seems full," she added, as they paused at the door, "but we can go into the morning-room." There they found Dr. Rafe, Miss Yarnley, and several other ladies, to whom Mrs. Labby innocently remarked. "I hear that Mr. Cherral has just been saying such nice things about the Cooeville ladies to Mr. Goff." Norwood suppressed himself with an effort.

"Oh, so you like the girls here, Mr. Cherral?" demanded Miss Yarnley. "How charmin'! Really? But perhaps you say that because you're safe. You're engaged to some Melbourne girl, I suppose. Every young man who comes to Cooeville is engaged."

The number of things in this short speech to which Norwood took exception could not be counted easily. He gave no reply, and Miss Yarnley, stimulated by the desire to settle an important question which had already been discussed many times by all Cooeville feminine circles, repeated her query with a slight alteration. "It's true you're engaged to a charmin' Melbourne girl, Mr. Cherral, isn't it? We heard you were."

Norwood considered for a moment. "There are certain topics which one discusses only with an intimate friend."

It was the cold and measured tone that pierced through to Miss Yarnley's consciousness more than the actual words. "Oh, really!" she exclaimed, colouring hotly.

Doctor Rafe glanced at Norwood with an expression in which astonishment, amusement, and just a trace of admiration were mingled. "Have a sandwich," he said heartily, and shoved the plate vigorously over towards Norwood.

Mrs. Labby hastened to make peace. "It's too bad of us all to bother Mr. Cherral so. I know from visitors we've had—some were from England, and others had been there—that the young people here have a much freer life, but ours are good girls, Mr. Cherral, and you'll find——"

It was unfortunate that at this moment a little incident occurred which was much discussed during the next week, and occasioned re-iterated explanations on the part of Mr. Tinner. Even as Mrs. Labby spoke, there arose from the dark and retired patch of garden, somewhat back from the open window, a softened rendering of Miss Tandy's unmistakable giggling squeal, followed by the statement in her equally unmistakable voice, hushed, but extremely audible, "Ow, Mr. Tinner, your nose is *cold*."

## CHAPTER XIV

IN the social sense of the word Doctor Rafe did not entertain at all, nor did he seek that others should entertain him. On the contrary, all invitations to an evening party, to a ball, to a formal gathering of any sort, he sedulously avoided. Should the hostess of the event be sufficiently persistent to corner him and extract from a man, red-faced with suppressed emotions, an acceptance to her evening, then indeed did Doctor Rafe exhibit the eternal youthfulness of the male. Sulking in silence till he could ease his mind, he would blow off steam with loud violence the first time thereafter that he met Railthorpe; proclaiming indignantly the rights of man, he would condemn bitterly the type of entertainment to which he had been bidden forth, define the conversation of Cooeville's leading matrons in no kindly terms, describe with unkind comments the salient qualities of the Cooeville damsel, and demand in heated way what people meant by it. From that time until the appointed day he would make injured and frequent reference to the evil hour in store, and upon the arrival of the said hour would frequently be found wanting by the expectant lady of the house.

Though thus exhibiting himself as one utterly unworthy, and as a man too base and ignorant withal to care to climb those heights whereon high society meets and moves, Doctor Rafe enjoyed heartily companionship of another nature; though saying nothing about it, he obviously delighted in the company of his friends. Railthorpe was welcome at Mrs. Bowyer's at any time; so was Goff; and Rafe himself, in winter sitting before his surgery fire, or on summer evenings sprawling on Mrs. Bowyer's lawn with one, or, as happened that evening, with both of these friends, was at his happiest.

"Last night," remarked Goff, "I had the pleasure of meeting our new townsman, Mr. Norwood Cherral."

"Charming chap," answered Rafe lazily, "but gushes too much for my taste."

Railthorpe laughed.

"What do you think of him, Rafe?" asked Goff.

"Dammim," replied Doctor Rafe succinctly.

"Well, that's a carefully reasoned summing up, showing marked powers of observation and inference, I must say." And Goff laughed too. "What do you say about Mr. Cherral, Railthorpe?"

"I don't understand him at all," answered Railthorpe, who had met Norwood on three occasions and found each time his warm advances towards intimacy received with a certain frigid disapprobation.

"Well, I understand all about him," asserted Mr. Goff. "And I explain him fully to any man who's lived in England when I say he's true to type."

"Are there many like him?" demanded Rafe.

"Everyone of his class is like him, they're all copies of each other, not one of them would dare to be different."

"Well," said Rafe, "if they're all like him, now I understand the expression 'Merrie England,'" and Doctor Rafe enjoyed heartily his own humour.

"I wish you'd be serious, Goff"—Railthorpe himself certainly was. "Tell me truly, is Mr. Cherral a fair example? Be moderate for once."

"Railthorpe, my boy, don't suggest that I, a member of the world's greatest race, could be immoderate with the English for my theme. It's the people of Ireland with their ideas and their poetry who leaven the sordid and so-called civilized world. It's——"

"Ireland be damned," said Rafe. "I needn't damn the Irish. That's attended to. Let's hear your views on Cherral."

"Do you know, Rafe"—Mr. Goff began to grow warm—"you often remind me of an Englishman? You're the same bull-headed bundle of prejudices. You know nothing of Ireland, you know none of her people, save the narrowest, bigoted peasant type on the farms round here, and though I treat you with a courtesy ye little deserve——"

Doctor Rafe lay back to laugh.

"—for the Irish are a polished nation by nature, ye great bellowing boo-hoo-ing, blatant calf of a Saxon savage——"

"I wish you two would stop barking at each other," said Railthorpe. "Goff, like a good fellow, tell me the truth about the English people. I'll never have a chance of going to England myself, and you, you lucky dog, you've lived there."

"Ye mean I nearly died there."

"The diseases of civilization," explained Doctor Rafe gravely, "work virulently on the savage."

This remark upset the gravity of all three.

"Well, now for Goff's lecturette," announced Rafe. "'The excellencies of the English.' By a wild Irishman."

"Railthorpe, me boy," Goff turned his back on Rafe "you're seized with a noble desire for the truth, and I'm the man to give it. Of the English working-man we needn't speak, for till lately the poor divil has had no chance these many generations."

"Bosh," declared Rafe. "There's compulsory education in England, isn't there?"

"Of the nobility," continued Goff, taking no notice of the interruptor, "I'll not speak either, for Rafe here, the poor

ignorant creature, couldn't understand it. He'd not even be able, I'll lay you, to explain off-hand the difference between a viscount and a marquis. Could ye now, Rafe?" asked Goff, making the appeal direct.

"Easy," answered the candid Rafe, "if I knew what either of 'em was."

"But my subject's not the ignorance of this poor Colonial here—though that's a big subject too," continued Mr. Goff—"but something far greater, the chief characteristic of the educated Englishman. It's easy to pick it out, and faith, it's a pleasure to talk of it. What is it? Why, the singular impenetrability of his skull; what's in it will stay there, nothing can knock it out, and anything left out must stay out, nothing can knock it in. The solidity, the magnificent imperviousness of that head, is enormous, it's wonderful, it's—it's colossal; that thickness is the classical national feature, it's the root of all his vices and the cause of his few virtues. D'ye hear me now?"

"The whole damn district can hear you," declared Rafe. "What the blazes do you want to yell for?"

"It's maybe because you're somewhat deaf to the voice of truth, Doctor Rafe, and not too bright in the brain. It's a fact that I'm telling you, and when y'admit the thick-headedness, y'only require a logical mind to find the two other national characteristics—ignorance and self-complacence."

"An educated Englishman ignorant!" exclaimed Railthorpe. "When you talk against England, Goff, you don't think you hurt her, do you? But you injure yourself. You make people think you—excuse me, Goff—ignorant yourself."

"I'll admit now that I'm speaking of one class only of a numerous nation," said Mr. Goff, "and I'll admit ye'll find many rich and fine natures sandwiched in here and there between thickly massed millions full of insular ignorance and arrogance. I admit it, d'ye hear me? But I'm speaking of the type that prevails, and faith it prevails enormously, and I'll put my bad word on it while Rafe here keeps breath in me."

"When you break out like this I hardly know whether you're joking or whether you're mad," continued Railthorpe, by no means mollified. "Oh, Goff, surely England leads the world; she has down through the centuries. The history of England is the history of the world's battle for freedom."

Railthorpe, tramping about the grass, spoke with eager intensity. Goff, unable to sit still, jumped to his feet and shook his fist. "Come out of the darkness of the ages. Poor creature! You're an ignorant idealist; an untutored, rap-sodical, poetizing, affectionate fool; a—a——"

"A blasted bleater," suggested Rafe.

"But listen, Goff," protested Railthorpe. "I hadn't half finished—it's not in mere spacious territory that England outweighs all other nations, but all the time she's been giving to the world great men, heroic soldiers, noble poets, profound thinkers in every science."

Goff had so much to say that he could hardly speak. "Oh, Railthorpe, ye speak as a man of another age, ye—ye prehistoric remnant, ye—ye benighted fossil!" He swung his arms wildly. "Listen now, I'll admit that long times back the English grew and flourished and rose and were great, but they reached their zenith centuries ago and ever since then they've been going down. D'ye hear me?" shouted Mr. Goff.

"Easy," answered Rafe, too lazy to be grammatic.

"What fearful rot, Goff!" Railthorpe was fiercely indignant. "When you sling about wild charges like that you don't convince anyone. You only make them think you're a—a——"

"A damn lunatic," completed Doctor Rafe.

"Wild charges! Ye brace of forsaken backblockers, ye pair of Antipodean Ananiases, ye woolly Colonials, ye parasites on the extremest tentacle of the grasping British Empire! Wild charges!"

"By a wild Irishman," supplemented Doctor Rafe. "Damn wild," he added glancing at his excited friend.

"I'm not so mad as ye think. I've history to back me up. I say the English were a great nation about 1600, and I say they've been going down ever since. And I can prove it."

"Sounds a tough job," remarked Doctor Rafe reflectively.

"It sounds blind and wicked disloyalty to me," declared Railthorpe hotly.

Goff's fondness for Railthorpe prevented him taking offence at this. Repressing his natural feelings, he gave the conversation a lighter turn and spoke with a laugh. "You brag of England's territory. Why, take any land that England's occupied, and you'll find an Irishman won it for her, and a Scotchman's keeping it."

Railthorpe, repentant at having spoken to his friend with such bitterness, accepted the new lead eagerly. "Yes, Goff, let's stick to history. I apologize for what I said just now, but you know how I love England. History it is. What about Clive and India? What about Canada and Wolfe, eh? Ah, I have you now, Goff, why Wolfe——"

"There was Irish blood in him," shrieked Goff. "Ye may say," he added excitedly, "that there's never been a great Englishman but he was an Irishman." Mr. Goff was unable to proceed further owing to the conduct of his friends.

"Oh, dear!" said Railthorpe at last, wiping his eyes.

"Oh, dear! Goff, when you're deadly serious you're the funniest chap I know."

"I can afford to amuse the poor pair of ye," observed Mr. Goff loftily. "For devil a chance have ye against me when I'm in earnest."

## CHAPTER XV

MRS. LIMMERING accepted paying guests, but Miss Scatterton kept a boarding-house and, as she herself said, made no bones about it.

At twenty-five minutes past one that day her chief boarder, Mr. Sol Lee, who comprised in himself the entire firm of "Sol Lee & Co., Drapers and Outfitters," having seen his shop safely shuttered and locked up for the weekly Wednesday half-holiday, entered Miss Scatterton's dining-room and fretfully waited the appearance of dinner, timed on that day, for the convenience of all hands, at one thirty.

"That clock's slow," he declared. "I believe they shove the hands about to suit themselves."

"That's an old story," answered Mr. Austerberry. "Give us something fresh for a change."

"The flies are very bad," snarled Mr. Lee savagely. "You want to hear something fresh do you? Well, there's nothing fresh in the town. Nothing stirring. No money coming in. This drought's killing everything. Nothing fresh unless you call the new solicitor something fresh. Seen him yet? There's no opening for a solicitor here, and if there were this fellow's not the man to fill the bill. He's been here for over two months and I don't believe he's seen a client."

"My word, Lee," said the fair and wholesome-looking Austerberry, expanding his forty inch chest as though lifting a burden, "you're a depressing sort of chap, aren't you?" He glanced at his undersized, grey, and dyspeptic fellow-boarder and added, "You'd sink a boat if you talked to it. What are you always growling for?"

"The lawyers here would make anyone growl. An honest lawyer—if there could be such a thing—and if he was cheap—fancy a lawyer being cheap!—might get a start here just because the opposition's so rotten. Look at Dobbsleigh, he's always too busy about horses to do any work, and he's always about the streets and in the pubs, never in his office."

"I suppose you've been giving him ten guineas worth of trouble to collect one of your three and elevenpenny accounts."

"Those who buy should pay," replied Mr. Lee coolly. "And Lambton's worse," he continued, returning to his



former theme, " he can eat a leg of mutton at a meal I'm told, and he looks it. The only brain work he does is to think whether he can hold any more. Oh, they're a pretty lot, the legal gentlemen of Cooeville, and I shouldn't be surprised if the new man was the worst of the lot. I wonder what he has the cheek to charge for collecting accounts. I believe I'll look in and see what he asks for it. He can't charge me six and eight for asking what he charges, I suppose."

" I hope he does," said Mr. Austerberry heartily.

Here entered Emma with the dinner, also Mr. Tinner, and Mr. Beeston, clerk at the post office : to them Mr. Lee remarked that they'd been talking about the new lawyer. Mr. Tinner said he trusted the newcomer would prove a valued addition to society; Mr. Beeston said, " Hear, hear "; Mr. Austerberry, glancing at the just uncovered dish, said, " Oh, my God, that hash again ! "

Mr. Lee viewed all food with well-grounded suspicion, from him it called forth gloomy prophecies when seen, sour comments while being eaten, and unhappy though bitterly, triumphant verifications during the two or three hours thence next ensuing.

" Cheer up," said Austerberry encouragingly, as Mr. Lee after some ten minutes ineffective picking pushed his plate away. There's bread and butter pudding to come, I asked Emma."

" I know it'll have currants in it," said Mr. Lee unhappily. " But I'd better wait till I see what it's like. As soon as I've finished I'll have half an hour's rest, it's a good thing for the stomach, and then I'm going down to the Mechanics till the Bowling Green fuss commences."

## CHAPTER XVI

IF you look carefully at the librarian's desk in the Mechanics' Institute, you will see a notice hung up on its railing. " Subscribers are requested to maintain silence." Nobody knows why it is there, and really, for a pleasant chat the opportunities offered by the Mechanics can hardly be equalled.

Doctor Rafe, a blunt creature indeed, called the Mechanics a gossip shop; Mr. Jessington more delicately referred to it as The Information Bureau, while some of Cooeville's leading residents, people who should have known better, spoke of Miss Geoghegan, the Librarian, as the Local Press.

Thus this apparently insignificant members'-reading-room, lined with current fiction, technical books of a by-gone age, and obsolete works of reference, is, viewed properly, the scene of many a chaste confidence, many an imaginative romance, a court from which there is no appeal, where many

a character, carefully weighed after the evidence for one side has been given, is found wanting, and is irrevocably sentenced.

"I think a man must be dark to be really handsome," Miss Geoghegan is saying to Miss Annie Wemby and Miss Jean Malintop. "And you couldn't call Mr. Cherral dark, could you?" she added wistfully.

"Oh, no, not dark exactly," admitted Miss Wemby. "I suppose you'd call him rather fair. But it's a nice sort of fairness."

"He ought to be a dark man," said Miss Geoghegan, "and he ought to have a moustache. And Mr. Cherral hasn't one."

"Oh, but I think a fair man can be handsome too," protested Miss Wemby.

It would perhaps be difficult to find a young man whom Miss Wemby could criticize severely; she gave her views on the one in question with kindly comments and finished up, "And he's got nice hair too, hasn't he? I wanted to stroke it every time I looked at him."

"You seem quite taken with him, Annie," said Miss Geoghegan, sighing sentimentally.

"Oh, I don't know, he mightn't care for poor little me." She laughed with the confidence of plump and pretty nineteen. "He might pick you, Win, or perhaps Jean."

Miss Malintop smiled. "It's a good thing there's no one to hear you, Annie."

"Oh, I don't care," declared the irresponsible Annie. "I think he's a dear. Mr. Railthorpe thought so too, because I asked him, at least he said he was so quiet and dignified. And you like Mr. Railthorpe, don't you, Jean?"

But Miss Malintop, who was looking at the titles of some books, gave no answer, though her averted face coloured faintly. "I'll take this book, Win," she said. "Aunt is waiting for me to get back, good-bye. Good-bye, Annie."

"Mr. Railthorpe's a great one to change his books," remarked Miss Geoghegan to Miss Wemby. "His list is always bigger than anybody else's. He's always putting down something in the Suggestion Book too, and he takes such funny books out. So he's taken a fancy to Mr. Cherral, has he? But then he's always taking fancies. Do you think——"

The door was wrenched open and Miss Tandy executed a dramatic entry.

"I hurried like anything to get here early," she declared, falling into a chair. "Aren't there going to be any more here? They can't have all gone on to the Tea yet."

"I don't know. Why, what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing much," answered Miss Tandy with great indifference. "I've got a bit of news though."

"Oh, what is it, Moll," exclaimed Annie, while the Librarian looked up with interest.

"I thought I'd make you both sit up." Miss Tandy spoke with a touch of spite. "You're very nice when you want anything. I've a good mind not to tell you."

Miss Wemby adjured her in affectionate terms not to be a mean thing, but to be a dear, while Miss Geoghegan, moved to the inmost fibres of her being, even as a starving one before whom food is dangled, turned beseeching eyes upon her tormentor and said, "Oh, Moll Tandy!"

That longing to impart information, which is one of the many pleasing traits in feminine nature, overcame Miss Tandy's resolve to be severe; indeed, that unselfish desire which makes one burn to impart lately acquired knowledge to those yet ignorant thereof is widely spread at Cooeville. These altruistic emotions and their consequent amenities go far toward making social life the elevating communion that we find it. "What would you say to a dance, as soon as the weather's cool enough?" enquired Miss Tandy with great calm.

"Oh, Moll!" cried Miss Wemby with sparkling eyes. "A dance? How simply lovely! What will you wear? Oh, what fun! Oh, Win——"

While the occupants of the Reading-Room were discussing avidly dress, possible partners, and other matters of vital importance, four more young ladies on their way to the Function of the afternoon arrived; to them were imparted with exclamations, cries, raised voices, rapid utterance, and a torrent of words, the great news and each speaker's views upon it. Mr. Lee tactlessly chose this moment to enter for a peaceful hour's perusal of certain magazines. Recognizing in the group round the Librarian's desk several of his customers, he smoothed out his scowl and refrained from any comment. He was, unfortunately, suffering from rapidly boiled mutton hash, waxy potatoes not thoroughly cooked, and hot bread and butter pudding to which currants had been added with liberal hand; he found himself unable to read comfortably when seven of Cooeville's young ladies were indulging in vocal ecstasies; policy fled before a rapidly rising temper, and the intruder so far forgot himself as to cough significantly and glance at the performers with a scowl no longer suppressed, but, on the contrary, in full working order. Silence fell.

But fourteen eyes all directed upon the same object proclaimed more loudly than ever tongue could do that. Well, really of all the—— For the space of six counted seconds, the opposing eyes crossed glances, then Mr. Lee, remembering that the fair faces opposite were oft to be seen at his counters, scowled more horribly than before—though this

time at himself—then, collecting all his self-control, he grinned horribly a ghastly smile, remarked with genuine irony, "Don't let me interrupt your reading, ladies," and withdrew, accompanied by three selected magazines, to the verandah outside, where he found a dazzling light, a shade temperature of 94°, and an assorted collection of active and elusive flies.

As the door closed behind him the storm burst forth once more, Miss Moll Tandy's high and slightly nasal notes, which possessed a peculiar power of penetration, piercing triumphantly through the unceasing supply of the other six.

The Cooeeville Bowling Club grounds, lying at the southern end of the main street, are as a green oasis in a dry parched land; the eyes of the passer-by, strained by the brilliant sunshine, the white dust-coat of the roads, the gleaming quartz gravel exposed at every few paces, and the glitter of a new galvanized iron roof, rest gratefully upon the soft emerald of the lawn and the darker green of the well kept surrounding hedges. But this afternoon it no longer lies quiet, restful, sombre; brighter colours prevail, white dresses or soft-hued gowns eddy about it, gay sunshades spot it vividly.

Mr. Wemy who, happy man, sees what meets the eye and no more, watches the gathering of Cooeeville's wives and daughters, admires the general effect of their attire, and listens to their laughing chat, he beams, he rubs his hands—neither small nor bony—together; whatever geniality he meets, he radiates it back increased tenfold in warmth and power.

Mr. Sol Lee, however, alas poor wretched one, sees what meets the eye certainly, but he also and immediately suspects it and squints viciously round and behind it; he notices the gay and tasteful (or otherwise) attire of the invited ladies, but, pricing each visible item with expert ease and comparing the amount spent with the effect achieved, he echoes the thought of an ancient, unknown, and probably polygamous writer, and declares that all is vanity; he observes the spiky high-heeled shoes trespassing upon that lawn which is sacred to men only, and even then but to those men who wear heel-less foot gear, and, suddenly smitten with the dark conviction that a large amount of the feminine finery displayed before his eyes has *not* been purchased at The Manchester House—Sol Lee & Co., Proprietors—but owes its origin to an alien source, he withdraws to the rear of the crowd in a highly acid condition, and there offers, to any who will accept it, caustic criticism.

The afternoon tea was over, Mr. Labby, the tall, broad president and host, had made a little speech, and Mrs. Labby had thrown the Jack—a great deal too hard—for the first

rink when Mr. Norwood Cherral arrived. He was at once taken in charge by the hostess of the afternoon, for Mrs. Labby has taken a decided liking to the new solicitor, and now she notices with approval his clothes, his bearing, his behaviour, and finds nothing to lessen her esteem in his quiet and restrained conversation. Mrs. Thridderley, seated on the other side of Mrs. Labby, regards Norwood at intervals with that interest which a good woman naturally feels in a bad man.

Mr. Allingham, though a member of the Bowling Club and a man prominent in all social matters, has arrived two hours late; once upon the scene, however, he wastes no time; if all one's energies are concentrated upon the act, the drinking of a cup of tea does not take long, after that the crowd can be carefully looked over and mentally sifted to see which are the best people to speak to—for the interests of the Bank of New South Wales; the ladies of course can be put aside at once, at least nearly all of them, and—ah there was Mr. Cherral just getting up and walking away. Ah, there he was speaking to Miss Frettle and her sister, quite right, he should be sociable, but with girls?—hardly. The most recent addition to the Bank's constituents should be introduced at once to everybody of importance, he should be made known, praised, talked about, pushed.

"Mr. Cherral, I'm glad to see you here; delightful, isn't it? You were wise to come. Decidedly. I must introduce you. Come this way." Mr. Allingham grasped Norwood's arm and steered him past the ladies to a shady spot beside the western hedge. "A representative gathing. How long have you been here?"

"About half an hour."

"I'm glad I didn't miss you, you were hidden among the ladies. As a public man don't sit in corners. Come out to the centre among the men. Show yourself. Make friends. Impress them. Stop, look"—Mr. Allingham tightened his grasp and brought Norwood to a halt. The banker glanced round the green with calculating eye. "There's big business here though some of the best overdrafts are away, and there's not a farmer in the crowd." He pulled Norwood closer to him. "Gain the confidence of most of these"—he motioned towards the throng—"and there's an easy thousand a year for you. In the town alone," added Mr. Allingham impressively.

"Kindly release my arm," said Norwood.

"The town for debt-collecting—with pickings—odds and ends of business—very payable—and for Court work and advertisement," continued Mr. Allingham, giving no heed to the request. "And the outside district for mortgages, oans, agreements, and solid estates. Fine business for you,"

Mr. Allingham almost smacked his lips. "You'll have them all in time. Tired? Well, sit down here. I'll bring along some men you should know."

Norwood, much annoyed, watched him depart; when Mr. Allingham some ten minutes later returned with two leading citizens, the new solicitor, "one of those men whom you must know to appreciate, quiet, but deep—full of knowledge, just packed, sir, packed, with legal learning," was nowhere to be found.

## CHAPTER XVII

MR. ALLINGHAM merited success in matters he undertook, for he spared neither thought in planning nor energy in execution. Hitherto, with no professional accounts at his bank at all, he now saw in Norwood the seed of a heavy harvest, he knew the other solicitors and their weaknesses, he determined that Mr. Cherral should have no weaknesses, and that he, Mr. Allingham, the Manager of the Bank of New South Wales at Cooeville, would work for Mr. Cherral, even as he had worked for the bank. "Dobbsleigh, ah, a poor character Dobbsleigh, he shall see Mr. Cherral succeed. Lambton? No, quite hopeless."

Having decided to push Norwood forward as a coming public man he turned a deaf ear to all his protests and explanations, and exhorted, warned, and manœuvred with unflagging zeal. He had just left one morning and Norwood sat considering how he might best bring to Mr. Allingham's notice the fact that he objected to being managed and directed to such an extent, when an unknown visitor walked in and held out a welcoming hand. "I'm not on business, just thought I'd look you up. How are you?" Norwood shook hands and eyed with obvious doubt his visitor, who sat down and stretched out his legs comfortably. "I see so many new faces all at once that really——"

"Of course. You haven't met me though. Name of Austerberry. I look after Labby's wheat-buying. Have you met Mr. Labby yet?"

"Er—Yes."

"All the better." Mr. Austerberry looked at Norwood obviously summing him up. The result seemed to inspire confidence. "Look here," he said, dragging his chair nearer, "I take it you're straight, I heard about you from Wemby and from Hoip. And from Mrs. Labby too. She's a trump. One of the best," he added emphatically. "I just looked in to contradict anyone who's been telling you there's no room for you here. There's more than a living for a man who looks after his work. You can do that easy. Eh?"

Norwood's first feeling when Austerberry began speaking was resentment. By what right did an unknown man, a clerk too on his own confession, walk into his private room and commence patronizing him in this most extraordinary fashion. His training prevented his expression being any index to his feelings, and Mr. Austerberry, inwardly admiring the steady gaze and dignified quiet of Norwood, and warmed by his own feelings of good fellowship, took up his message again. "I'll be running you out to Mr. Labby's some evening"—Norwood's feelings deepened, but he waited for the speaker to finish—"you'll meet some of the best fellows there. Do you know all the bank managers yet? They can help a legal man with the farmers, the cockies take all their troubles to their banker. If the grey mare dies, they let him know at once, and if the pet cow has twins they drive in twenty miles straight away to make sure he hears about it." Mr. Austerberry enjoyed his laugh and slapped his leg heartily. "You see what I'm driving at? Good-bye. Oh—I say," he added, suddenly returning. "I nearly forgot the very thing I came in for. Has Lee been here?"

"Mr. Lee? No, who is he?"

"Oh he's Sol. Lee & Co., Drapers. He might be in, and he's a mean, miserable sort of a devil. He's a most depressing chap," said Mr. Austerberry with a hearty laugh. "He was born for an undertaker but went in for rags instead. If he comes in here and tries to cheer you up by telling you it's a mistake to start here and there's no money in the district and you're bound to fail and some little things like that, tell him to go to the devil. I wouldn't work for Lee for ten pounds a week. If he met the angel Gabriel he'd tell him Cooeville had no use for him and point out that his halo was over one eye and his wings a cheap misfit. Don't let him give you the blues, that's really what I dropped in to warn you about. 'Bye."

## CHAPTER XVIII

MR. DOLOMY, of "The Cooeville Foundry, Agricultural Implements Made and Repaired," sitting at his tea, appeared to find the meat difficult to eat. "Mother," he said, addressing his wife, "I'm sorry for the beast this came off." He paused characteristically and added with a sigh. "He had a hard life." Another pause. Another sigh. "And the hardness entered into his flesh."

Joseph, who had his father's contented spirit, laughed. "It's a bit too tough to worry, isn't it? Have another potato."

"I suppose you're going to this meetin' to-night, Joe?" the father asked.

"Rather. Sander is a member of the lodge. I 'spose as president I must be there."

A ring at the front door brought Mrs. Dolomy to her feet, enter Mr. Allingham, treading as one going straight ahead in a clearly marked out path, also Mr. Norwood Cherral, treading nervously as one who knew not where path or companion might lead him.

"Mr. Dolomy," proclaimed the companion, "let me introduce my friend, Mr. Cherral, the new barrister and solicitor. You ought to know him. This, Mr. Cherral," the speaker rounded on Joseph who sat with an unpeeled potato on his fork and a surprised expression on his face, "this is Mr. Joe Dolomy, the President of the Australian Natives' Association. Joe, Mr. Cherral wishes to join your lodge—as an honorary member." The speaker did not know that Norwood, born in England, was ineligible. Joe laid down his fork and changed his expression. The hapless Norwood found himself welcomed hospitably as a guest, bidden to tea, relieved of his hat by old Mr. Dolomy, and invited to a glass of whisky and seltzer forthwith; deserted by Mr. Allingham, who, after a drink and an apology for interrupting tea—"We're having it early to-night," said Mr. Dolomy. "Won't you sit down with us?"—departed with his usual determination, brushing aside invitations, objections and such-like straws, after stating, "Mr. Cherral would like to go with you to-night to the send-off. Take him."

Norwood, pleading inability to stay to tea, left after ten minutes' chat in, which he took care to mention that Mr. Allingham had misunderstood him, and that he would not join the A.N.A.—at present—he added to soften the refusal, but having declined so many things when Joe Dolomy said, "I'll call for you 'bout eight to-night, so's you can come to the send-off if you care to," he said. "Certainly, thank you," under the compulsion of courtesy. Father and son saw him to the gate, and gave renewed invitations to come up whenever he liked.

At eight o'clock that evening several clusters round the side door of Shandy Saxon's showed that some event of social import was afoot. At a quarter past eight a general movement towards the dining-room showed the arrival of the guest of the evening, Mr. Sander, who, leaving Cooeville, and being popular withal, was, according to custom, invited to be at the Cooeville Hotel that evening at eight o'clock "to say good-bye over a parting glass of wine."

Norwood arrived with Mr. Dolomy and Joe, just as Rafe and Railthorpe appeared round the corner.

"Are you keen on this sort of thing, Mr. Cherral?" asked Railthorpe.

"It is my first experience."



"Wish it were mine," snorted Rafe. He detested send-offs; duty might compel him to go, but nothing could prevent him from being surly about it.

"Mr. Cherral's coming with me"—Mr. Joe Dolomy felt he was Norwood's host for the evening—"I—I hope he'll like it," continued Joe with an effort.

"Sure to," growled Rafe.

As the crowd drifted into the large dining-room there was a hasty scramble for the chairs in the most retired places, and nearly a fight over two that stood out of view behind the piano. The low-voiced conversation which had prevailed outside ceased. The proper heavy silence settled over the room, broken only by the coughing and clearing of throats of several who expected to be called on for a speech.

Joe Dolomy, on whom many eyes were turned, stuck his hands into his pockets and said. "I move Mr. Caxwell takes the chair."

"He's not here," replied several reproachfully.

"Well, get 'im," rejoined young Dolomy. "He's in the bar parlour."

Two obedient satellites went forth, and returned with Mr. Martin Caxwell, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria for the Cooeville constituency. A sigh of relief went up from several who had feared they might have to preside.

"Well, gentlemen," said Mr. Caxwell, "I was waitin' for a message from you. I understand it's been moved and seconded that I take the chair. Is that so?"

"Yes," said Joe Dolomy without a blush. "And there t is at the other end of the table."

"I have much pleasure," said the Chairman in trumpet tones, seating himself with that dignity which becomes Imperial thrones and Victorian politicians, "in invitin' the guest of the evenin' to sit on my right 'and."

Mr. Caxwell glanced at the assembly before him, and, realizing that the departing guest would be of no further use to him, but that all voters present should be conciliated, he pitched his presidential address in a vein of compliment only to the guest, but of eulogy regarding the hosts. Mr. Caxwell, partly from his exalted position, partly from his resonant voice, and partly from his pleasure in hearing it, frequently occupied the chair at public meetings.

"And when I look round," he concluded, after ten minutes speaking, in tones that resounded through the room, "and see such a representative gatherin' of this important centre, a gatherin' drawn from all sections of the community, when I see this, Mr. Sander, and realize that they have come without compulsion or urgin' in any shape or form, I feel sure that this important centre believes you to be a man worthy of

'igh favour, and I feel proud to preside 'ere and to feel that I have the honour of representing this important centre in the Parliament of the Land."

He sat down amid much handclapping and stamping.

"There don't seem to be no sort of toast list," he resumed, as the applause died out, "but I have much pleasure in callin' on others to support my remarks."

There was an uneasy silence, while each glanced furtively at his neighbour.

"I understand," said the Chairman, at last, "that our guest is a member of the A.N.A. No doubt some of you—perhaps you, Mr. Smith, you're in the lodge I know."

"Joe Dolomy's President," said Mr. Smith hastily.

"Mr. Dolomy," said the Chairman, "I have much pleasure in calling on you to voice the sentiments of this meetin' on behalf of the A.N.A."

Old Mr. Dolomy rose with a re-assuring smile. "There's only one Mr. Dolomy," he said cheerfully. "And that's me. All others is imitation. Eh, what's that?—he turned to his son who was jerking his arm and whispering, "Eh? They meant you? Not much, Joe, the Chairman's call wasn't for you. Not for Joseph."

The Australian Natives' Association, which has branches all over Australia, is not a political body. It says so itself. For all that, one who depends on the people's votes will not lightly esteem the lodge, and Mr. Caxwell hastened to correct matters.

"Mr. Dolomy, we shall be pleased to listen to your interestin' remarks in the near future. At present I call on the President of the A.N.A., that important body, comprisin' the energy and intellec' of our land, to speak to the motion."

Joe Dolomy rose with a red face. "Im sure," he began with hesitating slowness, "we're very glad to say good-bye to Mr. Sander"—"That's putting it rather straight," from Mr. Dolomy—"Order, Gentlemen," from the chair—"No, I don't mean that, I mean—I mean—you know. He's a valued member of the lodge," the speaker went on after a pause—"I'm sure we'll miss him. I think, I think"—pause—"Think aloud, Joe," suggested his father. "I—I—I call on Bill Beeston to second my remarks on behalf of the lodge," concluded Joe hurriedly.

He sat down awkwardly and Mr. Beeston sprang willingly to his feet. "Mr. Chairman, Mr. Sander, and Gentlemen, I feel greatly honoured by being called on to speak. I was far from expecting this honour. I endorse the remarks of the previous speakers. I've known Mr. Sander for two years now and I say he's a worthy member of the lodge. I say he's a man who commands the respect of all sections of the community. I say it without fear of contradiction. In

the execution of his public duty he's shown no fear or favour in any shape or form. I say this without fear of contradiction. In private life and in public life he's an ornament to any place where he may live. We're all sorry to lose him, but we must remember that our loss is another town's gain." Here Mr. Beeston paused for breath and loud applause broke forth; this may have been due to the excellence of the oration, or to the fact that many were tired of sitting quiet and made a cheerful noise when opportunity offered. Elated by his success, Mr. Beeston continued in similar rapid and characteristic strain. By the time he had finished Mr. Caxwell had analyzed the roomful of faces and worked out a little programme in his mind. "Before callin' on other speakers," he proclaimed, as Mr. Beeston resumed his seat amid loud clapping, "I see no reason why we shouldn't add to the already pleasin' 'armony of the evenin'. There's a pianner, and there's Mr. Smith. I call on Mr. Smith to add to the 'armony of the evenin'—by—by—by addin' to it," concluded Mr. Caxwell, a greater volume of voice atoning for a slight paucity of diction.

Mr. Smith, though he might blush to hear himself speaking in public, enjoyed singing: rising, he crossed the room with a society smile; then, seating himself at the piano, he gave, with athletic power and graceful swayings of the body, that introductory "tinkle tinkle tinkle, pom pom," which bespeak the master and the musician, and forthwith lifted up his voice in song.

Doctor Rafe, a lover of the natural pleasures of life, had a singular distaste for the joys of society; he was, in fact, restive at all times when, through force of circumstance, he had been lured to a formal gathering; he had betrayed, during the diplomatic utterances of Mr. Caxwell, and still more so under the whirling words of Mr. Beeston, a fidgetiness which, one hears, is absent among the well-bred; and now, under the spell of Mr. Smith's vocal efforts, he became irritable and gloomy. A cessation of song, while Mr. Smith scooped up into the instrument's treble notes, afforded him the relief of speech, digging his hands deeper into his trouser pockets he murmured to Railthorpe—"What horrible damn howling."

The voice thus maligned began the third verse, and Doctor Rafe, crossing his legs, gazed with stern wretchedness straight in front of him. As Mr. Smith's top note died away nearly 'a dozen men, bearing each one an instrument of music, filed in. The Cooeville Town Band had cut short its weekly practice to do honour to Mr. Sander.

The chairman welcomed the new arrivals with relief, and the necessary drinks having been brought forth, he arose. "Now, gentlemen, I'll thank one of the newcomers to speak to

the motion. Our departin' friend is a musical man himself, and will 'ighly appreciate any remarks comin' from one of his musical brothers. I see Mr. Bowyer's there. I call on Mr. Bowyer to speak on be'alf of the musical section of the community."

Mr. Bowyer was a capable battery manager, a worthy husband, an efficient euphonium player and, in his own way, a humourist, but a fluent or forcible method of public speaking had been denied him. In obedience to the chairman's call he arose. The happy guest of the evening apparently found it as difficult to be talked at as the speakers found it to talk at him; when the standing Mr. Bowyer gazed at him severely without speech, Mr. Sander found the strain too much, he hastily finished the whisky and soda which he had taken to mark the event—beer was his normal drink—and mopped a perspiring face.

Mr. Bowyer cleared his throat and said, "Ah!"— He cleared his throat again, made some technical remark about his valves being out of order, and added after a pause that he endorsed the remarks of the previous speaker. That he had not heard the previous speaker was of no moment. Mr. Bowyer then stood for a lengthy period in deep thought, and finally resumed his seat.

By this time every man had drunk several drinks and the social thermometer, despite the speeches, was rising rapidly. At the demand of Mr. Caxwell for further entertainment, Mr. Tinner, tenor soloist, and Mr. Smith, accompanist, walked to the piano. Doctor Rafe, doing his polite best to turn a curse into a cough, sighed heavily.

"As time is drawin' on," announced the chairman, when Mr. Tinner's contribution was over, "it now devolves upon me, Mr. Sander, speakin' as the representative of these gentlemen gathered here to-night, to do honour to you as their invited—er—visitor, to perform the pleasin' dooty of makin' a presentation"—and at the end of considerably further discourse, for in the execution of public duties Mr. Caxwell knew not fatigue himself nor suspected it in others, "a pair of silver mounted pipes in case" was, with a final oratorical flourish, handed over to the nervously moist recipient.

Great applause greeted the guest of the evening on his rising to reply; he said he was taken completely by surprise. He deserved nothing like this—this fine gathering, and this little—he meant this valuable—er—ah—souvenir. He could not say much in reply. He'd had a good time in Cooeville and was sorry to leave it, there were some good chaps in Cooeville, take it from him. He would carry away with him pleasant recollections of Cooeville and of his kind friends there, and would think of them always when smoking the souvenir. He hadn't much more to say.

(Prolonged pause. Several boots shuffled uneasily over the floor.) No, he couldn't think of anything more to say, but he thanked them for the souvenir—and—and—now he'd sit down, he thanked them——

"'Scuse me, gents," said Shandy entering, "just eleven thirty. Any more drinks before I close up?"

This entirely formal remark, made chiefly for the benefit of Constable Mullane there present, produced several further orders for drinks, and an understanding smile from the officer of police himself.

The business of the evening being now completed, pleasure became not only possible but permissible. Conversation became general: Mr. Smith tuned to the high prevailing pitch by one long shandy, one medium shandy, one medium beer, overcame his shyness of speech, and, seating himself on the bass notes of the piano, offered loudly to play any accompaniment they liked to name.

Mr. Caxwell deemed the time appropriate to divest himself of presidential honours, and, abandoning the chair of office, with conscious humility he mingled with the throng. The unknown face had not escaped his eye. Was the new man a voter or only a visitor? He approached Mr. Dolomy. "If this is your friend I'll trouble you to do the honours."

"Eh, who? What's that?" asked Joe.

His father, heartily enjoying himself, came to his assistance. "There'll be an election in 'bout twelvemonths, Joe, Mr. Caxwell just wants to make sure of Mr. Cherral's vote and interest. Mr. Caxwell, this young friend of ours has come to stay among us—Mr. Cherral."

"Pleased to meet you," declared Mr. Caxwell, shaking hands warmly. "I'm proud to know any friend of Mr. Dolomy's. So you've settled here, have you? Well, you might do worse. And what's your line?"

"I do not understand you," answered Norwood coldly.

"Ha, ha! don't understand me, eh? Well, I'm not hard to understand. I'm a plain man from off the land, sir, and I'm not ashamed of it, and as Mr. Dolomy here, my very good friend, will tell you, I have the honour of representin' this constitoency in the Assembly. Those are my two lines, sir, earnin' an honest livin' by the sweat of me brow when I'm not devotin' me time and energy to forwardin' the interests of this constitoency, a constitoency that has elected me to see that it gets its whack of what's goin'. And though I don't care about blowin' my own trumpet, you may take it from me that the interests of Cooeville are not neglected."

Norwood had not enjoyed the evening; the speeches, the singing, the conduct of all those present, appeared to him alike unspeakable: only the feeling that he was the guest of the Dolomys' had prevented him from leaving the room the

moment he had recognized the class of society present; he regretted his kindness in consenting to accompany Mr. Joe Dolomy, and the discovery that the guest of the evening, whom he had honoured by attending, belonged to the working class, put the seal upon his displeasure: annoyed at having lowered himself, he was in no mood to listen to Mr. Caxwell upon his favourite theme: without deigning to answer that gentleman he turned to the two Dolomys, bade them a curt good-evening, and left.

Mr. Caxwell, a member of the happy class that cannot believe their presence and conversation fail to please, looked after Norwood in surprise for a moment, then turned to Mr. Dolomy with understanding dawning in his face, "You didn't tell me he was deaf," he complained.

Old Mr. Dolomy, treading heavily upon his son's foot, apologized for his forgetfulness.

## CHAPTER XIX

"SORRY to have been detained so long, but will make up for it when I come back. I suggest that for business reasons, some little arrangement should be made between us when I return. Will be with you the day after you get this."

Norwood read this letter from Mr. Steggs over again. "What does he mean by 'some little arrangement'?" He made one arrangement with me—to spend two months initiating me into his practice—and he broke that after four weeks."

This was true; the erring Steggs had requested permission to spend a few days in Melbourne "to look round for an opening," and here was the first news of his return after an absence of nine weeks. Norwood's indignation when he did not return on the due date had soon changed to relief, for Steggs had brought no clients to the office, perhaps indeed, as Allingham had hinted, his presence kept them away.

Time had passed uneventfully with Norwood. During office hours he had read his favourite authors, whiled away the time as best he could, and gone for a walk after five o'clock: all his spare hours could have been taken up in social life had he so desired, but a hearty though informal general invitation from several houses, to "drop in any evening you like," had left him unresponsive: the proper preliminary courtesies had not been paid to him, and in any case this manner of asking a guest to one's home was, according to Norwood's views, one that could not be met by acceptance.

As yet he rested in ungrateful ignorance of the rising warmth of Cooeville's welcome: the well-dressed young

man, quiet, dignified, and prevented by his breeding from showing his contempt for his present neighbours, had impressed those whom he met; his reputation rose steadily, for Cooeville, unable to refrain from talking about its new citizen, and having found no faults as yet, spoke his praise in growing admiration.

After reading Mr. Steggs' letter a third time, Norwood leant back and allowed his mind to wander idly. Suddenly through the open door he heard a drawling, uncultivated voice addressing the office boy in the outer room.

"Boss in?"

"Yes, Sir; step inside, Sir."

"Aw right."

A tall, slouching, rough-bearded man, with an ancient, wide-brimmed felt hat still on, strolled into Norwood's room. Those mixed and dirty tweeds that always roused Norwood's artistic ire met his eye once more, and a grey flannel shirt, innocent of collar or tie, lay open at the neck, showing a little gush of hair from the chest; altogether Norwood felt that this visitor presented a most repulsive appearance.

"Good-day, young man," remarked the caller, after gazing at Norwood for some moments.

"Would you kindly remove your hat," said Norwood sharply.

The visitor gazed at Norwood as though he hardly understood his request. "You're the new lawyer, ain't you?" He spat with the precision of long practice under each of the two cane chairs.

"Be good enough," Norwood spoke angrily, "not to spit in this office."

The client took off his hat and scratched his head, gazing at Norwood in puzzled manner. "Aw right, boss," he said at last. "No offence I hope. Suppose I can sit down?" He lifted each chair in turn, rubbed out with his boot the mark he had made beneath it, sat down, and smiled in friendly fashion. "Soon put that right."

"Do you wish to consult me?"

"Well," said the client with much deliberation. "I dunno. I come to see if you could help me."

"Pray explain yourself."

"Right oh. It was like this here. I had a selection. Three hundred and twenty acres. *You* know. Section 42. A' course I had to reside on it for six years. *You* know. And I didn't."

"Well, go on with your statement," said Norwood, as the client paused lengthily and gazed at him.

"I didn't live on it more'n six months, and they called me before a — Land Board over at Booróloak to explain why, and I told 'em straight. But they said it wouldn't do.

That's what they said. I should a' had a lawyer there to plead me case for me and I might a got on better. And now," the visitor's slow drawling voice rose as a sense of wrong stirred him, "— me if the — Government ain't forfeited it on me! Because I didn't live on it. And why didn't I? Now I'll tell yer."

"You must not use such expressions here," said Norwood severely. "Your language is disgraceful."

"Eh? Wait a bit till I finish. Why didn't I live on it? I'm just going to tell yer." He hitched his chair round the table till he sat beside Norwood instead of in front of him, and laid a huge work-worn hand on his arm.

"I really must ask you," said Norwood, in his most frigid tone, "to moderate your language." He felt inclined to ask the client to go round to the front of the table and stay there, but told himself that probably a man of this type, a farmer or something, could only understand one order at a time.

"That's all right," the client assured him, putting by the question of language as unimportant, "I don't mean nothin'. Now why didn't I live on this land? Well, when that land was thrown open for selection and I got it, I seen Annie Casey, Bill Casey's girl. You know. A fine, big, healthy-lookin' girl she was. Big, strong sort. You know." He paused to let this information soak into his solicitor. "And I said, 'there's the one to help me on the selection. So I spoke to her and to old Bill. Fine, strong, healthy-lookin' girl she was too. My old man had known Bill Casey goin' on twenty year. He didn't know the girl much, but anyone could see she was a fine, big, healthy-lookin' girl——"

To Norwood all that his first client had said was meaningless. What was a selection? What was section 42 about? Where should he look for it? Above all, why must a man live on his land? And why was he talking about a girl and her health so much? Was it a breach of promise action? How hairy and horribly dressed the fellow was! Why had fortune sent him for his first client one drawn from the dregs of mankind, clothed in filthy rags, and apparently not in his right mind? With a disdainful expression Norwood freed his arm from his client's grasp and spoke with obvious dislike. "Pardon me, but does this matter involve any legal question?"

"Wait a bit," said the client, with the first appearance of haste he had shown. "I'm coming to that. Well, this Annie Casey—fine, strong, healthy-lookin' girl she was—and me, we got married. She was a fine, big girl all right, that is, she looked it. And wot did I find?"—he hitched his chair still closer to Norwood—"head aching, heart weak, liver up-side down, stummick——"

This anatomical enumeration of an absent woman's defects



struck Norwood as in bad taste, if not absolutely indecent.

"Are you talking of your wife?" he asked severely.

"Mrs. Bill Tonkins. That's her," answered the client. "I'm Bill Tonkins. *You* know. That's what I found about her. No good for work. Before I married her she was a big, strong, healthy-lookin' girl. After we were married, wot do I find? Always having the doctor, always sick, head aching, heart weak, liver——"

"You mentioned these matters before," interrupted Norwood with growing disgust.

"Did I?" asked Mr. Tonkins. "Well, *you* know. So how could I live on that selection twenty mile out? I had to live near the town for medicine and things, heart weak, liver——"

Norwood rose suddenly. Mr. Tonkins brought his diagnosis to an abrupt end, but added with confidence "You know." He paused and gazed at his solicitor. "So what could I do? I daren't go out of sight of the doctor. I might have him in any day—or twice a day if you come to that."

He halted again. Norwood said nothing. "And now the —— Government have forfeited the licence on me. And I want to know, can you help me?"

This query launched Norwood upon an uncharted sea. "Have you the licence with you?" he asked; perhaps it might help him. "And pray take your chair to the other side of the table and sit there."

The client hitched his chair away. "Here's the —— licence all right," he answered gravely, "but it's no —— good now. The —— Government——"

"Yes, yes," said Norwood, "I have told you to refrain from using that word. It is a mere expletive."

"It's a —— good word," corrected Mr. Tonkins solemnly.

Norwood coloured with anger, was this—this *animal*, daring to correct him? "I beg your pardon?" he said with icy interrogation.

Mr. Bill Tonkins spat into the fireplace. "No offence," he drawled.

"Shall I dismiss the fellow at once?" Norwood asked himself. He half rose to do so. "But, after all, this is an office open to the public. As long as he conducts himself with reasonable decency——" He glanced at his first client sharply to see if he were doing anything that called for immediate rebuke. Mr. Tonkins' eye was full upon him and met his: Norwood haughtily stared him down; at least he intended to, but the client declined to shift his gaze, Norwood even thought that the suspicion of a smile appeared. "Can the fellow dare!" he turned to the licence he held and began to read it.

"There is a clause that you must reside on the land. It

appears to be strictly drawn. And non-compliance with the conditions gives the Crown the power of forfeiture. I should say you had no remedy."

"Can't you do nothin' to that — cow of a Government? You tell them about the wife being a fine, healthy-lookin' girl. Put it to 'em hot and strong. — hot and strong. *You know.*"

"The Crown has power to forfeit, and you say that power has been exercised. I should say you can do nothing."

"That's your tip, is it?"

"That is my opinion."

"Well, you put it straight to me. I must say that. You put it — straight. And to think I can't do nothin'! And the wife a fine, big, healthy-lookin' girl too! Well, well." Mr. Tonkins, about to expectorate as a means of showing what he thought of the Government, remembered Norwood's request and withheld his fire. He scratched his head to see if any ideas were left undiscovered, but drew blanks; he glanced at Norwood. "And what am I owin' you?" he suggested.

Norwood had never seen a legal account and was quite at sea as to what he could or should charge, but he felt strongly that he could not on any account accept money from this dirty and disgusting fellow. "I shall ask no fee on this occasion."

"Eh? What's that? Ain't you chargin' me nothin'?"

"I have already said that I shall not."

The client, genuinely amazed, gazed at this new species of solicitor. "And you're not asking me to pay?" he ruminated upon this, and glanced suspiciously at Norwood. "Well, by gum!" He ruminated further. "Aw, I thought you might be able to help me. But it's no go. And you're not askin' yer charge?"

"Certainly not," replied Norwood impatiently.

"Well, you put it straight," answered Mr. Tonkins, rising slowly. "But to think of that — cow of a Government! And the wife! *You know.* And you're not chargin' me?" He moved towards the door, but paused half-way. "I say," drawled Mr. Tonkins, "what about one? Eh?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Norwood, observing his client jerk his thumb significantly towards the street.

"May as well have one with me," suggested the waiting Mr. Tonkins, putting on his hat and pulling the brim down all round with much care.

"I beg your pardon?" Norwood was puzzled.

"Cripes!" said Mr. Tonkins earnestly. "You're not a teetotaller, are you?"

"We need not discuss that question," answered Norwood stiffly.

"Well then," said Tonkins, accepting Norwood's reply as a denial of the charge and showing much relief, "have a taste now."

"A taste? Oh, I see, will I drink with you now? Decidedly not."

Mr. Tonkins, much astonished, gazed at his legal adviser. Norwood's refusal, as he was not a teetotaller, puzzled him more than his legal queries had puzzled Norwood; after considering the matter for a few moments he gave it up as hopeless, and remarking vaguely, "Well, this is a ——" shook his head solemnly, added, "Well, good-day," and walked out, leaving Norwood sitting in his office with mixed and changing feelings. At first he experienced nothing but relief at being rid of such an uncouth specimen, quite possibly a product peculiar to the Colonies; in fact, on second thoughts probably a typical Colonial.

To this succeeded anger. "What incredible impertinence! Asking me to drink with him! Actually trying to place himself on a position of social equality with me! This insolence must be put down."

When Mr. Steggs appeared next morning, unchanged by his Melbourne sojourn in expression or garb, Norwood, with a mixture of haughtiness and diffidence laid Mr. Tonkins' case before him.

To Mr. Steggs it presented no difficulties. He came to the point—the legal point—at once. "How long since the Land Board recommended forfeiture?"

"Well—er—really, he didn't say."

"Eh, didn't you ask him?"

"It did not occur to me as essential."

"Why, damn it," said Steggs impatiently, "what are you driving at? He's only got seven days to appeal. Didn't you tell him so?"

Norwood hesitated. He could say nothing in answer to this question without admitting his ignorance of the matter, and to confess that to this dirty and despised fellow was too humiliating. Pride and honesty struggled together.

"Eh?" repeated Mr. Steggs. "What did you tell him?"

Norwood's integrity of character, the only thing stronger than his pride, won the day. "I regret to say that this matter about Land Boards and so on was not included in the curriculum. And—er—really, I know nothing about it."

"Curriculum?" said Mr. Steggs. "Oh, ah. I see. Of course you're an LL.B. But whose office were you in after the University?"

"I have given no attention to office work as yet."

"Do you mean to tell me," demanded Mr. Steggs, pressing his hat on tightly and sitting down with a bump, "that you've never served in an office at all?"

"Never," answered Norwood stiffly.

"Look here," said Mr. Steggs, "what do you know? I'd better go into this with you."

At the end of a humiliating hour Norwood, under the practical test of Steggs' queries, began to realize that something was very much amiss. Either with Steggs' questions—that was probably it—or with his knowledge.

Mr. Steggs whose amazement had gradually become more and more rudely expressed at last summed up the matter from his point of view by the hopeless exclamation, "Why, damn it all, you don't know enough to lick a stamp." And on a sharp rebuke from Norwood he lost his temper entirely. "Look here, you couldn't even prepare a police-court summons for goods and chattels sold and delivered. You come up here to practise as a solicitor and you're not fit for an office boy. Of all the damn cheek! And on top of it you give yourself the airs of Lord Muck. Oh, my God, let me out of this." And Mr. Steggs, who had suffered long and much from Norwood's manner, banged the door open violently and departed fuming.

Mr. Steggs next morning offered a brief apology for his conduct of the day before. "The fact is, I'm run down. Had a lot of worry lately. Now you've a lot to learn. Better tackle it at once. To begin with, can you keep your own books?"

Norwood, who had intended to order Steggs out of the room with instructions never to intrude again, could not refuse the olive branch, and having accepted that, he saw no way of declining the proffered instructions. He asked with chill brevity, "Keep my books? In what way?"

"Do you understand book-keeping? Single or double entry. Either'll do."

"I am not a clerk. I know nothing of these matters."

Mr. Steggs grunted, produced some books from the safe, and proceeded to give Norwood his first lesson in practical office work.

After lunch he returned slightly the worse for wear, wrote in Norwood's name to Tonkins to call again, instructed Norwood what information to obtain from him, and, the office boy being out, asked Norwood with a delicate sneer, could he copy the letter. Norwood replied with a slight access of dignity, "Certainly," and, taking up his pen, was about to write out a copy of the letter in question, when Mr. Steggs, with several grunts, demonstrated how letters in copying ink could be cleanly copied off into the tissue-leaved press copy letter-book by skilled damping and pressure. "Never seen this done before?" he demanded.

"Certainly not."

"Hell!" said Mr. Steggs. And, fixing his hat on more firmly, he retired hastily for the needed stimulant.

## CHAPTER XX

SINCE their one conversation about his first poems, Railthorpe had avoided discussing, literary matters with Rafe; he talked and jested with his friend, but not again did he venture to sail his barque into deep waters; his affection for Rafe was strong and his admiration was sincere, but after one experience he decided to open no more the gate into his own garden of secret delights; in that dream-domain Rafe's voice sounded too loudly of worldly things, he trampled unknowing over places where only fairy feet should fall, he plucked or smashed down delicate blooms and saw neither blooms nor ruin round him.

But Railthorpe kept in mind Rafe's hint about light verse; he tried his hand; to his delight he found that with the pen he could use and enjoy keenly a vein of humour impossible for him in speech; when talking, social excitement defeated humorous perception, and always there disturbed his mind and clogged his tongue a nervous shyness, he knew he was never at his best when among others: but sitting at his own table, alone and free from risk of interruption, or tramping up and down the verandah in the dark with pen and paper and lamplight ready in his room—how different! How delightful! That irony which allowed a man to open his heart safely by saying exactly what he did not mean had always delighted Railthorpe, but in conversation he found it a dangerous relief; when he had complained to Rafe, "People understand what you say, but not what you mean," he had received but cold comfort from his friend. But now, with none to misunderstand, none to rebuke, he let his fancy wander free-footed along hitherto forsaken or forbidden paths. He felt as though he had suddenly found a friend whom he could thoroughly trust, to whom he could speak as freely as he could think, who understood every thought exactly as he meant it.

After the first few timorous attempts, made hesitatingly with a spirit full of self-distrust, he realized that he had discovered a new country where none could stay his pleasure; before a month had passed his confidence was complete; he chuckled delightedly as he wrote; some of the lines that appealed most to him seemed to appear on the paper of their own accord. Only the day before, when sitting down to write, with the memory of Rafe's words, "poetic poverty" in mind, the verses had run out easily on the sheet. Now he read them over laughing gleefully, and headed them, "By Poverty Depressed."

This evening the pen worked easily again; he felt he must

tell Rafe of the great result his advice had brought about. He took out of his drawer the two pages put away the night before. "I wonder will old Rafe care for this at all." He read it through again.

BY POVERTY DEPRESSED.

Hushed was the Bard's gay laugh,  
His brow o'er-cast,  
Silent his genial chaff  
He sits aghast.

"Tell me, Ye Maiden Muses, tell me true,  
What ill has happened him who honours you?"

Clio no answer gave,  
Nor yet Thalia,  
All silent as the grave  
The rest o' the choir.  
Some hollow trance or after-dinner spell  
Held all the Sisters of the Sacred Well.

"Speak, Bard," I cried aloud  
Once and again.  
"Reply, and do me proud,  
Where is the pain?  
Be it abdominal, occipital, thoracic,  
Thou shalt be doctored straight, Oh modern classic."

"No surgeons cure this ill"  
(Thus spoke the Bard),

"Nor potion, powder, pill,  
Can be my guard.

I owe a small account, long overdue,  
And if not paid to-day he says he'll sue."

"I scorn the legal throng,  
They darken truth:  
Law never righted wrong,  
Nor has it ruth:  
What is a judge? A man without a flaw?  
No!—He's a man unto himself a law."

"Do I descent from Kings,  
And eke Princesses?  
And must I pay for things?  
—The thought oppresses!  
Oh, is't a good defence in law that I  
Soar o'er the common crowd with pinion high?"

—Entered the Bailiff stern;  
I thought it best  
To leave the Bard to learn  
The law's behest.  
He who puts poesie before hard cash  
May publish verses, but he *must* go smash.

Varied the human mind :  
 Each has his choice :  
 Some love the whispering wind,  
 Or sweet maid's voice :  
 Some love the Attic bird to pour her throat,  
 Give *me* the rustle of a ten pound note.

"If he doesn't like *that*, perhaps this will suit the dreamy romance of his nature." And Railthorpe, laughing again, went carefully through the verses he had just written, altering a word here and there, and striking out one verse which failed, he thought, to fit in with the others. "There——" he jumped up—"Rafe can't disapprove of this, because once when I asked him his definition of a Bard he said, 'A silly, damn waster,' and this says the same thing only"—he glanced at the verses with mingled humour and affection—"it says it a little differently."

#### THE BARD TO THE BEAUTY.

Not to a Princess Proud  
 Howe'er she pines :  
 Not to the Thronging Crowd,  
 I sing these lines.

To thee, Oh Maiden sweet,  
 —Just hear me sigh—  
 I call for answer meet,  
 Or else I'll cry.

Behold me as I bend  
 With proffered rhyme,  
 Please kindly condescend  
 If you've the time,

And grant the sought-for boon,  
 Be the Bard's Bride !  
 And let his every tune  
 Be still thy pride.

Then shalt thou cook the meal  
 The which he eats ;  
 Or tripe, or cold cow-heel,  
 Oh, savoury meats !

Thy privilege 'twill be,  
 'Mongst other things,  
 To babble flattery  
 When'er he sings.

And when he wastes that cash  
 He'll rarely earn,  
 Think not that Bards are rash,  
 'Tis dross we spurn.

Thou, too, shalt mix his drink,  
 And brush his hat,  
 While he will sit and think  
 Of This, and That.

Such pleasures still belong  
 To maidens fair,  
 Who list a Bard his song,  
 And grant his prayer.

## CHAPTER XXI

EVENIN’,” said Joe Dolomy, entering Miss Seamond’s dining-room with a certain amount of restraint due to the fact that, it being Sunday evening, he had on his best clothes. “How are you, Lil,” he added as the younger Miss Frettle rose to greet him.

“Lize is in the kitchen,” said Miss Lily, “she’ll be in directly.” Mr. Joe having distributed his greetings appeared to have exhausted his fund of remarks. He sat down and put his hands in his pockets; he took them out again and crossed his feet; evidently considering the last move a bad one he uncrossed his feet and made his hands once more safe in his pockets.

“Have you been busy this week, Joe?” asked Miss Seamond. Sunday is the last day of the week to most people in Cooeeville.

“Not too bad,” said Joe.

“I saw Mr. Dolomy down the street yesterday. Is he quite well?”

“Not too bad.”

Miss Lily yawned with the frankness of Cooeeville youth: a knock at the open front door called her with undisguised relief to her feet, but Mr. Tinner, without waiting to be admitted, had exercised the privilege of a favourite, come down the passage, and now walked into the room. “Ha, ha. Thought I’d look in, you know. Hullo, Lil. ‘Do Miss Seamond. My word, Lil, you look all right this evening. What you been doing to yourself?”

Besides that talent for high finance which rendered him so proficient and valued an officer of the Bank of New South Wales, Mr. Tinner was gifted by Fortune with marked ability in quite another department of the world’s work; he might, in fact, be described as Sentimental Specialist. When he saw several girls together, joy filled his soul, and a smile irradiated his face and there remained: when with one girl alone, sentiment exuded, it oozed from him, he became, in fact, glutinous. With all young damsels he was indeed a



happy success, but some of maturer years professed a certain scorn for him, due perhaps to a supreme sense of safety, or possibly to a cloyed palate. Other young men, less bountifully blessed by Nature, spoke of him jestingly—no doubt to conceal a deep jealousy—and, with a bitter and envious allusion to his clinging habits, referred to him as Ivy Tinner.

Joe Dolomy noticed how Miss Lily brightened with the advent of this social favourite, and grew angry with himself. "Why can't I make her smile like that?"

Miss Seamond, observing his despondency, tried to chat with him, but it was a matter of effort on each side and the appearance of Miss Frettle, who had just finished her work, came as a relief. Another knock at the door excited Miss Lily's curiosity. "I'll go, Lize," she exclaimed, and ran to the front.

"Quite a party. Ha, ha!" remarked the facetious Mr. Tinner.

"Here's Mr. Cherral come to see us, Lize," cried Miss Lily, as she returned towing the astonished Norwood after her by the coat sleeve, "And Mr. Allingham too," she added as an afterthought.

Miss Seamond rose, but Mr. Tinner, before she could speak, welcomed the newcomers with what seemed to Norwood ill-bred officiousness and needless hilarity. "How do, Mr. Allingham. Ha, ha! Mr. Cherral, you're beginning to move about I see, ha, ha! in the best circles too, you know. Ha, ha!"

Norwood did not respond.

"I should have brought Mr. Cherral here before," said Mr. Allingham. "You ought to know him."

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Cherral?" asked Miss Frettle, lifting a chair over to him.

"It is Sunday," observed Mr. Allingham to Miss Seamond, in an unhushed aside, "so I decline to talk business, but you will find my friend Mr. Cherral a useful man. A sound lawyer. Discreet. An excellent man for a family solicitor."

Miss Seamond and her two nieces lived on the income derived from land and money left to them by the girls' late father, and whenever an investment matured and the money had to be re-invested, Miss Seamond put on her brown silk dress and called at the Bank of New South Wales; there Mr. Allingham administered financial advice in the Manager's room and afternoon tea in the drawing-room. Gossips affirmed that Miss Seamond could not buy a pound of tea without calling at the Bank about it. Certain it was that in return for Mr. Allingham's advice, Miss Seamond gave him the unlimited confidence of a grateful woman, and his remarks about Norwood, even though made on a Sunday evening,

practically robbed Mr. Dobbsleigh of a client, and constituted Norwood her solicitor from that moment. She turned to inspect her newly chosen legal adviser with added interest. "We're very pleased to see you, Mr. Cherral. I'd no idea you would be in this evening."

"Oh, I knew he'd come, Auntie," said Miss Lily, looking extremely arch. "Didn't I, Mr. Cherral?"

Norwood was puzzled by this statement, but controlling his surprise replied. "Really I could not say."

A month ago he would have been disgusted. To-night this feeling was absent; when Miss Lily had seized him by the arm at the front door, holding him lightly down the dark passage, he had felt no scorn at her conduct, rather a pleasant thrill ran through him, though he would not acknowledge it to himself; and now her chatter gave no offence, her flushed cheeks, her bright eyes, and that hair which insisted on curling over her temples and about her ears, performed in some extraordinary way a double miracle, preventing him from observing in her words or actions any lack of social training, giving to them all a potent charm.

"Well," said Mr. Allingham, breaking in, "I must be going." Norwood rose too. "Lucky man, Mr. Cherral," continued Mr. Allingham to him. "You can stay. Never get into the way of working on Sundays. A bad habit. There are some things I must finish to-night. But you're not such a busy man—yet. Stay here. They'll give you a good time." For Norwood's ear alone he breathed the excellent but audible advice, "Be sociable."

Norwood sat down, but he did not behave sociably; he remained stiff and disapproving, despite the earnestness with which Mr. Tinner strove to make everybody laugh. Had Norwood been asked for a personal criticism he might, declining to comment upon his hostess and her nieces, have admitted that he considered Mr. Joe Dolomy an obviously hopeless lout, and Mr. Tinner nothing less than a social outrage.

He addressed himself to Miss Seamond on the subject of the weather. With unusual emphasis she asserted that there hadn't been such a drought, let alone such a summer, in the district as long as she could remember, and that was many a year back. "You mustn't judge the place by what it's been since you came, Mr. Cherral, if Cooeville was always like this there'd be no one living here at all. It's really a nice climate as a rule, but this year"—she shook her head dolefully. Those who praised Cooeville to Norwood did not raise the district in his estimation, they merely lowered themselves: uninterested in the subject of Miss Seamond's remarks or in that lady herself, he nevertheless waited till a proper interval had elapsed after Mr. Allingham's depart-

ture, then, refusing to wait for supper, he took his leave. To his surprise and displeasure Joe Dolomy left with him. They walked in silence.

It was inevitable that they should ; for Norwood possessed no power of entering into the minds of others, and Joe Dolomy, though threatened with the stake if he maintained silence, could not have said, " The prettiest and best girl in the world won't have anything to do with me, and I don't know why she should. I was born here, and I left the State School when I was fourteen, and I've been working in my Dad's foundry ever since, and I'm rough and dirty, and I'll never have the chance of changing. The Dad looks to me for nearly everything now, it 'ud kill him if I chucked the foundry, and went to see the world a bit as I've always wanted. I'm sick of Cooeville, and I'm sick to think of what I'll be if I stay on here. But you're not a Cooeville man, I can hear that in your voice, I can see it just by one look at you, you're different to all of us, you've seen the world, and I wish you'd be my friend and help me, and I'd be grateful to you. I like you, and I wish you'd like me though I don't see anything in me that you might fancy." Dolomy halted at the corner where their ways parted and, standing silently with his hands in his pockets, fell to scraping the gravel with his foot. Though social ease in meeting and parting was obviously not to be expected from him, yet evidently he had something to say, and Norwood waited impatiently for him to speak.

" Well," he began at length, " I suppose I must be goin'——"

" Good evening," answered Norwood with crisp disdain, and left him standing there, still slowly scraping the gravel with his foot.

## CHAPTER XXII

If the day be calm and without a cloud the Cooevillan can bear a shade temperature of 100° without discomfort : energy and vivacity go forth unrestrained for the day's work, the dryness of the air crisps and stimulates the languid one, and further, he knows, from experience, that with the set of the sun there will arrive a glorious evening, not hot, not cold, but calm, scented, restful, a fitting finish to a good day's work, a delightful prelude to a good night's rest.

But if on a day that runs the thermometer into or over the 100°, the north-west wind should arise in his might and, unfurling his ten thousand streaming banners of dust, should thrash across the land, then indeed is the voice of discontent heard in the land from irritable morn to gritty noon and on to exhausted eve. This wind, declared by certain dust-

proof professors of hygiene to be a blessing, is, apart from these highly educated beings, disliked or dreaded by all: too often preceded by atmospheric conditions that depress the mind and fret the nerves and raise the temper, it rages cold in winter, hot in summer, dusty always, the ravaging foe of flowers, the horror of housewives, gardeners and fruit-growers, in winter driving rain or sand under doors and windows, in early spring thrashing the wattle and almond blossoms to pieces, in summer carrying a heated blast and an appreciable quantity of grit into the inmost recesses of every home, and outside withering the ripening fruit.

On Saturday night Norwood felt the air peculiarly oppressive; he sought relief out of doors, but the clouded heavens were gradually closing down over a stifling earth: he slept uneasily, lying on his bed without covering, and woke in the morning with the sense of something wrong. As he lay drowsily wondering what was the matter the rumbling in the chimneys, the smell of dust in the air, the creaking of the galvanized iron roof, told him the trouble. The north-west wind had sprung up in the night.

By church time the wind had increased to a gale, a yellow haze hid the town: Norwood, who was trying to read in his room, blowing the dust off the open book before turning a page, was summoned by a rather anxious Miss Limmering.

"Don't you smell burning, Mr. Cherral? And look,"—she opened a door facing south, Norwood looked out on a passable imitation of a London fog save that one could see for some two hundred yards despite it. "I'm sure there's smoke as well as dust."

Norwood now noticed the smell Miss Limmering spoke of. "But you don't think the house is on fire, surely——"

Miss Limmering sniffed, not at the smell, but at Norwood's ignorance. "That's not a house-on-fire smell. It's a bush fire. What a horrible day for it."

"A bush fire?" he echoed. "What do you mean?"

"Better go down the street and find out," answered Miss Limmering tartly. "Great silly!" she added as she banged the door behind him. "I believe he gets on me nerves more than the wind. A nice job there'll be to clean the house after this! And to-morrow's washing day!"

As Norwood turned into the main street a gig drove rapidly past him and pulled up at the Fire Brigade Station, then the fire bell broke out, its startling clangour rising above the rush and rattle of the wind.

"Started away out at Green Flat," the excited man in the gig was shouting to the eager little crowd when Norwood joined it. "It's sweeping the whole country north of us, if it gets past us——" New arrivals came every minute, but the man to take charge and direct was not there. "Ah,

there's Bill Plowright at last." A sigh of relief went up as a red-headed man in his Sunday trousers and his singlet—he had torn off his Sunday shirt when he heard the bell, his Sunday trousers he had, with a sigh, sacrificed to convention and left on—with a fireman's helmet in one hand, approached at a heavy trot. Railthorpe and Miss Scatterton's contingent arrived at the same moment. Bill arrived heated in body but cool in mind. "Where is it?" he asked. Twenty voices rose in answer. Mr. Plowright in reply lifted a voice of greater power than their united notes. "Shut your — jaw," he bellowed. "You, Dick"—to the man standing in the gig. "Where is it? Spit it out."

Dick explained hastily: before he was half-way through Bill had a grip of the matter. "That'll do. Stow it." He expectorated thoughtfully. "It'll be two miles out north and west. Ah! With a face going south and east God knows how big. And this side of it working back here against the wind." Bill paused again. "We might cut it off along Dalby's road."

The firemen present, knowing their captain's power, kept silence themselves and imposed it on others.

"What we want is bags, and every man that can swing 'em. Now where the — can we raise a hundred bags in two minutes."

"Here you are, Bill," it was Railthorpe's voice. "I suppose somebody'll pay for them. I've got the keys of Mr. Thriggerley's, hundred of news bags there."

"The very thing," said Bill joyfully. "Now, men," he raised his enormous bellow again, "to Thriggerley's, get six dozen bags, soak 'em in the horse troughs there and at Shandy's. Harry"—a fireman pushed forward and Bill spoke again in ordinary tones—"take ten men and see to the bags, bring a half-dozen axes from Thriggerley's too. "Dick"—the man in the gig tightened the reins—"drive round to every pub in the town and tell 'em to harness up every trap they've got, every single — cart, and come here at once."

The gig drove off, Harry and his men left with Railthorpe. Bill glanced at the remaining remnant. "One of you — get me coat, will you?" A lad went off in response to this courteous request. "Keep the bell going till we get 'em all here," added Bill. Five minutes passed with the numbers at the Station constantly increasing, then Shandy Saxon's cab drove up at a gallop.

"Volunteers to fight the fire. Volunteers here!" roared Bill, taking up a position beside the vehicle. Immediately more than its licensed number of passengers crowded into it.

"You, Jim," said Bill to the driver, "drive up to Thriggerley's, get a wet sack for every man from Harry Smith, and

two axes for the lot of yer. Tell Harry to climb in with you, then drive like hell along Dalby road till you strike near the fire, tell Harry this lot must tackle the corner of it nearest to us and spread themselves out. I'll be after you in two shakes. Now, chaps," Bill addressed the cab-load, "when you reach the fire, swing your — sacks for all you're worth. Put your — backs into it."

A howl of mingled assents, questions, jokes, promises, and oaths, rose as the driver cracked his whip and turned his pair for Thridderley's, his cab-load shouting joyously: heat, wind, and dust forgotten in the joy of conflict.

And now a straggling procession of buggies and gigs began to appear in the main street; each as it arrived was instantly loaded up from the crowd of ardent fire-fighters, each fire-fighter in turn loaded up with Bill's instructions and exhortations: and each departed vociferously. Mr. Martin Dwyer of the Corner Hotel, with his prize buggy and crack pair of ponies was speedily at Bill's service and quick to go forth at his bidding; Shandy Saxon's lumbering four-horse drag arrived next, Shandy himself, his portly form minus most of its clothing, handling the reins. "Swinging a sack's no — good to me," thus did Shandy make reply to Bill's earnest appeal, "but crowd the boys in here and I'll drive 'em about all the — day if you like. Whoa, Bess — yer! Count on me to tote 'em about, Bill. Bess! The two buggies and the gig is comin' along, the gig's for you, Bill, Dick's driving it. Keep it for the day." And Shandy, with something under twenty men all over the drag, whipped up his horses and swung round the narrow road with practised skill.

"Must get a few more off before I leave," growled Bill. His energetic calm was departing fast and anger was taking its place: several late arrivals were bringing bottled beer, a buggy with a boxful had just driven off, what Bill intended to be an organized battle might easily degenerate into an ineffectual picnic, and when on fire-fighting duties Bill hated foolishness with his whole heart.

Norwood, noticing that the throng of helpers had thinned down stepped towards the scowling Bill. "I should be glad to assist."

Bill, heated, angry, hoarse, and dry, glanced at Norwood's attire, his silk hat, his frock coat, his spotless linen, and his gloves. Bill did not know Norwood, and regarded a man who dressed like that on a hot-wind day as a freak. "Goin' fire-fightin'!" sneered Bill. "In a belltopper and a flogger! Oh —, talk sense."

"You are an insolent fellow," said Norwood, with mingled contempt and indignation. "I shall report you to your master."

"Aw' right," answered Bill, "but get out of the — road

just now, or——” he broke off to address heatedly the driver of another buggy: in this case the driver as well as the buggy obviously contained much beer. “We don’t want beer-biters and bottle-ohs at the fire,” said the Captain of the Fire Brigade bitterly, “we want men. Mick Coyne”—to the driver—“if you go out and mess up my men with yer —— liquor, I’ll throw you on the fire to boil.”

Mr. Coyne in reply waved a wide gesture. “Free country,” he said solemnly. “You go to hell.” Bill, disdainingly retort, glanced round, found his work of organizing at headquarters done, and climbed into the waiting gig. “Come on, Dick, the boys are all at it but you and me. Let’s get to work.” And stimulating the horse with whip and bellow while Dick held the reins, Bill, having seen two cabs, one drag, five buggies, and various other vehicles go off properly manned, equipped, and with fighting orders, drove off himself.

Norwood, at the reply of the Fire Brigade Captain, had turned round and gone back to his lodgings in contemptuous mood. Reporting briefly to Miss Limmering, “A bush fire to the north,” he shut himself up in his room. “The insolence of that fellow! But I deserve it for speaking to anyone that lives in this place. Of course, here to dress properly is to give offence. As for that disgusting, half-naked fellow——”

Plowright, however, had long ago forgotten Norwood: other matters engaged his mind. The galloping mare, given her head by Dick, bore them swiftly out of Cooeville, due east along Dalby’s road through stony country in which no bush fire could live. “Harry’ll see to it there’s one of his chaps waiting on the road for me,” shouted Bill. “Shake her up, Dick.” The poor land was rapidly succeeded by better country. Plowright cursed—as he noticed the long grass, white and deadly dry, in the paddocks on either hand, but they had travelled no distance into this changed scenery when the expected messenger from the second in command appeared. “’Bout a mile north of us, Bill—no, half a mile now—Harry Smith says—he sent men on to Duggan’s Rise and some of ’em are just back—that if we can hold it here——”

“I see,” Bill thought hard. “It’s burning sou’-east along the neck of good country between Duggan’s Rise ahead and the thin scrub behind us. That’s a stretch nigh two miles wide. If it passes us——”

Plowright spoke truth. Nearly two miles further on the stony ridge known as Duggan’s Rise crossed the road from the south and spread out north-westerly: the fire would travel slowly there: it would to some extent be bottled up in the stretch of heavily grassed land lying between the two strips of barren country which ran roughly north and south;

if the fire-fighters could prevent it crossing Dalby's road, which lay directly across the line of its advance, they might snatch a victory. This was their sole chance. Over the road the fertile valley widened rapidly, if the fire once jumped the road it would spread tremendously and sweep all the rich country to the south. The first farmer to be burnt out there would be Badgery; just across the road from the fire lay his best grazing land, now covered with tussocky dry grass and ringed and dead timber standing starkly white and grey: a quarter of a mile across it Plowright could see the drought-stricken unharvested crop, and further on the weather-board homestead itself.

Plowright, raced by the obedient Dick from point to point, stationed the various vehicles—no driver had dared to tie up his animals and leave them—along the road with brief instructions: then leaving the gig he climbed over the fence and hastened to join the fighting line. The farmers of that district were there to a man, thrashing away, some with sacks, but more with green branches. Along the line of the blaze sweeping down so furiously, the fighters, here and there shoulder to shoulder where the grass was long and the flames fierce, here and there a hundred yards apart where a barren patch slackened the contest, swung their weapons of defence vigorously, and thrashed out the flame as it ran along the ground licking up greedily the dry gum leaves, dead bark, and whitened grass. But ten times the number of men could not have barred the advance of one of Nature's strongest forces, fanned and driven on by another. The broken irregular line of fire rushed roaring on before the gale, driving back the fighters, and spreading beyond and over and around them with whirling eddies and gusts of sparks.

Railthorpe, toiling his hardest, realized once more what he had learnt at his first fire long ago, that a wet sack is no light weight, and that to use it with the proper brushing stroke is a condensed form of exercise. He staggered back gasping, half choked by the acrid smoke, with smarting eyes and pounding heart. Sam Badgery, a youth of about his own age, appeared beside him. "Bad bit this," yelled Sam. "I'll give you a hand," and he swung his sack viciously in defence of home.

"This bit's right," gasped Sam. "Hullo! What's that cooeeing for?"

"Something wrong," panted Railthorpe. "Get on to the road. We can see then."

There was no need to ask what news; the quickly gathering groups could see clearly what had happened; away to the east the fire had crossed the road, and now roared away east and south, through Badgery's heavily grassed and flat grazing paddock, eating slowly back westward—and another



half mile of progress to the west would give it the standing crop and the homestead! Sam flung his sack on the ground. "There she goes! It's all up now — it."

"Here's a buggy, Sam," cried Railthorpe; "we must get to the house."

"This'll be a knock out for mother, though," said Sam Badgery. He cursed the wind, but broke off to yell to the buggy, and, regaining cheerfulness, added, "Good thing we shifted our sheep." The driver of the buggy and pair was the ubiquitous Bill Plowright, he reined in the galloping animals with difficulty and raced them on again the moment six of the men got in while two hung on behind. "The fellows 'll all be at the house in a shake," he shouted to Sam Badgery. "The moment I seen the fire over the road I sent Dick after 'em tail over tip, he'll round 'em up. We must fight her on the Sandy Creek road now. Hold on all of you!" Bill roared as he turned the horses down a lane running straight south from Dalby's road to the Badgery homestead.

That morning Joe Dolomy and his father had driven out to pay their weekly visit to their farm which lay well out of the track of the fire. On their way back they heard the news, a passing rider galloping to the fray hailed them, "Badgery's goin' to be burnt out they say." "Take the Sandy Creek road to Badgery's, Joe," said the father, "we must get to the south of the fire, and as quick as we can. Step it out, Doll."

Joe shook the reins and clucked, Doll swished her tail and threw up her head, then, putting aside the little affectations of a pet, she settled down to her swinging trot that turned the miles behind her: the smell of burning increased, soon ahead of them and then all round them blew the almost invisible thin smoke of a bush fire when grass and dead timber is tinder-dry.

"I don't like this, Joe," Mr. Dolomy looked anxious and disturbed. "It looks bad for Badgery."

"Kim erp, Doll!" said Joe.

"Here we are," said Mr. Dolomy at last, "open the gate, Joe, look slippy. Leave it open for any others."

"Look," said Joe as they rattled up the private road to the house, now in sight to the north of them, "they've emptied the place." He pointed to the edge of the dam fifty yards from the house where tables, chairs, wardrobes, kitchen safes, and mixed piles of furniture and bedding and clothing lay scattered.

"Anyone at home?" called Mr. Dolomy. "Cooee, Joe."

As Joe obeyed a figure over the dam straightened up and beckoned to them.

"Dad and Sam are away at the fire," said Mrs. Badgery.

"I'm soaking bags and things. Are there more of you comin'?"

"The whole town will be out directly if it isn't at the fire now," declared her old friend. "Joe, take the mare out and tie her up, strongly too."

"Not in the stable, Dad. The fire may get it."

"No, no, outside here."

"Here's some more," shouted Joe, as a distant vehicle came tearing towards them down the track that ran north from the house to Dalby's road. Joe listened to the curses of the driver borne on the wings of the wind. "That's Bill Plowright's voice." It was. The stentorian Bill, urging on the indignant horses with howls and whoops, missed the slip rail post by a lucky lurch, and, swerving round on two wheels, jumped out of the buggy which disgorged Railthorpe and something like a crowd of men. Joe ran to the horses' heads.

"It's travelling hell for leather here from the east end of your grazin' paddock," shouted Bill. "It'll be here in two shakes of a lamb's tail. Now then, you blokes, get every cask and bucket, every — jug and kerosene tin, fill 'em and stand 'em all round the house. Get to it now."

Mrs. Badgery turned to the Captain in command. "How about the stables?"

"They're red-gum," answered Bill. "They can stand the risk better, 'sides they're nearer the dam. Mr. Dolomy," he added, "and you Mr. Railthorpe"—he drew them aside—"this place'll go, I think. If a man's such a — fool as to grow his crop right up to his back door and never cut it, serves him right. Our only hope, a — poor one too—is to burn a break along the Sandy Creek road and though this wind is blowing like hell's own bellows the fire'll run up here against it like a flash through *that*"—he pointed at the dry crop, long over ripe but still uncut because of the drought—stricken poverty of the stem and head, and now standing, half broken and trampled down by the stock that had been fed on it. "I can't light the break till I've plenty of men with me—"

—A dull boom mixed with a crackling sound came to their ears.

"Some big tree down," said Bill. "Now the moment they come—"

"Here's some more men," cried Railthorpe. "Three buggy loads."

"Thank God," said Bill. "Now then you fellows"—thus did Plowright address his newly arrived recruits, tumbling hastily out of the buggies, "stay in your — places, and drive like —" he pointed down the track running south to the Sandy Creek road, "spread out along the edge of the

crop there and fire it. Don't let a single — spark get over the road or we're done. You hear me? Not a single — spark. Four of you stay here," he added, turning to his former helpers. "In with you," roared Mr. Plowright to the others. "Get on—— Now Mr. Dolomy, I'll drive back here the moment I can, and then we must fire the crop round us here. If the fire gets here before I'm back, don't try to save anything but the house, let the stables and sheds go."

They watched Plowright's buggy tear off after the others, Bill driving after the fashion of a racing charioteer, erect, and howling.

In a few minutes smoke rose along the distant southern frontage of the crop, the standing straw burned fiercely even against the wind, and sent heavy smoke streaming away to the south-east. Almost immediately, through the rolling flames and smoke, they saw Plowright making back for the house in his buggy, the terrified horses bolting furiously.

"Look out for a smash," cried Railthorpe.

"Bill Plowright'll be killed," shouted Joe.

But Plowright kept his head: he steered his maddened pair through the entrance gate and headed them for the dam, hanging fiercely on to the reins; they dashed straight in, throwing up a cloud of spray, the shelving bank deepened rapidly, a few plunges and horses and buggy were in nearly five feet of water. Plowright, standing up, urged and turned his pair to a sloping side, where willing hands grasped the horses and led them up.

The flames that had first crossed Dalby's road, far to the north-east of them, had now eaten back westerly against the wind till they neared the north-eastern boundary of the standing crop; they touched it—instantly a wave of fire rose and swept fiercely down through the crop and towards the homestead. Plowright and his helpers tore round the fence that ringed in the homestead, firing the standing straw that rustled all round the two or three acres reserved for the home, save where the private track went north to Dalby's and south to Sandy Creek road. "The fences must go," yelled Plowright.

"Let 'em," answered Sam Badgery.

The just-lit fire encircling them crackled. A lull in the gale let the smoke of the burning straw from all round settle over them, the fierce heat almost singed them, the litter by the stable burst into flame, heat—apoplexy, suffocation, incineration, were not far off, suddenly the wind rose again and swept the smoke away. The men gasped for breath and rubbed their smarting eyes; they found the stable, built of red gum slabs with a thatch roof, was on fire, the wind-borne sparks were everywhere; to save the house, built of inflammable Baltic pine weather-board, seemed hopeless. Doll, Joe

Dolomy's mare, frenzied by the heat, the smoke, and the uproar, neighed and screamed, and, tugging and pulling violently, uprooted the post to which she was haltered and galloped frantically round the enclosure, dragging the post and kicking viciously. The pair brought by Plowright tried to bolt again, but capable men were at their heads and held them. Plowright himself neither flinched nor grew confused, after a few deep gulps of air, a hearty curse, and a remark that he was "smoked like a —— ham," he lifted up his voice and took charge, "Corner the mare, Joe. Throw a rope over her. Harry, take two men and see the stable fire don't spread. Mrs. Badgery, run into the house—shut the door after you—and pull down any curtains or blinds against the windows, pull 'em right away from the windows and chuck 'em on the floor. Now men, round the house with you, fight like —— but don't waste water. Thank God"—Plowright indulged in a vigorous aside as he observed the mare caught and held, "when I want a pair of —— iron horse-shoes kickin' round me head and me blind with —— smoke," said Mr. Plowright to the trembling Doll, "I'll let you know it."

Once more the wind slackened, and again the heat and smoke enveloped them. "Now then!" Four men and the two Dolomys held the horses, Mrs. Badgery fiercely carried out orders in the house, Harry and his men stood by at the stables, the others attended to the house, all choking, gasping, blind; again the wind rose, the enveloping mist of fiery heat and suffocating smoke and deadly sparks lifted, the staggering and reeling fighters drew breath again.

"Blast that roof!" Bill glanced at the gleam of the burning stable thatch shining red and lurid through the haze. "Now for it," he yelled, and next moment he and his band all round the house were at their work again, splashing water on the walls from buckets, kerosene tins, small tubs, jugs, anything, as the paint blistered and little flames fluttered here and there. The intense heat struck at them fiercely: the crop, the grass, the fences all round the homestead block were one black and red sea of smoke and flame.

"I'm beat!" panted one man. "Baked through."

"Bill," gasped Railthorpe, "the wind's blown itself out. Just gusts now. It may change."

"By ——" Bill's face shone with hope, "I b'lieve you're right."

The wind dropped dead: the fire lit by the men along the Sandy Creek road at the edge of the crop came roaring northwards towards the house, the fire that had crossed Dalby's road and reached the crop north-east of them came rushing southward upon them, the fire just lit by them all round the homestead to meet these two foes enveloped, roasted, stifled them. The two walls of red flame towering lurid through

the smoke, rushing towards them, roared instant annihilation.

"Stand by," yelled Plowright.

Even as he spoke the north wind rose again in a furious gust, the smoke lifted, the blown and fanned line of fire going south through the crop near the house met the opposing line travelling north, a huge fountain of yellow flame spouted into the sky—and suddenly went out.

Plowright glanced triumphantly at the black and smoking but harmless field, which a moment before had held such a menace over them. Again there was a lull.

The stable roof fell in with a muffled boom. Bill raced for the ruins. "Anyone hurt? All safe? Ah!" Bill sighed hugely with relief. "Stick to it, Harry. Where the devil's the wind gone to? Don't tell me its goin' to change?" Bill's voice was joyful. "Give me a south wind and we'll stop the fire along the Sandy Creek road for a cert."

It was now nearly seven o'clock in the evening, the north wind had been blowing since mid-night, and, as so often happens, it fell and ceased with the close of its day.

"Get on to those smouldering bits of fencing and stuff," ordered Bill. "Harry, get a ladder and go round the house, make sure there's no sparks burning under the gutters. Joe, will you have that straw raked loose and burnt. Hullo! The wind's changed." He lifted up his voice. "The wind's changed! Look!" The rising breeze could be felt, everywhere the smoke was drifting to the north. "We've beaten it, we've beaten it!"

All turned to their task with fresh vigour, Plowright exhorting, commanding, guiding, working, all at once. More helpers arrived from the Sandy Creek road where all danger was now over, the south wind blowing the fire line back to the burnt-out north. In twenty minutes all fear for Badgery's was over, the yard was straightened up, the furniture and chattels carried back into the house, and now the men who had been working on the fire line all day began to straggle in, to most of them Badgery's was the nearest place for a drink; blackened, half clad, with here and there a torn or burnt shirt or trouser leg, showing white shoulder or back, or lean and hairy leg, they kept arriving.

"It never got past Sandy Creek Road, Bill."

"Good job."

"But it would er if that — wind hadn't stopped. My oath that was a wind! It blew the — fire right into me — whiskers. Half me — beard's gone."

"That won't hurt you none," asserted the unsympathetic Bill.

"By — I'm that dry I've been spitting cinders this last four hours. Where's Badgery keep his tank?"

"Tank's dry long ago. Try the dam."

"That'll do me," and the speaker was departing with all speed when he stopped to say, "But, Bill, just think of it! A long beer, *cold!* Oh my ——— oath."

"Mine, too," said Bill, "now the work's over."

Man after man flung himself down at full length on the edge of the dam, and, plunging his head and shoulders well under to relieve his heated blood, lifted his head to gasp at the exquisite sensation of coolness, then with parched mouth drank his fill of water, fouled though it was with mud and horses and cows and ducks; some sat on the bank and let others pour a bucketful over their heads and down their backs, others poured it into their own breasts and shouted for joy as it ran down their bodies.

Gasps, grunts, gurgles, shouts, and the sound of sluicing, rose mingled with oaths in the nature of thanksgiving. "Hullo!" said one. "What's this?" A buggy driven at slow and careful pace was coming down the track from Dalby's road, it held three men, one drove, another supported the third in his arms. A scream from Mrs. Badgery, as she ran forward to the buggy, drew all hands together—"Oh, Dad!" she cried to the injured man. "What is it? Are you hurt?"

"It's all right, Mrs. Badgery," declared the driver. "We bin jolly careful of him. The wind blew a ——— big branch——" the speaker paused in confusion.

"It's all right, mother," answered Mr. Badgery himself, "a limb off some of the dead timber was blown down and it got me. I b'leeve it's a broke arm. I'll be going along to the Doctor in a minute. We just come here to tell you it's all right."

"You can rest easy now, Mr. Badgery," said Bill Plowright, "we'll arrange to watch the fire all night. The neighbours'll help. Some of that big timber'll burn for two or three days yet."

"Now, mother," said Mr. Badgery from the buggy. "Do you think we can get a cup of tea and a bite for these good friends? We owe our house to them."

Mrs. Badgery, sorely shaken by the last happening of an exciting day, beckoned a welcome to Plowright and his men and waved them towards the house; she tried to speak, but broke down in tears. A blackened scarecrow ran out of the crowd to her. "Don't cry, mother," exclaimed Sam. "It's all right now. We—we——" his own voice quavered; he had been fire-fighting fiercely for eight hours without rest or food, "We've saved the old shanty"—an hysterical gulp broke from him as his mother cried in his protecting arms.

"Now then, you fellers," shouted the observant Plowright, "come along to the dam and let's sluice the muck orf of us."

"It—it—it's the smoke!" gasped Sam, fighting desperately after his fleeting self-control. "It's the smoke!" He forgot his mother's presence and thought only of the men around, "This—this—this bloody smoke," he sobbed, "it makes a feller's eyes run."

## CHAPTER XXIII

A TOWNSHIP Clerk of Courts, though but one man, is many officials. As Clerk of Petty Sessions he looms largely in the public eye when that Court sits, for he directs that it be opened, he calls on each case, he administers the oath to each witness, he advises the Bench when invited, and finally he orders that the Court be closed; as Warden's Clerk other responsibilities beset him, as Registrar of the County Court still others, as Justices' Clerk and Clerk of the Peace he has occasional busy moments, and if he be a Commissioner for taking affidavits, there rests upon him the not unpleasing duty of rapidly reciting a certain short formula upon given occasions, and immediately collecting the appropriate fee.

Thus one unacquainted with township life, knowing the varied titles and duties heaped upon the local Clerk, might well picture him as a pallid member of the Civil Service, fretful from overwork, thin-haired through worry, dyspeptic from hastily bolted meals, bent at his desk racing through his work from early morn to weary bed-time, striving feverishly to finish each day's huge and inevitable task and to overtake the accumulating mountain of arrears. Let this ignorant stranger rise from his unhappy reverie; let him banish his fell nightmare; let him learn the error of his imaginings; let him, in fact, make the acquaintance of Mr. Jessington. See then, instead of the unhappy spectre of your vision, an official whose hours are from ten to three with a half-holiday on Saturday, a man whom none save conscience and an occasional inspector and a monthly visiting police magistrate may rebuke for absence, inattention, or a pleasant loitering with duties, one to whom the Crown—august abstraction—affords the best built and coolest business apartment in Cooeville—an office in the Court House itself—a man who can find scope for skill in his work, who can have the ultimate prospect of the Bench of the Court of Petty Sessions before his ambitious eye.

Mr. Jessington himself regarded not official closing hours; if his work was not completed he toiled on; if he had finished for the day he felt himself entitled to arise upon the stroke of three, and stroll up the street to meet friends, discuss the news of the day, and possibly enjoy a social glass. This afternoon, seated in the cool gloom of Shandy's bar parlour,

he awaited with unquenched thirst and heroic fortitude the arrival of some friend. To drink alone is, in the higher circles of Cooeville, a sign of one of two things. (A) Severe internal pain necessitating the instant and inward application of port and brandy mixed to the afflicted part. (B) A criminal instinct. The colloquy of some men in the bar conversing in undertones soothed his ear with murmurous quiet, he closed his eyes, he nodded. Suddenly he sat upright: one of the voices uplifted in emotion gave forth interesting matter mixed with alcoholic imagination. "'Yes,' I sez, 'I put it to yer straight. You're the noo lawyer,' I sez. 'You give me a leg up,' I sez, and 'you're a made man. You know.'"

"That was the straight tip all right," said a second voice, which apparently emanated from a roughened throat.

"Yes," continued the first voice, "that's how I meant it. And the noo lawyer, he looked me straight in the eye, I'll say that for him, he looked me straight in the eye, and 'Take off yer hat,' he sez. 'I'll learn you,' he sez. Well"—the speaker took and audible drink—"I shifted me hat and sez, 'You know Bill Casey's girl,' I sez, 'fine, big, healthy-lookin' girl she was all right'—and the noo lawyer he chips in"—the speaker adopted a mincing and exaggerated distinctness of utterance—" 'Erlow me to sergest,' he sez, 'that you be good enough'—oh, 'e's a sarcarstic bloke is the noo lawyer all right—'be good enough,' 'e sez, 'to avoid spittin' in these 'ere premises. When I want you to spit in this — shop!' 'e sez, 'I'll — well let you know it.'"

The speaker, much pleased with this flight, repeated the last few sentences, extracting the full flavour with obvious relish. Mr. Jessington, now quite awake, smiled happily. Voice number two observed sympathetically. "Like his — cheek."

"No," replied voice number one reflectively. "No, 'e don't seem to have no cheek to speak of, it's just his style, that's what it is, just his style. And I sez, 'Well, you know. Fine, healthy-lookin' girl she was, and there was the selection. So I married her. Ah'"—the speaker enjoyed a sip. "'And there she was, heart weak, liver upside down'—and the noo lawyer comes bluffin' me again. 'Do you speak like that about yer wife?' 'e sez. 'My — oath I do,' I sez. 'It's true all right, and if you don't believe me I can — well prove it.' I had 'im beat there, so 'e sez, 'Get on with your — yarn,' he sez. 'Right oh,' I sez. 'It was like this here. How could a man live on his — selection twenty miles out with his wife always — sick? Eh? I put it to yer straight,' I sez. 'How could 'e keep to his Licence? Eh? And now,' I sez, 'this — cow of a Government what's forfeited me Licence on me'—and 'e chips



in again and—' Fork out yer — Licence,' 'e sez, as if 'e was sayin', 'shut your — jaw.' 'e's short is the noo lawyer, and—'ullo, me beer's done. Wot'll you have, Jim?"

Mr. Jessington, at pleasant ease, waited for the next chapter. "Ah," said the narrator, breathing deeply after a long pull at the replenished glass. "' Ah—well,' I sez, ' here's me — Licence,' an 'e climbs on to me again quick and lively, and whaffor do you think?"

"Any — thing, I 'spose," observed number two.

"You wouldn't guess it, no, not in a thousand," continued number one. "' You're too — fond,' the noo lawyer sez to me, ' of usin' bad — words.' 'e sez, ' when I want a bit of — good cursin' done,' 'e sez, ' I'll handle me own — team. I erlow no one,' 'e sez, ' to curse in this here shop,' 'e sez, ' — me if I do,' 'e sez."

"Cripes!" said number two in astounded tone.

"So," resumed number one, "I give 'im the Licence and 'e read it right through, same as if 'e'd never seen one before—Dick Dobbsleigh now would tell you wot was in a Licence without takin' 'is 'ands out of 'is pockets—yes, 'e reads it right through. Ho! 'e's a slow and careful bloke aw'right, is the noo lawyer, and 'e sez, 'Not a — hope.' 'Wot?' I sez. 'And me that married a girl, heart all wrong—you know, liver upside down'—but he shut me up short again, Ah——" the narrator refreshed himself once more.

"I don't like no truck with lawyers," growled voice number two. "You never know what they're gettin' at, and they'll get at *you*, safe."

"There's something in that," conceded voice number one. "But this chap ain't going to get at me, though 'e's trying to. Yes, 'e is. When we'd done the business and I'd got me Licence back—Oh, I took care of that, you don't catch me leavin' me Licence with a lawyer, no fear, and I asked him the damage, 'e sez, 'On this occasion there's no — charge,' he sez. 'Wot?' I sez, 'don't I owe you somethin'?' 'Not a — copper,' he sez. That sounds aw'right, don't it?"

Voice number two concurred.

"Ah, 'e was only bluffin'," explained the historian. "Later on 'e sent me a letter to come again. I lost that — letter a week or two ago, or I'd show yer his — game. It's likely I'd go to 'im again, ain't it? Oh, yes!"

The speaker enjoyed his irony and his drink. "No," he added, "when a lawyer says 'e won't charge yer there's somethin' wrong, 'e's up to some — caper, he'll — well ruin you if you let him. It's — well up to you to look out, I can tell you."

Voice number two agreed heartily.

"So I went up to Dick Dobbsleigh," continued number

one, " 'e's looking after my little job for me. Eh? Well, just for luck, Jim, I don't mind if I do."

Time had passed rapidly with Norwood during the weeks since his first client had called. Mr. Steggs had from that time taken the purchaser of his practice in hand as a pupil. And so matters, enlivened now and then by a request by the master for a loan—"pay you to-morrow"—had progressed to that afternoon; Mr. Steggs, having in the morning successfully negotiated one of the aforesaid loans, took one of his intervals for private affairs that day, and did not arrive at the office till late in the afternoon, when he suddenly appeared before Norwood slightly overcome, and waving aside legal studies demanded earnestly, "No clients yet?"

Norwood gave no answer.

"They'll come in time. Still we must do something." He paused and considered carefully. A plan came to mind. He nodded almost cheerfully at Norwood. "Time we did something, eh? I must hunt you up a client. I've got it. Come over and see Shandy. Bound to meet somebody there. You might shout for me once or twice. Have a good effect." He brightened visibly and settled his hat on more firmly.

"And who is Mr. Shandy?"

"Mr. Shandy be damned. We call him Shandy because he's always mixing 'em."

"Mixing them? Oh, yes, I remember, a shandy is one of your colonial drinks."

Mr. Steggs, whose methods of expressing his feelings were lacking in refinement, condemned certain portions of his anatomy, and asked, "Have you never drunk a shandy?"

"I have not."

"Well," said Mr. Steggs, pressing his hat down harder, "time you did. Come on. Just down the street. Do you good. Come on."

"Certainly not," answered Norwood sharply.

Mr. Steggs turned back from the door which he had already reached. "What's that? Aren't you coming?"

"I said certainly not."

"You ought to shout for me. It'll do you good. It will really. You're sure to meet someone there. Come on." Mr. Steggs, not quite himself owing to his morning's exertions, displayed some emotion. "What's your objection?"

Norwood's temper rose. "One may leave public-house society to the lower classes."

"Eh?" said Mr. Steggs. "What's that?" He thought it over and finally grasped its meaning. "Look here," he said fiercely, "you—you—Oh, hell!" and stirred to profound and contemptuous wrath he burst angrily from the office.

## CHAPTER XXIV

A YOUNG man whose main ideas concerning the opposite sex are drawn from the published works of Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Thackeray, will, upon visiting Cooeville, walk in a fair way to be astonished.

The early death of Norwood's mother, and his father's subsequent aversion from feminine society had so restricted the circle of acquaintances that the only ladies Norwood met were all early friends of his parents, and, in consequence, much his senior. These held the same views as his father on all subjects which might be discussed, and all that Norwood learnt from them merely confirmed his faith in what he had been taught. Experience of the sex Norwood had none, and never had there entered into his mind a conception of the power women exercise over men, whereby a man, at the call of the right one, and, as the numerous shipwrecked lives of history testify, often at the call of the wrong one, will arise and forsake all, even honour, to do her will.

Norwood had passed through no love passages since a little affair in England when he was eleven years old and she was sixteen; the girls of Cooeville whom he had met had at first been classed all together under one heading, "Unspeakable." Yet since that walk with Miss Lily Frettle on Sunday afternoon, her laughing, easily-blushing face had frequently come into his remembrance; each of his several meetings with her since had deepened the impression, and of late he had found it increasingly difficult to drive her away from his thoughts: her eyes, large, blue-grey, clear as a child's, her pretty fair complexion, and her manner, saucy, pleading, confiding, coquettish, with a charm all its own, would insist, in spite of himself, on forming the subject of delightful reveries.

Mr. Norwood Cherral did not ask himself if that manner of hers were well-bred, nor did he compare Miss Lily with anyone of her sex whom he had known. No, Mr. Allingham, who could, it appeared, be considered a trustworthy man, had taken him to Miss Seamond's and Miss Lily's home and had said, "Be sociable." Perhaps after all it was his duty to be so. It was a soft moonless evening, he collected hat, gloves, and cane, and, with a feeling of pleasant excitement, set out to call upon Miss Seamond.

## CHAPTER XXV

ANYONE desiring to interview Mr. J. B. Sackell, grocer, iron-monger, and timber merchant, of Cooeville, will always find him at a reasonable and business hour on the footpath just outside his shop; there, protected from the sun by the verandah, he will be seated, save in moments of earnest argument, upon the sack of potatoes or upon the sack of onions, that like unto the pillars Jachin and Boaz at the entrance to the porch of King Solomon's temple, stand at the right and at the left hand of his shop door. By the Napoleonic and Solomonic stroke of seizing and occupying this strategic position, Mr. Sackell, at rest upon one of the aforesaid pillars of modern commerce, can see all passers-by, can answer the business queries of those who desire to trade with him, can cock an eye withal at the goings-on in the shop, note the demeanour and alacrity of the assistants, and, when the affairs of finance no longer hold his attention, can discuss with any friend who comes by the various affairs of state cognizable by a man of business, a man of substance, a man of flocks and herds, and a Councillor of the Borough of Cooeville.

Mr. Bill Plowright of "The Cooeville Carriage Factory, Vehicles of all Descriptions Made and Repaired," had called on Mr. Sackell about some timber for a new shed, and the matter having been arranged to the satisfaction of both sides, Mr. Sackell, the earliness of the hour preventing any stress of business, held his friend in converse.

"And what I say is," Mr. Sackell declared, "if you pay a man his price, you ought to get what you're buying."

"Sounds all right," admitted Mr. Plowright, his large voice taking on a conciliatory tone.

Under stress of argumentative emotion, Mr. Sackell brought his clenched left fist, back up, crooked little finger, and huge double jointed thumb projecting, into play. This action, striking to the observer, and easy of partial imitation, was public property. Other Cooeville magnates smiled responsive to it, and Mr. Tinner humorously copied it to the no small gratification of his fellow bank clerks.

"Now I buy my law from Dick Dobbsleigh," continued Mr. Sackell, with growing irritation and characteristic gesture, "and I pay 'im 'is price. But goin' on for months now Dick's gettin' slower and slower, and lately he's put me off time and agen with some lie or other. Am I to go on payin' a man to be always humbuggin' me? No — fear."

Mr. Plowright signified his entire agreement with Mr. Sackell and assured him in characteristic terms of his warm

sympathy, repeating in deep tones and with appropriate solemnity the words, "No — fear."

"It's goin' on five months ago since I took a job over to Dick—a simple transfer, a thing I've had put through in three weeks many a time," continued Mr. Sackell, "and if I've bin once to Dick's office I've bin twenty times, and the job ain't done yet. What's the good of havin' a lawyer to look after your work if you have to look after the work yourself and after the — lawyer too. Eh? Where's the sense of it?"

"No — sense at all," declared Mr. Plowright feelingly.

"I'm sick and tired of Dick and that's a fact, but what am I to do? As for that Lambton"—the speaker spat vigorously as a complete exposition of his views about Cooeville's second solicitor.

Mr. Plowright, to show that he agreed with his friend's views, imitated his action. The appearance of Mr. Norwood Cherral walking down the street to his office turned the current of Mr. Plowright's thoughts into a new channel. "There's the new man," he observed, jerking his thumb back. "Heard anything about him?"

"Dunno nothin' about him," said Mr. Sackell.

"Looks as if he thought a heap of himself," commented Mr. Plowright. "Though," he added, gazing after Norwood, "I dunno why."

Mr. Sackell scratched the back of his neck reflectively. "I wonder if he's as big a — loafer as Dick Dobbsleigh? It 'ud be a big thing for him if he ain't."

"They're a rum lot, lawyers," explained Mr. Plowright.

"I've 'arf a mind to give 'im a turn," said Mr. Sackell. "But," he added, alluding to Norwood's long frock coat and silk hat, which latter article of attire is only worn in Cooeville at a wedding or at an important funeral, "what's he rigged up like that for?"

"Looks rum, don't it?" admitted Plowright. "And — hot I should say." Messrs. Sackell and Plowright themselves attended to their daily work during summer without either coat or vest. "I see him the day of the bush fire dressed up just the same, but I didn't know him from a crow then, and I told him what I thought about his hat."

"He ain't taken the hint then," said Mr. Sackell in a dissatisfied manner. "Look here, Bill, it's early yet, but I'm upset. Come and have a taste."

The stimulus afforded by one pint of beer drove Mr. Sackell to take the step he had been thinking of for some time.

"Bill," he said. "No, I won't have another—I don't know that new lawyer and no more do you, he may have a tall hat and not much under it, but I'm goin' to wait this morning for Dick Dobbsleigh, I'll wait till I get him if I miss

my dinner, and if he puts me off again with any of his lies I'll give the new man a chance, — me if I don't."

"No harm in trying," Bill agreed.

Norwood, disdaining to mix with Cooeville residents, and not interested to hear local talk, knew nothing of the estimate that his neighbours were forming of him: it did not enter his mind as he sat in his office late that afternoon that at the Mechanics several members of the feminine youth and beauty of Cooeville were discussing him with kindest words, and that at Mrs. Wemy's ladies of maturer years and thereby, one may assume, of riper judgment, mentioned his virtues and spake his praise. Alas, dear to the heart of man as is feminine commendation, yet upon that alone may no young and poverty-stricken solicitor live and thrive.

"Well, young man," said a voice at the office door, "still waiting for flies to come to your parlour, eh?"

Norwood, who had noticed the vulgarity of the voice and of the address before he raised his eyes, looked up to find it in face and manner too. "I do not understand you," he answered freezingly. But his manner passed unnoticed by the visitor.

"Well, it's time you learnt to understand plain English, isn't it? I thought I might give you a little job." The visitor sat down. "I suppose you'll let your first client off costs altogether? I think I'm the first client. I pass this little shop a dozen times a day and I've never seen anyone near it. You'd be glad to have something to do I should say."

Norwood, unaccustomed to meeting any save his social equals, had of late been frequently taken by surprise and was always at a loss in emergencies; he regained self-control now with an effort. Who was this man? Was he mad?

"May I ask if you came in here merely to—" Norwood stopped with an effort and concluded—"to question me?"

"Quite right," said the visitor approvingly. "Quite right. Get down to business. Time is money—at least my time is. Yes, I've an account I want collected, but I want you to fix your price for the job if you get it. No results, no pay. And as I'm your first client—"

"Would you be good enough," said Norwood, who had suffered his caller so far, not from patience, nor from a desire to placate, but because it would have been lacking in dignity to show annoyance, "to tell me who you are and what you want. And leave my private concerns out of the discussion."

"Oh, you needn't come any of your airs over me," answered the caller with a boisterous laugh, that had a touch of anger in it. "And don't pretend you don't know who I am. That's the account I spoke about"—he laid a bill-head on the table as he spoke and Norwood's eye caught the heading,

"Sol Lee and Co. The Chief Drapers. The Cheap Drapers. The Cash Drapers."—"and it'll tell you all about me, though I daresay you knew all the time."

"What do you mean by your unwarrantable, your most insolent assertion?"

"Eh? What's that, my what?" asked the startled Mr. Lee.

"The matter will not appeal to you," said Norwood, with fine scorn, "but I find it an impertinence to have my word doubted."

"Eh? Your word? Oh, come, I never doubted your word, what are you talking about?"

"Am I to understand that you apologize?"

"But I never said anything to apologize for. What do you want?"

Norwood rose.

"All right." Mr. Lee was slightly alarmed, this new solicitor was evidently a remarkably sudden young man, and was furthermore quite an unknown quantity. Who could say where he might stop if he once got going. "I'll apologize, there, anything for a quiet life."

Norwood gazed at him severely.

"Well, well," grumbled Mr. Lee. "Sit down, can't you, and talk business. That's right. Now about this account"—for a moment Norwood hung in the wind, two months ago he would have dismissed the man contemptuously, but now perhaps—"It's all right," said Mr. Lee, noticing his hesitation. "I apologize. What more do you want?"

Norwood sat down, irresolute.

"And now for business. This fellow Condon—that's his bill I gave you—he's getting into debt at other places in the town, he owes Thriggerley a lot I know, so I want to be first in. I wouldn't be beat by Thriggerley for fifty pounds." Lee's face grew dark at some remembrance. "I won't stick at a trifle to beat Thriggerley, no, and I wouldn't let you stick either. By the way"—he narrowed his eyes suspiciously at Norwood—"you're not Thriggerley's man, are you?"

Once more Norwood looked full and severely at Mr. Lee who shifted his gaze uneasily. "The question as to who may be my clients is quite outside your province."

"Oh, all right, all right," exclaimed Mr. Lee in haste. "That'll do. I never saw such a fellow. I trust you of course," and Mr. Lee proceeded to explain the means by which he intended to secure judgment against Condon and seize his goods before Thriggerley could take action.

When his client had gone Norwood sat still, feeling a certain bitter contempt for Lee, or for Steggs, or for Cooeville, or for fortune, or for himself, he could hardly decide which. That he, Norwood Cherral, should descend to this! Acting

as dun for a petty draper! Could there be any greater humiliation in store?

Mr. Steggs on being haughtily requested to do whatever was necessary about the summons, settled his hat on firmly, and showed clearly that the degradation and humiliation of the matter did not strike him at all. "Good thing a job's turned up at last. Funny Lee should come here though. He's a mean little squirt, thinks everybody's trying to cheat him, he must have heard you given a good name. Well, it's a beginning, every little helps." He paused. "I say, Cherral, this is the first case you've had. Aren't you going to christen it? I think you ought to celebrate for once. You needn't let Lee see us, he's a teetotaller—got a weak stomach—but you've never shouted once yet. It won't create a good impression if you avoid a drink every time. I've had nothing to speak of to-day, and we both need it, and it'll do us good." Mr. Steggs became almost eloquent with desire. He pressed his hat down. "Eh?"

"I have already declined to join you in these practices," answered Norwood stiffly.

"Practices be d—d," declared Mr. Steggs angrily. "You're a cold fish yourself and think everyone else should be. I don't see what fun you get out of life. Dammit, I've had enough of you for to-day, I must have a little rest." He departed in search of the required repose, and found it in tacking up and down the main street, zigzagging from hotel to hotel, testing the liquors and trying the patience of the people at each port of call.

Mr. Steggs did not present himself at the office next day till after lunch, but then explained that the weather had upset him. "Don't feel well at all. Liver, I think. It's this infernal drought."

Norwood making no comment on this diagnosis suggested that perhaps another three weeks was too long a time to ask him to wait and perhaps—

Mr. Steggs gazed past Norwood with dead eyes. "Want me to go?" He spat vigorously. "Engaged for six weeks at nothing a week and gives me notice." He spat again. "What next!" Apparently refreshments came next, for he retired precipitately across the street.

For the remainder of the day Norwood remained in solitary state; he was just locking the safe preparatory to closing the office, when a knock at his open door caused him to look up. He saw a clerical gentleman whom he soon understood to be the Rev. Albert Snodleigh, Clerk in Holy Orders, of St. John's, Cooeville.

"I feel that I owe you an explanation, Mr. Cherral, for calling on you here instead of at your lodgings, but my evenings are quite taken up and to call at Mrs. Limmering's



for you in the afternoon would be an empty courtesy. I wish to meet you as well as to call upon you."

"Pray do not mention it."

"You know of course that I have been relieving at the seaside for the past two months or I should have called before. I was naturally pleased at being offered a prolonged change from here during the summer months and accepted eagerly. I only resumed my duties here last week."

"Quite so."

"I am not a man to indulge in idle talk, Mr. Cherral," continued Mr. Snodleigh. "I observed you at divine service morning and evening last Sunday and feel that you will be a helper." He paused, but Norwood said nothing.

"I find a deep and increasing need of stimulation in the spiritual life here, especially among the men. I find the men here are penetrated, yes, quite penetrated with a spirit of indifference. It is deplorable, truly deplorable." He paused and gazed out of the window.

"I regret to hear it."

"Realizing the great need of enlightenment here, I gave a special series of sermons, but I fear that few realized and enjoyed all that was in them. And one man whom I had urged, urged almost to entreaty, did not attend one of them."

"It must be most disappointing."

"And when I spoke to him rebukingly for his neglect of his opportunities, he forgot himself entirely, he spoke most insolently." Mr. Snodleigh's eyes kindled as he remembered his parishoner's conduct. "He argued with me," he declared. "I fear he is an atheist at heart."

"It must be disheartening."

"It is, Mr. Cherral, it is indeed, but it is pleasant to meet one who can appreciate my difficulties. You lighten them by appreciating them, Mr. Cherral. And I feel——"

Mr. Snodleigh's further observations were cut short by the abrupt return of Mr. Steggs, who, in endeavouring to drown his indignation, had attained a mental state wherein only one idea at a time was possible. He ignored the cleric, and confronting Norwood across his table, stared past him with glazed eyes.

"Pay me," he said. "Pay me."

Norwood, speechless with surprise and anger, eyed him with disgust. Mr. Steggs thought for a few minutes and added, "Pay me, Pay me." He fixed his hat more firmly on his head and changed his tone from a level chant to a threatening cry. "Pay me. Pay me."

Norwood, recovering himself, indignantly ordered him outside. Mr. Steggs with equal indignation rapped fiercely on the table and vociferated, "Pay me. Pay me. Pay me and I'll go."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Snodleigh rising, "I ——"

"Pay me," demanded Mr. Steggs.

"Leave the room instantly," ordered Norwood.

Mr. Steggs, in reply, attended to his hat.

"I shall be delighted to renew——" began Mr. Snodleigh, when Mr. Steggs, grasping the fact that a third party was present, rounded on him fiercely. "Pay me," he said angrily.

Mr. Snodleigh drew back hastily. Mr. Steggs followed him up and repeated his demand in raised tones, then suddenly recognizing the one he was pursuing, he whisked round and hastily left for the street.

"Dear me," remarked Mr. Snodleigh, emerging from the corner into which he had been driven, "what a peculiar—and if you will permit me to say so—what an entirely objectionable person."

## CHAPTER XXVI

COOEVILLE puts forward no claim to elegance or excellence of architecture in its business edifices, one has only to walk down the main street to realize this; and in the more domestic thoroughfares too, one finds, not the stately homes spoken of by the poet, but buildings that a hypercritical, ill-mannered, and outspoken man might call conventional and inconvenient and crude in design; mistaken, flimsy, and shortlived in material; ready laid bonfires for any chance spark, inviting feasts for any colony of white ants; hot in summer, cold in winter, ugly, dangerous, and preposterous at all times. But if this frank person travelled a mile due east of Cooeville to "Tallangatta," the home of Mr. Labby, Mrs. Labby, and an uncertain quantity of young folk, he would have felt the necessity—a compulsion more irresistible because persuasive instead of hectoring—to alter his condemnatory views. The rough old paling fence that runs along the front is really only useful as a dividing line and as a support for the tumbling mass of hedge and climbing roses, which, instead of forming a thorny rampart, lean over to the oncoming guest with sweet-scented welcome. The gate offers no spiked and bolted barrier—it is always ajar; you pass through it from the glare of the road into the little grove of well-grown orange trees where dark green glossy leaf, fair and perfumed flower, and rich coloured fruit, rest and refresh one. From these a rough pergola, sprawled over by vines, leads you to the verandah. But let no rash intruder judge from his ease of entrance that the Labby household will be to him for a spoil and for a prey; it being summer weather, wherever the coolest spot may be found there also will be found Bill Sykes,

snatching a much-needed forty winks. Bill Sykes is a dog : class, Old English Bull ; record, unbeaten in the show ring ; carrying in front of him a huge lowering face which proclaims—to the ignorant—an insatiable and bloody-minded ferocity : carrying at the other end of him a tail which is by comparison insignificant and ridiculous in the extreme, and carrying between the two ends of him aforesaid a heart overflowing with humility, with kindness, with love, and with loyalty. He is the friend of every little child in Cooeville, and accepts from them with native and austere gravity of face and absurdly undignified little wags and wriggles of his tail, compliments, pats and ear-scratching. Bill, being extremely short and thick in the neck, finds summer a trying period ; but duty is duty, and perceiving your approach, he rises from a deliciously cool and dusty hole under the gloom of the largest orange tree and approaches with stately and leisurely gait ; as you, poor stranger, halt, frozen with fear, Bill, standing gravely beside you, presses his short, wrinkled, tip-tilted snout against your legs, taking slow, long, and noisy inhalations the while. The result of this searching test into your character appears to be eminently satisfactory ; Bill gives three wags of his tail—remember it is exhausting weather—and, the duties of inspection and the rites of hospitality having been thus performed, he retires, dignified always, to the coolest spot aforesaid. There, instead of lying down, a matter calling for some exertion, his legs give way, he falls prone, and sinks once more into light but necessary slumber.

Bill has been brief, dignified, kindly, welcoming. Riki-Tiki-Tavi—always addressed as Riki—throws dignity to the winds, and to all strangers is darkly-threatening, vicious, deaf to all reasoning, incensed at all endearments ; fortunately he is only a magpie with one wing cut, and his heart-whole assault on the intruder in defence of hearth and home can go no further than shrieks of rage, whistles of biting sarcasm, whoops and hoots of defiance, and vicious jabs and digs at your boots. As Riki scolds along beside you with drooped wings and devilish expression in his beady eyes, his relentless cursing wakes from post prandial repose both Jack and Jill—a pair of kookooburras ; raising their heavy beaks they burst into clacking laughter which tails off *diminuendo ritardando*. But their merriment, short though it may have been, has instant consequences ; stirred from her siesta at the rear of the house, Jess, a pedigreed sable collie, rises with a sharp bark, shakes out her magnificent frill, and rushes to meet the invader, bursting, in her excitement, across one end of the verandah, bumping and upsetting cane lounges and deck chairs. Sir Lancelot, Anastasia, and Sylvia, three half-grown kittens, abruptly awakened, view this act which flings them headlong from their favourite cushion, as a gross

trespass and a dastardly outrage; springing to the highest vantage points available they raise by common consent the banner of a swollen and protesting tail, and, striking a series of humpbacked and antagonistic attitudes, they spit out a chorus of curses. Jess is a lady, therefore she is beautiful and dainty, therefore also she feels trifles that Bill Sykes would disdain to notice; the volcanic eruption almost into her face of three kittens, each kitten itself a volcano in full blast, disturbs her already agitated mind. Besides, she dislikes being sworn at, yet knows she must not chase Sir Lancelot and his sisters. She pauses with one paw held delicately up, throws out to you a short enquiring bark, and glancing at the three hoisted and defiant tails, alters her voice to a threatening grumble. By this time you should have reached the verandah, where Jess, at once assuming company manners, notices the cats no more but walks before you along the side verandah to the front door, swinging her bushy tail with slow and easy welcome, lifting and placing her slender legs and pretty narrow paws with a somewhat self-conscious grace. As you reach the front door you breathe more freely. At last you have attained sanctuary, there can be no more nerve-racking surprises, no more savage dogs, vicious magpies, no more—a fearful, piercing scream thrills into your ear and runs shudderingly up and down your frozen spine. Another and another and another come from behind that thick screen of tecoma and honeysuckle almost beside you. Is it a fearful murder? Is it a chained maniac? Is it a child with its dress in flames? Is it—moist with dread, shaking with terror, you burst round the edge of the creepers to be met by a large white cockatoo upon his perch, who, satisfied with having attracted your notice, ceases to shriek, and, with drooped head and slightly elevated sulphur-yellow crest, ingratiatingly suggests, "Scratch poor cocky."

This is too much: drying your forehead and endeavouring to quieten your pounding heart you ring the front door bell angrily, nearly fall over the youngest Miss Labby—Babs, aged three—in the cool dim hall, followed by Babs you stalk into the drawing-room, dark to your eyes just in from the bright sun, find a chair with difficulty and your shin, and sit down with a relieved sigh and a sense of security at last, only to spring hastily to your feet at a wriggle and a strangled screech beneath you as Victoria—mother of Sir Lancelot, Anastasia and Sylvia—effects an indignant and hurried exit from her favourite arm-chair. Babs—tender-hearted lover of all animals—resents your action with a storm of tears, and pattering up the hall to her mother reports—as your burning ears tell only too plainly—"Naughty man satted down on *poor puss-tat*."

Norwood, brought out at Mrs. Labby's request by Mr. Austerberry behind Mr. Labby's fast trotter Patricia, had to pass alone through the various environing perils of the Labby home, while Mr. Austerberry himself drove round to the stable entrance; but when brought by Mrs. Labby from the drawing-room to the large and cheerful living-room, Norwood found the head of the house and two visitors there besides himself—Mr. and Mrs. Ormerod of "Warrington," the one station in the Cooeville district.

"Ah, Mr. Cherral," said Mr. Ormerod, in his slow voice that hung upon one note like the drone of a preacher heard at a distance, "I had hoped to meet you before this. I have heard of you. I am pleased to meet you."

"We all are," said the burly Mr. Labby heartily, "and it's your own fault you've not been out here long ago. Do you think I've nothing to do but chase around mustering young men and yarding them in here? Eh? Now mother, look after him and give him cake or something, and Austerberry too."

"Are you looking after the tea or am I, father?" demanded Mrs. Labby, as she supplied Norwood and Austerberry's wants. "And the idea of talking about Mr. Cherral as if he were a sheep!"

"He might be worse," asserted the unabashed host. "I've seen a ram fetch two thousand guineas, and I don't suppose Mr. Cherral would bring that. Would anyone give two thousand guineas for you, Mr. Cherral?"

"No one," answered Norwood. A note of sincerity and a hint of bitterness sounded in his voice despite himself. Mrs. Labby noticed both. "The poor boy, how lonely he must have been. We should have brought him out willy-nilly long ago. He's very young, and good-looking too, and how nicely he holds himself and behaves."

"Ah," began Mr. Ormerod, using his favourite opening, it sounded almost as if he struck a tuning fork to find his pitch—"Our friend Labby looks at things from two points of view, stock and wheat, or wheat and stock, I don't know which comes first."

"Both," answered Mr. Labby with conviction. "And I don't think there's any man a big enough fool to say I'm wrong."

"Every man to his fancy," answered Mr. Ormerod, "but I admit that I am inclined to agree with you about sheep."

"Of course," assented Mr. Labby, accepting this as merely rational. "And another thing——"

"Now, now, father," corrected Mrs. Labby, "you mustn't start talking about sheep. This is Sunday, and besides you'll tire Mrs. Ormerod and me—and I daresay Mr. Cherral. I don't suppose you find sheep fascinating things, do you, Mr. Cherral?"

Norwood admitted that he did not.

"If you're a Melbourne lawyer," Mr. Labby spoke with the fine pity of the man who knows that his department of knowledge is really the only one, "I suppose you don't know the difference between a merino and a cross-bred?"

"I must confess I do not."

"No," said Mr. Labby, greatly pleased, "and I suppose you could hardly tell a wether's lamb if you saw it?"

Norwood again admitted that this was so.

Mr. Labby's affection for his own humour, which was of an extremely robust type, here displayed itself: the two ladies, wrapped in all the innocence of ignorance, smiled vaguely; and Mr. Ormerod, observing that no harm had been done, allowed himself a gentle chuckle.

Norwood was puzzled by this merriment, but for reasons which he afterwards ascertained from the shouting Austerberry, no one explained the joke.

Mrs. Ormerod, well known to be cautiously slow in admitting anyone to her acquaintance, had been quietly considering Norwood. Several points of description borne to her ear by flattering rumour had stimulated her curiosity; she declared now that rumour had not exaggerated. That Norwood was of English birth appealed to her: both she and her husband came from the Motherland, and their only child, a daughter, was even then living with an aunt near London that she might complete her education without incurring what her parents thought the many dangers of Colonial schools. Mrs. Ormerod on a first inspection was inclined to approve of Norwood, and after chatting with him for some time found her original estimate more than confirmed.

Soon Mrs. Labby made the conversation general, and presently suggested that Mr. Labby should take their new visitor round the garden—"The sun's gone now, father, and you know you like being outside whenever you can."

The society and the talk of Mr. Labby, as Mr. Labby's wife believed with her whole heart, could not fail to interest and delight any visitor. The host rose with alacrity. He, too, knew that the society and talk of Mr. Labby could not fail to interest and delight any new and Melbourne and ignorant young gentleman.

He took Norwood into the garden because his wife had suggested it, but fortunately the garden, over which no time need be wasted, was on the way to the stables, the cow house, the pigstye, the poultry run, the pigeon house, the duckyard and the paddock: each of these things to be exhibited and explained to the new man contained one or more animals. It was unfortunate that going in a direct line from the side verandah through the garden, the stables, out of all the list, should be the first arrived at. There were only two horses there, but one of the animals was Patricia and the other

was Haversack. "Now," said Mr. Labby, leaning comfortably against the door, "if you can enjoy a good thing when you see it, just run your eye over Haversack there. You've seen Patty and what she can do, and it's not a bad performance either, she's one of the finest little things in the district. Aren't you, Patty? Eh, old girl?" He walked in and stroked Patricia's neck as he spoke, she edged away, pricked her ears forward at Norwood the stranger, and blew out her nostrils noisily. "You can go into any stables you like from here to Melbourne—I'm not talking of racing stables of course"—pursued Mr. Labby, "and you wouldn't see a better pair. Patricia's one of Erin's—and he's good enough surely—and Haversack there is a better one still." Mr. Labby paused for Norwood to exclaim at the splendour of Patricia's pedigree, and to enquire with wonder the name of Haversack's sire, for, as Mr. Labby justly felt, the horse that rose superior in the blue-blood of stable aristocracy to a filly by Erin from a dam of equal merit must be something glorious indeed.

Norwood replied politely but vaguely, and Mr. Labby, fully satisfied of his guest's consuming curiosity in the matter, launched out into a minute history of Haversack, his immediate ancestry, their good points, their records, their performances, returning therefrom to Haversack himself, his points, his present condition and his possibilities, proceeding thence to unfold an extremely detailed record of an alarming illness passed through by Haversack shortly after he had been acquired, the first symptom being—Mr. Labby was in full swing, having indeed delivered himself of barely half the matter, when Master Stan Labby appeared on the scene and ruthlessly interrupted his father's speech. "Tea, Dad."

"So," continued Mr. Labby, "when he said that I said 'Get out,' I said, 'don't you come telling me——'"

"Tea, Dad."

"Really you must excuse me," exclaimed Norwood who, not wishing to interrupt, had spent nearly an hour waiting for a chance to go—"if you will say good-bye to Mrs. Labby for me——"

"Nonsense," said Mr. Labby. "Of course you'll stay to tea. Mrs. Labby expects you. We have it early on Sunday. What a pity I haven't had time to show you round. I've a cow there"—but Mrs. Labby herself now appeared. "Is this showing Mr. Cherral the garden, father? I might have guessed where you'd take him. I hope you're fond of live stock, Mr. Cherral, because Mr. Labby's not happy unless he's doing something about them. From horses and sheep down to prize chickens——"

"He's been enjoying himself all right," declared Mr. Labby heartily. "I've been telling him about Haversack."

## CHAPTER XXVII

"THE first day of the week! Ah!" Railthorpe, on his back upon Mrs. Bowyer's lawn, drew a long breath and sighed luxuriously. Doctor Rafe extended beside him expressed his comprehension and his sympathy by a grunt.

"We should value our Sundays, Rafe."

"Dead slow," suggested his friend.

"You old ruffian, what would life be without them?"

There was a long pause, then Railthorpe began. "I want to speak to you about poetry again, Rafe. Don't yawn so, as though the mere mention of it put you off to sleep."

"It damn near does."

"You're not encouraging, Rafe."

"Who wants to encourage you? A man who writes poetry deserves all the knocks he gets. And the harder the knocks the better, because it's got to be knocked out of him and the sooner it's done the better."

"Rafe, if you met a true poet, and he listened to your views and believed them, you'd depress him so that he'd blow out his brains at once."

"Not he. Not poetic enough. These fellows that must be always brooding over rhymes haven't the pluck to blow their own heads off. They'd pick something easy and make a noise about it twelve months beforehand, and then they wouldn't do the job after all. Bleat's their only strong suit, and you'll find it a safe rule, the more bleat the less brain." Rafe, after growling inarticulately for a few minutes, was compelled to join Railthorpe in his laugh.

"Rafe, I'm glad you've expressed such a liking for verses, because I've got some more to show you."

Rafe groaned.

"I came to you for advice and you said 'try light stuff.'"

"I didn't mean it."

"Too late now. I followed your instructions and I've brought some of the results for you to look over. Here you are. Stick it in your pocket till I go."

"Not much of it I hope," said Rafe complying. "You're getting quite brazen. The first time you could hardly bear to mention it, the second you hand it over without a twinge. I suppose in a week or two you'll be reciting your latest to me—with appropriate gesture."

The two friends with their common hatred of recitations found this an excellent joke.

It was late that evening when Railthorpe went home, but Doctor Rafe found time to peruse with deep interest the



sporting news in Saturday's paper; he found that it merely confirmed him in his views, and he at once came to two definite decisions, first, to put that fiver on Gallicus, second, to go forthwith to bed.

It was in the process of hastily disrobing that he came upon Railthorpe's manuscript. "Those damn poems." He stood irresolute, then making up his mind he placed the candle conveniently, got into bed, and unfolded the pages. "By Poverty Depressed," came first and Rafe who, forgetful of the mention of light verse, had expected matter similar to Railthorpe's first writings, was taken by surprise. "There's some sense in that. It's just what I've been telling him. Like his cheek to laugh at me in his rhymes and then get me to read them. What's the next—'The Bard to the Beauty.'" He glanced through it, "Hum. How many more. Only one? What's this, 'Concerning the duties of a Bard.'"

"The Bard, allow me to state, is in that peculiar but nevertheless happy condition

When he thinks that no one but he himself occupies such a superior and joyful position:

To put the matter politely, he is smit with a sudden penchant—a thing for which he was always willing,

And now looks dreamily at the hard facts of life, and buys rings, and is not particular to a shilling.

The maiden in question is, I am told, golden-haired, and displays a remarkable tendency towards embonpoint,

But that doesn't affect the Bard in the least, for he thinks that whatever *she* has can't be wrong.

Personally, of course, I have no rooted objection to adiposity; but what I always dread

In the growth of fat, is, lest it should creep up, and eventually fill all the head.

I am somewhat surprised at the Bard for agreeing to marry her, for is it not his poetic duty

Never to tie himself down to a mate, though (as a Bard) to be constantly in love, and in thrall to new beauty,

So that when any fair one grows ugly, or avaricious, or ill-tempered, or extravagant, or obnoxious in any way, or instead of being adored is just hated,

He may transfer his affection, and sonnets, and remarks on things, to another, without being called fickle or sated?

A Bard should live in his age, and sing from his heart, and a man with only one wife

Is naturally tied down to the praise of one particular style of beauty which may not be observable during life.

Let him roam, therefore, from flower to flower, and sip their sweets, and brush the bloom from many a peach;

And let him celebrate, as the varying mood shall seize him, the remarkable and distinctive excellence of each.

However, I trust that the Bard, having promised to marry as aforesaid, will now conduct himself with all due sobriety and decorum ;

And having found the first rather nice will not eagerly seek for some more of 'em.

For, believe me, he has his hands, if not his arms, full, and between ourselves

I think that—Oh, here come the Bard and the maiden ; perhaps we would do well to screen ourselves."

Rafe permitted himself a chuckle. " This stuff is ahead of those first things I should say. Anyhow they're no worse. Nothing could be worse. Perhaps he'll work up to magazine yarns yet." Doctor Rafe yawned. " Well, there's nothing like poetry to put a man off."

He yawned again and went to sleep.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

NORWOOD, compelled to notice the drought in some things of major importance, began to observe it in minor matters too ; he saw the covers of his books warp and curl, he found the *Cooeeville Chronicle*—at which he occasionally and disdainfully glanced—so dry that it tore almost at a touch, each night as he put his head to pillow the smell of the dust rising from it almost choked him, the back of one of his hair brushes split, on calm days a buggy driving down the street left a trail of dust that hung an hour in the air. And still the rain failed. The country roads turned to dust, and thousands of acres of soil not bound together by vegetation or moisture began to crumble and whirl up before the wind. Norwood was at work upon the Police Offences' Act, 1890, one morning when a shouting in the street called him to the front. He found the road filling rapidly, everyone calling to others and pointing to the north ; the shops emptied out their inhabitants as the sunlight failed and twilight fell over the land ; the air hung strangely still, close, and heavy ; and far to the north—spreading wide over the horizon and high to the heavens—rose huge, slowly revolving pillars of dark smoke, boiling and eddying as the vast enshrouding curtain advanced with stately slowness and in dread silence upon the town. A panic-stricken hush fell upon the watchers, they looked at each other with faces white in the rapidly darkening street ; and the Captain of the Salvation Army, lifting up his voice, proclaimed the end of the world, and bade them harken for the last trump.

Norwood gazed in fascinated awe.

The darkness deepened, moaning and rumbling came from behind the advancing veil. As it neared the town the op-

pression of the air lifted, the dust rose from the road as though sucked up by a gigantic invisible mouth, a cold wind swept down the street and as the black and unknown foe broke upon the town, daylight failed, and such a dust storm as men had never known before raged through Cooeeville.

"Why, it's only an old dust storm!" shouted Mr. Lee, with shaky bravado. "Only a dust storm! What's there to be frightened at? Who's afraid?" demanded Mr. Lee loudly. "I must get my goods in. This'll ruin them." He dashed into his shop to order the shifting inside of the rolls of flannelette and serges stacked at the doorway and against the verandah posts. Through all that day, and for half the next the whole district was shrouded in a yellow haze:

And still day after day, week after week passed by and the earth remained baked, and without vegetation; still the sheep died in their thousands and cattle and horses in their scores, still the overworked railway station-master and his staff arranged for the trucking away to districts untouched by drought of such stock as the owners could afford to save; still the air met the face hot, and dry, and dusty; still the water in the public reservoir sank and grew fouler; still the private supplies in each family's corrugated iron tank decreased and became more precious; still the gutters stank, and the roads grew rougher and deeper in dust; still the heat and the abnormal dryness of the air tested and found wanting the cheap wooden houses, here and there widening the cracks, here and there warping a board from its place, while, in the rooms within, the shoddy furniture twisted and split, and the thin heavily varnished veneer cracked and peeled off.

But Cooeeville and all in it were so distasteful to Norwood, that dirt and drought and discomfort were bitterly assumed by him to be, for it, merely normal.

"Are ye there?" asked a voice.

A small man with rusty red hair and scrubby beard stood at the door. "Come in," said Norwood.

"Condon's me name," announced the visitor in a dull voice. "I got yer summons, but I don't know what to do about it." The speaker's wandering, pale grey eyes and vacantly hopeless expression were even as a banner, proclaiming, to all who could read the sign, weakness and failure. But Norwood's eyes did not see these things.

"Do you admit owing the money?" he asked.

"I'll be owin' Mr. Lee somethin' this five or six year." Condon's gaze was more vaguely dissatisfied than ever as he added. "But I don't want to go to court."

It was sometime before Norwood, after much questioning, understood that here was a man without money, intending to live on credit till the next harvest; a man, in fact, who did not pay Lee's account at once, because he had nothing

with which to pay it. Norwood felt non-plussed. He had no wish to appear in Court on this matter, and if Condon spoke truly what would be the use of obtaining a verdict? The man had nothing. "See Mr. Lee himself, and tell him what you've explained to me about being without means. Probably the summons can be withdrawn." And Norwood dismissed his visitor.

Mr. Lee, however, when he brought Condon back to the office after lunch, had other views. "You wait outside, Condon, till I've talked it over with my solicitor." He closed the door carefully after the obedient Condon, and turning to Norwood asked what had been arranged. He brushed Norwood's report of the conversation aside with the remark. "Knew all that long ago. He's working three horses. And there's the buggy.—Now I want you to arrange with Condon to get a verdict to-morrow—he can't stop that if he wanted to—then get out a warrant at once and seize those horses, and if anybody claims them I'll fight him. I want to get in before Thridderley. I want to beat Thridderley even more than I want my money." Lee spoke with vicious emphasis. "He had me once, he cost me pounds and pounds. He's a robber—you can't repeat that," exclaimed Mr. Lee hastily, recognizing that his temper had mastered his tongue. "You can't repeat that. But I must beat Thridderley. And I want my money. And you ought to do both for me. That's what I pay you for. Now you get Condon in and fix it up—don't say a word about the horses or the warrant of course." And, oblivious of Norwood's looks, Lee brought Condon in and sat down with a critical air to observe how his solicitor would conduct the business. But no criticism was called for, Norwood, with the curtness of one dealing with a distasteful matter, informed Condon that judgment would be obtained against him. Save a depressed remark about "it doin' him no good in the paper," Condon offered no objection.

"That's all right, Condon," said Mr. Lee, anxious to get him out of the room before he could ask any awkward questions. "You can get off home now, nice and comfortable. And you needn't talk about this."

"He'll never do any good," said Mr. Lee, looking after the departing Condon. "He's the sort of man that can only travel downhill. I'll take care that he gets no more credit from me."

As Norwood went home that evening his mind was troubled by the fact that on Tuesday week he would have to appear at the Court of Petty Sessions and speak in public for the first time in his life. "It will only be a few formal questions of course, Lee will go into the box and give evidence that the amount is due. That is all, and probably there will be very

few people in Court and——” Norwood’s thoughts were interrupted, a large hand grasped him by the arm as he was passing Mr. Sackell’s shop and stayed his progress.

“Here,” said Mr. Sackell, as a man making at once a momentous decision and conferring a vast favour. “I’m goin’ to give you a job. I bin thinkin’ about it this long time.” He appealed to a short, heavily built man beside him. “I sez something to you about it afore, didn’t I, Bill?”

“That’s right,” answered Bill, in a deep and powerful voice. The voice recalled the face to Norwood’s mind. Yes, actually, this was the fellow who had behaved with such insolence at the Fire Brigade Station. “Begood enough——” Norwood began haughtily, but Mr. Sackell continued, “I’ve just had a bit of a row with the other man, and when I see you comin’ along so handy thinks I I’ll strike while the iron’s hot.” Still retaining his grasp of Norwood’s arm he turned his head to address a customer coming out of the shop. “Your lot’s all ready, Mr. Badgery. An’ about that iron——”

Norwood, glancing with open indignation at Plowright, turned his attention to Mr. Sackell, he gazed severely at this unknown, big, hairy man, without a coat, with a celluloid collar and no tie, whose large and dirty hands had just been fondling potatoes and whose grasp left a perceptible quantity of soil on Norwood’s black coat sleeve.

“Kindly take your hand off,” he said sharply.

Mr. Sackell did so, but it was more to shut it and shake it impressively with crooked little finger and double-jointed thumb jutting out, than to comply with Norwood’s wish; for Mr. Sackell, unaccustomed to fastidious people, but thoroughly conversant with the power of money and with his own power to bestow it, missed both Norwood’s expression and the tone of his request. “I’m goin’ to give you a job,” he repeated, wagging his hand at Norwood. “Mr. Allingham speaks well of you—with you in a minute, Mr. Badgery—I don’t care if you are a new man,” continued Mr. Sackell, arguing with himself, “I suppose I can change my lawyer if I like. Now you listen to me”—he turned aside to spit, replacing his hand on Norwood’s arm as he did so. Norwood, much disgusted, freed himself, brushed the marks of Mr. Sackell’s hand from his coat sleeve, said severely, “My good man, you should not stop me in the street. If you wish to consult me, call at my office,” and walked hastily on.

Mr. Sackell gazed after him, open mouthed. “Well!” he said, and paused for words. “Well!” he repeated slowly and emphatically. Mr. Badgery, concealing a grin with difficulty, hastily stepped back into the shop. Mr. Sackell turned to his friend.

“Don’t ask me,” said Plowright, no less amazed at Norwood’s conduct.

"Isn't he a fool?" demanded Mr. Sackell, as the power of coherent thought and speech returned. "Isn't he a — fool? What's he doin' here? We got no use for a feller like that."

"He beats me," replied Mr. Plowright, shaking his head. "That's the way he went on to me once. A short-tempered chap he seems."

"He'll do no good here," asserted Mr. Sackell. "Why, I might a bin a — rouse-about the way he treated me. What's he here for?"

Mr. Plowright shook his head again.

"A hundred a year he's thrown away," commented Mr. Sackell. "A hundred a year, easy, or nearer two. I could a' put that in his way if I liked. And he's throwed it away. Like dirt. Oh——!" Mr. Sackell, a Justice of the Peace, an ex-mayor of the Borough of Cooeville, a leader of the district in all municipal and political affairs, had received in public, and from a man of complete insignificance, a stinging rebuff. "He brushed his coat where I touched him—you saw that, Bill?—and called me 'My good man!' Oh——"

## CHAPTER XXIX

MR. HOIP tipped his hat forward and scratched the back of his head, then he looked at Mr. Wemby.

"Yes," said that gentleman, "Mrs. Wemby says I ought to do something for him, that he must be finding Cooeville very dull."

"We don't find Cooeville dull, do we, old man?" asked Mr. Hoip, looking particularly jaunty with his hat still well to the front.

But his friend, casting back in his mind for his wife's words which were in the nature of a message to Hoip as well as an admonition to himself, gave no heed. "She says he needs more friends, and that the friends must look him up without waiting to be asked."

"You'd wait a deuce of a time if you did. Eh?"

"And she thought you and I, Hoip, might call in now and then to cheer him up a bit."

"I'm game," declared Mr. Hoip. "Any old time you like. Let's dodge up the street now if you're on." Mr. Hoip began marking time. "It's nearly five, and—er—we might meet Jessington, you know."

"So we might," assented Mr. Wemby, much refreshed by this idea. "And we might take Mr. Cherral over to Shandy's, eh, Hoip? It would do him good."

"Fact is, old man, I'm not in love with him," observed

Hoip. "If you take him over to Shandy's, by Gee, he'll take all the sparkle out of the beer. Fact is—this is in confidence, Wemby" —Mr. Wemby's large head nodded assent, "the wife wishes I were more like Mr. Cherral. And I *don't*."

"Dear me," said Mr. Wemby slowly.

"No man," declared Mr. Hoip, strong in virtue of the statement he was about to make, "should talk outside the house about any little differences he may have at home. Not to any one, you understand, Wemby."

"Certainly, Hoip. Certainly."

"But I can trust you old man, and between ourselves —"

"Between ourselves," repeated Mr. Wemby solemnly.

"—the wife sees a heap in Cherral that I *don't*."

"Mrs. Wemby seems to like him too," admitted that lady's husband. "And so does Annie."

"But they wouldn't rub it into——" Mr. Hoip remembered himself with a jerk. He coughed and swung his arms in restless fashion. "Fact is," he added, sinking to unwonted depths of cynicism, "a man's only got to look supercilious and say, 'Really,' in a way that means he doesn't care a damn for you, and all the women chase him."

Mr. Wemby, naturally astonished at this outburst, passed his arm through Mr. Hoip's, and in tender and soothing tones suggested, "Let's stroll up the street a bit."

"It's all right, old man. I know," said Mr. Hoip, contrite, but continuing, "I can trust you though. I don't want to growl at the chap, he's not a bad sort perhaps, and he's not had much luck here or else he hasn't got much sense——"

"Yes. Yes," said Mr. Wemby, and led his friend forth.

At Shandy's Mr. Wemby paused with an anxious expression, then coming to a decision with an effort he turned in, followed by his friend. "Has—er—have you seen Mr. Jessington?" he asked, sitting down in the bar parlour and looking seriously at Shandy himself.

"Not laid an eye on him," replied the licensee, producing two clean glasses and gazing out of the bar door.

Mr. Wemby considered the state of affairs, "Well—er—Hoip, my dear fellow, you're rather upset"—Shandy took up one of the glasses and laid a hand upon the beer pump—"I've had a heavy day at the office, too"—Mr. Wemby fanned himself with his hat—"and it's trying weather. Will you—" Mr. Wemby asked, suddenly inspired with a great idea—"will you have a drink?" Shandy filled the two glasses at once.

"Wemby," replied Mr. Hoip, who had walked up the street in silence after his recent crisis of the nerves, "I think we both deserve it." He accepted the foaming glass from

Shandy, and broke through his silent stateliness sufficiently to add, "Here's luck."

With the second glass—"I think we should wait here a little while for Jessington," said Mr. Wemby—Mr. Hoip threw off reserve. Shandy had retired to the other side, the public side, of the bar; the two friends were alone, and the performance of a social act kindles in some breasts an added warmth of friendly feeling. Mr. Hoip drew his chair nearer to his friend. Mr. Wemby leant over towards Mr. Hoip, who was obviously about to speak. "Going back to what we were speaking about, Wemby, old man"—Mr. Wemby nodded—"don't think too much of it. The wife was talking about him and wishing I'd make more of a friend of him." Mr. Hoip took a sip of beer.

"Mrs. Wemby told me," said Mr. Wemby, "to ask him down, and twice I went into his office and told him we'd be glad to see him any evening, and that he'd find me at home on a Saturday night for certain. But he's never come."

"Same here," rejoined Mr. Hoip. "I mean, the wife told me to fetch him along. He called after the wife's party, you know, but he came in the afternoon—fancy calling in the afternoon—he might have known I'd be out, and it happened the wife was too, so he just forked out a card to the girl and left. Deuced stiff and formal I think. The wife told me to look him up and say how sorry she was to be out, and so I did, and said he was welcome to come along any old time. I—er—asked him," continued Mr. Hoip, becoming extremely grave, "to have a drink too while I was there—had to say something you know—but he declined as stiff as you please."

Mr. Wemby shook his head.

"Fact is," resumed Mr. Hoip, twisting his moustache out of the road, "he's not the sort of chap I'd cotton to anywhere. Always got a fence round him."

"I'm afraid he doesn't approve of taking a glass of wine with a friend," agreed Mr. Wemby. "The once or twice I've been into his office I—I"—Mr. Wemby spoke slowly, evidently choosing his words with care—"suggested a glass of—the same as you did, Hoip," said Mr. Wemby with a burst, "and really he—he—he didn't seem to like it."

"No one can say I'm fond of drink," asserted Mr. Hoip, finishing his glass appreciatively, "fond of it for itself, you know. But when you meet a friend the least you can do is to take one if he asks you."

"And if he doesn't ask you?" suggested Mr. Wemby, after thinking over his friend's statement.

Mr. Hoip waved this remote contingency aside. "Well, old man, I feel better, let's beard the lion." Mr. Hoip sprang up, sparring actively, and upset a chair. "Fit for anything. I say—here's the idea, old Jessington's sure to be up soon,



we'll interview our solemn young friend, fetch him down, meet Jessington here and er—and er—What do you say, Wemby?"

Mr. Wemby concurred.

"Come in," said Norwood, in answer to a vigorous thumping on his door. It was nearly six o'clock, and the office boy had long gone home. Messrs. Hoip and Wemby entered, Mr. Hoip tumultuously, Mr. Wemby solemnly.

"How goes it, old man," exclaimed the former. "By Gee, you must be busy to be fagging away at this hour."

"I cannot claim that professional matters detained me."

"I like," said the kindly Mr. Wemby, breathing heavily, "to see a man in earnest about his work. It does you credit, Mr. Cherral."

"Rather!" said Mr. Hoip, expansively. "That's the style. When the clients are in, skin 'em. When there aren't any, grind away to be ready to skin 'em. That's the sort of thing. Eh, Wemby?"

"It does you credit," repeated that gentleman. "My friend, Mr. Hoip, and I were at—were up the street, and we thought we—ah—we'd look you up, Mr. Cherral. We haven't seen much of you lately."

"Not a blessed blink, by Gee!" corroborated Mr. Hoip.

Norwood gave no answer, he saw nothing but faults in his visitors; his office, he said to himself, was for professional purposes only, these two were using it for social ends, of course one could not expect them to know better; Mr. Wemby had taken his hat off, and, with anxious face, was smoothing down his hair, what was the matter with the man? Mr. Hoip, on the other hand, kept his hat on, and if his hands were not in his pockets—vile habit—he was waving them restlessly about. The fellow had absolutely no repose of manner, he was in fact typical of the Colonial, of vulgarity and bad form.

As Norwood with these thoughts in his mind gazed at their unconscious subjects, Mr. Hoip on his part was looking at Norwood with some attention; having poured out his griefs and his objections to this young man, into the friendly ear of Wemby, and obtained great relief thereby, he now, in the presence of the criticized one, felt all resentment and dislike depart. "Wemby," said he, waving his hand towards Norwood, "this won't do. Our young friend is off colour. Look at him, eh?"

Mr. Wemby looked more fixedly at Norwood, and shook his head.

"Wants bucking up, don't he?" demanded the reader of other men's bosoms. "You want shaking up, Cherral, old chap. Too much office—no good. Now, look at me. I do my day's work, but no more, no, by Gee. If work's up

to date at five p.m. sharp, a man should put up the shutters. Wemby, what do you say?"

"It—it's sound advice, Hoip, very sound."

"A man owes something to himself," continued Mr. Hoip. "Now, look at me. About five to-day I was down in the dumps, flabby you know, feeling a bit off, I come up the street with Wemby here, and knock about a bit, and here I am, fit as a fiddle and lively as a cricket. You should come out with us, my boy."

"We would be pleased, Mr. Cherral," added Wemby, heavily, "to look in any afternoon to cheer you up."

"Cheer 'im hup, no, cheering hup, no, I mean cheer him up, that's what you want," declared Mr. Hoip, "and we're the men for the job. Eh, Wemby? Hurray!"

As an incentive to immediate mirth, Mr. Hoip seized Norwood's fire-irons from the fender, and waltzed about the little room clashing them loudly together. Mr. Wemby gazed at the musician with gratified eye, and then looked anxiously at Norwood for the first symptoms of revived spirits.

Norwood regarded Mr. Hoip with chill disdain. "I should be obliged," he said, during a lull as Mr. Hoip stooped to pick up a chair he had overset, "if you would avoid making that noise. I find it excessively disagreeable."

"All right, old man," rejoined the complaisant Mr. Hoip. He dropped his instruments of music into the fender with a culminating bang as he inquired. "Got a headache?"

"I'm afraid you're not well, Mr. Cherral," said Wemby before Norwood could answer. "You don't look at all well. If you've finished your studying for the day, Hoip and I will see you home with pleasure."

"Rather!" assented Mr. Hoip, swinging his arms and marking time. "We'll trot you along and shake you up. Do you good. Besides, Wemby, we might meet Jessington, eh?"

Little as Norwood desired the society offered him, their road home was his, and, closing his office, they set out together, Mr. Hoip rendering conversation by either of his companions unnecessary; as they neared the Cooeville Hotel his exultation broke forth. "By Gee, there'd old Jessington after all. What luck! Wemby, old man, don't you think—eh?"

They found Mr. Jessington standing in the front of the hotel talking with a commerial traveller, while the licensee enjoyed the leisure of the hour seated on a chair beside his door.

"This is a very pleasant meeting, Jessington," declared Mr. Wemby taking charge, "Shall we, Hoip—shall we—ah—Mr. Cherral, have you met my friend Mr. Saxon yet?"

"I have not the—er—pleasure," Norwood glanced at the stranger with Jessington.

Mr. Wemby rubbed his hands together. "It's quite time you did. Eh, Hoip?"

"By Gee, yes," affirmed Mr. Hoip. "Some of us meet him nearly every day."

"Mr. Saxon," pursued Mr. Wemby, "lives, as one may say, in—in the arena. I suppose, Hoip, that nearly every bargain that's made is—is——," Mr. Wemby hesitated.

"Is wet," suggested Mr. Hoip. But Mr. Wemby, not unmindful of Mr. Cherral's presence, went farther afield to explain his meaning. "Consummated is the word," he declared after a pause. "A great many business deals are consummated here, Mr. Cherral. And you might say"—Mr. Wemby's laugh began to be visible—"that Mr. Saxon stands godfather to them for he—he——"

"He wets the baby's head," explained Mr. Hoip, as his friend again halted for a word.

Mr. Wemby turned an admiring glance on Mr. Hoip. "Mr. Cherral," he said solemnly, "let me introduced you to my friend—our friend—Mr. Saxon."

Norwood looked round completely puzzled; the stranger and Jessington had just gone into the hotel. No one was present save Wemby and Hoip. Certainly the village publican with his coat off was lounging negligently over the back of a chair on which he was sitting astride, but of course Mr. Wemby would never—"I do not understand," he said. "There is no one except ourselves here."

Mr. Wemby, beaming, extended his hand towards the lounging Shandy. "This is Mr. Saxon, Mr. Cherral."

Norwood who had heard of the one in question often enough, but always by the name of Shandy, turned to Mr. Wemby in genuine astonishment and indignation. "The publican!" he exclaimed. "Are you inviting me to meet the publican as a friend of yours? Really you must excuse me. I should not have thought it possible. In fact, you must excuse me altogether. Good afternoon." And Norwood left them forthwith.

Shandy Saxon was lounging no longer: he was, on the contrary, standing erect, with darkly-colouring face; Mr. Wemby completely staggered, gazed after Norwood with his mouth open. Mr. Hoip, the first to recover himself, ejaculated, "Well, by Gee"—he paused, and completed the word—"whilikins!" The first and only use by Mr. Hoip of the full force of his favourite adjuration marking the depth of his amazement.

"Hoip," said Mr. Wemby, taking off his hat to mop his face, "I—I—Shandy," Mr. Wemby pulled himself together, "Mr. Saxon, will you join us in a glass of wine." He abandoned formality and added, "I insist on it, Shandy."

"It's a fact," said Mr. Hoip, "I mean I insist too."

Shandy Saxon fully appreciated the delicacy of Mr. Wemby's invitation; this new solicitor might be too proud to even know him, but Mr. Wemby—he quickly filled three glasses, and, making no reference to what had just occurred, respectfully drank the health of his two visitors. Mr. Wemby and Mr. Hoip drank his.

### CHAPTER XXX

It was evident to Norwood that with the dismissal of Steggs and the assertion of himself his practice was commencing to grow; there was the case of *Lee v. Condon* for Tuesday. Here was the clerk, Railthorpe with another legal matter, and yesterday that dirty-handed shopkeeper had notified him that he was transferring his legal business to him—"But he will come in a chastened spirit after my little lesson in behaviour. And now what does this local product wish to see me about?" And he turned to the waiting Railthorpe.

"Here's an account against Mrs. Bean, Mr. Cherral. At least it's not an account, Mr. Thriddlerley got judgment in the police court against her two years ago, he wants you to issue a warrant of distress straight away. I've put the date and the amount and costs of the judgment on this bill to save you having to hunt it up." He looked up at Norwood. "You don't know Mrs. Bean at all?"

"Who is she?"

"Oh, she washes for different people, and takes jobs of scrubbing and so on."

"Of course I know nothing of the woman."

Railthorpe looked troubled. "Well, I'm sorry. Business always seems to me so hard, Mr. Cherral. Doesn't it to you?"

"I have not considered the question."

Railthorpe sighed again, began, "I hope"—then apparently deciding to say no more he added, "Good-bye" and went out.

As March came in Norwood learnt the vast importance of St. Patrick's day. Before the eventful 17th, Mr. Allingham appeared upon the scene, not once but many times, and, in spite of a marked coldness on the part of Mr. Cherral, advised and exhorted till finally Norwood, to escape further forcing, agreed to attend the afternoon sports conditionally on his being no longer urged to go to the ball in the evening.

The great day was hot and the way to the grounds was long, dust lay thick, at first on the road but later, thrown up by vehicles and carried by the wind, upon hats and shoulders. Norwood, heated, disdainful, aloof, almost choked, with his black silk hat and black frock coat already greyed by atmospheric deposits, strode along with the crowd. The

farmer's double-seated buggies with their loads of husband, wife and children creaked by; the horses feet falling inaudibly on the road's soft and powdery top-dressing. All were out for the day, all were in their best, happy, and determined on making the most of their holiday. Rosettes of green ribbon completed every costume, topped almost every whip, and finished off the harness of many horses: and the Irish accent floated abroad in the air almost as thickly as the dust.

As he passed through the entrance gate of the ground, he was enthusiastically met by Mrs. O'Dowd, and Miss Dwyer, each of whom was conducting a raffle; Norwood did not know them, but they knew him. Miss Dwyer, daughter of Mr. Martin Dwyer and the domestic manager of his hotel, opened fire with irresistible blandishments and a look that, despite the pressure of urgent business, contained more than a hint of sentiment. "Oh, Mr. Cherral! Here's the very thing for you, a dinner set of forty-eight pieces, entrance half a crown." She eyed him roughly. "Ah! When you make some poor girl happy 'twill be the pride of your house. And all for two and six."

Norwood saluted the ladies gravely and produced his half-crown for Miss Dwyer, who instantly left him in pursuit of another newcomer.

"Sure I knew it was Mr. Cherry was the gentleman," declared Mrs. O'Dowd, a farmer's wife of some sixteen stone. "'Tis the face of him told me so," she continued, "and here's meself giving him a bed quilt, me own daughter made it. Two shillings it is for the raffle of it, Mr. Cherry. And 'tis meself'll see you get it."

Norwood observed that he had only penetrated a few steps into the enclosure, and began to wonder if he would have to pay for every yard he advanced. "Madam," he began, "let me get a little further in."

"Hwhat!" Mrs. O'Dowd's voice rose and her punctuation disappeared altogether. "Give your money to Biddy Dwyer and nothing to me the Saints be good to us and me that thought the world of you——"

Norwood considered that perhaps two shillings was a small sum to give if thereby he could avoid the lady's wrath. He paid. Instantly accusation became compliment, culminating in a prophecy of great wealth and numerous progeny.

Norwood found nothing to interest him in the sports or the people; he disliked crowds, he longed for his former home with its sequestered garden, kept in perfect order by a gardener, himself kept in perfect order: the prevailing male attire roused his contempt; the soft, wide-brimmed, felt hats, the suits of numerous variety, all country-made, all hopelessly

unfashionable, all of dingy tweeds, coat, vest and trousers often of three different cloths, while his eye ached as he observed the younger wives and daughters in their gay diversity of raiment, where greens, magentas, pinks and crimsons smote the air violently.

But other Cooeville residents found entertainment enough. Dr. Rafe, assisted by Railthorpe, was picking out some of the farmers wives for afternoon tea at the grandstand. "There's Mrs. Maloney, Railthorpe; catch her."

"Ah, Doctor dear, is it tay? Me daughter Norah's in there pouring it out for them and she'll give us the best. I'm all of a sweat huntin' for Annie Galvin, Joe Galvin's girl, Doctor, she kem in wid us and not an eye have I put on her since we passed the gate—Saints preserve the gurrul and her all in her best too and a fair dustin' we got comin' in——"

"Annie Galvin will be all right," Rafe cut short her lamentations. "Do you know Mrs. Clancy? I'd like her to come along with us."

"I'll annex her," said Railthorpe, pushing through the crowd.

"And is it Mary Clancy I know?" demanded Mrs. Malony. "And me that nursed her through her first! Little Pat it was, faith he's big Pat now and"—continued Mrs. Maloney, sinking her voice to the confidential tone of one imparting family details to a medical man—"it's soon he'll be having a little Pat of his own and——"

Mrs. Maloney's mind, unhampered by intellectual problems, could devote itself to the incubatory instinct; Doctor Rafe, however, easily satiated with these matters, greeted Mrs. Clancy, who arrived even as a vessel of broad beam and great tonnage towed by the slight but active Railthorpe, with outspoken relief. The two ladies at once foregathered in voluble colloquy.

The grandstand—ironic term!—serves a three-fold purpose; the unroofed top, raised some eight feet above the ground in front and sloped upward to the back, is occupied by rough wooden forms; let those men who, elevated above the mob, sit in noble state upon patrician benches, be wary, and, imitating that marble immobility which stamps the Best, avoid wriggling or sliding about; the benches resent such conduct, and, with splinters in numerous array and of singular sharpness, punish the seated, ignorant, and restless one: the space underneath the front of this roof supplies a bar, while beneath the loftier back, partitioned off from the bar, is the Tea Room.

This large apartment, with its rough trestle-tables, innocent of cloth, and rougher forms for seats, was almost full. A bevy of ladies served the tea—which, if it had any fault at all, was not that of weakness—from a washing copper:

another detachment, with liberal hands, cut cakes and bread and butter.

"Come on, Mrs. Maloney," said the host, "here we are. Waitress," to a tall damsel rescuing with thumb and finger a fly from the cup of tea she carried, "tea and cakes and so on, and remember it's for Mrs. Maloney, so bring the best. Nothing but the best for you, eh, Mrs. Maloney?"

"You're a divvle, doctor," declared the hugely gratified lady, fanning a red face with a green handkerchief.

"He is that," corroborated Mrs. Clancy.

Mrs. Maloney, declaring she was that dry she couldn't suck a tooth, poured her tea into her saucer and supped with audible enjoyment. Annie Galvin was forgotten.

Rafe, excusing himself, went forth to bring in more guests, presently he returned with three other country wives, and, to Railthorpe's amazement and pleasure, Mr. Norwood Cherral. Father Reilly, who came in at that moment with two young ladies, was also hailed by Doctor Rafe and bidden to join his party. Father Reilly, accepting the invitation, took charge of the gathering. "I'm glad to see you in good company, Doctor. Miss Dwyer—Miss Dunne"—to the young ladies whom he had brought in—"Do you know my friend Mr. Cherral?"

Norwood, who had not yet met Father Reilly, concealed his surprise, and bowed gravely. Miss Dwyer, whom Norwood felt he had seen somewhere before, giggled and observed, "He knows me well."

"Sit by him then," commanded the Reverend Father. "Can't you see he's dying to have you beside him?"

"The botherin' flies do like the tay as well as meself," declared Mrs. Clancy. "As soon as I take wan out of me cup there's two more schwimmin' in it wid all their legs."

"I'm supposed to be helping here," Miss Dwyer confided to Norwood, "and so is Mary Dunne, but there's so many to give a hand and I've been at work since seven this blessed day. I think I need a rest. But you don't, Mary," she turned to her friend. "You've not been out with a raffle all the day, and you hang back as if you'd never do a hand's turn."

Miss Dunne, who, in addition to brilliant hair, possessed a rich and lazy contralto voice, looked at Norwood.

"Me legs," she said simply, "is achin' something crool. And Biddy Dwyer grudgin' me a seat this day!" and she turned her gaze with characteristic deliberation upon Miss Dwyer. Miss Dwyer declining to meet her eye looked at Norwood and observed, archly, "She wants to have you all to herself, Mr. Cherral, but you won't forget me, will you?"

"He will not," said Miss Dunne, with creamy smoothness of voice, "ye give him no chance."

Here Mrs. Maloney, albeit ignorant of her social duty as the senior lady at the table, notified them all that afternoon tea was over by declaring that she couldn't hold another bite.

"Would you like to take us round the grounds?" asked Miss Dwyer, as they all rose. "It's little of the sports that Mary Dunne or me has seen."

"I shall have much pleasure," answered Norwood.

It is to be feared that both ladies found the time pass somewhat heavily. Norwood answered briefly such queries as they put to him, but made no effort to entertain them. Several glances unobserved by Norwood were exchanged between Miss Dunne and Miss Dwyer, and the latter, observing a friend at a distance, was much surprised when she and her companions met him.

"It's Mr. Dobbsleigh, how funny us running into you; you know Mr. Cherral, don't you?"

"He's my learned friend in Court," said Mr. Dobbsleigh, with a laugh. "I don't know what he is out of it. Had tea, you girls?"

"We don't want tea," said Miss Dunne slowly, "but——" she again exchanged glances with Miss Dwyer, and as they moved on, Miss Dunne, drawing somewhat away with Mr. Dobbsleigh, engaged him in earnest converse. Norwood, finding Miss Dwyer alone even worse than Miss Dwyer plus Miss Dunne, was deciding to go home, when Mr. Dobbsleigh's actions attracted his notice; that gentleman, shouting with laughter, bent double and smote his knee vigorously, he then patted Miss Dunne admiringly on the shoulder and left, presently he rejoined them, and immediately after a young lady, with copper-coloured hair, a large hat blown over one eye, and a huge green rosette at her neck, bore down upon them.

"It's Mr. Cherral?" she asked.

"My friend Mr. Cherral," replied Dobbsleigh, waving his hand towards Norwood, "Miss Ryan."

She turned to him. "Ah, Mr. Cherral, you're a great man for raffles they say, and you've taken chances with all the others and never a one with me. Sure you won't say no to a last chance. A last chance, Mr. Cherral!"

Norwood, tired and irritated, would have walked on, but his companions had halted and were looking expectantly at him, several bystanders also gave him their attention, for the young lady with the last chance for sale had an excited and appealing manner, and a voice that carried. Norwood, identified to every eye by his tall hat, found himself unexpectedly a marked centre of attraction. The situation annoyed him. "Very well, madam, if you wish it so greatly. How much is it?"

"Only half a crown, Mr. Cherral. Oh, thank you, I knew



you'd take the last chance. Ah—now me day's work's done. May you win the raffle, Mr. Cherral, and——”

Mr. Dobbsleigh now came to the front. “By the way, Miss Ryan, what is it you're raffling? Something good, I hope, if my friend Mr. Cherral's going to win it?”

Miss Ryan turned to Norwood. “Ah, you're a gentleman, Mr. Cherral, to take a chance without ever asking what it was for. Sure, it's a perambulator, Mr. Cherral. God knows you may want it some day, and——” The loud laugh of Mr. Dobbsleigh, mingling with that of many others, stopped her.

“Oh dear me!” cried Miss Dwyer, suffering severely from suppressed emotion. “A perambulator! Oh!”

Norwood, conscious of the ring of grinning faces, coloured and gazed haughtily round him. Miss Dunne returned his look with one of calm inscrutability. Miss Dwyer, however, completely upset by the expression on Norwood's face, gave up the attempt to hide her feelings, and, drawing slightly to the rear, let herself go completely. In this process she was ably imitated by Mr. Dobbsleigh and several others.

“And don't forget, Mr. Dobbsleigh, me size is sevens,” said Miss Ryan.

Miss Dunne frowned at her gently.

## CHAPTER XXXI

“It's too bad, Jean, the way I use you. When everything seems hopeless I come to you to read through my book of lamentations, and when I've discovered over again what a wonderful world this is, you have to listen to all I'm going to do in it.”

“You know, Douglas, that I like you to tell me all about your thoughts. Which is it to-night, a wonderful world or the other thing?”

“Jean,” said Railthorpe, ripping open his waistcoat to take a deep and unfettered breath, “I'm surprised at you asking such a question. Here it is a starlight, peaceful, Sunday evening; I've the pleasure of seeing you home from church, and after that I'm to have the pleasure of spending the rest of the evening with Doctor Rafe, and perhaps Mr. Goff will be there too; and we're out of that ugly business street—just stop and breathe this air—it's not very dusty—and look at that infant moon, and consider those stars, and oh, Jean, the blue behind them! Lamentations to-night? No, indeed! A song of triumph instead, a pæan of victory—to be won in the future.”

“I'm glad to hear it, Douglas. It saddens me when I find you in one of those despairing moods. Begin your song of victory. It will help you to win it later on.”

"Jean, you speak with the tongue of an angel. Your voice proclaims my triumph. Did I ever say this was a hard world, Jean? I deny it. I deny everything, unhappy or evil."

"I hope you will always deny things like that. I suppose Cooeville now is a beautiful place?"

"It's not the place, it's the mind that makes the man."

"Oh, Douglas!" Jean Malintop laughed. "This is a very different tale from what you tell me sometimes."

"Both tales are true, Jean. I must speak as I feel. Tonight this little town," he waved his hand, "is a cradle for great men, the yet unfamed birthplace of poets and philosophers, a future throne for kings of the mind, and a visiting place for tourists."

Jean laughed again, happy herself to find him happy. "Doesn't that sound rather mixed?"

"A mixture defines everything, including life. Cooeville is a mixture. And all that it inhabit. No, not all, you're no mixture, Jean, you're good right through. This town? What is wrong with it? Who dare say anything against it? Hasn't every man who does anything for the world come from some little country place, some spot never heard of till his birth but famous since his death? Cities? I scorn them. What city-man has ever done anything save make a fortune by beggaring his neighbours? Cities and swindling and sweating," declared Railthorpe, high spirits and love of phrase-making running away with him, "and for the country, calm and content." He laughed and added, "I had to open the safety-valve a trifle, Jean, but I'll behave now."

"Never mind what you call behaving, Douglas. You will do very well just as you are. But didn't I hear someone say only last Sunday that one must have money before one can do anything in the world?"

"Jean, you've said exactly what's in the air, I don't mean just in Cooeville, I believe it's all over the world. Every successful man says it because he's got it, every poor man says it because he wants it, and every ambitious man says it because he means to make it. And Jean—don't laugh at me—I believe they're all wrong."

"No, Douglas, I won't laugh at you."

"Can't you see that idea is all wrong, Jean? When all's done, what is it that matters in this world of ours? Nothing but one's thoughts. And what has money to do with them? A millionaire's fortune couldn't purchase him the birth in his mind of a beautiful idea, and ten times his fortune couldn't buy up and destroy the influence of an evil thought."

"No, Douglas, I suppose not."

"And here's your gate, Jean, and I've been talking all the way from the church. I might have let you say something. But it's all your fault, Jean, you're so sympathetic, you really make a fellow open out and tell you whatever he has in his mind. You're a born extractor and hearer and keeper of confidences, Jean."

"I don't want everybody's, Douglas, but I'm always glad to hear some of yours. Now go back to Doctor Rafe's and talk to him as you've been talking to me."

Railthorpe laughed. "No chance of that, Jean. He'd shut me up in a minute. But I'll talk to him in another fashion. Good-night."

"You'll have heard the latest, Railthorpe, about your friend Mr. Cherral?" asked Goff, half an hour later. "This old wife here"—he indicated Rafe—"will keep you posted, no doubt."

"I heard something, Goff, but you know we can't accept ill-natured gossip at face value."

Doctor Rafe grunted.

"If your information concerned an interview between Messrs. Wemby, Hoip and Cherral, our esteemed fellow-townsmen, Mr. Shandy Saxon, not having a speaking part, why then, my boy"—Mr. Goff began to show symptoms of excitement—"it's true, every word."

"How do you know, Goff?"

"A story like that about an Englishman bears on its face the stamp of verity."

Doctor Rafe grunted again.

"Goff, like a good chap, reveal to us the workings of your mind, we all know Mr. Cherral about equally. Rafe just doesn't bother about him, I admire him, and you—you verbal volcano—you're never tired of erupting abuse over his nation."

"Get to him, Railthorpe," ordered Rafe, "he needs a dressing down."

"I'll tell ye now why I knew the story was true. Why, faith, because it's just typical."

"We've only your word for that," suggested Rafe.

"You might explain things a little, Goff," added Railthorpe.

"I will that, and I'll begin at the beginning. A chicken now is born out of a circumscribing and cramping shell, the Englishman is born into one—and never gets out of it. From his birth upwards the English child is constrained to bow down before a certain god; by the time he's fifteen only those who adore the same deity are admitted by him to exist."

"I know the deity you mean," exclaimed Railthorpe, "the God of Respectability."

"What do you say, Rafe?" asked Goff.

"I say, dammy," responded the gentleman addressed.

"Then you're both wrong. Their god is known as Good Form. But he should not be so much as named. It's not good form to mention good form."

"I suppose you think you're witty," growled Rafe, never averse to blowing up his friend's smouldering fires.

"To be witty is not good form," replied Mr. Goff. "The rules and regulations of this god are entirely negative. It's not good form to possess a sense of humour, it's not good form to have ideas, it's not good form to be original, it's not good form to see anything from any point of view except the point of view that your circle has held for the last hundred years—nothing less than a century will do—it's not good form to think, it's——"

"Give it a rest, dammit," interrupted Rafe loudly. He added thoughtfully, "I'll get a guinea for you yet, Goff."

"I hope you will, but how?" asked Mr. Goff.

"Certifying to the Crown that you're a damn lunatic," replied Rafe briefly.

Railthorpe laughed heartily. Goff smiled. "You ought to be an Englishman, Rafe. You don't like the observations of an original and brilliant man like—well—to keep to the truth, we'll say like myself. And the true-blue English suspect and dislike brilliancy of conversation. They do that."

"What fearful rot you talk, Goff," said Railthorpe. "Do you want us to believe that everytime an Englishman——"

"A well-bred Englishman," interrupted Goff, "middle-class or higher."

"Just as you like. Do you mean to say that whenever he thinks of something brilliant or original he suppresses it?"

"The well-bred Englishman never thinks," answered Goff.

Rafe chuckled, and Goff joined him, but Railthorpe sprang up, "And how much of all this do you say is to apply to Mr. Cherral?" he asked scornfully.

"If he's what I size him up, every word."

"If a man could be the—the tea-cupful of conventions the soulless, brainless, heartless, miserable wretch you picture the whole nation"—Railthorpe, injured in his love and admiration for the English race, spoke excitedly—"they wouldn't last a week and——"

"*Vis inertiae*," interrupted Goff.

"Well," said Railthorpe, calming down, and even becoming rather shamefaced, for Rafe was laughing at him, and Goff was obviously pleased at having roused him, "I won't say any more about the nation, it can take very good

care of itself. But why can't you let the English alone, Goff?"

"Because of——"

"That'll do," broke in Rafe loudly. "What damn rot you talk. What have the English done to you?"

"They're a sordid crew," declared Goff, "and they've saddened the souls of a noble and spiritual nation."

"You and your nation!" answered the polished physician. "If the truth's known, Goff, I suppose you owe it to the English that you were dragged out of your native bog and operated on for web-feet. As far as possible," asserted Doctor Rafe, raising his voice to drown that of his guest, who was interrupting fiercely. "I say that as far as it's possible to make a civilized being out of a wild Irish, Goff, it's been done in your case, and you owe it to the English. All that Ireland has she owes to the English."

"There are times," said Goff slowly, "when I could use a club on you."

Railthorpe considered it time to intervene. Rafe's play could be singularly heavy, and Goff was apt to become earnest in a moment. "I wish you two fellows wouldn't interrupt so, I began by talking about Mr. Cherral——"

"A fine chap," asserted Rafe. "English to the core."

He laughed heartily and presently Goff joined him. "You're an insulting devil, aren't you now, Rafe?"

"Anything you like, but, by Jove, I drew you that time, Goff." Rafe laughed again with much delight. "I had you foaming. Go on, Railthorpe, let's hear your praises of Cherral."

"Praises? No," said Railthorpe slowly. "But I believe he'll win here. He'll stick to it, you'll both admit——"

"We will that," assented Goff.

"And he can be trusted, not only in money matters, but whatever work is given to him he'll do his best at. You can't say that of the others. There's something about him that the others lack, and when the crowd learns this, they'll all come to him."

"Maybe you're right. But what does that prove? Why——"

"Give us a change, Goff, let's hear you on the English virtues," suggested Rafe, with malice aforethought.

To his disappointment the challenge was accepted. "There's little need, though I'll tell you them. All the world knows their good qualities, and I'd rather instruct by pointing out the bad ones that y'all turn your heads away from. Ye pretend they don't exist, but I'll proclaim them. I will that."

"But what about the peculiar virtues, Goff?" asked Railthorpe.

"Ah, they're a practical people, a sordid race always

will be; they've proved it by driving every great thinker born among them either to despair or else out of his country."

"This is a very Irish way of praising, isn't it, Rafe?"

"And the Englishman's persevering," continued Mr. Goff, quite undisturbed, "and brave. Here ye see an instance of a vice pushed far enough becoming a virtue—partly from being too thick-headed to see he's wrong, and partly from his belief that being English he must be right, he's not an easy man to beat. He goes fighting on when a man of brains—d'ye see me—would realize in a moment that he was wrong or the prize wasn't worth the battle for it."

Railthorpe sat up indignantly. "What a rotten way to explain bravery and patience under defeat, and perseverance and nobility——"

Doctor Rafe yawned with open sincerity: and Railthorpe, acutely sensitive to the atmosphere of his audience and shrinking quickly from ridicule, broke off hastily.

"And he's consistent," resumed Mr. Goff, "and that's all. There are no high matters to think over in summing up the English virtues. Railthorpe, it's the truth I'm telling you, I'd not hurt your beliefs wantonly, for ye've feeling of your own and a heart behind them. At a pinch ye might almost pass for an Irishman——"

Doctor Rafe growled something inarticulate.

"—ye're not like this rhinoceros here—an ill-mannered, grunting——"

"Ill-mannered, eh?" asked Rafe. "What about you, the guest abusing his host? A nice thing that! When I meet a man worthy of decent treatment I'll give it to him. I bet you Cherral wouldn't call me a rooting, damn, grunting rhinoceros—in my own home, too."

"He would not," admitted Mr. Goff. "He'd not think of it for one thing. And—faith I was nearly forgetting, Railthorpe, did I say there was nothing so beautiful about the Englishman that ye couldn't describe it—I was wrong. Now this'll please us both, for it's of high breeding I'm going to speak, and that's a fine subject to you and to me, but quite beyond poor Rafe here."

Doctor Rafe unfortunately gave some confirmation to this statement by a scornful grunt, followed by a loud and indignant "Dammy."

"Ye'll see I can be generous to a foe when I say that in their own circle most of the better class English have the finest manners in the world—except, perhaps, two other races——"

"It's a pleasure to hear you doing them justice for once, Goff."

"I'd rather praise than blame—except at times," admitted Goff, "but there's a charm about good manners that no

man may explain. Ye can't define it, it's as light as air and as all-pervading too, it's in the atmosphere, it's in the blood."

Railthorpe gave a sigh of content. "Go on, Goff."

"Ye'll understand it's no assumed thing, it's no veneer. Ah, give the devil his due, in his home and among his equals the well-bred Englishman is charming. Ye'll be put to it to match him—except in Ireland and France."

"Oh, Goff, it must be beautiful, I've read of it so often and thought about it. Do you know why it doesn't crack and break when a strain is put on it, Goff? I think it's just because it's never even been taught to them. It's a mellow fruit ripened through long generations of high-minded men and sunny fortune. It's——"

"What's all this?" demanded Rafe violently. "What the blazes——"

"That'll do now, Rafe"—Goff came to the rescue of the much abashed Railthorpe. "It's something you're full of yourself, and that's why you're so shy of hearing it. Railthorpe, if it weren't for this shining example of high-bred courtesy we see sprawling and lolloping about here, I'd despair of making y'understand what I'm talking about, for it's unknown in Cooeville here, it's unknown in Victoria—in all Australia I've no doubt, except to those who've travelled and seen it for themselves, or to the men and women that come from the old world. But you've an imagination, Railthorpe—ye can guess at it."

"Oh, yes!" said Railthorpe wistfully.

"Do you mean to tell us that no Australian has decent manners?" demanded Rafe loudly. "Eh? A nice insult from a bleating bog-trotter, a—a—Oh, dammy." Doctor Rafe gave up the attempt to convey in words his full meaning and sought to enlist the aid of another. "What do you think of it, Railthorpe?"

"Oh, it's true, Rafe, every word and more. I know it is. You can't expect it here, Rafe, we're so young, we haven't the noble old schools and universities, we——"

"All right, all right," shouted Rafe, then dropping to his usual tone. "No need to go off into yards of yap about it. Anyhow you don't know, you're only imagining, while as for Goff, well, of all the—oh——" and Doctor Rafe snorted again.

"But Goff knows, and he wouldn't mislead us, Rafe," hinted Railthorpe.

"I would not—at least not you, Railthorpe my boy, and as for this stuttering lump of crass ignorance, this twelve stone of blonde beauty here with half an ounce of brain and nothing in it, d'ye think I'd demean myself by noticing him—the fat lump he is."

Rafe chuckled.

"And, indeed, you're right, Railthorpe," continued Goff. "This charm of manner is a growth of time. It's not for crude Colonials. D'ye hear me, Rafe?"

"Got to," replied that gentleman, briefly and bitterly.

"It's strange, isn't it, Goff," suggested Railthorpe, after a pause, "that the only one I've ever seen of the class you speak of"—he hesitated—"I mean Mr. Cherral of course—"

Rafe sat up in great delight. "That's it, Railthorpe. After all this enthusing and flute-flute, let's look at our local sample of this tone, this manner, this exquisite indescribable old-world courtesy, this something too good for crude Colonials, this general atmosphere of 'Haw! Dammy! Keep your dirty distance, damn your eyes, don't cher know' It sounded quite too sweet and pretty-pretty and utterly-utter when you two damn bleaters were nearly weeping over it—I was nearly weeping myself to think I'd die without running across it—but when you come down to facts and show me a specimen of it—no thanks. Politeness is all right—in it's place"—added the speaker with caution, "but we want workers and fighters and thinkers, we've no room for that cross between a solemn prig and a pompous ass that you admire so—too superior to work, no brains to think with, too high to mix with other men, nothing to do all day but sit about and say, 'Haw! What a fine fellow I am. As for these damn Colonials, I'm willing to take their money, but dammy if I'll allow them to associate with me'—that's not the type of man we need."

The length of this speech showed the depth of the speaker's feelings. Goff had listened impatiently, now he came in with a rush, "Ye don't know what you're talking about, ye benighted heathen, ye've missed the point—didn't I say their courtesy was reserved for their own? I'll wager now that our young friend if ye put him back in his proper circle could show a touch of the real thing, but not amongst us; no, indeed, nor the like of us. The behaviour of the Englishman towards all his inferiors—and that's everybody except the English of his own class or higher—is another matter, ye might say it's an opposite matter. If ye're not a true-blue Englishman of the right set, ye're only a foreigner—which is low indeed—or a Colonial—which is worse, a sort of mongrel, d'ye see me—"

"But, Goff, suppose he doesn't know where you come from—he can't tell a man's nationality at a glance—"

"Why then, Railthorpe, ye're a stranger, and all strangers are enemies."

"I'm off to bed," announced the host, rising with his usual suddenness.

Goff laughed. "Now there's a fine instance of high-bred



courtesy, eh, Railthorpe? —I'm going, Rafe. Railthorpe, I'll not give in. The attitude of the Englishman to all he believes his inferiors is no pleasant thing"—Rafe seized his arm and led him to the gate. "I've seen it, I say," declared Mr. Goff, warming up. "If an Englishman were capable of an ideal"—Doctor Rafe marched him on to the footpath and shut the gate between them. Mr. Goff leant over it and held his friend by the coat sleeve, while Railthorpe laughed at both. "D'ye hear me, Rafe, if an Englishman could rise to the height of having an ideal, then his ideal for conduct towards strangers would be a—a"—Goff hesitated, obviously in search of an oral thunderbolt—"an arrogant iceberg," he concluded triumphantly. "D'ye hear me, Rafe?"

"Get to blazes out of this," Doctor Rafe freed himself from the grasp of his excited friend, who hung over the gate, gesticulating eagerly. "I'm expecting to be called up to-night."

"Ye'd rather lie grunting in your boudoir than listen to me expounding the immortal truth? Oh, Rafe, Rafe, there's cold English blood dribblin' about inside ye."

## CHAPTER XXXII

NORWOOD, happily ignorant of the pleasure his interview with Mr. Sackell was affording all the district, sat in his private official room, letting his listless mind run back over the months he had been at Cooeville—a knock at his door, and the office boy ushered in an early caller. Decidedly the practice was growing.

"Come in," said Norwood. A short, stout man, full-bearded, bald-headed, solemn of face, but with an occasional humorous twinkle in his eyes, came in rather sheepishly, holding a sheet of foolscap in one hand and his hat in the other.

"Good morning, Mr. Cherral. You don't know me, I suppose. We haven't met yet, and I know you don't belong to our little flock."

Norwood looked at him severely. There was a certain familiarity in the man's address that he resented. And what did he mean by "our little flock"? "I do not understand you," he replied coldly.

"No. No. Mr. Cherral, of course you don't. Trewhella's my name. You know the store at the corner, Trewhella's Cash Store?" He paused for Norwood to say he was glad to meet him and shake hands. So far from doing either Norwood sat still and silent, gazing somewhat sternly at him. Mr. Trewhella felt nettled, and resolved to come to business

at once. "It's about Mrs. Bean. You've put the police in. I found out what the amount was from Constable Mullane last night. I suppose, Mr. Cherral, you know Mrs. Bean's circumstances?"

"Sufficiently for the matter in hand."

Mr. Trehwella seemed daunted and disappointed by Norwood's chilly manner. "I hoped you didn't. And—ah—the fact is, we don't like to see her few sticks of furniture sold up, and—er——" he became disconcerted under Norwood's steady gaze and his voice trailed off.

The silence became uncomfortable even to Norwood. "Do you represent her?" he asked. "Are you a relative?"

Mr. Trehwella seemed much relieved at this question. "Speaking to you as a man of the world, Mr. Cherral"—neither speaker nor auditor saw any irony in this—"as a man of the world I should say, no—she's nothing to me. But speaking to you as a man and a brother, she's my sister, Mr. Cherral. She belongs to our fold, and when worldly things go wrong with her, we're the first ones who should hold out the helping hand." He paused, but Norwood said nothing. "So you see, Mr. Cherral, I've been round to see two or three of the brethren and they're all willing to help. It was no use seeing Thriggerley, I didn't waste any time over him."

"I understand the debt is a just one," said Norwood severely.

"Well, it's rather awkward for me to talk about it, me being in the same line, but if you care to hear Mrs. Bean you'll learn all about it. A just debt? Why, she's paid the money three times over."

"I confess I do not understand you. My client's claim is obviously just. In fact, it is undisputed. This woman had judgment given against her by the Court two years ago for the amount. Did she defend the case?"

"No good," answered Mr. Trehwella grimly. "She knew that, poor thing. She knows enough law from the trouble she's had not to fight a case when she's signed a promissory note for it. And she knew enough of Thriggerley not to worry herself asking him for a favour."

Norwood had begun to wonder whether he was inflicting a hardship on a deserving woman, but Trehwella's comment on Thriggerley smacked to him rather of petty spite than of honest belief.

"I cannot enter into a discussion with you on the moral attainments of Mr. Thriggerley," said he stiffly. "Would you be good enough to let me know why you called."

Mr. Trehwella's brown face coloured at Norwood's words. "I came in here," he replied bluntly, "to see if you would help a poor woman. The rest of us will make up enough to pay the debt. I looked in to see if you would care to con-

tribute to a worthy cause by knocking something off the costs. But I won't ask it now. We'll pay your warrant in full." And Mr. Trewhella, head well up, tramped out of the office.

Norwood had been disturbed by Mr. Trewhella's visit; the remark, "She's paid the debt three times over," rankled in his mind. Lacking any other business to occupy his mind, he brooded intermittently over Mrs. Bean's affairs. Finally, before leaving the office for the day, he wrote to her to call as soon as possible.

### CHAPTER XXXIII

Norwood found the woman waiting for him at the office next morning; middle-aged and apparently weary, she sat looking at him for a moment. "So you're Thriggerley's new lawyer, are you? Well, I've come because you asked me to. Here's your letter to prove it."

"Ah, Mrs. Bean? I am glad you have come."

"Are you? Well, I'm not. More trouble I s'pose. Whadjer want now?" She looked at Norwood again, anxiety and hostility combined in her glance. "I s'pose you're goin' to try gettin' some more out of me, but you've no chance. So you can just sell me up." There was more of fatigue than defiance in her voice.

"Pray do not misunderstand me," said Norwood. "I knew nothing of your circumstances when the warrant was issued. Indeed, I know nothing of them now. And I wrote to you to come here that I might find out how you are situated—if you will be good enough to tell me."

Norwood's manner, always cold and distant when speaking to a social inferior, was warmed by the courtesy he felt due to a woman. Mrs. Bean hardly understood him, but her resentment lessened; this new lawyer was a perlit feller at least, and didn't try comin' the bounce on yer.

"I'll tell you anythin' you want to know. I ain't got nothin' to hide, Gawd knows. What was you wantin' to hear about?"

"In the first place"—Norwood was thinking of Trewhella's statement—"I should be glad to know how the debt was incurred—what was it for?"

"Ah! You know something about it then. Wot was it for? You may well ask. I don't mind tellin' you it was Bill that started that debt. Do you know Bill?—Mr. Bean, me husband?"

"No."

"Well, I thought you might. He ran up an account unbeknownst to me at Thriggerley's—you see he's a good husband to me, is Bill, but somehow he don't have no luck

with work; and it's come down to this, that if I can keep Bill from spendin' more'n I give him, I'm satisfied. I don't want nothin' from Bill if he'd only not run up bills against me unbeknownst to me. Well, I had a bit of Crown land in me own name then, and well Thridderley knowed it. I had it afore I married Bill. A nice bit of Crown land in the street at the back of Thridderley's shop. So when Thridderley sent for me to see him I lands in at his office—this is goin' on six years ago—and finds Bill has run up an account near eleven pound for minin' and tucker and things—Bill does a bit of minin' now and then—and Thridderley had booked it up to me though I knew nothin' about it. And when I told him I knew nothin' about it, he listened to all I'd got to say and some of it twice over I daresay and then he turned real nasty—the things he said to me about swindlin' and the things he'd do to Bill, you wouldn't hardly believe. He give me the rough side of his tongue and a bit over. I was fair worried to death at the time over Clara—she was a little thing then, and 'ad the croup dreadful and when at last he turns to Mr. Railthorpe—him that keeps Mr. Thridderley's books—that was looking nigh as upset as I was, and says, 'Make out the account against husband and wife and I'll get a summons against 'em for next Tuesday,' he sez. 'They must be shown up,' he sez. Well, that beat me. I didn't want no summons, and I didn't want Bill to be shown up, for Bill has a good heart if he *does* have bad luck. So I thought it over that night, and next mornin' I went to Thridderley's office, but he said the summons was out and he wouldn't withdraw it unless I'd mortgage this bit of land to him, and pay him off bit by bit. So I signed what he told me to, and I was to pay off a little every now and then, and I paid him two pounds down. And when I come to sign what he called a promissory note, what with costs and stamps and interest and what he called renewal fee for the next six months my two pounds was all gone and I owed him ten pound odd still."

Here Mrs. Bean paused for a moment. Norwood, ignorant of commercial matters and of certain business methods, had listened attentively. Mrs. Bean herself was finding much relief in talking of her troubles to one who listened with interest, and without interrupting.

"And do what I would I couldn't get that amount down. I paid Thridderley, and paid and paid for years, and it never seemed to do no good, and though I'd bin lookin' to that land to help me some day—it was a real nice bit er land"—Mrs. Bean without any symptoms of distress in her tired voice wiped away a stray tear—"I made up me mind to sell it, fifty pound at the least I thought to get for it, so I told the auctioneer to sell it and it was offered for sale, but times was

bad just then and I didn't get a bid, and the advertisin' cost me eighteen shillings, and Mr. Thridderley was wild with me for tryin' to sell it, and began to press me, and he got nasty about it.—It's a long story," said Mrs. Bean, drawing a deep breath, "and me takin' up yer time and thank you for listenin' to me."

"I am greatly interested," answered Norwood. "Please go on."

"Well, there ain't much more to tell, after a lot of trouble and worry and argle-bargle I had to let Thridderley have the land at his own price. Fifteen pound was all he would give for it, and after all was squared up between us that left me two pound odd in his debt, and what with one thing and another, and two years ago I give up dealin' there—I'd always paid cash myself, mind you—I couldn't stand Thridderley's prices and said I wouldn't pay the balance on Bill's old debt. So I got a summons. And Mr. Thridderley wouldn't take anthin' 'cept the whole lot, and more costs and interest and so on, so I just had to let it go to Court—that's goin' on two years ago now—and then a couple of days ago Mr. Mullane came along and seized me furniture, and then you wrote to me to come here, and here I am, and what you're goin' to do I can't say. So now you know."

Mrs. Bean finished with a rush, drew a long breath, wiped her eyes, and sat back. Norwood had, according to his habit, refrained from interruption; but when Mrs. Bean who had seldom had such a combination of stimulants to speech—a pet subject, an interested auditor, and a clear field—finally halted, he observe with some hesitation, "This is a most extraordinary story and reflects no credit upon my—upon the other side. I suppose you haven't exaggerated at all?"

"You mean am I tellin' you lies?" asked Mrs. Bean calmly. "Why should I? Ain't the truth enough? And I can prove it easy. Since the policeman came I've been huntin' up all me receipts and a nice job it was, nigh six years to go back—and now I've got all Thridderley's papers and receipts to show what I paid. I put 'em together last night. There's not everything here, he used to tear up different things when I'd paid 'em and he tore up a lot when I signed the land over to him, but there's a lot of figures here.—You'll find I'm telling you no lies." And she commenced to unfold a much wrapped-up parcel. Finally, she handed over a pile of documents and bill-heads, and without enmity, but without relaxation of vigilance, watched carefully to see that there was no tampering or appropriating. To go through the papers was slow work to the untrained mind, and to some extent uncertain, but Norwood soon decided that there was ample verification of Mrs. Bean's tale.

"I am obliged to you," he said handing back the bundle. "You understand, of course, I knew nothing of this when I took charge of the matter."

"I s'pose not, if you say so," admitted Mrs. Bean, but doubtfully. Was he not a lawyer and an enemy?

"You may accept my assurance," said Norwood haughtily. "And this matter is at an end. I shall tell Thridderley to withdraw that warrant of distress and to give you a receipt in full."

Mrs. Bean gazed at Norwood in astonishment. "Thridderley let me alone when the Court give a verdict against me? There's no chance of that. But if he'd take back that warrant and give me a little more time—I could pay him off in time. But I'm tired of paying interest. And I gotter pay somethin' for you I s'pose. We've all got to live."

"You must accept my statements without reservation," said Norwood. "Mr. Thridderley will, of course, do as he is advised. And there is no fee to be paid to me. I tell you that this supposed debt need trouble you no more. Good morning."

"Well," said Mrs. Bean, folding up her parcel of papers again with great care. "I know you're Thridderley's lawyer 'cos Mr. Mullane told me so. But I shouldn't a thought it. When I got that receipt in full from Mr. Thridderley that you speak of," added Mrs. Bean, with the caution of experience, "I'll be sure of it. But you're not goin' to make up a bill for yourself?"

"I have already told you that I shall not."

"Well," she rose to go, "I'm obliged to you for that." Mrs. Bean's gratitude was sincere, but doubt and suspicion still hung in the air. "And thank you kindly for listenin' to me. It's me does the listenin' most times."

## CHAPTER XXXIV

NORWOOD'S disgust with commercial greed, with the law which permitted it, with Thridderley who practised it, with Thridderley who had used him—Norwood Cherral—as an instrument of extortion, grew and increased. As he walked to his office next morning it filled his mind, and as he lifted his eyes there was the man concerned on the other side of the street. Norwood walked hastily on. He heard Thridderley whistle, and presently a voice hailed him.

"Mr. Cherral, Mr. Cherral," called Railthorpe, running after him. Norwood turned. "Mr. Thridderley wants you. Look——" Norwood glanced across the street. Mr. Thridderley whistled again and beckoned. Norwood's temper rose; he could not imagine anyone whistling him up; was he a cab-

driver? Nor could he stomach any client beckoning him in lordly way to attend. Railthorpe supplied a vent to his irritation.

"I should have been more obliged by your not calling my attention to such impertinence. I consider your conduct officious." And he turned and pursued his way, his pace quickened by annoyance. Railthorpe, deeply hurt, stood still for a moment, then hearing Mr. Thriddlerley's call, he crossed over to him. "Did you tell Cherral I wanted him?"

"I did, Mr. Thriddlerley, but——" Railthorpe, pulled up hastily. "He must not injure Mr. Cherral's prospects by letting Mr. Thriddlerley know what had happened, and yet he must give some explanation.

"Well? What is it now? What the devil's the matter with Cherral? Why didn't he come?"

Railthorpe flushed and stammered, but gave Mr. Thriddlerley to understand that Mr. Cherral was in a great hurry and had, expressing regret therefore, gone off.

"He'll find it a sight better to hurry when I call him," commented Mr. Thriddlerley. "It looks as though he's trying his airs on me, and I won't have that. Tell him I want to see him at once. He'll soon have to shut up shop if this is the way he plays the fool. I'm not old Sackell and so he'll find. Send him down to me at once."

Norwood had hardly seated himself when Railthorpe arrived rather breathless and looking extremely uncomfortable. He wasted no time in awkward preliminaries. "Mr. Thriddlerley says"—kindness forbade the correct quotation—"that he'd be obliged if you'd see him at his office. I suppose it's about something important, because he wants to see you at once."

"My office is the proper place for him to consult me," said Norwood. "And I too wish to see him as soon as possible. Be good enough to tell him so."

"Oh, Mr. Cherral, excuse me, but that's not the way to—I mean, really, I can't take a message like that to Mr. Thriddlerley."

"Indeed? Why not?"

"Well—it's not what he's accustomed to. Really, I'd feel I was making mischief between you if I said that to him. Everybody looks up to him here and he—he's accustomed to people waiting on him."

"I cannot discuss your master with you. You have delivered his message to me, now deliver my message to him." Railthorpe, deeply mortified, left the office without speaking.

Mr. Thriddlerley entered Norwood's room without loss of time, intent upon giving the young pup a damn good dressing down, and, upon the young pup's humiliation and repentance,

some sensible advice. His immediate reception afforded him a startling surprise.

"Be good enough not to smoke in here," said Norwood sharply. "And also take off your hat when you come into my private room."

The Englishman and the gentleman, slight in body, indomitable in spirit, sprung from a long line of the ruling caste, looked severely and authoritatively at the ignorant, insolent, and petty provincial grocer: the township magnate, self-lifted from poverty by hard work and by business ability unhampered by scruples to the ownership of half Cooeville, and of many farms, gazed with hard eyes at the poverty-stricken, pitiful little whippersnapper of a solicitor without a client and without the ability to get or even to keep one.

"Look here, did you hear me call you in the street?" he asked, without taking any notice of Norwood's rebuke. "When I call, you come."

Schooled to believe in self-restraint as he was, Norwood required all his self-possession now.

"My good man," he said loftily, "you forget yourself. That is not the way to address me."

Mr. Thridderley started. His little burst of offended dignity and bad temper disappeared in a surge of deeper and more dangerous anger. For over twenty years all men had approached him with apparent respect; it had been left for this penniless, ridiculous and conceited boy to patronize and insult him. He stood there now, Norwood's enemy, resolved to crush him, and drive him from the town. His feelings were too powerful to explode in mere abusive rage. "Do you know what a fool you are, Cherral?"

Norwood passed this over as beneath his notice. "I sent for you in reference to Mrs. Bean. I have seen her and inspected the papers she produced. It looks as though she has paid you more than the amount originally due and has given you an allotment of land as well. Is that correct?"

Mr. Thridderley whitened round the nostrils, his eyes seemed to grow smaller. "What has that to do with you?"

Norwood's anger almost mastered him. "It has this to do with me—I decline to assist in any further oppression of an unfortunate woman. You must withdraw the warrant at once."

"Mrs. Bean'll pay that money, or she'll be sold up. I'll have that money and I'll have it collected in your name. And you'll be sold up next. You damned, dirty little puppy. You'll smart for this day's work. You'll——" Mr. Thridderley, preventing himself with difficulty from a vicious outbreak of abuse, left the office.

Norwood spent the next hour pacing about his room, too agitated to sit down, yet ashamed of himself for being so



troubled in mind. Fancy a grocer having the power to disturb one so ! This came of having anything to do with trades-people.

By late afternoon he had decided that as the Court had given judgment against Mrs. Bean, Thriddlerley could claim the amount. He wrote a note to Mr. Jessington asking him to withdraw the warrant, and enclosed his cheque for the amount due.

### CHAPTER XXXV

THOUGH Norwood had now been settled in his<sup>1</sup> new life for some considerable time, yet his standing in the opinion of Cooeville had not improved. On his arrival there he had been welcomed, almost courted. His good-breeding had made him conceal his contempt for the township and for all its inhabitants. His stiffness and silence in social life were considered not unbecoming in a young man and a stranger, and his aloofness instead of offending increased his reputation. The young ladies admired and confessed their admiration ; the matrons held him up as an example ; for some time his popularity had increased rapidly. But he had caused the onward current of praise gradually to slacken ; and, continuing in his course, had now made it ebb. The time for reticence had passed by, and instead of the habit, now unnecessary if not improper, disappearing, it had increased ; his chilly demeanour, no longer in place, was resented ; his objection to appearing in society, at first attributed to the recent death of his father and to his financial disasters in Melbourne, was beginning to offend : an unpleasant rumour had blown about that he declined so many invitations because he objected to mixed society. Some Cooeville people were commencing to think that what they had praised as dignity in Mr. Cherral should now be condemned as snobbishness ; that the former admirable restraint of his conversation now merely showed that he thought none of them fit to speak to ; and that his markedly solitary habits were due, not to studious tastes or a dreamy nature, but to his belief that none of those round him were fit to be his associates.

This change in popular sentiment re-acted on its subject ; Norwood, at no time apt to be unduly optimistic about Cooeville people, needed only the hint of a demand to be met on equal terms, to withdraw himself still more, and with added haughtiness ; the thought of suspicion or dislike on Cooeville's side hardened his feelings and embittered his contempt. But the less Norwood saw of the men and women of Cooeville whose friendship he had disdained, the more he came to look forward to his visits to Miss Seamond's, the more did he derive his sole sympathy and comfort from Miss Lily, the more did his thoughts and his wishes dwell upon her, the more

did he angrily shut out from his mind any hints of conscience that he would do well to visit less frequently the one home in Cooeville that attracted him.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

Nine forty-five a.m. at Mr. Jessington's room in the Court House; Mr. Jessington busy entering in his Petty Sessions' Register the particulars of the two summonses that should have been filed with him yesterday; Mr. Dobbsleigh, who has just handed in the summonses lounging over the counter; enter Mr. Norwood Cherral, who acknowledges Mr. Jessington's salutation with a certain stiffness due to the nervousness of a young solicitor appearing in his first case, and Mr. Dobbsleigh's with a stiffness due to dislike; Mr. Dobbsleigh, in no way abashed, squints as he reads the entries for that day's Court in the Register nearly upside down.

"Hullo," says Mr. Dobbsleigh, "let's see that summons of Lee against Condon." He inspects it, and remarks, "Will this be called on last?"

"It's first on the list," replies Jessington.

"Well," answers Mr. Dobbsleigh, "it might suit me to have it on last. I wish you'd see to it."

"Ask Cherral," directs Mr. Jessington, writing hard. "If he's agreeable I am."

"Right oh!" says Mr. Dobbsleigh, and turns to Norwood, who, however, feigns to be absorbed in some papers.

Enter Senior Constable Sullivan, who stands by erect and solid and stolid, ready for the Court which will be declared open at ten o'clock. Enter Mr. Lambton, Cooeville's third solicitor; Mr. Dobbsleigh, who has been scribbling a note, here leaves the room. Enter Mr. Dolomy and Mr. Geoghegan, Justices of the Peace. Mr. Jessington lifts his large Petty Sessions' Register, and they all move to the Court Room. Senior Constable Sullivan takes up a position near the witness box. Mr. Lambton, Mr. Dobbsleigh, and Mr. Cherral sit at the table just beneath Jessington's desk, facing the Bench. Mr. Goff, who has just arrived, sits at the other side of the table, opposite the solicitors, with his back to the Bench. Constable Mullane unbars the front door and admits the attendant gathering; there is an unimpressive wait while the litigants, interested persons, and loafers, shuffle and scuffle for seats, then from a door behind the Bench the two justices appear with appropriate solemnity, the solicitors at the bar rise and bow to the Bench, the Bench takes no notice of the Bar, "Open the Court," orders Mr. Jessington. "The Court of Petty Sessions is now open," proclaims Senior Constable Sullivan. Constable Mullane at the front door repeats the announcement. Mr. Jessington opens his Register.

Norwood's heart thumped, and something swelled in his throat till he almost choked. He knew that as his case was undefended he would only have to ask Lee two or three leading questions and the matter would be finished, but his first appearance as a speaker in public!

"Solomon Lee versus Joseph Condon. Oh, Mr. Dobbsleigh?" Jessington pauses and nods at Dobbsleigh. "Mr. Cherral," says that gentleman, "no objection to the other cases being taken before yours? They're all undefended—ten minutes'll finish everything."

Norwood grasped eagerly at the reprieve. "Not at all!"

Two undefended debt cases are disposed of; as the third is called on someone slips a note into Mr. Dobbsleigh's hand, he reads it and retires to Mr. Jessington's room, and returns almost at once. As the complainant in the next case steps into the witness box, Mr. Thriggerley appears at the private door to the Bench and is welcomed by his colleagues; as Mayor of Cooeville he takes the position of Chairman of the Bench.

"What's Thriggerley come down for?" asks Lambton of Dobbsleigh. "There's no contested case on?"

"Don't ask me," replies Mr. Dobbsleigh. "Perhaps he felt like it."

The last case before Norwood's is over, the complainant comes down from the witness box.

"Lee versus Condon," said Mr. Jessington, in quite his ordinary tone.

Norwood rose. "I appear for the Complainant." His voice fell harsh and strained on his ears.

Mr. Dobbsleigh rose nochalantly. "I appear for the Defendant."

Norwood's heart pounded suddenly. Had Condon tricked him into not preparing the case for a fight, meaning to fight all the time? Why," he exclaimed, with apparent astonishment, "there is no defence."

Mr. Lambton laughed.

"Thank you," answered Dobbsleigh. "I think that is for me to say. You can't act for both sides, you know."

The Bench, saving the Chairman, smiled. The case before them was the last on the list, there were three of them together and there was plenty of time, a little disturbance at the Bar would be an agreeable interlude, and would repay them for having walked down to the Court, and after enough of it they could all go up to Shandy's and have a glass together to wash away any soreness.

Norwood felt snubbed and hotly ashamed. Dobbsleigh, though impertinent, was correct in his statement, but he felt the Bench ought to know of Condon's behaviour. "I do not wish to appear for both parties," he said, "but some

days ago Condon called at my office, he admitted that he owed the amount, and agreed to judgment being obtained against him to-day."

"This is very improper," asserted Mr. Dobbsleigh, "my friend inveigles an ignorant man into his office, leads him into admitting something he doesn't understand, and then has the nerve to talk about it in Court. Besides," added Mr. Dobbsleigh, suddenly dropping the aggressive, and assuming the legally argumentative, "that statement of my friend's is not on oath. If my friend wishes to give evidence on oath to strengthen all the weak points in his case, I shall be happy to cross-examine him—and your Worships will know how much value to attach to his evidence. Really," said Mr. Dobbsleigh, in much and virtuous surprise, "I never heard of such a thing before. It may be the practise of a certain class of city solicitors, but I must inform my friend it won't do here."

Norwood never interrupted a speaker, and, despite Mr. Lee hissing virulent instructions into his ear, he waited with growing indignation for the end of Mr. Dobbsleigh's address of innuendo. When the end came—"I am not accustomed"—began Norwood haughtily, "to such——"

But no scruples about interrupting bound Mr. Dobbsleigh; in fact, he preferred breaking in. "It's of no interest to us what my friend is accustomed to, and if he's not used to the truth the sooner he learns to be the better, for he'll always get it from me."

Mr. Dolomy here smiled cheerfully and remarked, "We're glad to hear the news, Mr. Dobbsleigh."

Mr. Lambton laughed. Mr. Dobbsleigh looked severe. "When addressing the Bench from my place at the Bar," he declared gravely, "I hope nothing but the truth will ever pass my lips."

"Thriddlerley on the Bench!" whispered Lee to Norwood angrily. "It shouldn't be allowed. Get him off at once."

"Be good enough not to interrupt," answered Norwood.

"I shall require to examine all the entries in the Complainant's books," continued Mr. Dobbsleigh, who knew his men, and was well aware that few local Justices like being on the Bench when a lengthy and uninteresting case is to be heard, "and I don't expect, if we begin the case, to finish this morning. I suppose," he glanced at the papers in front of Norwood and at Mr. Lee to make sure that no shop books had been brought down, "I suppose that my friend is ready to produce not only the ledger, but all the day books or counter books as well?"

"I'll get them in five minutes," said Mr. Lee rising eagerly.

This was quite enough for Mr. Dobbsleigh. "In this case," he said, addressing the Bench, "there is a good deal

of legal argument to be heard, besides the evidence as to fact. With all deference to your Worships I submit that the case is one to be more properly heard by the Police Magistrate, and as my friend is not ready to go on and has not even the shop books of account to submit to the Court and to me, I see nothing for it but to adjourn the case. I am compelled by the way this case has been brought into the Court by my friend to suggest that it be adjourned to the Police Magistrate's day—ah, he won't be here till this day three weeks. That will enable my friend to prepare the case for hearing and will afford more chance of justice being ultimately done."

"Has Mr. Lee his books here?" asked Mr. Thriggerley.

"Why didn't you tell me to have them here?" whispered Lee fiercely to his solicitor. "I'll get them. Tell the Court they're here."

Norwood, glancing indignantly at Mr. Lee as he elbowed his way to the front door, rose to address the Bench. "The books are not here, I did not consider it necessary to bring them when Condon declared himself willing to have judgment given against him——"

"As alleged," interjected Mr. Dobbsleigh.

Norwood flushed with anger but restrained himself. "Such a remark is unworthy of notice," he said coldly, "and——"

"You notice it all right though," declared Mr. Dobbsleigh triumphantly. "Of course, your Worships, there's no evidence of the defendant saying anything at all. I needn't insult the intelligence of your Worships by pointing out that only a statement on oath can be evidence, and here's my friend talking away in a lordly manner and expecting us to swallow it as gospel. I don't know," hinted Mr. Dobbsleigh, "whether your Worships are satisfied to be treated like this, but speaking for myself I affirm most distinctly that I'm not. Are we children?" demanded Mr. Dobbsleigh, skilfully linking the Bench with himself as among the aggrieved. "Are we children, I say, that we're to be talked down to like this? And upon my word," declared Mr. Dobbsleigh, glancing round the Court, "here's my friend who hadn't even a shred of paper to back up his case, now hasn't even a man to prove it. Where's the Complainant in this case? Where's Solomon Lee?"

An irrepressible laugh broke from the crowd at the back of the Court, the Bench smiled, the Senior Constable Sullivan, grinning largely, ordered "Silence in the Court."

Mr. Thriggerley turned and the three Bench-mates conferred in undertones.

Again Norwood's politeness hampered him; he waited eagerly till the Justices finished their discussion, till, in fact, they had come to a decision. When the Chairman turned to the Bar again, he began, "Why the books were not here

in the first place has already been explained. They will be here shortly. I must oppose any adjournment."

But Mr. Thridderley cut him short. "The Bench has decided to adjourn the case. We feel that we have no option. As to the costs?"

"I am entitled to the costs of the day," said Mr. Dobbsleigh. "And I claim the usual fee, one guinea. Adjourned for twenty-one days," suggested Mr. Dobbsleigh to the Bench with ingratiating expectancy, "with costs one guinea. I thank your Worships."

Norwood felt a smothering wave of vague incompetence sweep over him. He knew that his case was a just one, that there could be no real defence, and he keenly desired to proceed with it at once, both the facts and the law when once the case was laid before the Bench would be in his favour, yet he could hardly obtain a hearing. Perhaps Dobbsleigh had gone a little too far, or perhaps Mr. Thridderley had misrepresented his colleagues' views, for there was a further short discussion on the Bench, Mr. Jessington by invitation joining in, before the decision was given, "Adjourned for twenty-one days, costs ten and sixpence, to be costs in the cause."

Mr. Dolomy added, "The Bench isn't unanimous about this case. I don't see myself why it shouldn't go on, but there's two to one against me."

"Any other business?" asked the Chairman.

"Any applications to be made to the Court?" demanded Mr. Jessington officially. "Close the Court. Court's closed."

A fierce tugging at Norwood's sleeve turned him to view Mr. Lee and his chief assistant laden with ledgers and counter books. "What have you done? Is my case on yet? What? Is the Court over?" demanded Mr. Lee passionately, as the Court rose and a buzz of talk began. Mr. Lee was perspiring with haste and weight carrying. Anger shone in his eyes and sounded in his voice. "What have you done?" he snarled at Norwood. "Can't you speak?"

Mr. Dobbsleigh here left the Bar and sauntered towards Mr. Jessington's room.

"Thridderley and Dick Dobbsleigh been too much for you?" asked Lee bitterly. "What's happened? Come on, speak up, can't you?"

Norwood had by a strong effort driven away all outward signs of discomposure. "Your case has been adjourned for twenty-one days. Be good enough to call at my office, I prefer to discuss business there."

"Twenty-one days! I'll see you at your office all right," answered Mr. Lee, looking absolutely venomous. "I'll go there now, this very instant. Adjourned for twenty-one days! Good God! What on earth were you——"

Norwood turned his back on his client and left the Court by the door used by the Bar and by Court officials only.

"Dick, Dick," said Mr. Dolomy, shaking his head at Mr. Dobbsleigh as they went out of Court, "fancy you on the high horse! You always giving the Bench the truth! I like that, I must say."

Mr. Dobbsleigh, abandoning forensic dignity with the closing of the Court, winked knowingly.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

NORWOOD walked quickly to his office with hot heart and embittered mind. He found Lee waiting for him and almost bursting with accumulating rage.

"Here's a nice thing!" he exclaimed, the moment Norwood appeared at the door. "What do you think of yourself. I'd like to know. Condon owes Thriggerley money, and you let Thriggerley on to the Bench! And let him put off my case! And let Dobbsleigh twist you round his little finger! What I gave you a job for beats me. I could do better myself. Just standing up there, not a word to say for yourself, letting them do what they liked with you"—Mr. Lee paused, becoming almost speechless with anger.

"Mr. Lee," said Norwood, looking his client full in the face, "if you wish to discuss any business matter with me you must behave with proper restraint. You must alter your style of address at once. Otherwise you must go."

"Don't try that game on with me, because it won't come off you know. I give you a job—a simple little job that your office boy could do—and you make the most ungodly hash of it that a man ever heard of, and then you sit there and try to come your high-and-mighty airs over me. But they won't go down, I can tell you, my fine gentleman——"

Norwood rose. Mr. Lee stopped, changed colour, and drew back." "Since you decline to accept my advice," said Norwood, "you compel me to take the only step left." He unpinned Lee's bill-head from the draft summons and handed it across the table. "This is the only document of yours I possess. Here it is. I decline to have any further dealings with you. Be good enough to leave the room."

At Norwood's words Lee hesitated, then with face flushing with rage he rounded on his former solicitor. "I don't want to stay in your dirty little room. I only came in for a kindness. Everybody knows you'll starve. But I wouldn't help you now, no, not if you paid me for it, my broken-down fine gentleman. I'll tell everyone the sort of fellow you are. I'll tell them about you, my pretty high-and-mighty lord Jack-an-apes. You're too superior to do my work, are you? We're

not fit for you, aren't we? Oh, I've heard about you, you'll soon give up those fine airs, my boy, you'll soon——”

Norwood, after asking Lee to go, had at first taken up some papers and ignored his foe: he now abandoned the attempt to be oblivious, and rose. Mr. Lee, whose courage, whatever it might be, was not of the physical variety, hastily opened the door. The sight of the office boy in the next room for an auditor, and the street within easy reach for retreat restored his confidence. “Too proud to collect my accounts are you, my fine gentleman? I'll let all the business people know it. They'll be glad to hear of it. If——”

Norwood, trembling beneath his outward calm, advanced to the door so rapidly that Mr. Lee, slamming it in its owner's face, fairly ran out into the street.

### CHAPTER XXXVIII

RAILTHORPE felt keenly Rafe's lack of sympathy with his dreams and his writing. Raising friendship to a height of perfection, eager himself to sympathize with all Rafe's feelings, devoted to him with an affection almost passionate, endowing others with his own ideal beliefs and with his own fervent feelings, Railthorpe's nature called confidently for a return of equal wealth; and felt inevitable failure as a cruel blow.

He passed three days, after seeing Rafe about the light verse, in deep despondency; it was not that Rafe had criticized the verses severely, that would have been endurable; but no, he had just not been interested in them, and, in fact, would hardly bother to say anything about them save a grumbling suggestion. “Why not write something local?”

For a week Railthorpe had been avoiding him; for a week he had remained unhappy. But when Saturday night came, though the day had been a long and a busy one and he had not escaped from Mr. Thriddlerley's office till eleven, the cloud began to lift, the reaction set in, he could not sleep; that peculiar sensation which he knew so well, delightful, yet profoundly disturbing and exhausting, that sensation of freedom from the world of Cooeville, of exaltation to another state, rose in his heart; it filled his spirit, it possessed him. The south wind had sprung up in the afternoon; the night was one of bracing coolness. Railthorpe, thinly clad, bare-footed and lacking coat and vest, walked up and down his little front verandah heedless of the fallen temperature; he had that within him which, with radiant glow, defied external chill. His day's work done; his aunt in bed, the concealing night giving unfettered wings to thought, was his. Cooeville drifted down and away from him. Life with its beauty and its sadness filled his spirit; his mind, uncontrolled by his body



and apart from it, ranged at will. Thoughts rushed to mind, his horizon widened magnificently; ideas crowded fast, fiercely, almost to pain. Things that had troubled him during the day: weariness, a vague longing, a dawning discontent, appeared beside the vast survey of his mind's eye as dust motes in a universe. He breathed fast, unknowingly he quickened his pace; he threw out his hands in eager gestures; his eyes glowed; he groaned in a sublime agony of rapture. Time flowed fast in noiseless, rapid current; rather indeed time existed no more; there was no time, no body, no space, only divine thought that transcended all.

It had struck one when he returned to his room, his mind suddenly weary, and void of the thoughts that had been firing his spirit. All at once, small things replacing great, he remembered Rafe and his advice to write something local: the events of an evening, two days ago, when he had tossed about in bed for hours suggested a title, "Ode to Sleep"—no, a lullaby. No, Rafe should have what he asked for, "A Local Lullaby." The excited mind, beginning to work on it instantly, recalled the trifling events of that forty-eight hours old evening—the cold coffee he had found in the kitchen the untuneful cat that had disturbed him later, the crying baby in the house at the back; local it should be with a vengeance. It shaped itself at once, he scribbled eagerly, laughing as he wrote. Before two it was finished, and, thoroughly exhausted but happy as he had not been for many days, he tumbled into bed, the lines he had just finished singing through his head.

#### A LOCAL LULLABY.

Wakeful one night and restless of heart, and averse to seeking that seclusion which his boudoir afforded (we speak of this apartment with a certain amount of reticence),

The Bard addressed himself to indite an ode to Sleep, which would lull with its sedative song any reader thereof, and would soothe to silence and slumber even that cat upon the back fence,

He arose, therefore, and, casting from off his soul the black mantle of melancholy and wiping away from his cheek the starting tear, He stepped forth on to the front verandah and in to the soft embrace of Night, and spoke as becometh a Bard or Seer.

"Pluck me the plant mandragora, and cull  
 The dreaming poppy from its native East;  
 Pour out such drowsy draughts as soonest lull  
 The pulsing brain to sleep: or grant at least  
 That this harsh life may turn to dreams,  
 So that vague pleasures languidly hold sway,  
 So th' flight of Time, while night draws on to day,  
 But one, brief, rich hour seems."

—Thus far on Poesie's devious path had the Bard proceeded when the Murmurous Quiet of Night was broken.

By the hiccupping yell of a babe, which had (in all probability) drunk milk with too much casein therein, and suffered therefrom, and, more by token,

Proclaimed the fact in primitive but unmistakable language till its hullabalooing

Was broken in upon and hushed by the song of the mother, sung in manner indubitably charming and cooing——

—“ List while I sing a soothing song,  
 Until you sweetly slumber once again,  
 So softly-sandalled hours shall pace along  
 Unheeded while you hear the old refrain.”

“ Sunk has the sun adown the Western steep,  
 This is the sacred hour beloved of sleep,  
 Think not the night was made for sport,  
 Think not the day is all too short,  
 Say not that he who sleeps when bedded  
 Is rather apt to be thick-headed,  
 Say not that sleep's a brutish habit  
 Fit only for the foolish rabbit ;  
 Sleep, googums, sleep, touched by mosquito never,  
 Nor flea, nor any naughty thing whatever,  
 The catfish and the kangaroo  
 Need slumber soft, and so do you.”

“ Why art thou restless ? Thy old friends are here,  
 Friends that keep with us through th' unvarying year,  
 The dust storm still goes whirling by,  
 The North wind still keeps all things dry,  
 And through the hot, thick, eddying air,  
 Cheerily shines the bush fire's glare,  
 While with its own dear, soothing roar,  
 The battery stamps as heretofore.  
 Sleep, for to-morrow happy thou shalt sit,  
 With the usual gravel, flies, and glare, and grit,  
 With curled-up tail now sleeps the yabbi,  
 Oh slumber, do, my little babby.”

“ 'Tis night, my wee thing, and the hour has come  
 What time the blowfly stills his merry hum :  
 The wombat waddles to his pillow,  
 The seagull snoozes on the billow,  
 The pup has ceased to bay the moon,  
 The crane sleeps by the calm lagoon,  
 The bull-frog and the iguana  
 Now ask repose 'neath Night, her banner.  
 Sleep, darling, sleep, for that way comfort comes :  
 I'll smooth thy cot, and brush away the crumbs.  
 E'en the unceasing cockatoo  
 Now slumbers soft, and so should you.”

"Sleep, for I've sung the soothing song,  
 And now you sweetly slumber once again ;  
 May softly-sandalled hours still pace along  
 Unheeded, till your proper rest you've ta'en."

—"Ha," said the Bard, with no inconsiderable amazement,  
 "This has either put the child to sleep (or has killed it),

"And verily I feel that way myself." And he retired with incredible celerity, and having found his pipe, he filled it,

And fell asleep in disgust and his armchair, with the wreaths of smoke from the smouldering pipe surrounding his head

As the dust surrounds the dog fight, or the bag surrounds the bagful, or the smile surrounds the face of changeable and extreme youth as soon as its tears are shed.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

WHEN Condon walked into the office two days after the Court, Norwood gazed at him with angry astonishment. "You have no right to come here. You should see your solicitor."

Condon took off his hat and rubbed his head.

"But," added Norwood, "I think I should tell you that I consider you a contemptible fellow. Now go."

Condon took the rebuke meekly. "I couldn't get in before to-day. I didn't know you wanted me before, and I come straight here as soon as I put me horse up."

"That has nothing to do with it. Go to Mr. Dobbsleigh. I decline to see you."

"Mr. Dobbsleigh? And why should I go there at all?"

"Isn't he acting for you? Isn't he your solicitor."

Condon almost smiled. "A poor man like me don't need a solicitor. I'm dealin' wid you just now, and wan lawyer at a time's enough for me. I brought you in a couple of pound to-day, it's all me and the Missis could raise."

Norwood's anger departed and surprise took its place. "What do you mean by defending the case against you the day before yesterday, after agreeing to let me get judgment, and now paying something on account?"

"Me defend the case, Mr. Cherral? What would I do it for? I owe Mr. Lee the money and sorry it is I am to keep him waiting. I was never off me farm last Tuesday."

"But you instructed Mr. Dobbsleigh to appear at Court for you."

"That I never did. I've not spoke to the man this two months but for 'good-day to you' or the like of that."

"Wait here till I come back," said Norwood sharply.

"Come in," called Mr. Dobbsleigh, as Norwood knocked at his office door. "Oh, it's you, Cherral. How are you?"

"Condon is at my office," said Norwood curtly. "He tells me he did not instruct you to defend Lee's case. Naturally I refused to believe it."

"I'm glad to hear Condon's in town," answered Mr. Dobbsleigh, blowing the dust off the papers in front of him.

Norwood waited. Mr. Dobbsleigh yawned.

"Have you nothing more to say?" asked Norwood.

"Not a word," replied Mr. Dobbsleigh cheerfully.

"I cannot understand this. Will you kindly explain things?"

"Nothing to explain," said Mr. Dobbsleigh, with elaborate carelessness.

"I am compelled to think there is something to be hidden." Norwood's anger almost mastered him. "If I discover anything improper, be sure I shall do my best to have it punished."

"Ta. Ta," said Mr. Dobbsleigh, waving his hand towards the door. "Thanks for coming up to tell me Condon's in. I've got something for him. Mind the step."

Norwood, with the remembrance of Dobbsleigh's unpleasant hints against him at Court, could restrain himself no longer. "I consider you a most ill-bred fellow."

"That's all right," answered Mr. Dobbsleigh. "All the town knows what *you* are."

Norwood left in disgust.

But next morning hardly had Norwood seated himself at his office when, to his amazement and indignation Mr. Sol. Lee entered hastily. But the indignation was evidently not on Norwood's side alone.

"You needn't look at me like that," snarled Lee, scowling at Norwood. "I know all about it now. Oh, yes, I've found it out."

"You are an insolent fellow," said Norwood coldly.

Mr. Lee's rage swept him on. "I see now why you were so anxious to throw me over. You thought I wouldn't find out, didn't you? Ah, but I did. I found out you acted for Thriggerley once and got the sack from him, and you're trying to crawl back into the favour of a man like that, are you, by swindling *me*?" Rage drove Lee beyond the bounds of caution.

"Are you mad?" asked Norwood.

"Do you think I don't know?" demanded Lee, his voice rising. "Condon's just been in and showed me the summons—Thriggerley's summons against him, thirty pounds odd, and——" Lee's voice rose almost to a shriek—"it's for hearing next Tuesday—and you got my case put off till that day

fortnight, so Thriddlerley'll get his verdict fourteen days before me and get all Condon's goods ! ”

As a flash of lightning in the night reveals to the wanderer the sought-for road, Lee's words solved for Norwood the puzzle of Dobbsleigh and Condon's conflicting statements; how plain the plot lay before him! His mind recalled instantaneously the scene in Jessington's room just before the Court opened: Dobbsleigh (no doubt instructed by Thriddlerley to collect the money Condon owed him), noticing Norwood's summons, *Lee v. Condon*; once more in his mind's eye Norwood saw Dobbsleigh scribbling a note and going out with it, once more he heard Dobbsleigh ask in Court when *Lee v. Condon* was called on, “ Mr. Cherral, no objection to the other cases being taken before yours ? ” And again he heard himself answer, “ Not at all. ” Of course that note was to Thriddlerley; and had not Dobbsleigh in turn received a note in Court and strolled out for a minute, no doubt to see Thriddlerley outside and get his instructions; and when Dobbsleigh came back had not Thriddlerley himself gone on to the Bench, and, using his influence, had Lee's case adjourned? Norwood felt as though he had been struck in the face. What a dupe he had been! He breathed as though stifled by a foul atmosphere. He rose with white face. “ Do you actually believe that I could do such a thing ? ”

“ Why, you've as good as owned up to it. Don't try to come the fine gentleman over me again. I know you now. I—— ”

For once Norwood interrupted. “ I assure you upon my honour that what you have told me is completely new to me, and shocks me profoundly. ”

“ That for your word of honour ! ” cried Lee, snapping his finger and thumb contemptuously. “ Tell that to the marines. It's a put-up job I tell you, and I'll see you pay for it. I'll tell everyone. I'll—— ”

“ To have done as you insinuate, ” said Norwood, speaking with difficulty so deeply was he moved, “ would be the act of a sordid wretch. And you actually think it possible that I should do this ! ” Pride came to his aid. “ I scorn the man who could think me guilty of such dealing. Till this moment I never knew so pitiful a fellow lived. Go! Go ! ” he advanced on his accuser with such passion in his face and gesture that Lee, panic-struck, bolted from the room slamming the door behind him. Norwood opened the door to say to the office boy in a stifled voice. “ I'm engaged should anyone ask for me. ” He locked his door and fell into his chair.

Ruin, bereavement, poverty, solitude, these Norwood had faced without flinching. But to be deemed capable of such paltry treachery! To hear his word of honour scoffed at, to know that one man at least believed him, Norwood

Cherral, to be a liar and a knave! It was too much—the door was locked, no one could come to the window, he was alone, he was honourable, he was friendless, he was young, he had never before met baseness and injustice, he leant over the table with his head on his hands, and overtaxed Nature had her way.

## CHAPTER XL

NORWOOD slept badly on the night after Lee's attack, and rose with the headache that had been troubling him for the last three or four days somewhat worse, but this slight ill-health in no way lessened the resolve he had come to during the waking hours of the night, the wrong Thridderley and Dobbsleigh had done in secret must be exposed to public condemnation; he would appear at Court on Tuesday when the case of Thridderley against Condon would be heard, he would explain the facts to the Bench and after seeing to it that Thridderley got no verdict against Condon, he would take further steps to have Thridderley's conduct brought under the notice of the proper authorities, that his Commission as Justice of the Peace be cancelled; as to Dobbsleigh, he would endeavour to have him struck off the roll. "But I must be sure that Condon attends the Court on that day. I'll write at once. He will be my only witness. I can hardly call Thridderley himself to admit that he has done wrong, and to force Dobbsleigh to give evidence against his client is impossible."

He passed the day at the office in these thoughts, and as cool evening came over the land, he hushed a suggestion by conscience that he was acting indiscreetly, and set out to pay one of his frequent calls upon Miss Seamond.

Miss Frettle had shown at first a frank willingness to be friendly, and her young sister evidently approved of the family's new acquaintance, but when later the new acquaintance became their most frequent visitor and obviously took pleasure in Miss Lily's society, Miss Frettle grew anxious, she watched Norwood when he was with them, she listened eagerly when her friends discussed him, and on the few occasions when she was alone with him, her talk was entirely serious. Once satisfied that he was, in spite of Mrs. Malintop's hints, no longer a gambler, and certainly not fond of drink, schemes ambitious for her sister's happiness filled her mind, and she welcomed Norwood's visit with unselfish warmth.

## CHAPTER XLI

RAILTHORPE had spoken truly when he said to Rafe that he wrote with no idea of selling: hitherto he had used his pen with no thought of a public to read what he was writing; the serious poems relieved his mind as speech with another eases the heart, while in scribbling off his light verse he found even greater comfort in speaking freely behind the safe veil of irony. But if he enjoyed writing these lines so much, perhaps others would enjoy reading them. As soon as this idea occurred to him, he felt convinced of its truth; there must be more than one with tastes like his own, who would laugh over his jests, who would feel to the full the justice of his complaints. This might lead, it must lead, to his knowing more people, each one of them a member of that delightful circle who could find pleasure and comfort where he did. His gratitude overflowed as he thought of these things. Should he really speak through his writings—not the trifle he had done so far, but what he would do as he learned and ripened—to many a tired or dejected soul? And would they give him in return that sympathy and understanding and affection which would stimulate the mind to a passion of joy and effort, which would act as a fresh gale to the smothered fire of a heart overladen with its own aspirations, kindling to a sublime fury every spark, forcing to the white heat of rapture and utterance the former stifling load of thought?

He trembled with longing and delight, and all his feelings rose joined in the vow to strive to be worthy. The collected numbers of light verse now totalled a score: he copied out twelve, headed them "The Bard," and late that night dropped into the post a packet and a letter to Vellon & Co., a well-known Melbourne firm of booksellers and publishers, asking them would they undertake publication. An anxious week passed before the reply arrived; the firm regretted that their experiences with verses in Victoria did not warrant them in making any further experiments in that direction, but they had read Mr. Railthorpe's poems with pleasure, they considered them above the average, indeed they were unusual and well worthy of publication; if Mr. Railthorpe cared to publish at his own expense he might be more successful than many others who had done so; they would be pleased to submit quotations.

Mr. Railthorpe, himself, after reading this letter till he knew it by heart, had no doubt at all that he would succeed better. "If these men, whose business is to know good writing from bad, enjoy 'The Bard,' how much more will other

people enjoy it, people who haven't a keen literary training and who aren't so severely critical." Such reasoning appeared to the reasoner unanswerable. He wrote to Vellon & Co., and once again waited some days with eager impatience. When at last the answer came, Railthorpe discovered that the publishing of verses by the author is a luxury; the firm would not recommend an edition of less than five hundred copies, and that number—here followed technical explanations of the paper, type, and binding suggested, would run to £32.10.0. The figures staggered Railthorpe. By careful saving for years he had all but forty-five pounds in the Savings Bank. There was his aunt to think of. Would he be right to put so much on one venture? "It's not that I just want to see myself in print. When I began writing I wrote just for myself, yet now I see that a man can no more write his best for himself alone than he could sparkle his brightest in conversation if only talking to himself. Even though it takes all my savings it's reasonably certain I'll get far more back, not in money, but in something far beyond money—in friends."

## CHAPTER XLII

COURT morning again, but how different a one for Norwood; no shyness this morning, merely a complete scorn for Thriddlerley, Dobbsleigh, and the Court; no nervous dread, but the stimulating assurance of certain shame for his enemies, and of victory for Justice.

Mr. Dobbsleigh, who was lounging in Jessington's room with his hat on the back of his head as usual, had the impertinence to nod and say, "Good morning." Norwood haughtily cut him. Mr. Dobbsleigh, showing no signs of grief or confusion, resumed his whistling through his teeth and closed one eye knowingly in Mr. Jessington's direction. Mr. Jessington, raising his eyebrows slightly, gave his attention to his work. Three Justices arrived together, Mr. Thriddlerley, Mr. Geoghegan, Mr. Sackell. But Mr. Sackell, finding the new solicitor with Mr. Jessington, retired in dudgeon to the Justices' room, taking Mr. Thriddlerley and Mr. Geoghegan with him. Norwood himself, finding the presence of Dobbsleigh obnoxious, went to his place at the Bar to await the opening of the Court.

"Our young friend is getting himself disliked," observed Mr. Dobbsleigh.

"If half the yarns you hear about him are true I don't wonder. I used to look in at his office every now and then, but I had to give it up. What the devil's the matter with the chap?" asked Jessington.

"He's beyond me," answered Dobbsleigh. "But I owe



him a bit myself. When I get the chance, you watch me tinkle up my noble."

"Hum, you always had an infernal cheek in Court, Dobbsleigh," replied the Clerk of Petty Sessions in a tone by no means complimentary. "If I were on the Bench you wouldn't be allowed to carry on as you do."

"That's all right," replied Dobbsleigh easily. "When you're on the Bench, I'll take a few lessons in manners from Cherral."

"You might do worse," said Mr. Jessington thoughtfully. "He may be deuced stand-off, but I should say you could trust him right through. Ten o'clock," he added, gathering up his papers, "In with you."

"Undefended cases," said Mr. Jessington, turning the pages of his big book as soon as the Court was declared open and the noise of the audience crowding in at the back had been silenced. "John Thridderley versus Joseph Condon."

"I appear to oppose," said Norwood rising at once. "And——"

"According to the ordinary rules of procedure," observed Mr. Dobbsleigh, rising leisurely, "and also according to common politeness, the solicitor for the Defendant waits till the solicitor for the Complainant says that he appears for his client. But in this instance I take the liberty of saying that we are all accustomed to expect no courtesy from Mr. Cherral and not much knowledge of the rules of Court either."

Mr. Goff, in the Press seat opposite Dobbsleigh, glanced up in surprise. Norwood saw that he had made a slip, trifling certainly, but nevertheless a slip. "I regret that I was somewhat premature. I shall wait my time," he said addressing the Bench, and resumed his seat.

"Some people are extremely sorry—as soon as they see they're bowled out," observed Mr. Dobbsleigh. "But it's wonderful to what lengths they'll go if there's no one to pull them up. Personally, I never think there can be much sincerity in an apology that you have to knock out of a man. However, one mustn't expect too much from some people, so I mention, now that I've been allowed an opportunity for doing so, that I appear for the Complainant."

"I repeat that I appear to oppose in this case," said Norwood. "As to what has just been said by Mr. Dobbsleigh, I scorn to do more than call attention to the fact that a Court of Justice is no place for insult and buffoonery. I hope the licence that has been allowed will not be extended."

"Now he's giving your Worships a lecture on how to behave," remarked Mr. Dobbsleigh.

"We don't want any of that," said Mr. Sackell. "While I'm chairman here—and I'm sure I speak for my—er—for Mr. Geoghegan too——"

"I agree with Mr. Sackell," said Mr. Geoghegan. "We'll insist on the Bench being treated with proper respect. That's what we're here for."

Norwood looked with open contempt at the Bench. To be twitted and insulted by a provincial attorney and a brace of shopkeepers!

"To come to the point," he continued, disregarding the observation of the Bench, "I appear to object to this case. It should not be dealt with to-day. In fact——"

"That's all right," said Mr. Dobbsleigh briskly. "This is quite a characteristic application by my *learned* friend"—he dwelt significantly on the adjective—"It seems he wants an adjournment, and instead of asking for it subject to your Worships' decision after hearing both sides, he comes here and lays it down to your Worships in his lordly way, 'This case must not be heard to-day. It don't suit me.'"

"Silence!" cried Senior Constable Sullivan as Constable Mullane allowed an audible laugh to escape.

"I ask for no adjournment," replied Norwood angrily. "You twist my meaning grossly and in your own insolent fashion."

Mr. Dobbsleigh, much pleased by this open attack, proceeded on his accustomed path. "May I beg my gentle friend to remember that this is one of His Majesty's Courts certainly only a Court of Petty Sessions where he must feel horribly superior to all us little men—including your Worships of course. When he's tired of abusing me and telling your Worships how to do your work, perhaps he'll condescend to inform us—if he doesn't want an adjournment—what he does want."

Norwood was quivering with anger but, controlling himself as well as he could, he spoke to the Bench, once more ignoring Mr. Dobbsleigh. "I ask that this case be not heard on the grounds——"

Mr. Dobbsleigh was entitled to ask and be told what the defence was, before he called any evidence, but for some reasons he was not desirous of Norwood's defences being enumerated just then. "If that's the stand you take," he interrupted, "I submit to your Worships that this is another instance of my friend's jumping the hurdle before he comes to it. He doesn't want an adjournment, but he doesn't wish the case to be heard to-day, and how can your Worships say whether you'll hear it or not till you've heard the Complainant's evidence? It's not likely your Worships will refuse to hear a case till you know what sort of case it is—what it's all about—and then you can listen to the learned arguments of my superior friend—beg pardon—superior arguments of my learned friend."

The Bench conferred together and announced that they

agreed with Mr. Dobbsleigh. A protest from Norwood was stopped by, "We've decided to hear Mr. Thridderley's evidence, Mr. Cherral, and we'll hear you later." Norwood sat down with feelings in his heart which nearly overpowered him.

Mr. Thridderley now ascended the witness box, was sworn, and answered briefly his solicitors questions proving the debt. Then Mr. Dobbsleigh sat down, and Norwood, with suddenly elated spirits, rose. He knew he had the right to question Thridderley, and though he had never before tried cross-examining nor even heard another doing it, surely it was easy to ask this man the few simple questions necessary to spoil his chance of winning the case and to ruin his reputation. Even if Condon, who had been seen and instructed about the case yesterday, should arrive late it would not matter now, out of Thridderley's own mouth would he convict him. "You were on the Bench this day week ago?" demanded Norwood, his haughty disdain for the man he addressed showing plainly in voice and face.

Mr. Thridderley turned his gaze to his own solicitor and kept it there while he listened to the new solicitor's questions. "Yes."

"You adjourned the case of Lee versus Condon for three weeks?"

"Of course that question can't be asked," interrupted Mr. Dobbsleigh.

"I must really insist that this perpetual and impertinent interrupting be stopped," said Norwood angrily.

"If you insist, of course that settles it!" answered Mr. Dobbsleigh. And he laughed. Norwood could scarcely believe it, he looked to make sure—Mr. Dobbsleigh was still laughing—the fellow was unworthy of further notice. He turned his wrath on to Thridderley. "Perhaps you will be good enough to answer my question?"

"I like a joke," explained Mr. Dobbsleigh, rising again. "And I can have compassion on a certain amount of ignorance, but this is getting a little too strong. Mr. Thridderley don't answer that question unless the Bench tells you to. Your Worships, it's one of the rules of evidence—well known to all except those who don't need to know anything about law, because they're superior to it—that oral evidence of the decision of a Court of record can't be given. The record of the Court speaks for itself and is the only evidence admissible. If His Gracious Majesty—beg pardon—if my friend wishes to show what a decision of this Court was in a case last week, he must go about it in the proper way."

Norwood's confidence suddenly weakened; he believed Dobbsleigh was correct; he remembered learning something like this out of one of the text books. But what was the proper way to prove a decision of the Court? While for a

moment he hesitated, evidently perplexed, Mr. Jessington made a move. "I have the Register here, your Worships," he said, turning round to the Bench. "I can prove what Mr. Cherral is asking about."

Mr. Dobbsleigh frowned at this. "Oh, well, if my friend's done with my client he may stand down and you can prove what you like."

Norwood disregarded Dobbsleigh as before. "I should be obliged if you would go into the box, Mr. Jessington."

Mr. Thriggerley stepped down from the witness box and seated himself just behind his solicitor. Mr. Jessington, carrying his large Petty Sessions' Register, mounted the box, instructed Mr. Sackell in an undertone how to swear him, gave evidence in due form, produced the entry in the Register dealing with the case of Lee and Condon, and proved the point that Norwood desired.

"I've nothing to ask you," said Mr. Dobbsleigh, as Mr. Jessington looked to the complainant's solicitor for his cross-examination. "I'd have admitted the adjournment if I'd been asked to, and saved all this waste of time. However, your Worships, that's my case. Mr. Thriggerley's has proved the debt, the severe cross-examination he had to stand"—Mr. Dobbsleigh laughed again—"didn't shake him at all, and though I could confirm and buttress up the complainant's case with all sorts of books and documents, I submit we've proved our case and I'll stand on that." He sat down, smiling.

"Now, Mr. Cherral," observed the Chairman of the Bench, "we'll hear what you have to say."

"I have not finished with Mr. Thriggerley yet," said Norwood. "Let him go back to the witness box."

Mr. Dobbsleigh could push on vigorously in a winning battle. "Nonsense!" he declared briskly. "We'll be here all day if this goes on. My friend said he'd done with my client and I've closed my case. How on earth does he imagine he can cross-examine him again."

"I did not say that I had done with your client," answered Norwood hotly. "It is outrageous that such statements should be made."

"I agree with you," retorted Dobbsleigh. "And it's outrageous that you should not only make the statements complained of, but should try to act on them. Your Worships, I am driven to state that either my friend here thinks you're a very weak judicial team that he can drive where he likes, or else he doesn't know enough about Court work to tell my witnesses from his own."

Norwood's dislike and contempt for Dobbsleigh and for the Bench had enabled him to come to Court with steady nerves and to commence his work there with complete self

possession, but the headache and lack of appetite that had troubled him for some days past had weakened his self-control, and left him in a highly irritable condition: Dobbsleigh's constant interruptions and gibes fretted and galled him sorely, and now a sudden return of that old feeling of incompetence in legal matters—experienced before in Lee's case in Court—rapidly undermined his confidence, and his stimulating certainty of victory.

"Well, Mr. Cherral, what are you waiting for?" asked Mr. Sackell.

"For Thridderley to go into the box again," answered Norwood in a strained voice. It was all he could think of.

"We all know we can't expect any decent behaviour from our friend," said Mr. Dobbsleigh, "but I'll trouble him when he's speaking of my client to refer to him with ordinary courtesy as *Mr. Thridderley*. Of course"—Mr. Dobbsleigh's tone grew sarcastic indeed—"he's only an influential merchant and a large landholder, and one of our most respected citizens, and the present Mayor of Cooeville and a lot more things, mere trifles of course compared with Mr. Cherral's importance and standing in our midst—ha, ha!—but in this Court, and while I'm appearing for him, I ask that he be treated with reasonable respect."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Geoghegan, "that you do well, Mr. Dobbsleigh, to call attention to this. Mr. Thridderley can of course feel assured of our respect and sympathy and we'll support"—he broke off owing to Mr. Sackell's elbow under cover of the Bench striking him heavily in the ribs. Mr. Jessington, eyes front to the Court, and only the back of his head to their Worships, smiled safely and appreciatively. Mr. Geoghegan's desire to shout with the largest crowd had earned the comments of Cooeville for many years.

"Let him go back," repeated Norwood harshly.

Mr. Dobbsleigh laughed scornfully. The Bench summoned Mr. Jessington to their assistance. The conference lasted some time; finally Mr. Jessington resumed his seat and Mr. Sackell cleared his throat vigorously. "In our opinion," he announced, "Mr. Cherral having finished his examination of Mr. Thridderley——"

"If he did finish it, your Worships," remarked Mr. Jessington, turning to them.

"—In our opinion Mr. Cherral had finished examining Mr. Thridderley," Mr. Sackell amended the order of his remarks, "he let him get out of the box so that settles it, and there's no use arguing about it. If he hadn't done with Mr. Thridderley, he wouldn't have let him go. It's no use talking. And," continued Mr. Sackell, more slowly as he recalled Mr. Jessington's whispered advice and repeated it,

“if he completed his cross-examination of the Complainant in this case—and we say he did—and allowed Mr. Dobbsleigh to close the complainant’s case, he can’t call him back for further examination.”

Mr. Jessington rose, and turning round, again whispered to their Worships. “Oh, yes,” added Mr. Sackell, “without our consent, and we don’t give it. But if Mr. Cherral insists, he can call Mr. Thridderley as his witness, but then he can’t cross-examine him, he’s bound by Mr. Thridderley’s answers.”

“Let him go back,” repeated Norwood.

“As your witness, certainly,” agreed Mr. Dobbsleigh. “Mr. Thridderley, please go into the box.”

“Now, Sir,” said Norwood to the witness, “we know that you were on the Bench that day and we know Lee’s case was adjourned for three weeks.”

Mr. Dobbsleigh yawned. “Never mind telling us what we know,” he suggested.

“Be good enough to tell us,” continued Norwood, “why you came down to Court that day.”

Mr. Thridderley turned to the Bench. “—I came down to hear the cases of course.”

“To adjudicate. Exactly,” interjected Mr. Dobbsleigh.

“I must insist that you do not interrupt,” exclaimed Norwood angrily.

“Give him his turn, Mr. Dobbsleigh,” said Mr. Sackell.

“Certainly, your Worships. Certainly. I was only helping things on.”

“When your assistance is desired,” replied Norwood, loftily, “it will be asked for.”

Mr. Dobbsleigh remained unmoved. “When a man hasn’t brains enough to see what a hash he’s making of his case, I don’t mind giving him a leg up now and then.”

Norwood’s patience broke down. “How dare you speak to me in this fashion? What do you mean by your insolence? What——”

“Now then, Mr. Cherral,” said Mr. Sackell, “we can’t have this squabbling between you solicitors. Get on with your case.”

“I must ask you, Sir,” said Norwood to the Chairman of the Bench with white face and blazing eyes, “not to address me in this way. If decent order were maintained in your Court, the insolent course this fellow has pursued from the first would never have been permitted. I am not accustomed to having a childish and ridiculous accusation of ‘squabbling’ thrown at me, nor can I allow it. And when you attribute an equal share of the conduct that has disgraced this Court to me, and endeavour to rank me as an equal offender with this—this person”—his contemptuous gesture indicated Dobbs-

leigh—"you forget yourself. And though you hold His Majesty's Commissioner of the Peace that gives you no right to address me in your official capacity as you would not dare to do in your private one."

It was the astonishment and indignation of the Bench which allowed Norwood to complete his remonstrance. Senior Constable Sullivan gazed at the man who could tackle a Bench in this fashion with amazement, deeply tinged with admiration. Mr. Jessington, trying to catch Norwood's eye, shook his head violently. Goff glanced up, shot a whisper at Norwood, then, on second thought let him alone, and attended strictly to his reporting for the rest of the hearing. Mr. Dobbsleigh, completely overcome by two contradictory emotions—anger at Norwood's allusions to him, and delight at his impolitic comments on the Bench—leant back and ejaculated, "Well——!"

Mr. Geoghegan grew red, Mr. Sackell lowered blackly. A sigh rose from the throng of auditors at the back of the Court; then silence fell over them as they listened intently for the next speaker.

"I've lived in this town for thirty years and I've sat on this Bench for the last five and never, no, never——" Mr. Geoghegan was breaking into voluble history and reproach when Mr. Sackell, a man of different calibre, silenced him, and called Mr. Jessington. After two or three words with him he announced, "I adjourn the Court for ten minutes," and retired to the Justices' room behind the Bench, accompanied by the protesting Mr. Geoghegan and by Mr. Jessington.

Dobbsleigh and Thridderley left the Court Room; conversation buzzed at the back. Norwood remained in his place at the Bar; he noticed Condon in the front rank of the audience, and decided to call him as soon as he had done with Thridderley unless he could get sufficient information to defeat Dobbsleigh from Dobbsleigh's own client.

When the Court resumed there was an expectant hush. Mr. Sackell cleared his throat importantly. "I adjourned this Court for ten minutes," said he, "that nothin' might be done in the heat of the moment. I've consulted with my colleague 'ere and with the Clerk of Courts about committing one of the solicitors for contempt. That solicitor said there'd been disgraceful proceedin's in the Court to-day, and I'm with 'im there; there's bin more disgraceful goin's on here than ever I see before, and I've been a Justice of the Peace twelve year come next May and heard some queer cases in my time too. And all these disgraceful doin's are the work of one man, the man what talks so much about it, and insults the Bench as I've never heard the like before nor ever hope to. There's some people thinks they can act in this Court same as

if they was in the street, but I tell him here it won't be allowed, not for a minute. It's not only the Court he's insultin', nor the Crown what's represented by us two on the Bench, but it's an insult to me, what's been in this town more years than he has weeks and can prove it—and my colleague too of course." Mr. Sackell coughed, dipped his pen carefully in the ink bottle, and laid the pen down. "Me and my colleague has considered the question of committing the cause of all this trouble for contempt of Court, but after talking it over we're agreed that it's only due to his ignorance because he doesn't know any better, and we'll let 'im off the punishment he richly deserves. We're treatin' him with leniency because we don't want to be hard on him. But we take this opportunity of lettin' him know he's had a narrow escape, and that we'll have no more of it. The Court will now get on with business, and I trust there'll be no more disgraceful goin's on—unless the one concerned would like to apologize to the Bench for what he's said."

Norwood little knew how much Mr. Jessington's salutary advice and warning to the Bench had influenced the Chairman's address. As soon as it was concluded Norwood, rising, answered bitterly, "So far from desiring to express any sorrow for what I have asserted here, I say now that these last observations we have just heard appear to me quite characteristic and eminently in keeping with prior statements. I reiterate all that I have said, and wish I could find stronger terms to express what I feel."

"That's all about it then," replied Mr. Sackell hastily. "You get on with your case. Mr. Thridderley, you come into the box again, please. Now, Mr. Cherral, stick to the witness and never mind speechifying to the Bench. We're business men and can't sit here all day listening to you. Ask the witness questions and stick to that."

"I thank you for your courteously-worded advice." And Norwood turned to Thridderley, standing in the witness box. "You arrived at Court late this day week ago?"

"Yes, I came down a few minutes late."

"There were two Justices on the Bench when you came—sufficient to constitute a Court?"

"Yes, I found that so when I got here."

"Yet you went on to the Bench?"

"Yes, of course I did. I've a right to."

"Now, Sir, did you not come down here that morning because you received a note from your solicitor warning you to?"

"How can such a question be put?" asked Mr. Dobbsleigh, interrupting sharply. "Any communications between solicitor and client are privileged."

The Bench upheld this objection.



Again Norwood saw he had made a slip. "Well, why did you come down to the Court?"

"He's answered that already," replied Mr. Dobbsleigh. "To attend to the cases, of course."

Norwood was baffled, he had not yet learnt the fine distinctions of the law of evidence, and the application of such of them as might help him. Once more impotent anger mastered him.

"Every question I ask this witness is objected to by his solicitor. Every objection is supported by the Bench. I shall waste no further time in trying to extract the truth from him. I have done with this witness."

"That will do, thank you, Mr. Thridderley," said Dobbsleigh. "I've already closed my case, your Worships. It's for the other side to go on now."

Mr. Sackell, breathing heavily, nodded in reply.

Norwood knew theoretically that he had the right to address the Bench before calling any evidence, opening up and explaining his points before he proved them. Though contemptuous of the idea that a fair hearing could be obtained from the present Bench he declined to retire defeated. He rose to open his case against Thridderley.

"If your Worships had seen fit to grant my first application and hear what I had to say then——"

Mr. Dobbsleigh was on his feet at once. "I object, your Worships. No address can be made to the Court now."

"I have every right to open my case," said Norwood angrily. "You presume too far."

"I admit, your Worships, that the solicitor for the defendant has every right to open his case to your Worships"—Mr. Dobbsleigh paused. Norwood thought him defeated and, addressing the Bench, said hotly—"Then I demand that these unmannerly interruptions cease. He admits himself to be in the wrong, yet behaves as he likes unchecked."

—"before," continued Mr. Dobbsleigh, "he calls any evidence. But he has called evidence. Therefore he has no right to address the Court."

"I have called no witnesses," said Norwood sharply. "Condon is my sole witness and he has not been in the box yet."

Mr. Dobbsleigh laughed. "You called Mr. Thridderley as your witness."

"Of course you called Mr. Thridderley," asserted Mr. Sackell. "After me warnin' you about it."

Norwood remembered now. "That is true. I had forgotten it. I regret it. But I called him then at the suggestion of the Bench, and I claim the right to address the Court now."

"You've no right at all," answered Dobbsleigh. "I object, and I ask your Worships for a ruling."

Their Worships conferred together, and with Mr. Jesington, then Mr. Sackell announced that Mr. Cherral had no right to address them now except by the consent of the Bench. "But we think it may shorten the case to let him go ahead."

So now we'll listen to whatever he's got to say, and I hope he'll make it short."

Mr. Dobbsleigh had confidently expected a ruling in his favour, he rose to protest, but Mr. Sackell would not be moved. "It's all right, Mr. Dobbsleigh, let him go on. We've agreed to let him have his say, and we're not agoin' to change our minds."

Further protésts were equally unavailing, and Mr. Dobbsleigh, in no pleasant temper, was forced to give way.

Norwood wasted no time. "Nothing shall deter me," he began, "from doing to-day what I consider my duty, nothing shall turn me aside from exposing a scandal, and a scandal committed by the man to whom you show such deference."

Here Mr. Dobbsleigh intervèned again and angrily. "I don't mind a mud-slinger slinging as much mud as he likes, but I warn him he'll be expected to prove it."

"I take no notice of puerile threatening," said Norwood. "I affirm that this day week ago the Complainant Thridderley came to the Court for the express purpose of adjourning Lee's case against Condon. Before I call any evidence look at the facts that require no proof. Condon is in difficulties: among other debts he owes Lee five pounds odd and Thridderley thirty-two pounds odd, Lee issues a summons against Condon. Condon admits the debt and consents to judgment."

"Oh, come!" Mr. Dobbsleigh was on his feet again, "we fought that out a week ago. You can't run that in now."

"I shall prove all I say," retorted Norwood hotly. "Be good enough to sit down."

"Let him go on, Mr. Dobbsleigh," said Mr. Sackell

"Certainly, Sir," replied the tactful Dobbsleigh, sitting down at once.

"As I was saying when subjected to the usual impudent interruption," continued Norwood, "Condon consented to Lee obtaining judgment, yet when the case was called on here seven days ago Thridderley went on to the Bench." Norwood, conscientiously careful to allege nothing save what he could prove, made no mention of Dobbsleigh's writing a note, and receiving a note, and getting the hearing of Lee's case delayed. "Mr. Dobbsleigh said he had been instructed by Condon to defend the case, and against my wishes the case was adjourned for twenty-one days."

"Because you weren't ready to go on," interrupted Dobbsleigh.

Norwood made no reply to this. "Thriddlerley having thus, by a gross abuse of his powers as a Justice of the Peace, put Lee's claim off for three weeks at once issues a summons against Condon, Condon on receipt of this summons comes to me, and, on being challenged, denies that he ever authorized Mr. Dobbsleigh to appear for him, and denies that he has any defence to Lee's claim. On these facts I accuse Thriddlerley of having used his position as Justice of the Peace to pervert justice. I say he caused Lee's case to be adjourned that he might himself get judgment against Condon first, and I say that Mr. Dobbsleigh and he are equally guilty, for if one defeated justice on the Bench, the other appeared at the Bar in collusion with him, and misled the Bench by stating that he appeared for the Defendant Condon, when, as a matter of fact, he had received no instructions whatever from Condon but was acting against Condon, for Thriddlerley. And I claim that one is a disgrace to the Bench, just as the other is a disgrace to the Bar."

Norwood had neither legal learning nor forensic experience; none of the gifts of the orator, a good voice, a fine presence, an impressive delivery, were his; but he was an educated man, stirred beyond all nervousness by indignation, and he spoke with a fluency and a sincerity of conviction that impressed his hearers. His bold charges upset altogether the judicial calm of the Court. The two Justices on the Bench gazed at him in astonishment: a murmur rose from the audience at the back, and Mr. Dobbsleigh was up in a moment. Thriddlerley black with rage sprang forward and was about to speak when his solicitor forced him back into his seat and whispered rapidly to him, then turning to the Bench, "This, this a criminal charge"—he almost stammered—"and both on my client's behalf and on my own——"

Norwood did not hesitate now to interrupt. "I understand that Mr. Dobbsleigh has no right to address the Court at present."

"But I will address it," cried Dobbsleigh. "Your Worships, this is a scandalous abuse of the Court. It should not be allowed. A man who throws about such reckless and wicked charges is nothing but a slanderer. He should be silenced, he must be stopped, he——"

"There's no need to say any more, Mr. Dobbsleigh," interrupted Mr. Sackell. "I never knew before that this town was full of swindlers and criminals and disgraces to this and that, but it takes a newcomer to find us out. If Mr. Cherral can prove what he says of course—but if he can't well, then I'll feel it my jewty to speak pretty strongly."

"You ask for proof," said Norwood. "You shall have it. Call Condon."

Condon came forward, climbed into the witness box and

was sworn. Norwood passed over all formal preliminaries, nor did the Bench notice their omission. "Condon, have you any defence to make to Lee's summons?"

"That's a ridiculous and improper question," objected Dobbsleigh.

"Let him go on," answered Mr. Sackell.

"Now Condon, answer me," said Norwood.

"I might owe Mr. Lee a bit of money," admitted Condon slowly, remembering what he had been told at Mr. Dobbsleigh's office that morning.

"Didn't you receive a summons for the amount? And in my office did you not——"

"This is too much even for us, I think, your Worships," interrupted Dobbsleigh. "A man can't hector and cross-examine his own witness."

"Better let him alone, Mr. Dobbsleigh," responded the Bench.

Norwood regarded neither the Bench nor Dobbsleigh, he merely waited till any remarks were completed: astounded at Condon's reluctance in giving evidence he attributed it to dullness, and to help the man decided to put short direct questions.

"Did you receive a summons from Lee for five pound thirteen shillings and six pence?"

Condon considered this. "I did now," he finally admitted.

"Did you come to my office about it?"

"I come to your office. Yes."

"Did you admit that you owed the money?"

"That's a leading question on an important point and I object," declared Mr. Dobbsleigh.

The Bench, assisted by Mr. Jessington, upheld the objection. "Don't ask the witness, 'Did you say so and so,'" directed Mr. Sackell, tutored by Mr. Jessington; "ask him 'What did you say?'"

To Norwood there was something inexpressibly bitter in having to accept advice from such a source, and this bitterness deepened when he realized that the advice was correct.

"What did you say then, Condon?"

"I didn't say much."

Mr. Dobbsleigh laughed.

"Come to the point, man," said Norwood angrily.

"Go on, Mr. Condon," commanded the Bench. "What did you say?"

"I said I was a poor man."

Norwood's anger was rising fast. He thought Condon stupid to idiocy. The Bench was now eager to hear Condon's evidence. "If the solicitor for the other side has no objection to this witness being helped on a bit, the Bench will

raise none," explained Mr. Sackell graciously. "All we want is the truth," supplemented Mr. Geoghegan.

"As your Worships please," answered Mr. Dobbsleigh. "My client and I have nothing to hide. On the contrary we absolutely insist on the fullest enquiry."

"Did you admit to me that you owed Mr. Lee the money he claimed by the summons?" asked Norwood.

"I might have owed Mr. Lee a bit."

"Did you agree to judgment being obtained against you?"

Condon rubbed his head reflectively. "Well, ye see—I changed me mind."

"Did you consent to judgment or not?"

"Well, ye see, I didn't understand you. So I changed me mind."

"There is," said Norwood, addressing the Bench, "an apparently impenetrable barrier of stupidity here. I shall pass on to another subject and return to the matter of the consent."

"Of course you took his consent in writing," remarked Dobbsleigh. "Why not produce the document?"

Norwood was about to proceed without giving heed to this suggestion when the Bench put the same query.

"No consent in writing was taken," replied Norwood, who began to feel certain limitations pressing round him. "I asked him did he consent, and he agreed."

"Of course, your Worships, in that case Mr. Cherral will have to give evidence himself," observed Mr. Dobbsleigh. "And even then it's only a case of oath against oath. No one else was present when this extraordinary arrangement is alleged to have been made."

"It so happens that a third person, the Mr. Lee in question, was present," retorted Norwood.

"Well, you didn't say so," answered Dobbsleigh. "And even then, your Worships, it will only be Lee's evidence buttressed up by his solicitor's. A very questionable proceeding. For, of course, this appearance in Court, though formally for Condon, is really in Lee's interest."

"You can't appear for Mr. Lee when the only parties to the case are Mr. Thridderley and Mr. Condon," said Mr. Sackell, after a word with Mr. Jessington.

"I am not appearing for Lee," answered Norwood.

"You're quite sure of that?" persisted the Chairman.

"I have said that I am not," responded Norwood haughtily. "And that must be sufficient. I have no intention of giving evidence myself, nor shall I call Mr. Lee in any event. I no longer act for him. I have nothing to do with him."

Mr. Dobbsleigh was taken greatly by surprise. "Not acting for Lee? Have you turned him down too? Well,

really! Your Worships, excuse me, I've never had such a morning in my life. But——"

"I am not here to minister to your humour," replied Norwood. "And I ask your Worships that my examination of Condon be interrupted no further."

"Go on then," answered the Bench.

"Now, Condon," Norwood forced himself to patience, "let us come to the heart of the matter at once——"

"I wish you would," said Mr. Sackell.

—"Did you instruct anyone to appear for you to defend the case of Lee against yourself?"

Condon again rubbed his head thoughtfully. "Well, ye see, I left that to Mr. Thridderley."

Norwood refused to credit his hearing. "You misunderstand me——"

"He understands you very well," interrupted Dobbsleigh. "And has given you a very proper answer."

"There's something wrong here," declared Mr. Sackell. "Don't start fighting among yourselves again. Here, I'll ask the witness. Mr. Condon, did you tell anyone to defend the case for you?"

"Ah, I'm no scholar, I leave the likes of them things to Mr. Thridderley."

"Do you mean that Mr. Thridderley advises you in your business?" interjected Dobbsleigh.

"He does that. Sometimes."

"And did he advise you to defend Lee's case?" asked Mr. Sackell.

This question posed the witness. Mr. Dobbsleigh knew from what Condon had told him in his office a few hours before that matters were safe enough. Still he waited with some anxiety while Condon considered. Some witnesses say too much.

"I leave them things to him," answered Condon at last.

"Well," continued the Chairman of the Bench, "if he told Mr. Dobbsleigh to defend the case for you, you're agreeable?"

To this Condon returned answer not perhaps direct, but nevertheless unmistakable. "Mr. Thridderley's the man."

"If your Worships would permit me?" said Mr. Dobbsleigh, rising, "Two or three questions may end the case. Mr. Cherral can take the witness in hand directly."

Norwood objected. The Bench consented.

"Mr. Condon, if you look upon Mr. Thridderley as your friend and adviser"—Mr. Dobbsleigh paused impressively,—"then why do you make such wild and gross charges against him, and against me too, in defending this case?"

"I'm not defending it," answered Condon.

Norwood started in astonishment.

"Do you mean to tell their Worships," demanded Dobbsleigh, with an excellent imitation of amazement, "that Mr. Cherral is not acting for you to-day?"

"And why should he be?" asked Condon.

"Look here," said Mr. Dobbsleigh, "you answer this question, yes or no. Did you ask Mr. Cherral to appear here for you to-day?"

"He told me he would," was the unsatisfactory reply.

"But did you ask him to?"

"He told me he'd come to Court this morning and I was to be here. 'Don't be late,' he sez."

"Yes. Yes. Never mind what *he* said. What did *you* say? Eh? What did *you* say?"

"I said 'Good-day to you,'" answered Condon, with much simplicity.

Loud laughter from the auditors at the back greeted this reply.

"But you know," persisted Dobbsleigh, "I want a perfectly straight answer, Condon. Is Mr. Cherral fighting this case for you to-day?"

"I'm not fighting the case nor that gentleman neither. I told him myself, 'What does a poor man like me want a solicitor for?' And I told you that when——"

Mr. Dobbsleigh cut short further explanations and revelations. "That'll do, Mr. Condon, thank you. Your Worships, I feel that you, as well as I, have been grossly imposed upon. It appears now that Mr. Cherral is not appearing for the Defendant—then he has no standing in Court. He came here representing himself as Condon's solicitor, defending this case on his behalf—and it turns out he's a rank impostor. And he, your Worships, he, the man that's misled the Bench and the Bar, the man who the whole of this morning has been acting a lie, is the one who's been accusing Mr. Thriggerley of crimes, lecturing your Worships on your conduct in Court, and calling me a disgrace to the profession. Such brazen——"

"You needn't say any more, Mr. Dobbsleigh," interrupted the Chairman. "I want to make sure of things. Sit down, will you. Mr. Cherral, you're not defending this case here for Mr. Lee?"

"Certainly not. I have said so already."

"Nor for Mr. Condon?"

"Condon is my witness, but I am not defending this case for him. No, certainly not."

"Then why do you come to Court over this matter at all?"

"In the interests of Justice," answered Norwood proudly.

"Seems to me you made a big mistake," commented Mr. Sackell.

"I agree with you," replied Norwood bitterly.

"Mr. Jessington?" said the Chairman, and there was

another conference. The Bench was obviously angry, yet quite at sea as to what could or should be said or done by it.

"Well," announced Mr. Sackell at last, "so far as we can see, this Court is only to hear the case of Mr. Thridderley against Condon. Anythin' wrong, I mean any improper conduct charged against a Justice of the Peace or against a solicitor—if there was anythin' improper, which we don't believe for a moment—should be sent along to the proper authorities. This Court can't deal with it." So far Mr. Sackell was more or less following the path marked out by Mr. Jessington. He now proceeded on his own way. "We're that sick and tired of the whole case, what with squabblin' and arguin' and takin' away everybody's character and throwin' mud about which can't be proved, that we've had more than enough of it, and when we find out through Mr. Dobbsleigh that all the time you'd no right to be speakin' to the Court at all and was only deceivin' us sayin' you appeared for Mr. Condon—and Mr. Condon says he never did—well, we feel strongly inclined to punish you, same as you deserve. But me and my colleague 'ere has decided, after carefully thinkin' the matter over, that we'll let you off this time, but if ever you try on any of these here tricks again you'll be properly dealt with."

"And I say," began Mr. Geoghegan, but Mr. Sackell, turning to his brother Justice, conversed with him in an undertone. Mr. Geoghegan said no more to the Bar, and Mr. Sackell added briefly to Norwood, "That's all."

Mr. Dobbsleigh rose. "Your Worships, that may be all right from your point of view, but I ask you for permission to say this—Mr. Cherral has made publicly charges against my client and myself of a most serious nature, his attempt to prove them has been a ridiculous fiasco, but for all that Mr. Thridderley and I have no remedy against him, for his gross slander being made by Counsel at the Bar is not subject to the law of slander."—Mr. Dobbsleigh perhaps forgot that Norwood had not been appearing for a client.—"I demand that Mr. Cherral come out from behind the cowardly screen of professional privilege, and repeat outside the Court what he has said to-day, that my client and I may have our remedy. And I warn him that the whole charge he has made is nothing but a mare's nest. My client holds in the ordinary way of business an authority from Condon which I now produce. Under this document Mr. Thridderley has the fullest powers——"

"I don't know that we need go into that now, Mr. Dobbsleigh," interrupted Mr. Sackell. "My opinion is nobody'll listen to what Mr. Cherral's bin talkin' about, and if he can't see what a mess he's made of tryin' to prove his case, everyone else can. He treats some of the leadin' men of the town as if they were dirt, and tells others they're disgraces. What



he means by it all I don't know and what's more I don't care. Nobody'll listen to him. If he cares to repeat what he's said in here out in the street that's his look out——”

“But——” began Dobbsleigh.

“Never mind any more. The thing's finished with so far as this Bench is concerned,” declared Mr. Sackell angrily.

“Then, your Worships”—Mr. Dobbsleigh gave up attempting any further attempt at vindication—“I ask for an order for the amount, and costs.”

Mr. Sackell looked over the original summons handed up to him by Mr. Jessington. “We give an order,” he said, “in Mr. Thridderley's favour for thirty-two pounds eight shillings and sevenpence, with the proper costs.”

“Stamp two and six, and professional costs—I've been kept here the whole morning—say two guineas, total two four six, your Worships,” said Mr. Dobbsleigh.

“Yes, we'll give you that.”

“Order for thirty two pounds eight shillings and sevenpence with costs two pounds four and sixpence,” said Mr. Jessington, writing rapidly in the Register. “In default distress.”

Norwood, whose headache had increased till he was dizzy with the pain, left the Court by the solicitors' door without speaking.

## CHAPTER XLIII

WHEN Norwood sat down to tea that evening at half-past six, he felt no appetite, though he had eaten nothing since breakfast: his usual reserve had deepened; he sat at the table oblivious of some curious glances from Miss Limmering, indifferent to her mother's conversation, and soon retired to his bedroom. When the light began to fade he left the house.

“Is he going there again do you think, Minnie?” asked Mrs. Limmering, recalling a recent suggestion by Mrs. Malintop that Mr. Cherral was engaged to Miss Lily Frettle. “He was very quiet all tea time and hardly ate anything.”

“I don't know where he's going,” declared the daughter. “And what's more I don't care. But if I bothered my head about it I suppose I could guess.”

“I remember,” said Mrs. Limmering, seated in her favourite and reposeful armchair, and reminiscent after an excellent and appreciated meal, “the night your Pa proposed to me. He was just like that, hardly a word out of him. We'd been out for the evening together and at supper he never took a bite.”

Miss Minnie sniffed in disparagement of men in general, then, remembering that the particular man under discussion

was her deceased father, she added with aggressive penitence. "All right, Ma, I'm listening."

"She's a nice girl," continued Mrs. Limmering, her mind reverting to Miss Lily Frettle, "and she's always nicely dressed too."

Miss Minnie's sniff was here unmistakably critical and disparaging, but the placid mother proceeded, "And she's always smiling and got something to say for herself. Lize is a nice girl too, of course, but give me Lil for choice. Lize never looks half so nice. She doesn't seem to trouble about her clothes much either," said Mrs. Limmering, in mild surprise.

Miss Limmering stared at her mother, and gave abrupt utterance to the remark. "Not enough for two."

"What's that, Minnie? I wonder will Mr. Cherral marry her."

"He's got the whole place talking about her apparently."

"He's evidently smitten," continued the mother. "Look how he's been going there every night—and so quiet over it too. I never knew a thing about it. He never said a word to me."

"You needn't take all Mrs. Malintop says as gospel, Ma. How does she know he goes there every night?"

"Why, she said he did, Minnie, this afternoon," explained the mother.

Miss Limmering gave up that point as hopeless, but she declined to withdraw her attack altogether. "I don't believe he's been carrying on with Lil as much as Mrs. Malintop says, Ma, and I don't believe things are half as bad as she makes out either. I heard that about Mr. Sackell long ago, and it was quite different to what she told me. And I don't believe he was rude to Mr. Hoip either."

"Well, she said he was, Minnie, though I don't know why, really."

"Mr. Cherral's not that sort of man, Ma, he's a lah-de-dah gaby if you like, but he's not a man to be rude to anybody. He thinks too much of himself to be rude."

"Well, he certainly never goes on like that to me, I must say, Minnie. A more polite young man than Mr. Cherral you might look for before you'd find him. Perhaps he wasn't well when he spoke to Mr. Hoip. You know yesterday, when I said, 'You've got a headache, I can see, Mr. Cherral,' he said he had. Perhaps he had a bad head when——"

"Oh, well, Ma, if you will have it he insulted Mr. Hoip, he did then. I don't care. Even if he did, Mr. Hoip only got what he deserved, I'll be bound. He wants sitting on now and then, Mr. Hoip does."

"Oh, I don't know, Minnie—but about Mr. Cherral—do you think he'll marry her?"

"What's he going to live on if he marries her I don't know. If that silly vain little thing marries him, a nice time she'll have. Just like a man! Marry a girl because he wants her, without enough money to keep her, and she spends the rest of her life washing up and sewing on buttons for him."

"Oh, Minnie, what things you say! You're always so sharp on men. I'm afraid you'll never marry if they hear you talking like that. And I should like to see you settled, Minnie, you'd make a good wife to any man."

"That'll do, Ma," exclaimed the flushed and indignant Miss Minnie. "As if a man's only to snap his fingers for me and I'd come. I see myself crawling after any one of them!" asserted Miss Limmering, much wrought up. "No thank you. I've seen too much of them to trust a single one of 'em. Don't you talk like that again, Ma, because it puts my back up."

Norwood strode along the darkening road, spurred on by hot heart and burning mind. Soon the tiring body calmed the tumult within him, and without reasoning about it, but swayed by a necessity for human sympathy, he turned to the only quarter in Cooeville where, he believed, he could find it.

Miss Lily had long learnt his knock; she opened the door herself, candle in hand. "Poor Lize has a headache and we forgot to light the hall lamp. Come in. Auntie's in with Lize, but she'll be out directly."

The candle lit up the fair face with its flushed welcome, and turned to an encircling frame of golden light against the blackness of the unlit hall the rebellious tendrils of her hair. Something in Norwood's expression startled her: with delicious shyness she lowered her eyes.

"I must not stay long," said Norwood hoarsely. "But—but—the day has been a long one," he spoke without knowing what he said: the excitement and strain of the past hours, the lack of food, and of sleep, the continual headache, had almost destroyed his self-control. His dislike or contempt for everyone in Cooeville save Miss Lily, focussed that evening on her all his kindly and better feelings, and kindled to a dangerous heat that tender emotion, sweet, vague, purposeless, which had been his one solace in Cooeville.

"I must get the hall lamp," she murmured. They stood alone in the hall, the front door shut; Norwood, acting not upon conscious thought, but on the irresistible sweeping surge of emotion, suddenly found himself clasping the small rounded figure of Miss Lily to him and kissing the soft cheek now hot with blushes.

The candle fell upon the floor and went out, leaving them in darkness.

## CHAPTER XLIV

NEXT morning Norwood felt strangely apathetic, breakfast had no attraction for him, and at the office he made no attempt to read or indeed even to think, but sat in his chair inert and almost torpid as the hours went by.

For the last fortnight constant headache had oppressed him throughout the day, and the nights, spent in uneasy slumber, disturbed by horrible dreams, gave him no feeling of rest and refreshment: he blamed the continued drought for the state of his health: it was past the middle of April, but still the sun glared down fiercely from an unclouded sky.

For the last five or six days, Norwood, eating less and less, weak and in pain, had devoted all his energy, his will, his self-control, to keeping himself going: he declined to admit that he was ill. An idea had grown in his mind that to give way to sickness would be, in some indistinct but shameful fashion, surrendering to Cooeville, hated place, and to all its hated people; a morbid frenzy drove him on as wholesome strength steadily decayed; he would keep on, the office should be open during the proper hours, he himself would be in attendance there; nothing else mattered, money might be almost exhausted, clients—they were not wanted. In the physical and mental condition to which he was now reduced, the only idea that he could firmly grasp was not to surrender—to what he could not explain.

Next morning he remembered with relief that it was Friday. "Only one more day after this to live through somehow, and I can rest all Sunday." He felt wretched; his head throbbed, his limbs pained him with their weight and weariness, he pressed his aching back against his chair, and let time go by as he sat there conscious, but almost unthinking. He looked up at the noise of a footstep.

"Hullo!" said the strong and cheerful voice of Austerberry. "Lee's in a great state about you. Swears you're all that's bad and a bit over."

"What is that? I am quite indifferent."

Austerberry, a happy tempered man, and by no means touchy, smiled at Norwood's answer. "Lee'd put anyone's back up. He makes me tired quicker than any other man I've met. But you needn't work it off on me, you know." He blew through his pipe and explained. "Lee should have been born an old woman. He'd take afternoon tea I'll swear, if it only agreed with him, and he'd keep a cat but for the expense. Tell us when you feel better," he added.

"I have said all I intend to say."

Austerberry looked up in surprise. Norwood's unvarying

stiffness of manner he had, in talking with others, put down to a defective upbringing. "Don't blame him for it. He doesn't mean it." Mr. Austerberry would say. But apparently just now Cherral really felt disinclined to talk about it. He hastened to put matters right. "I thought you'd enjoy telling me. By Jove, if I'd kicked Lee out of my shop I'd enjoy talking about it nearly as much as doing it, but if you don't want to, of course you don't. Don't you smoke?" he added, blowing out a blue-grey cloud luxuriously.

"No. I do not. And if I did I should not smoke in my office."

Mr. Austerberry rose suddenly. "Look here, if you object to my smoking here I wish you'd said so. Why the devil didn't you? So long for the present."

Norwood made no reply.

"Rum chap," thought Mr. Austerberry, as he walked along the street. "He'd give all hell a chill if he fell into it. What does he mean by it? What rotten luck to be born like that!"

It was an effort for Norwood to reach Mrs. Limmering's when the time came to go home. He declined to come to tea, and lay on his bed throughout the night without undressing. Mrs. Limmering had been much distressed by his looks and his poor performance at the tea-table for the past fortnight, but neither she nor her daughter realized how serious his self-starvation had been, for neither of them sat down to breakfast with him, and when, as of late, he had not come back to the one o'clock dinner, they took it for granted that he had dined at the hotel. Their enquiries concerning his health had been so curtly answered that finally they, attributing his ill looks to monetary worries, had forborne to question him further.

## CHAPTER XLV

NOTHING but dogged resolution got Norwood out of his bed next morning and took him to the office. His head had ceased to throb so violently, but a variable torpor clouded his mind, once or twice he heard his voice muttering some words, and wondered in a detached way what he was talking about. The walk to the office required sustained effort. He dropped into his chair and leant back thankfully, feeling that all he desired was to rest and to be let alone. But he was not to have his wish. Late in the morning, just as his mind cleared slightly and he felt better, a heavy footstep came through the outer office and some one knocked at the door.

"Come in."

Joe Dolomy opened the door, and glancing back to make

certain that the office boy had gone to lunch, pulled the door to behind him. His face was marked with smuts from his morning's work: he remained standing against the shut door.

"Yes?" said Norwood stiffly. "You may sit down."

Dolomy shook his head. "Not in your place," he answered heavily. "I couldn't do it." He spoke with no trace of intention to insult, but only as one explaining. He remained where he had first taken up his position, turning his soft felt hat about in his hands. "I don't quite know how to speak to you," he said slowly. "I don't know whether you're an honest man or—" he paused—"or something' I ought to throw out the room."

Norwood gazed at him in dull amazement.

"That's why I came down," continued young Dolomy, in the same heavy, level voice which a careless listener might have deemed expressionless. "I come down to find out if you're a man, or—or—the other thing."

Norwood used his new found strength and mental clearness to the full. "Tell me what you mean by these—these"—Norwood hesitated, then his eye noticed his visitor's working garb—"these insolent threats," he concluded harshly.

But Dolomy seemed to be impervious. "I only come here to find out the one thing, and I'll know it before I leave. But"—he appeared to be speaking more to himself than to Norwood—"I can't bring myself to speak her name."

"Her name!" It flashed into Norwood's mind that this young Dolomy was a proclaimed admirer of Miss Lily Frettle. Of course! How often had he found him at Miss Seamond's when he called himself, how often had the sulky and apparently speechless lout sat glowering in a corner! But now Norwood's conscience stirred: he saw his past conduct towards Miss Lily Frettle unroll before him; their first meeting; his easy contempt for her speech, manner, and behaviour; his unrealized admiration for her physical charms; her deepening influence over him; her—"but you know what I mean without my saying it," he heard Dolomy's voice continuing. Sudden anger surged up in Norwood's heart. What presumption of this fellow to intrude on his most private affairs. "Oblige me by being intelligible or else leave the room."

"I was there last Wednesday night," Dolomy went on, "and she didn't come in all the evening, nor Thursday night neither. But"—he suddenly grasped his hat viciously, "I was there last night too, and—and"—his voice sank—"I heard her crying." He looked Norwood squarely in the face. "I want to know what you're going to do."

"You impertinent fellow!" said Norwood, struggling to clear his mind and regain his feeling of complete contempt for the speaker. But reproof was wasted on Dolomy. It was

as though he were going over the various workings of his mind that had led up to this visit to Norwood, and nothing could turn him aside. Without noticing Norwood's remark, save to wait till he finished, Dolomy took up the tale again. "I'm not smart, but I could guess what was wrong with her. Before you came she never cried. Before you came to her she was always different to me. Before you came to her she never spoke so sharp to me as she has done, no, nor as Lize did last night. So it's you that turned her against me, though I could stand that, and it's you that makes her speak so sharp to me, though I could stand that too, but it's you that's making her miserable and I won't stand that. No," said Dolomy, passion for the first time rising in his voice, "No, by God, I won't stand that."

"You are an insolent fellow," repeated Norwood feebly.

"Till I find out just what she wants," said Dolomy, recovering his self-control, "I won't do nothin' to you. I came here to tell you I knew about her, and to see if you'd meet me like a man. I thought you might be a man," added Dolomy, almost wistfully, "but," his tone hardened, "seein' what you are, I'll wait till she tells me what to do."

"Leave this office at once."

Dolomy took no heed of him. "You thought you could play fast and loose with her because she'd no father or brother to look after her. But you forgot me. I'll be a brother to her."

"Do you hear what I say?" demanded Norwood, passionate shame and anger almost smothering him. "Leave me. Leave me."

"I might 'a guessed the sort er thing you were without coming here to-day to find out," continued Dolomy. "But I wanted to be sure and I hoped—I hoped—but now I'm sure." He paused. "That's all I think." He considered things slowly. "Yes, I think that's all. So now you know." He looked up at Norwood.

Norwood haughtily stared at him, but he could not stare him down. Norwood's own eyes wavered and fell. He said nothing.

Young Dolomy turned and tramped heavily out of the office. And Norwood remained in his room to think: he declared to himself that he was a dishonoured man, and that the one way of escape from dishonour was by death; his thoughts turned darkly to suicide; his end would grieve no one, perhaps rather they would be glad; Dobbsleigh would smile, Doctor Rafe would make a joke over it, and Thriggerley would be relieved. And life was intolerable. But would it seem to Cooeville that he, an Englishman, had shown the white feather? Should Cooeville triumph over him? Never! He would fight to the last. Never would he surrender

to these Colonials, these—these half-breeds, these mongrels. He sat with his former stupor mastering him again. It was late in the day when he came to himself with a start; he looked at his watch, it was four o'clock. He decided to go back to his lodgings an hour earlier than usual while he felt fit to walk. He would turn into bed at once; to-morrow would be Sunday, he could have a thorough rest before Monday, and the office once more.

## CHAPTER XLVI

"PLEASE, Doctor," said the small girl at Mrs. Bowyer's front door early on Monday morning, "Mrs. Limmering says she wants you."

The little messenger, who had a portion of her unfinished breakfast in her hand, gazed with rounded eyes at Doctor Rafe in his dressing-gown, wondering if he always slept in that funny nightie with the pretty tassels tied at the waist.

"Who's sick there?" asked Rafe.

"Please, Doctor, I don't know. She sent in to us for some one to bring you, so—so I came, Doctor."

"All right. Is she in a hurry?"

"Please, Doctor, she said she wanted you at once."

"All right, Sis, tell her I'll be there in a shake. I mean I'll come up at once." Doctor Rafe, who had retired to bed that night at 4 a.m. owing to a professional attendance connected with one of the usual domestic events, grunted with disgust several times as he hastily dressed, and, thinking of Mrs. Limmering's supposed illness, gave a prophetic diagnosis with the appropriate etiology. "Bilious attack. Too much cake."

"It's not Ma," said Miss Limmering, in answer to Doctor Rafe's query. "It's Mr. Cherral. We might have known he'd be sick the way he's been going on."

Rafe found Norwood in bed, and for a minute studied the flushed face, the bright eyes, the alarming restlessness, the dry lips muttering incoherently.

"Pulse?" said Rafe to himself. "Ah, 120. Hum! Dirotic. Temperature?" he waited. "100. Hum. Respiration? Tongue? Ah. Nice tongue you've got, my friend." He considered. "It must be—and yet how can it—unless he's been ill for a week or more and fighting against it. And why delirium so early? Don't want nervous complications, thanks. Ah!—if it is, and he's been playing the fool for the last fortnight, what about the rash?" With unexpected tenderness and dexterity he bared Norwood's body. One glance and a touch was enough. Covering up



Norwood gently he stepped back and stood for a minute with his hands in his pockets gazing at his new patient and, putting together the ascertained facts, he gave in one word a characteristic diagnosis. "Damn," said Doctor Rafe.

Thereafter, in addition to his professional round, he spent a busy morning on Norwood's affairs; a somewhat lengthy interview with Mrs. Limmering and her daughter, another one with Mr. Allingham, a call at Norwood's office, another call on the local nurse, a visit to the chemist's, then Doctor Rafe strolled slowly up the street, his hat reprehensibly over his eyes, his hands reprehensibly in his pockets, deep in thought.

"Now then!" he said gruffly, as he ran into someone. "Look where you're going. Hullo, Railthorpe. Where are you off to?"

"I have to go to Mr. Thriggerley's for some papers he left at home. Are you going that way?"

Rafe made no answer but tramped along beside his friend in silence. Railthorpe recognized his mood, and afforded him the consolation of companionship without the intrusion of speech. Rafe, at last rousing himself out of his thoughts, broke the silence by swearing heartily.

"What's the matter, now, Rafe? Anything wrong?"

"If there's one thing I can't stand it's losing a patient. And I think I'm going to do it." And Rafe swore again.

"Has—has someone left you for Doctor Bettensedge?" asked Railthorpe, feeling a delicacy in questioning, yet anxious to show sympathy.

"You're not generally such a thick-head," replied the courteous Rafe. "No, anyone can leave me if they like, and be damn to them. What I mean is to have a patient slip through my fingers; die, dammit. That's what I don't like." Doctor Rafe was stirred by his thoughts and by the presence of his most trusted friend to a mood of unusual expansion. "I can't stand it. I don't care who it is."

"Is it—could—no"—Railthorpe began, hesitated, and broke off.

"Oh, you needn't be too polite to ask about it," said Rafe irritably. "You won't go bleating about it all over the town. No one knows yet. It's your friend, Mr. Cherral. You never saw such a case in your life. Typhoid. He's had it for I don't know how long, and he's been fighting against it. The worst damn thing he could do, lord knows what mischief's done by his not giving in sooner. There's high fever, exhausted strength, and, to cap all, nervous symptoms I don't like. They're deadly damned things. It's about the nastiest start for a typhoid you could have. It's not exactly the delirium that frightens me, it's the style of it. And other little things warn me too."

"That poor fellow!" said Railthorpe. "What he must have endured, Rafe, and without a complaint. He's been suffering for days and days, and quite alone."

"Why should you pity him?" asked Rafe bluntly. "He's never done anything for you, except snub you whenever he condescended to speak to you."

Railthorpe flushed. "We needn't remember those things now, Rafe."

"Why needn't we?" Rafe believed in no one abusing Railthorpe except himself. "You must have got a proper dressing down before that Court case. You looked sick enough just after you'd seen him anyhow. Like his damn cheek, I suppose he called you a Colonial or something worse—if he thinks anything could be worse—and ordered you to stand by with your hat off whenever you saw him."

"Never mind raking about for grievances."

"You know he treated you as if you were a bounder," insisted Rafe, in raised tones. "If you want my views I think he's a fool and a snob."

"He deserves praise," declared Railthorpe stoutly, his face reflected his feelings as he added, "How many can meet ill fortune bravely? And look at him. What he suffered before we knew him, we can't say, but he came down from wealth to poverty, and here he's endured business-starvation——"

"He can't expect clients to crowd to his office if he kicks out the first few who come to him."

Railthorpe passed this by as unworthy. "He's suffered loneliness. Solitude is a fearful thing, Rafe——"

"You couldn't ask him to associate with mere Colonials."

—"And to crown all he's been fighting disease, and never a cry. Rafe, don't go on sneering at him, it's not fair to yourself."

"Have it your own way then," growled Rafe, who felt better for having blown off steam. Norwood's behaviour to Railthorpe, and the fact that Railthorpe never complained of it, were two matters over which he soon grew hot. "I don't pretend to admire the fellow, but," he added abandoning the personal for the professional view, "I'm called in to attend him, and, by Jove, if I can save him, I will."

"Now that's more like you, Rafe. But it is such a bad attack?"

"The attack's bad enough, but the other things are worse. He's not a fellow of great stamina, he's not got the best chest in the world either, he's run his strength down to nothing, and what you were fluting about so eloquently"—Doctor Rafe's sarcasm was apt to be of the heavy variety—"probably depressed bodily health as well as mental. Then I'm not called in till it's pretty well too late, and then on top of all"

—Rafe's voice rose as he recited his list of troubles—" here's the question of how to shift him."

" But why do you want to shift him ? "

Rafe pulled up and glared at his friend. " Look here, young fellow, isn't it about time you gave up your habit of asking silly damn questions ? "

Railthorpe laughed, took Rafe by the arm, and propelled him forward. " It shan't be asked any naughty questions then," he said soothingly. " It shall tell its own story in its own little way."

Rafe's irritation gave way to Railthorpe's pleasantness. " Well, the shifting is the great trouble, Railthorpe. Cherral shouldn't be lifted from the bed he's lying on, and that's a fact. If we carry him to the train and take him to the Werimac hospital—well, we might as well carry him to the cemetery. Save time."

" Won't Mrs. Limmering allow him to stay ? "

" Don't know. Haven't asked her. Daresay she would."

For some reasons Rafe showed signs of sulking at this question. Railthorpe discreetly said nothing. " It's like this," began Rafe at last, " Cherral's prospects don't depend on what I can do, typhoid is one of those diseases where all the doctor can do is damn little. We're helpless sometimes. And I'm helpless now. And I don't like it. The nursing's everything. And he must have two nurses, he'll need constant watching, night as well as day. His case may be a long and costly one, and—here's the trouble, Railthorpe—he's practically stone-broke. It took me nearly an hour's jawing to get that out of Allingham. So he must go to the hospital. That's the only chance for him. And to carry him there spoils his chance. There's a nice damn deadlock for you!" And Doctor Rafe, encountering a bunch of weed thrown into the street from the neighbouring garden, kicked it viciously.

" Is it just a question of money? Would he be as safe in other ways at Mrs. Limmering's as at the Hospital? "

" Pretty well, better in some things, worse in others."

" And you could get good nurses ? "

" Fetch 'em with a wire."

" And how much would everything cost ? "

" How do I know ? " demanded Rafe loudly. " Anything from a tenner if he goes out to-night, to over a hundred pounds if he makes a long case of it—nurses' fares, and nurses' fees, their board and lodging, and his own—Oh, don't make me add it all up again."

" A hundred pounds! Oh, Rafe!" Railthorpe sighed. " No, I couldn't think of it. I could find about ten though."

" All very fine," grumbled Rafe. " Do you think I'd let you be such a fool ? "

"Rafe, you know you dislike him, you and he have been almost enemies from the start, and now—oh, Rafe, what a noble act it would be for you to forgive his rudeness and save his life in return!" Railthorpe, easily stirred to admiration of any virtue, flushed with enthusiasm and laid a hand on Rafe's arm. "And they say Romance is dead!"

"You blazing young fool!" burst out Doctor Rafe angrily. "That's Romance, is it? Take up a job like this, and after two months' work get an undertaker's account, and a letter from the Bank to pay up my overdraft."

"There would be no undertaker's account," answered Railthorpe softly, "but a really glorious document instead."

"Oh, beg pardon," said Rafe bitterly. "I didn't know you'd arranged matters with the Almighty. And what's this superior document you're talking about? Some unknown friend of Cherral's sending me a fat cheque, I suppose."

"No," answered Railthorpe, "it's the record of a noble deed."

"Well I'm damned!" said Doctor Rafe feebly, and leant helplessly against the neighbouring fence for support.

"No, you're blessed. Your profession gives you the skill, and your means give you the power, and your own good heart," Railthorpe touched his friend's arm, "gives you the inward prompting. Rafe, when you do this, you remind me of a saint."

"Thank God I'm no damn saint," broke out Rafe violently, with an extraordinary confusion of theological terms. The sentence tickled Railthorpe's ear, always quick for verbal felicities and peculiarities; he burst out laughing.

"Go to the devil," exclaimed Rafe irascibly. "Here's Thriggerley's. In with you, off with you." And shoving Railthorpe through the gate, Doctor Rafe left him hastily.

As he came into the main street again, Mr. Sol Lee, turning from a critical consideration of his display of drapery, bade him "Good morning." Rafe nodded and was continuing his way. "Hold on, Doctor, pity you're not a married man. Here, look at that!" and Lee waved his hand at the results of his window dressing.

"Well, what about it?"

Mr. Lee observed Doctor Rafe's absence of enthusiasm with regret and annoyance. "You're no artist, Doctor, I can tell you that."

"I'll tell you what you are if you like," suggested Doctor Rafe.

"Never mind that," said Mr. Lee hastily, and he turned to the real subject of his interview—"Oh, Doctor, by the way, any news?"

"Nothing to speak of."

"Oh, no! Of course not!" Mr. Lee screwed up his face

derisively. "As if I didn't know all about it. I heard that Thriggerley said he'd drive him out of Cooeville, and though I didn't say anything—I don't go about bragging of all the things I'm going to do—still I took care to act as I thought fit."

"What's all this about?" asked Rafe with a yawn.

"You can play that game on Thriggerley and others, but it won't do with me. I know your friend Mr. Cherral has bolted—though I didn't know you were a friend of his. Thank goodness he hasn't run up an account with me. I wonder how many weeks' board he's let Mrs. Limmering in for."

"So he's bolted, has he?" asked Rafe.

"You can bet your life on that—but you can't come it over me, Doctor. You know all about it. Who closed up his office a couple of hours ago and gave his office boy the sack, and tipped him half a crown over and above the week's notice—just wasting whatever money Cherral left with you to square up things as far as you could."

"So it's the boy who's let you into it, Lee?"

"Never you mind," answered Mr. Lee darkly. "When a man behaves to me like that Cherral, you'll find he won't get on, and——"

"Here's your friend Thriggerley," interrupted Doctor Rafe.

Mr. Lee wheeled round sharply. "He's no friend of mine; still, he'll be glad to hear about this."

"And you'll be glad to tell it," suggested Rafe.

"Good morning, Mr. Thriggerley," said Lee. "I believe you said Cherral wouldn't stay long in the town, eh?"

Mr. Thriggerley, the good business man, regarded Mr. Lee, another man of commercial instincts, with open immobility and with secret mistrust. Their conversations of late years had been merely those of necessity, conducted, so to speak, with finger on trigger. "Mr. Cherral?" he inquired.

"He's bolted all right," observed Mr. Lee, in the careless tone which some adopt for imparting startling matters. "With me and you against him he couldn't last long."

Mr. Thriggerley's expression showed that Lee's information was news to him and good news too. "So he's cut and run for it, has he? Well, he brought it on himself. When a man doesn't know how to behave, especially to his betters, he's bound to have a fall. Did you hear he'd left the town, Doctor?"

"Lee was telling me something about it," answered Rafe casually.

Mr. Lee looked away to conceal a smile.

"His office is shut this morning," observed Mr. Thriggerley? "I noticed that a while ago."

"Did you," said Rafe.

Mr. Lee enjoyed greatly, but of necessity privately, this conversation between his two companions.

"Well," remarked Mr. Thridderley, "it's what I said would happen, and it has happened."

"Looks like it," admitted Rafe.

"Cherral always was a fool," declared Mr. Lee, "though some people couldn't see it"—he glanced at Rafe—"but now everybody'll see that Mr. Norwood Cherral, the high and mighty solicitor, that no one was good enough to talk to, is no better than any other insolvent runaway. He's down and he's done, and a good job too. That's what I say."

"Yes," admitted Doctor Rafe, "I suppose that's what you would say."

"Well, I shan't miss him," said Mr. Thridderley, "and I don't think anyone else will. He hadn't a friend in the place"—Doctor Rafe yawned—"if he hadn't run away from the town I daresay he'd have been chased out. Do you hear me, Doctor?"

"Every word," said Rafe. He yawned again, then pursued his course up the street. "Cherral may be a fool, as those two miserable squirts remark," thought Doctor Rafe, "but he gave Thridderley a fine dressing down in public. And as for Lee, Cherral must either have charged him cash in advance, or else kicked him off the office mat. Nothing else could make that little fusser so vicious. I should say Cherral insisted on cash. How they enjoy the glad news that Cherral's run away! How they'll bite when they find out the truth!"

It was nearly three o'clock before Doctor Rafe was free to pay one of his frequent calls at Goff's office.

"Are you there, Goff? Right. Is this chair clean? You and your machine oil spoilt a pair of my pants once. Ah"—Rafe sat down and tilted the chair back at a comfortable angle—"I've had a busy time, Goff. Been about at all this morning?"

"No, I've been tied up here."

"Well, I'll tell you the news. Heard about Cherral?"

"No, what's he done now?"

"I wish I knew myself." And Rafe, thoroughly enjoying his gossip, retailed the various happenings of the day so far as they concerned his new patient, including the conversation with Lee and Thridderley. When he came to speak of the meeting with Railthorpe, which he kept till the last, the strength of his feelings apparently forbade lounging back, he sat up and thumped the table. "You needn't believe it unless you like, Goff," he declared in great indignation, "but what do you think Railthorpe had the nerve to suggest?"

Goff listened without interruption, while Rafe, breaking

off now and then to express his private views on Railthorpe, on his doubtful sanity, and on his undoubted cheek, explained his young friend's suggestion.

"I won't brush the bloom off the fruit," said Goff, "by pointing out that no doubt the ten pounds he mentioned is at your service. No, I'd rather look at his idea in its simple beauty and naked artlessness."

"That's one way of calling him a damn fool," said Rafe scornfully.

Goff looked at his visitor with humorous pity. "The dominant feature about your character," he remarked, "is a tender subtilty of thought and expression."

Doctor Rafe appeared to think a grunt sufficient reply to this.

"A case of cash versus conscience, eh? By Jove, what a headline! And what are you going to do, Rafe?"

"What's it got to do with you?" growled Rafe.

"Merely this, my dear Chesterfield, all the expenses you speak of will only be a loss if Cherral dies."

"Well?"

"I second Railthorpe's motion. As it's a case of life or death we mustn't hesitate. I'll guarantee you say half the loss if he dies, if he lives he'll pay us back, you can swear to that. Let Cherral stay at Mrs. Limmering's, and do you get the nurses at once. Would you like a cheque on account now?"

Doctor Rafe, falsely termed Chesterfield, rose up with a bang. "You can keep your infernal cheque. And your suggestion. And your advice too."

Goff jumped up in great excitement. "What's come over you, Rafe? Of course I'll do it. I'll write a cheque now."

"I won't take your cheque," asserted Rafe sullenly.

"Ye needn't take it then. Ye can get it any time. But wire for the nurses at once."

"No, I won't."

"Rafe! Would you kill the man? Is it money's the trouble? Rafe, I thought more of you."

Rafe scowled, and remained silent.

"It'll not be over a hundred?" asked Goff excitedly.

"It's a big sum."

Goff looked troubled for a moment. "No, not when it saves a life. Rafe, I'll go bail for the full amount. I'd give you the full cheque now if I'd that amount to my credit."

Still Rafe said nothing.

"I don't understand you, Doctor Rafe, at all. You'll oblige me by attending to Mr. Cherral at my expense. D'ye hear me? And ye'll spare no expense either."

Rafe resumed his chair and tilted it back to its former comfortable angle. "No, I won't."

Goff moved about the room in great anger. "Ye will. Ye must——"

"Railthorpe and you can go to blazes," interrupted Rafe, red in the face with some barely repressed emotion. He tried vainly to suppress a grin, then, giving up his efforts at self-repression as hopeless, he shouted with laughter, "Drew you that time, Goff. I'm running Cherral's case on my own. I wired for nurses this morning."

## CHAPTER XLVII

"MOTHER," said Mr. Wemby at tea that evening, "perhaps I oughtn't to tell you this"—he wrinkled his brow anxiously as he considered the ethics of his action—"do you know of anyone getting the fever?"

Mrs. Wemby paused in her ministrations to run over the list of invalids known to her, Miss Annie assisting.

"No," said Mrs. Wemby at last, "Mr. Cunder's new clerk got it almost as soon as he came here, what was his name, Annie? Mr. Cunder told us——"

"No, it can't be him. He was sent down to the Hospital so it can't be him, because"—Mr. Wemby wrinkled his face up again—"because—well Mother—Annie, you mustn't speak of this—Doctor Rafe sent a telegram this morning to Melbourne for two nurses. Two nurses, to come at once—Doctor Rafe asked me to send the wire away at once. The telegram said it was typhoid."

"Didn't the Doctor say who the nurses were for, Pa?" asked Miss Wemby, while her mother still cast about in her mind as to the identity of the unknown sick one.

"Well, Annie, when I was checking the telegram and telling the Doctor I'd send it away at once I—ah—in fact, I said, 'Doctor, all telegrams handed into me are confidential and mustn't be mentioned to anyone'—remember that, Annie—and I asked him who was sick, and said I wouldn't mention it, and the Doctor—you know his way, Mother, he just said, 'Well, *don't* mention it,' and walked out. He forgot to tell me who it was. Do you know," Mr. Wemby became tangled in thought and extricated himself with difficulty, "I think you can always tell with the Doctor when one of his cases is going wrong"—Mr. Wemby was evidently suffering from his recent interview—"he—he grows quite peculiar, doesn't answer you and is very—very short. But it's only because he's thinking hard," wound up Mr. Wemby, loyally.

"Do you mean short-tempered, Pa?"

Mr. Wemby rubbed the back of his neck. "No, not what you might call short-tempered, though——"

"Well, he may be a bit grumpy now and then, Pa, but



he's a dear all the same," asserted Miss Annie, "and he can be very kind you know. The time I nearly broke my ankle at the tennis court, it hurt dreadfully and all the others were trying to help me to stand up, and when the Doctor came he was so cross to them all. But not to me, he was awfully nice to me, and when the lorry came round to bring me home the Doctor carried me over to it all by himself, and so gently too. And when poor Mr. Tinner, who was trying to help, got in the road and nearly tripped him up—Oh, Pa, you should have heard the Doctor swear; oh, it was awful. With all the girls there too, but he didn't care a bit—oh—And yet it sounded nice too somehow, as though he ought to swear."

"Why, Annie!" exclaimed Mrs. Wemby. "And you a Sunday School teacher——"

"I can't help it, Ma. It sounded just right then somehow. And the way the Doctor was carrying me, my head was near his shoulder and the ankle was hurting dreadfully and yet I wanted to laugh when he was talking to Mr. Tinner, so I just turned my head round and hid my face on his shoulder. It's a nice shoulder to rest on," continued the shamelessly affectionate Annie, "and I wished he had to carry me all the way home instead of just to the lorry."

Mr. Wemby beamed happily upon his daughter, and she, observing his gaze, leant against him. "Pa's got a nice shoulder too. Don't you think so, Ma?"

"Why, Annie, how you talk, resting on young men's shoulders, and your father's, too, when you hurt your ankle, and a fine fright you gave me when the lorry came up to the door and the Doctor on it and whistling; he whistles very nicely and hymn tunes, too——"

"Do you ever swear, Pa?" interrupted Miss Annie.

"Well—er—Annie, I'm afraid——"

"Yes, indeed, your father did sometimes, Annie. I remember, soon after we were married, before we came here we were living at Fitzroy, it wasn't a nice house we had, and the people near us weren't nice either, and one day, just as your father came home to tea, a man at the back door, I think he was a tramp, or intoxicated, or something like that, was very rude to me, and I wasn't very well at the time, and I was frightened, and when I heard your father coming down the passage, oh, I was so glad, and I began to cry, and he found me crying, and the man was running away to the back gate, and really—I was just like you, Annie; I suppose you get it from me—I didn't mind what your father said a bit, though really, when I came to think it over afterwards, and the poor tramp, I'm afraid you hurt him too, father—fancy knocking him down twice, Annie! and such words all the time—Oh, quick! Pat your father's back, Annie!" Poor Mr. Wemby, overcame

with modest confusion, had choked explosively over his cup of tea.

"Oh, you brave Pa!" said the admiring daughter, after attention to the purple-faced Wemby's broad back had restored him. "He might have had a knife and killed you! In front of poor Ma, too!"

Mr. Wemby, breathing heavily, passed his cup for more tea.

## CHAPTER XLVIII

TYPHOID fever does not, like some illnesses, run a well-marked course, with or without a crisis, after which, should the patient survive it, improvement is rapid and recovery reasonably certain; this evil disease can linger on indefinitely till the patient dies. Unless proper precautions are taken it is highly infectious; with it there can be much pain, and there must always be danger. In severe cases, after reaching its height it retires slowly and treacherously, laying snares, ambushes and deadly surprises, enlisting to its aid other diseases; often dealing the patient, just as he appeared to be safe at last, a fatal stab, and even if finally driven defeated from the field, it oftentimes inflicts in its flight a life-long injury.

Doctor Rafe's habit of reticence in professional matters was well known and well liked. Railthorpe, however, who neither repeated matters confided to him, nor hinted that he knew of them, afforded the safety-valve of speech to Doctor Rafe in such matters as he felt justified in mentioning. Norwood's case was one of these, and to the eager Railthorpe the troubled physician opened his heart in words.

"It'll be a fight," said Rafe, a week after he had been called in. "If it were a mild or even an average case he'd be starting on the up grade now. Third week."

"And is there no sign of that yet?"

Rafe laughed grimly. "When the first time you see your patient you find that rotten, low, muttering delirium, you know you're in for a big trouble. In any typhoid case there's a risk of heart trouble in the third or fourth week. With Cherral——" Doctor Rafe shrugged his shoulders.

After this Railthorpe called to see Rafe at Mrs. Bowyer's regularly every evening just after ten. On some days he got but scant reward, for Rafe was troubled, silent and irritable, but one night he opened out, and over Railthorpe were poured the accumulated fears and annoyances.

"What the deuce are you worrying me for? Eh? Do you think if I had good news I'd bottle it up? Any change? Of course there's a change and a damn bad one. Bah!" Doctor Rafe snorted several times and cooled off as suddenly

as he had grown enraged. "I said there was a change, didn't I? Well, it's not exactly a change, it's just something I knew all along was coming—he's well into the fourth week—and now it's come. He can't grow worse and not go under, and he can't last long as he is."

Rafe whistled for a few minutes, mopped his face and neck, and finally pulled off his tie and collar. "This damn weather is enough to choke one"—Rafe spoke irritably—"Nice weather for a sick man. Is it ever going to rain again?"

"The nights stimulate or irritate more than invite to slumber, don't they?" said Railthorpe.

"Invite to slumber?" demanded Rafe violently. "What the devil are you driving at? If you mean the night's too damned hot to let a man sleep, why can't you say so? Eh? Invite to slumber! Oh——," Doctor Rafe's indignation overcame him.

"I—I beg pardon," stammered Railthorpe, greatly abashed. "I'm afraid," he added, tactlessly guessing at a cause from an effect, "you didn't have a good sleep last night."

"No chance"—Doctor Rafe, unobservant of his friend's deduction was mollified—"Up with Cherral till two, and there at six this morning. And I'll have to put in to-night there."

"Do you mean sit up with him all night? Isn't that the nurse's work?"

"If he doesn't stop going down-hill precious quickly he'll never climb back. When I call there to-night I'll decide whether to sit it out or not." Rafe yawned as he spoke.

"You must feel the strain." Railthorpe's sympathy was always easily roused.

"I can have a snooze in an arm-chair beside him if I like, and the nurse can wake me if she notices anything. Here, get out of this, time you were in bed. Home with you. Go on." And Rafe led his companion to the gate and thrust him forth.

"Good-night," said Railthorpe cheerily.

"Get out of this, damn you," replied Doctor Rafe with the utmost heartiness.

As Rafe came up the street from Mrs. Limmering's late next afternoon, Mr. Allingham came out of his private front door (as distinguished from the Bank front door), slammed it behind him; tested whether it had shut properly, twice; came through the little garden gate; shut it; tested whether its latch had caught, twice; felt that his bunch of keys was safe in his pocket; pulled it out and made certain that three special keys were on the ring, re-pocketed the bunch, felt his key pocket again to make sure the bunch was there, looked at

his watch, and, all things being done thoroughly and in order, announced himself ready for his walk. He sighted Rafe and joined him. "Going up the street, Doctor? I'll come with you. I always take a constitutional just before tea if I can find the time. You get enough running about without it. Lucky man, aren't you?"

"Sometimes."

"A constitutional every day helps to keep the liver in order," announced Mr. Allingham. "You don't need to be a doctor to know that. I find it a very good thing. The long hours of business—for the Bank's business is growing, always growing, Doctor, you'll be glad to hear—confined to the Manager's room all day, Doctor, and every evening there are returns to be attended to or securities to consider—hard work, Doctor, quite out of your line—I find all these things play up with a man's liver. Are you ever troubled by the liver, Doctor?"

"Other people's," answered Rafe curtly.

Mr. Allingham missed the point. "Yes. Of course. Oh, ah, by the way, Doctor, I'm very glad I met you. I meant to come up to see you. A matter of business I was thinking over, a most important matter, Doctor, drove it out of my head. How's Mr. Cherral?"

"About the same."

"Ah, I'm sorry to hear it. I hoped he might be improving. It was about him I was coming to see you. I think you ought to know about it, Doctor. It's a most extraordinary thing. I wish I'd known about it before."

"What's the matter now?" demanded Rafe, marked symptoms of restiveness beginning to appear.

"I can't give you the exact particulars of how Mr. Cherral's name came up in business correspondence with the Melbourne office—Bank confidences must be kept at all costs, Doctor——"

"Well, keep them," snapped Rafe.

—"But," continued the undisturbed Allingham, "in consequence of his name being mentioned, one of the men at the Melbourne office wrote me a semi-private letter about our mutual friend. Mr. Cherral keeps too quiet about himself altogether, Doctor. I've complained of that before."

"You have."

"Ah, well, it's true. Mr. Cherral does himself wrong, he's been hiding his light under a bushel. In this letter I'm speaking about, Doctor, I'm at liberty to tell anyone this——"

"If they care to listen," growled Rafe.

"Eh? What's that, Doctor? Well, do you know I find, that is I'm told, that Mr. Cherral's father had invested a great deal of money in Bank shares and other securities, and when the crash came two years ago—a tremendous crash it was

too, Doctor, but it didn't shake the Bank of New South Wales—heavy calls took all he had and more, and then he died, broken-hearted I should say, leaving his estate insolvent."

"Look here, suppose the fellow's father was insolvent, do you think you ought to spread the news? He's not the only one who fell into the soup that year, or last year for that matter."

Mr. Allingham gave a brief, entirely self-satisfied laugh. "Ha, ha, Doctor, you're quite right. But you're wrong too, I said Mr. Cherral's father died leaving his estate insolvent, I didn't say he *went* insolvent, and I'm not spreading bad news, a thing I'd never do about a constituent. Trust me for that, Doctor. But good news. Ha, ha."

"All right, it's your concern—and your customer's."

"Constituent, Doctor, constituent. When you or anyone else, when Mr. Cherral for instance, goes to Mr. Thridderley's shop——"

"He's likely to," grunted Rafe.

—"and buys something, he's Mr. Thridderley's customer, but when he comes to me and opens his account here, he is a constituent of the Bank, of the Bank of New South Wales. He's *my* constituent, in fact."

"Sorry for him."

"Ha, ha, Doctor, you will have your joke. But wait a minute, Doctor, here's the cream of the thing—when Mr. Cherral died—old Mr. Cherral, Doctor—our man as Executor of his father's will, should have declared his father's estate insolvent and let it pay so much in the pound. But—hold on, Doctor," as Rafe interrupted—"here's the thing, Doctor, he didn't; his own private fortune, a fine solid amount, was intact, it hadn't been invested in Victoria—English securities, Doctor—he could have let his father's creditors go hang and lived in luxury himself, I'd have done it, Doctor, the creditors were only burst Banks and Companies, no good at all, they deserved being burst up, nobody would have been injured, but our man—a fine thing, Doctor—he hands over the whole of his private means, every penny, to his father's creditors. Now, Doctor, what do you think of that?"

Rafe growled something inaudible to his companion.

"Eh? What was that, Doctor? What do you think of him?"

"If you want to know, I think he's a quixotic damn fool," answered Rafe, concealing his real feelings.

"Ah, ha. You may say that, but it's a fine thing, a thing not many of us would do, eh?"

"Hope not."

"I wish I'd known all about this before," continued Allingham, "not that it would have altered the business

relations between Mr. Cherral and me, but—I wish I had known it, Doctor.”

“ Well, you know it now.”

“ Yes—if it’s not too late. But it was a fine thing, Doctor. That’s the sort of character we want here, that’s the sort of man who’s a credit to the Bank, Doctor. I don’t think the other men here have got one like him on their books? No, Doctor. When you want the best terms you must come to the Bank of New South Wales, when you want the best Bank of course you come to the same, and now, you see, when you want the best men you must come to us too. You see that, don’t you?”

“ Good-bye,” said Doctor Rafe, turning off abruptly.

## CHAPTER XLIX

THE clouded greyness of the hour before dawn at the end of autumn lay over Cooeville; through the ghostly haze that drowned the lower parts of the town, the steeples of the churches and the high roof of the court-house rose like dim unreal towers of romance from misty and veiling waters of oblivion.

A man walking with light and rapid step came out of the darkened main road, up the rising cross street, and halted before Mrs. Limmering’s gate; he glanced back at the town he had just left below him, and at the East yet barely touched with light, then he turned to gaze eagerly at one of the front windows, open at top and bottom, and bare of all curtains or blinds, through which shone a lighted lamp; he whistled a few notes softly, and waited.

Doctor Rafe tip-toed out of the front door and walked stiffly to the gate, he leant over it with relaxed muscles and hunched-up shoulders. “ He’s alive,” he said in answer to a hasty low-voiced enquiry. “ But I promise nothing.”

Railthorpe drew a long breath of relief. “ At least you’ve pulled him through the night.”

“ Put it that way if you like,” Rafe spoke wearily.

“ Have you had any sleep, old man?”

“ No chance.”

“ I wish I could help you, Rafe. I’d do anything for you.”

“ I know. I know. You can’t help. No one can.”

“ You must get a good long nap through the day sometime.”

“ I’ll see if I can. What sort of a night has it been? I’ve never thought about it. It must have been a brute.” He sniffed as he spoke. “ It’s hot and dusty now. And, by Jove!” he added with surprise, “ I’m wet through with perspiration.”

"It's been a horrible night, Rafe, close and still and muggy. No freshness in the air. I couldn't sleep for thinking of you and Mr. Cherral, and I've been out in the garden most of the time. There must be a change coming. See, there are clouds."

Rafe gazed at the faintly colouring East with haggard eyes. "You're quite knocked out, old man," Railthorpe was deeply moved. "Don't make yourself ill in trying to save another."

Rafe kept his gaze on the horizon; the four weeks that had passed since he first attended Norwood had been full of anxiety; the last two nights he had passed sitting alert at his patient's side; weakened in self-control by long vigil, and softened in mood by the quiet, the gloom, the solitude of the hour, Rafe felt the infection of his friend's emotion, and while his indignant intellect said—"Must be getting soft. Want of sleep. Rest and a tonic"—he felt his heart swell till he nearly choked; he fought for self-control behind his hard stare, and at last could say with all his old irritability as he adjusted his thick glasses, "Now then, off with you. Get to bed or I'll have you on my hands next."

At ten o'clock Rafe swallowed a hasty breakfast and made his way to the barber's for the freshening and improving shave; he noticed Mr. Thridderley and Mr. Lee at the corner ahead in angry converse, and the thought came to his mind that to knock those two heads together would brighten him even more than a shave. Mr. Thridderley, unaware that he was choosing an inopportune moment, called Rafe to a halt as he was passing.

"I don't quite know what to make of you, Doctor."

"All right," said Rafe.

"I've been waiting for you for the last month to come to me and explain yourself, but you don't seem to understand things. No, you certainly don't. I've been expecting you to apologize."

"You don't expect much, Thridderley."

Mr. Thridderley regarded Rafe with severity, faintly tinged with the suggestion that an immediate and proper request for pardon would meet with favourable consideration. Mr. Lee, on the contrary, feeling doubly strengthened by having such a just cause of complaint and such an ally, glared at Rafe with an expression of absolutely dare-devil bravery. Doctor Rafe leant against the verandah post, put his hands in his pockets and assumed his frequent and insulting expression of extreme boredom; he also yawned. Mr. Lee longed for a handful of hat pins to stick into him.

"It won't do, Doctor, and so I tell you," continued Mr. Thridderley. "You ought to know your own interests better than that."

Doctor Rafe yawned again. "Eh? What's that?" he asked.

This obliviousness of the fact that a most important person was addressing him acted upon the most important person even as a forced draught to the furnace of his wrath; while as for Mr. Lee, the internal pressure per square inch instantly increased to an alarming degree.

"It's not a thing to be treated off hand," resumed Mr. Thridderley. "I may say I don't like the way you're behaving about it."

"Behaving!" sneered Mr. Lee. "Is that what you call it?"

"Well, come on," said Doctor Rafe impatiently, "Out with it."

"It's just this, Doctor," answered Mr. Thridderley, anger beginning to take the place of dignity, "you told me and Mr. Lee that Cherral had run for it."

"When you'd that very instant left him," interrupted Mr. Lee, who had long since made inquiries. "A nice thing to do! Coming down the street and telling everybody lies——"

Doctor Rafe, by a strong effort, remained unaware of Mr. Lee's presence and remarks.

Mr. Thridderley took up once more his accusing and rebuking history. "It wouldn't take much to make me deal pretty sharply with a man who did a thing like that to me. I can understand some people trying to do me a dirty trick but——"

"Look here," said Doctor Rafe, abandoning his lounging and nonchalant air, and becoming alarmingly attentive, "do you say I did a dirty trick?"

"I say you did," declared Mr. Lee challengingly.

But Doctor Rafe was waiting for Mr. Thridderley's answer.

"Well, put it to yourself"—began that gentleman.

"I'll do nothing of the sort," asserted Doctor Rafe vigorously. "I ask you, do you say I did a dirty trick?"

Mr. Thridderley began to wonder if he would not have done better to let matters alone: he wished too that Lee were well out of hearing; Doctor Rafe had by no means the reputation of a man who would allow himself to be trampled on, and apparently at that moment he was in an irritable mood. "What did you want to tell me he had run away for? That," said Mr. Thridderley, finding his dignity again, "is not the sort of thing I can allow."

"I won't allow it either," asserted Mr. Lee. "And I say it was a dirty trick. A dirty trick," repeated Mr. Lee with relish.

Mr. Thridderley, observing that Doctor Rafe took no notice of this, felt that he had let the Doctor off too easily: if that miserable little shrimp Lee could talk like that quite



safely—"That's not the way to treat a man of my standing in the town, Doctor Rafe. It's not the way to treat me, I can assure you. It's not the sort of thing I'm accustomed to, and I won't allow it, Doctor Rafe, I won't allow it. If you don't know which side your bread's buttered, you'll have to learn it."

"It's time some people were taught," gibed Mr. Lee. "And," he added vauntingly, "we're the men to teach them."

"There's some one that'll be taught a pretty sharp lesson if he's not careful," threatened Mr. Thridderley.

Doctor Rafe's countenance became a rich crimson. "In the first place, Thridderley," he began, with obvious self-restraint, "I told you nothing about Mr. Cherral. Your friend Lee supplied the information. His dirty little mind invented the news, and your dirty little mind welcomed it."—Mr. Thridderley fell back a pace—"And," went on Doctor Rafe, commencing to let himself go, "if you expect me to put you right every time you and Lee make fools of yourselves, you can damn well go on expecting it. D'you think I've nothing to do but follow a pair of blasted, bleating jackals all over the town to see they don't get off the rails?"—the speaker was no purist in matter of metaphor—"And since you ask me for a little straight talk," continued Rafe, vigorously following up Mr. Thridderley as he retreated another pace, "I may as well tell you Lee and you are a well-matched pair. A couple of miserable yapping devils—bah—you make me sick. Get out of my road or I'll put the pair of you in the gutter." And Doctor Rafe brushed by the astounded magnate and the terror-stricken Lee with huge contempt.

## CHAPTER L

THOUGH the time of heat and dryness should, according to customary rule, have long been over, still the great drought lay upon the land; cruel Summer had conquered and destroyed the succeeding season, marching triumphantly on from week to week, subduing to his arid will the cracked and dusty earth.

That day had tried the patience of all; heavy masses of cloud filled the heavens from earliest light; the sun, although unseen, made his power felt the more: as the day grew older the clouds closed in, smothering the gasping earth; with night came no relief; the oppressed land seemed void of air; the heat weighed upon anxious life, a heavy palpable thing.

Early that evening Rafe cycled hastily to Mrs. Limmering's. "I expected your message, Nurse." He stood for some time at the bedside considering his patient; studying him as a

General watching the enemy, and calculating the forces against which he must do battle to the end.

Norwood, changed beyond possibility of recognition, lay on his back, well down in the bed, almost as though he had contracted and fallen together. The shaven head, the skeleton frame, the wasted face, no longer flushed, but dull, and dirtied in aspect from lack of a razor; the sunken, open, unseeing eyes; the unsteady lips, black, thin, dry, and cracked;—nothing met Doctor Rafe's eye to cheer him, but all that he saw spoke loudly of danger. Even as he stood there watching, Norwood's restless hands twitched, and he grasped with nervous picking movement at some object invisible to others. Rafe had seen this for days before; knowing from the first the type of case before him, as the disease developed and the expected symptoms unmasked themselves he had met them cheerfully; but now, as he stood there with weary body and strained nerves, and watched those hands proclaiming deadly mischief, his heart sank, chill dread overcame him; he sat down beside the bed, heavy-hearted, despondent, almost vanquished.

"He's very bad, Doctor," said the Nurse. Again Norwood's wrist twitched, again with jerky feeble movements he picked with his fingers. Suddenly the dogged fighting spirit swelled Rafe's heart, and ran tingling and flooding through him. With a few brief directions to the nurse he pulled his chair nearer to the bed and sat back; his eyes, his mind, his whole faculty upon his patient, oblivious of all else.

For some time past the signs of heart trouble, that Rafe knew must come if improvement delayed, had been manifest; the strength of that organ was giving out under the continued strain.

A long hour passed: the sultry oppression of the air was extreme; all the doors and windows in the house were open, yet Rafe felt it a labour to draw his breath, and perspiration dripped over his eyebrows on to his glasses.

Nine o'clock came without any change. The patient's pulse was a running one, almost uncountable. At eleven o'clock Miss Limmering gave a whispered message that there was plenty of hot water on the stove, and she and her mother were going to bed.

Mid-night passed; once more Rafe aided the labouring heart. The second hour of the new day arrived with the patient still alive, with the physician still sitting up in his chair with eyes intent upon his patient's face, and fingers lightly on his wrist at intervals; the nurse sitting in her place, or moving quietly to carry out with trained deftness Rafe's brief orders. In the lamp's well-directed light Rafe saw Norwood's face greyed by that dusky hue which, to the medical man, tells merely of a failing heart, but to the eyes of

others, less skilled, shows as the shadow of Death's wing, hovering over his victim, before, with cold hands, he stills the fluttering breath.

Again with all his art Rafe strove to rally the oppressed heart; but when once the Angel of Death expectantly enters the sick-room he may not be lightly driven forth; and throughout the small hours of that morning, Rafe at one side of the bed, and Death at the other, fought unceasingly through the long oppressive minutes for the prize of the young life that lay flickering between them.

At four o'clock Rafe heard Railthorpe's whistle at the gate, but dared not leave his patient.

The day dawned hot and still; it was all but six o'clock; suddenly there was a sound of wind in the air; the dust rose in clouds; with the passing of the first whirling gust, a wind blew from the north-west bringing with it the longed for coolness, and the smell of rain. The lamp flared up, the front door slammed.

"Look to the lamp, Nurse," said Rafe, bending over his patient. "Here's the rain at last, thank God."

Norwood gave a fluttering sigh.

"Stand away, Nurse," ordered Rafe sharply.

Norwood drew another and a deeper breath.

"Is he going?" whispered Rafe to himself.

As he spoke the first few scattered drops of rain, heralds and precursors of the tremendous downpour that broke up the great drought, cleansing, freshening, and sweetening Cooeville, smote, heavy with warning, on the low iron roof.

END OF SECTION I.

## SECTION II

## CHAPTER I

RAILTHORPE stumbled out of the Mechanics, ten minutes after it had opened that evening, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes. The Melbourne press had just given its verdict on "The Bard," and moved and stirred with almost inexpressible delight and shyness, he fled from the publicity and gaslight of the members' reading-room to the solitude of the winter night outside.

He walked rapidly from the town. Could it really be true? The great Melbourne critics, one in that Saturday's issue of a daily paper and one in a weekly Society journal, had praised him greatly. Success had begun at last. Now he would find friends in the many homes of Melbourne. In some of those grand dwellings shown in the illustrated papers there must be understanding hearts and sympathetic minds—and they would all read "The Bard." And these dear people who could understand, the flower of Melbourne, of Victoria, men, and, yes, women too, high-minded, beautiful women—he blushed hotly from pure delight—would see "The Bard" and reading, not what was printed, but all that lay unsaid round the actual verses, would know what he was really trying to say.

Glorious picture after picture rose up before his mind; his thoughts outran definite wording, he walked as one who, long exiled and hopeless of the home-return, finds himself suddenly in his own kingdom. But—Saturday night! He had actually forgotten the shop! He hurried back to work.

All through the next day he wandered about his little garden, or sat dreaming in his room, too happy to bear even the presence of a friend.

Plans rose in his mind and passed before him as scenery to the gazer in an express train; though there was little to consider and scheme for himself; his path lay so plain before him.

Full of his one-time secret, now made public all over Victoria, Railthorpe experienced a mingled pain and pleasure, a happiness and yet a desire to hide, as he walked to his work on Monday morning. The *Chronicle* did not appear till Tuesday, yet the wonderful news was out in the Melbourne papers. His shyness increased as he neared Thriddlerley's. Why, though so early, there was Mr. Thriddlerley himself, and beckoning for him too. "I didn't think Mr. Thriddlerley was a literary man, but"—he arrived glowing with pleasure.

"Hurry up, Railthorpe. Hurry up. Did you hear about Johnson? F. E. Johnson?"

Railthorpe, taken aback by his employer's unexpected question and his obvious ill-temper, stared at him for some moments before answering. "Johnson? No. I haven't heard anything."

"I don't know what I pay you for," said Mr. Thridderley angrily. "I notice I have to find all these things out myself. You'd all ruin me in a week if I wasn't here to keep things straight. Here's this damn fellow Johnson been getting a lot of his goods from Bailey over at Boorooloak instead of from me, and he's heavy in debt there as well as to me and Bailey's got a summons out. God damn it!" exclaimed Mr. Thridderley viciously. "Why haven't I a man worth his salt in the office? Fancy Bailey getting in with a summons before me! Bailey, that's a third-rate, tuppney hapney man in a dirty little hole like Boorooloak. I'll make Johnson sweat. You make out a copy of his account in duplicate. I'll see Dick Dobbsleigh as soon as he's down. Get on with that account now, it's a long one, don't waste any more time over it. I don't suppose you want me to make it out while you sit and pick your teeth, do you?"

Mr. Thridderley's habit of working off his ill-temper upon his subordinates had always galled Railthorpe sorely; after one of his employer's frequent outbursts he felt unspeakably degraded. To-day, silently buckling to, he worked diligently at the urgent task; by noon he had finished it, and was able to turn to the ordinary work of the day which had perforce stood over. He worked late that night, and, tired out by the long hours over figures, and by the close atmosphere of the office, went straightway to bed. But the secret glow that had brightened and strengthened him all day increased. "Perhaps some day soon I'll be able to give up office work, and Mr. Thridderley, and all like him."

Rising early he waited impatiently for the *Chronicle* and opened it with eager anticipation. He found nearly a column devoted to his book, original criticism was refrained from, but some of the verses were given, and the reviews of the Melbourne papers were quoted in full. Railthorpe drank again of that exquisite and intoxicating draught—public appreciation.

He found during the day that Cooeville did not read the literary criticisms of the Melbourne dailies, but that the remarks of the local paper were noted of all: no one save Rafe had heard the great news yesterday, everybody knew it now.

"Bin writin' a book?" remarked one of the counter hands, as Railthorpe came into the shop in the morning. He could only answer "Yes," and pass on to the privacy of the little office. Mr. Thridderley himself, when he came down to the

shop, was the next to congratulate the happy author. "I see by the *Chronicle* you've been writing poetry, Railthorpe. You must have a lot of spare time."

"I can't claim it as poetry, Mr. Thriggerley, it's just light verse."

"Well, poetry or verse, it's all one to me, thank God," replied Mr. Thriggerley. "I've one bit of good news though. Dobbsleigh got that summons served on Johnson last night—it's a thirty mile trip out to Johnson's and back I should say—and I saw Johnson in the street as I came down. He'll find out the man who tries to get the best of me'll have to get up pretty early. That's what he'll find. I'll have none of this hanky-panky game with me and so I'll tell him. It's not as though he's a man likely to be any good to me later on either. He's too far behind to pull up now, and the bad season must have about settled Mr. Johnson. And if it hasn't settled him," concluded Mr. Thriggerley, beginning to open his letters, "I will."

## CHAPTER II

THE fresh log thrown on the fire in Mrs. Limmering's best bedroom crackled cheerfully; the glowing charcoal beneath it sent out a warmth both delightful and necessary in an invalid's room when midwinter and a dripping sky reign over Cooeville, and the damp air from outside strikes cold upon the cheek.

Norwood, propped up with pillows and snugly tucked in bed, looked at the fire with wondering eyes as he turned over in his mind the many pleasing problems that were born each day that dawned.

The hearty contempt and dislike with which Rafe had at one time looked on Norwood had been removed during the last two months. A medical man who is willing to chat with his patients inevitably hears all the local news, and for weeks past Rafe had rescued from the sea of gossip washing around Cooeville certain stories about "the new young lawyer that's dying of the fever." Trewella's tale of Mrs. Bean, Jessington's quiet remark, "Tandy went to our new man to secure some property against his creditors and was fired out with a flea in his ear. I get this from Dobbsleigh. Tandy went to him after"—these things appealed to Rafe; and once his prejudice against Norwood was overcome, he could remember with approval certain of Norwood's actions which he had condemned at the time they were done—the neglect of worldly interests, the bold running counter to public opinion, the indifference to policy and diplomacy shown in his conduct towards Lee and in his public attack on Thriggerley; capping all these came

Allingham's news of Norwood's surrendering his fortune to save his father's name, "and not bleating about it," added Rafe to himself, for to him the power to keep silent on the subject of one's good deeds ranked equal in virtue with the deeds themselves.

Professional interest deepened his feelings for Norwood, and since he had sat at the patient's side fighting doggedly each inch of his descent to the bars of the pit, proprietary pride, most human of feelings, warmed and softened his heart towards one whom he had twice given up and who had twice feebly struggled back.

Norwood found various astonishing things happening next morning; instead of lying in the accustomed quiet of a sick-room, he lived from breakfast to lunch time the quiescent centre of a domestic cyclone, and in the afternoon his room, refurnished, rendered more sociable by extra chairs, brightened and scented by vases of violets and a few narcissus, could no longer be recognized as a bare sick-room; while its inmate, feeble, white-faced, hollow cheeked, large eyed, with only a few days' growth of hair on his head, but clean shaven, freshened, and happily expectant of something pleasant to come, lay in bed, turning gratified eyes upon the altered scene, enjoying the flowers as only those can who have been shut up without them for many weeks. Soon the nurse entered. "Here's a visitor to see you, Mr. Cherral," and she discreetly retired.

"Dear me," exclaimed Mrs. Labby bustling in, "how nice and warm it is in here. There's a south wind outside that freezes you. I'm sure there's snow somewhere"—she broke off as she reached Norwood's bedside; she knew he had been sorely sick, but his appearance, pitifully weak, moved her motherly heart: she forgot that she knew him only slightly, that he had a reputation for snubbing mercilessly any advances, she only remembered that he was sick and solitary, that he had no father nor mother, and that she had always liked him.

"I certainly did not expect a visitor," said Norwood. "Believe me," he added earnestly, "I appreciate your kindness."

Mrs. Labby bent down and kissed his white cheek. "That's because you've no mother to do it for you," she said, laughing and blushing a little.

Mrs. Labby's comfortable face, kindly looks, and almost affectionate manner, moved Norwood deeply; he was still feeble in the extreme. "Mrs. Labby," he began, but could not go on, he turned his head aside. Mrs. Labby patted his hand. "Poor boy," she said softly. "Poor boy."

Norwood was quite overcome. Mrs. Labby, blind to everything she should not see, moved over to the window. "Dear, dear, to think that tyrant of a Doctor wouldn't let me come till to-day. And what a fright you gave us all, Mr. Cherral.

But Doctor Rafe's very pleased at the way you're getting on now"—she chatted away, and Norwood was soon himself again. "Oh, exclaimed Mrs. Labby, "I was forgetting—Nurse, Nurse." She went to the door. "Nurse, I've seen the Doctor, and it's all right, but of course I must let you know. There's a little mould of jelly here for Mr. Cherral." She opened her basket. "Just a trifle to give him an appetite. Could we have a spoon, Nurse?" A plate, spoon, and table-napkin appeared in quick time. "And I'll sit beside him while he eats it, Nurse, to make sure he doesn't give you any."

The Nurse smiled as she went out. Mrs. Labby insisted on Norwood tasting the jelly at once, and after the first spoonful he needed no pressing. Mrs. Labby did not hold the reputation of being one of the best cooks and housekeepers in Cooeville for nothing. There was rich invalid port, specially bought for Norwood, in that jelly, though he knew it not.

"My old man"—Norwood experienced no distaste at hearing a husband thus referred to—"wanted to come up long ago, but the Doctor wouldn't allow it, and to-day when he said he'd come with me, I wouldn't allow it. Men have so little sense, you know," explained Mrs. Labby cheerfully. "He'd sit here for hours and hours and tire you out—dear me, just as I'm doing. Good-bye. I'll be here again in a few days. Nurse, Nurse—I'm off now——"

### CHAPTER III

"I HAD hoped you might dine with us the first night," said Mr. Ormerod, as he pulled up the buggy at the front door of Warrington homestead and helped Norwood out of his rugs and wraps, "but I have Doctor Rafe's orders for to-day. Where is that groom? Ah, here is Mrs. Ormerod to welcome you."

"Drive round to the back, Tonkins," said Mr. Ormerod to the just-arrived groom, "and bring in the parcels, and take Mr. Cherral's suit case to his room at once."

"Aw right."

The drawing voice sounded familiar to Norwood, and the name Tonkins—ah, it was his first client.

"You must let me take you to your room at once," said Mrs. Ormerod, leading her guest inside. "You'll find it warm enough, I hope. We dine about half-past six in winter, but you have to go to bed now."

"Doctor Rafe's orders, my dear boy," said Mr. Ormerod, coming past them and throwing open a door. "Here we are. 'Put him to bed as soon as you get out,' Doctor Rafe said."

Norwood, fatigued by the long drive, sank into the big arm-chair before the fire with a feeling of peace and comfort. The room, not large, but furnished with taste, satisfied that



love of refinement which had been starved since he left his Melbourne home.

Life at Warrington, and perhaps at other stations too, was passed in singular agreement with its atmosphere, or, indeed, one might say, with its origin; for sheep had brought the station into being, sheep gave it the present and still-thriving career, and to sheep might the inquiring mind trace many strange resemblances: the average superior station sheep spends its term of life in dignified ease, so did Mr. Ormerod; all its wants are carefully attended to, so were Mr. Ormerod's; at certain seasons it enjoys, or otherwise, a time of strenuous activity, so did he; and as, without effort, throughout summer and winter there slowly accumulates upon the sheep his woolly wealth, so does the efficient or fortunate station owner experience a steady growth in his bank account; and as at fixed intervals the sheep, innocent of heart and ignorant of mind, yields up to incomprehensible higher powers its now overgrown and burdensome riches, so alas, does the squatter, himself possibly alike innocent of heart, and certainly similarly ignorant of the workings of the higher powers, yield up, when drought oppresses the land, some, or all, of that wealth which has, perhaps, become somewhat overgrown as well. Should the inquiring mind aforesaid, abandoning the hard road of strict analogy, stray joyously into the errant paths of fancy, it might even imagine that as a sheep betrays no marked vivacity of spirit nor remarkable intellectual grasp, so does station life rather encourage a dignity of demeanour, and a well-fed and calmly ruminative outlook upon life, than profound thought, accurate learning, or that deep and searching contemplation, demanding the sacrifice of all that this world esteems, which has given to mankind its noblest spirits.

Mr. Ormerod's conception of the duties of a host would at all times have made the visit of a guest easy and pleasant: he expressed a wish that his daughter, soon due at Warrington, after a three years' residence in England to complete her education, were with them, but failing her presence he did his own best, and, with Doctor Rafe's specific instructions added, Norwood found his days lazily luxurious indeed: it suited his condition of health excellently. With numerous drives to neighbours, or to inspect certain paddocks or mobs of sheep, and with social afternoons that arrived frequently with visitors, Norwood enjoyed, in irregular succession, restful, and solitary, and sociable hours.

He welcomed opportunities of being alone; he felt a need, a necessity, never experienced before, of considering certain questions which he had until lately deemed irrevocably settled. He had lived and moved until the age of twenty-three within the narrow limits of his own class. But his lessons in human nature began on the day he arrived at Cooeville: and the

course prescribed by overruling necessity contained for many days nothing but the distasteful, the disheartening, or the disgusting.

Norwood possessed the courage of his nation and the well-bred endurance of his class; but he had found the people round him at Cooeville so different from those of his own circle that all his most cherished convictions were unknown, ignored, or laughed at; this could not change his beliefs; rather, the less his ideas had been accepted by these others, the deeper root had they taken in his mind, till finally he had trodden an ever-descending path of solitude, narrowness, bitterness, contempt, hatred, despair; he had neared the brink to which this path must bring all finer natures, and had not physical illness arrested his progress, he must have reached the inevitable goal of his long travel, and have concluded in insanity or death.

The delirium of fever had displaced the delirium of pride; and in the convalescent stage succeeding that, his own physical weakness, the kindness of others, the softening of the heart peculiar to his condition, left him, who had but lately been so irrevocably fixed in his ideas, drifting upon a restless sea of doubt, astonishment, and dawning suspicion of himself.

Norwood had much to turn over in his mind. From the day of Mrs. Labby's appearance in the sick-room many visitors had called at Mrs. Limmering's for him, and the careful secrecy Rafe had maintained concerning Norwood's finances was rendered futile: first Mr. Allingham, when Norwood was showing rapid improvement, told him in strict confidence how Doctor Rafe had come to the Bank making enquiries about Norwood's standing, how he, as Manager of the Bank of New South Wales, had declined to afford definite information but owing to special circumstances had hinted broadly at the true state of affairs, and how Doctor Rafe had thereupon taken complete charge. When Norwood, thinking merely that Doctor Rafe had trusted to the future for payment of his professional charges, spoke to Mrs. Limmering about arrears of board, she told him Doctor Rafe had settled it regularly each week and had paid one Nurse's board as well. "I thought he was using your money for you while you were sick, Mr. Cherral, I'm sure if I'd known——"

He spoke to the one Nurse who remained about her fees, the story was the same. She had been regularly paid. "And what about the night Nurse who has gone?"

"Oh, I know the Doctor settled with her too."

Norwood, much moved, tried to thank his physician on his next visit: but Doctor Rafe, extremely red as to the face and rough as to the manner, first heartily condemned all old women who would gossip about other people's business, he

then condemned Norwood for making a fuss over nothing, finally he condemned himself, and retired, growling. At their next meeting, when Norwood gratefully reopened the subject, Doctor Rafe with great irritability of manner demanded loudly, "Are you going to drop it, dammit? Raising a hell of a howl about the thing every ten minutes"—he kicked the nearest chair out of his way, dropped his glasses, and, the Nurse being absent, was forced to crawl, short-sightedly about the floor feeling for them; he relieved his feelings meanwhile by hearty abuse of all damn bleaters, and, running his head against the iron corner of the bedstead, instantly discovered that Norwood was the worst damn bleater of the lot. Finding his glasses at last he adjusted them carefully and demanded, "What do you want to thank me for? I didn't want to do it, dammit. Railthorpe worried me to look after you till I was sick of him. Goff and he—a pair of bleaters—wanted to pay my bill. Like their damn cheek. I don't know what this place is coming to."

And when Norwood, wondering more and more, spoke to Goff when he called, Goff laughed the matter off and explained, "I only offered to take half of a definite liability. But Railthorpe offered Rafe all his savings."

From Miss Limmering, who inclined to except "the Doctor" from her general condemnation of the male sex, he learnt of Rafe's tireless attention; he heard that Rafe, for three nights running, had sat the hours through beside him with unwearied care, that on the night the drought broke up Norwood himself had twice been given up, that his first sign of improvement dated from next day, and that "Mr. Railthorpe, all the time you were so bad, used to come up in the night at all hours and wait outside to hear how you were. I used to hear him whistle, and then Doctor Rafe would go out to him."

And some considerable time later on Doctor Rafe's command that Norwood should go away from Mrs. Limmering's for a two months' holiday had come the warm invitation from Mrs. Ormerod to make Warrington the scene of final restoration to health.

Yes, there was much to think over. Norwood felt the insistent pressure of each of these startling facts.

Unknown to Mr. Ormerod or his wife there grew up at Warrington by processes, slow in action but durable in effect, a new Norwood Cherral: at first a man almost drowned in doubt and perplexity, but with the daily increase in bodily strength, a man whose mental outlook grew wider, a man who passed from his first shocked and unhappy condition to one humble and receptive. And as the days and weeks went by in pleasant companionship, thoughtful solitude, and progress to better health than he had ever yet enjoyed.

gradually the mists confining the horizon of his spirit cleared and rolled away, and Norwood felt that he saw stretching before him the path of duty. And the new spirit within him declared that be it rough or steep, or even be it barricaded against him, follow that path he would.

#### CHAPTER IV

"KIM airp," said Tonkins to his pair as he and Norwood left Warrington: he relapsed into silence till they reached the gates at the entrance to the drive, where he delivered over the reins to Norwood with the ominous injunction. "If the orf 'orse plays up when I open the gate give 'im a belt, and hang on, for Gawd's sake." The maligned off horse walked meekly with his mate on to the road and pulled up of his own accord.

Something was wrong with Tonkins: a discovery made just before he started to drive Norwood back to Cooeville had perturbed him: he drove in unusual silence till his feelings became too much for him when, by an entirely human twist, he turned his annoyance on to the off horse. "You see this 'orse?" he asked, pointing it out with a cut of the whip. "He's a nark and no mistake. He's always fer lyin' low and takin' a bloke on the hop. You know. I've seen 'im pulled up at the railway crossin' and me spittin' on me two hands to hold him when the train come by, and he never turned a hair, and o'ny lars week I was comin' home this road with 'im—a three chain road and nothin' on it to frighten a lady—and all of a sudden I finds meself hangin' on to me lord with the bit in 'is teeth an' 'is tail in me eyes and 'im goin' hell for leather. A nark?" declared Tonkins. "It's flatterin' to call you a nark." An once more the whip fell.

Norwood's first entry into Cooeville had taken place in midsummer; now it was winter; then he had come by train; now by buggy; then dazed, friendless, and despondent; now rich in hope, rich in resolution, richest of all in the discovery of good in others.

Mrs. Limmering's cottage came into view, no longer a strange, uncomfortable boarding-house, but a place with a well-remembered room, a place inhabited by well-remembered faces; even Miss Limmering's somewhat grim welcome, "Oh, you're back at last, are you?" failed to ring unpleasantly. "We waited afternoon tea for you," she added aggressively. "I told Ma you'd be late. Anyone coming from Warrington always is. Now then," as Tonkins arrived with Norwood's bags, "look where you're going, and don't bump the paper off the walls."

Mr. Tonkins, as a married man, acknowledge this salute with a sheepish grin, and returned with all speed to his horses

Norwood went back to the buggy ostensibly for his rug. "I am obliged to you"—he began, feeling in his pocket, but Mr. Tonkins interrupted. "I see the Missus just before I come away."

"Indeed," said Norwood not understanding.

"Yes," said Tonkins, gazing fixedly at the ears of the off horse. "And she told me you give her a couple of sovereigns, and it's bin botherin' me all the way in."

"Come, come," said Norwood. "That's her business. She attended to my room. Here, oblige me——"

"My business too," affirmed Tonkins, declining to look at Norwood or his proffered gift. "I aint give you a fair deal, I—I——" Tonkins betrayed signs of confusion which his friends would not have credited. "Listen to me a shake and I'll tell you all about it. You mind me seein' you about me selection?"

"Certainly."

"And you never charged me nothin'."

"Well? Come, oblige me——"

"And yer wrote to me to come again. An' I never. Ah." Tonkins almost forgot his confusion in the pleasure of narration. "No, I never. I seen another lawyer. *You* know. And he told me different to you." Tonkin's steady gaze at the ears of the off horse hardened. "He told me different. He told me to take it to the Minister for Lands. Ah. An' I done it. And when all that was over what do I find? Over five pound to the bad an' no good done. The Minister he wiped me out. *You* know. If I'd a stuck by you I'd bin better off. And to-day you give me Missus two quid unbeknownst to me. I wish the Missus hadn't took it. A fair thing's a fair thing. Though I'm obliged to yer," he hastened to explain. "Got yer rug? Right oh, so long. Come erp, you." He raised his hand in salute to the unmollified and impatiently waiting Miss Limmering, waved his whip in greeting to Norwood, and drove hastily off.

When Norwood entered his office next morning he stood for a moment in grateful amazement. Was this the unattractive room in which he had spent the hot and dusty summer? He had arranged through Rafe for Trewhella's handy man and combination genius—painter, paperhanger, glazier, bricklayer, carpenter—to put the office into some order, and for Mrs. Bean to clean it, but the result exceeded expectation. Dust, dirt, and accumulated litter had been scraped up and swept out; shattered panes, loose flooring, and broken and uneven fireplace hobs had been repaired; and now, clean ceiling and walls, a bright window, a freshly ochred fireplace with a cheerfully blazing log in it, and well scrubbed floors, greeted the returned tenant: even the shabby square of linoleum that had never looked anything but

dust-coloured now showed through its fresh beeswaxing a bright pattern in parts. The numberless dusty bundles of Steggs' papers had been boxed up, and put in the wood-shed, and the welcoming grin of the former office boy, now re-engaged, was wide enough to take in all these improvements and yet leave a substantial portion for Norwood's special behoof. Norwood appreciated the change. His room was really cosy. He sank into his chair with a feeling of ownership and took up the *Cooeville Chronicle* with a desire for local news never before experienced.

He expected no clients that morning, but before he had done more than open the *Chronicle* the office boy ushered in Mr. Trewhella. "I hope I'm the first in, Mr. Cherral? Has anyone been in before me?"

"No, I have just arrived myself," Norwood looked at his visitor: some months ago they had parted with anger on Trewhella's side and disdain on Norwood's. Why had he come to the office now? Surely not to obtain payment for his account for work done to the office? "Was my father right after all? Are all tradesmen contemptible?"

Mr. Trewhella sitting down rubbed his hands together between his knees, and in turn looked anxiously at Norwood. "Mr. Cherral, Sir, last time me and you parted it was in a bad spirit—at least on my side, Mr. Cherral. Humility's one of the great virtues and I try to practise t, but no man enjoys being treated like a dog."

Mr. Trewhella, by no means sure how he would be received, thought he was going too far and pulled up hurriedly. "What I wish to say is that when I spoke to you in this room last, and put it to you you might knock off something from the warrant against Mrs. Bean, there was a misunderstanding. If you'd given me half a hint of what you meant to do it would have been different."—Mr. Trewhella blew his nose violently. "It wasn't till you were laid upon the bed of affliction, Mr. Cherral, that I discovered what you'd done. A noble act, if you'll excuse me. You did nobly, sir. Nobly. And today I saw in the *Chronicle* about you being back at the office this morning and I said to myself, Moses Trewhella, it lays before you as a duty; not to say a pleasure, Mr. Cherral"—the speaker showed that he felt he walked on thin ice here—"to see you, Mr. Cherral, and withdraw anything as I may have said offensive, and speaking in the sacred name of charity and not as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal where all is equal, to thank you, Mr. Cherral, as man to man, for your work in helping the desitute and the afflicted."

Here Mr. Trewhella, having eased his bosom of much perilous stuff, and having rounded off his speech happily and with a cadence which appealed to him as a local preacher, pulled up and eyed Norwood expectantly.

Norwood felt ashamed that he should so have misjudged his visitor a few moments ago: he allowed no further misunderstandings to rise, certainly this man was a village grocer, but he was also an earnest man and one who, finding that morning something unpleasant which he deemed a duty, had arisen and performed it.

"Possibly I did not behave quite as I should have at our last meeting, Trewhella," he said, forcing himself with all the power of past resolutions to see things from a new point of view. "And in that case I wish to express my regret. As to Mrs. Bean's matter pray say no more about it. I am under an obligation to you for bringing the true facts under my notice."

And Norwood, wondering at himself, shook hands, thanked Trewhella for his good wishes, and watched him depart, his heart unaccountably warmed by this visit.

Norwood had expected Doctor Rafe to call at the office that morning, and he was not disappointed. A carelessly slouching figure with the boxer hat tipped over the eyes and the hands in the trouser pockets, strolled through the open door into Norwood's private room without knocking or question; and, without removing his hat or giving any greeting or even taking the hands from the pockets, he, having thus, according to Norwood's code, been guilty of seven mistakes, achieved an eighth by sitting down on the table. Norwood had learned, after being almost driven to suicide in the teaching, after almost dying of loneliness and pride, after impairment of mental stability almost reaching to insanity, and after an illness that had taken him down to the gateway of Death, as nearly as a man may go and yet return, that a man may be of worth even though he offend against one or more of those unwritten regulations which decree how a well-bred Englishman shall behave.

Rafe's carriage, conduct, and speech had offended Norwood from their first encounter until his illness. But now, though he observed all the errors committed by his friend, neither resentment nor criticism rose in his mind.

Doctor Rafe ran a professional eye over Norwood and fired at him the query. "How's the weight?"

"How do you do, Rafe? I'm very glad to see you."

"How's the weight?" demanded Doctor Rafe, raising his voice irritably, and remaining oblivious of conventional greetings.

"The day before I left Mr. Ormerod tried me on the woolshed scales. I've risen to nine stone ten."

"You ought to fatten up now. They often do after typhoid."

Norwood plunged into a matter which he feared Rafe might make awkward to handle. "It's never very pleasant

discussing money matters, but I should be obliged if—er—if you would let me know the total of what I owe you—in money, Rafe, there are some things which I feel I can never repay, and——”

The polished physician, instantly colouring angrily, jumped off the table for the purpose of smiting it a severe blow. “Give it a rest, dammit. Can’t I come in here without this—this——” he paused, at a loss for a word sufficiently scathing; finding none, he repeated in a loud voice, “Dammit,” and resumed his seat on the table.

Norwood, who would have been ruffled if not disgusted a few months ago, now smiled. “Since you object to it so, I won’t enlarge upon my gratitude though I assure you——” Doctor Rafe, repeating his favourite remark, got off the table and made for the door.

The first clerical work to which Norwood turned on Rafe’s departure was the making out of a private balance sheet. The total deficit appalled him. One article of his creed which even recent experiences had not caused him to revise assured him that debt was dishonour. He had jealously treasured the few selected remnants of his mother’s jewels till now, but when it was a case of sentiment against honour, sentiment had to retreat. He went down to the Bank forthwith and, directed by Mr. Tinner so to do, entered the Manager’s room to ask for his box deposited for safe custody, and to take counsel with his banker.

“Sit down, Mr. Cherral. What can I do for you?”

Norwood smiled. He noticed frost in the air, nor could he blame his former admiring herald and unceasing trumpeter. “I want about three hundred pounds, Mr. Allingham.”

Mr. Allingham looked at nothing with inscrutable expression. His keenest pleasure was to grant an application for an overdraft, “One more on the list,” to be murmured with joyful re-iteration;—but Cherral’s application? Quite another matter. Most unbusinesslike. Ask for accommodation without security? Absurd.

Norwood, hesitating and embarrassed, continued. “I know what I’m going to ask is not quite proper—is really not banking business at all——”

“Quite so,” thought his hearer.

—“but unfortunately I know no one in Melbourne who could—er—arrange matters for me, and I wonder if I might ask you to arrange a—a sale for me.” And Norwood asking for his box from the strongroom, produced three jewelled rings, explained his wishes to his attentive hearer, and finally arranged matters on a business footing.

Mr. Allingham liked Norwood’s new manner, but past happenings, Mr. Cherral’s treatment of the Bank of New South Wales, of the Manager of the Cooeville branch—no, it was



too much. Norwood was about to go, Mr. Allingham coughed. Norwood rose. "Good-bye." Mr. Allingham made no reply save that he coughed again and gazed fixedly at the window. Norwood had only gone as far as the door when Mr. Allingham called him back. "Mr. Cherral, Mr. Cherral."

"Yes?"

"Close the door, please, it's private!" He coughed again. "Mr. Cherral—no offence I hope—but do you—ah—um——!"

Mr. Allingham, during office hours and in his own Managerial apartment, could not be embarrassed, tongue-tied, or at a loss: he left that to the other party to the discussion. But just now he went singularly near to one or other of these states: recovering himself by remembering what institution he represented in that room and in Cooeville, he looked full at Norwood and asked, "Mr. Cherral, are you going to stay here?"

"Before I answer you, I ask you as my Banker, do you think I should go or remain?"

Mr. Allingham's gaze reverted to the window: he wished he had let the thing alone; this was a very awkward question; still as a man's banker he must also be his adviser, even when advising him was a matter painful to both parties. He shook his head. "The prospects are not what they were. It's easier to start quite unknown than—er—when, to speak frankly, Mr. Cherral, when there's a prejudice against a man. A marked prejudice, I'm sorry to say."

"Then you advise me to go?"

"Mr. Cherral, you see me here in this office, it's a sort of centre for this town. The best men in the district come in here. I see some of them every day. I make it my business to know *their* business. I make friends of them. They tell me all their news, they tell me what they think. The farmers are the men that help a solicitor, transfers, mortgages, wills, estates, agreements, leases—and the farmers like a bit of news. They discuss a fresh business man in the town keenly. One who does business with him for the first time spreads the news through his circle, what he's like, how he does business, what sort of a man he seems, whether he's dear or cheap, and each man of that little circle takes it to *his* little circle." Mr. Allingham shook his head again.

"Yes. Pray don't hesitate to speak frankly."

"Some very influential men have been taken to your office by me, Mr. Cherral, during the five months you were there—and—er—I regret to say—they—er—they—er—in fact, they didn't like the way they were treated, Mr. Cherral.—And of course they spread their opinion."

"Then you recommend that I should not think of trying to practise here?"

"These men are slow to change, Mr. Cherral. Slow to change. If they like a man they'll stand a lot of neglect and mistakes and so on from him. But if they don't like him—well, they won't go near him, Mr. Cherral. Offend one, you offend many. No, Mr. Cherral, since you ask me—I'm sorry to lose you of course—several of the biggest farmers in the district are dead against you—men with married sons and daughters all over the country—connections all over the place, in fact—all dead against you. And the leading business men here—I needn't tell you this, Mr. Cherral—they're against you strongly. To a man. No, since you ask me I say you'll have a much fairer start where you're not known. Prejudice, Mr. Cherral, prejudice. It's a hard thing to fight against." Mr. Allingham shook his head again and declined to meet Norwood's eye.

"I quite assent to all you say——."

Mr. Allingham nodded and remarked. "Naturally."

—"there are many valid reasons for leaving here, but for certain reasons I decline to act on them."

Mr. Allingham's expression of gloom changed to one of astonishment. "Eh? How d'you mean?"

"I mean that I shall not leave Cooeville."

"Eh? Are you going to try to practise here?"

"I am."

"But it's almost hopeless."

"I know that."

"It'll be a long pull."

"I am prepared for it."

"You'll have to fight for it."

"All the better."

Mr. Allingham rose, and, forgetting his own responsible position as Manager, his former disappointments in Norwood, and his recent advice, slapped him vigorously on the shoulder. Norwood, also forgetting that he was an Englishman and a gentleman, permitted this liberty taken by a Colonial and a mere Bank Manager to pass unrebuked.

"I shouldn't know you," declared Mr. Allingham. "You're a new man. Go in and win."

"I shall," said Norwood.

## CHAPTER V

Norwood waxed stronger each day; he enjoyed his meals; he breathed with pleasure the stimulating air of earliest Spring; he responded vigorously to the bracing climate; he felt a new man. The past fortnight had not seen him idle in his resolve to redeem the past, but two urgent matters still unattended to lay upon his mind, and in one of them indecision clouded

his outlook. As to young Dolomy, he must be seen; but as to Miss Lily Frettle? What was the right thing for him to do?

Putting that matter aside for the moment he checked off the list he had made in his mind. First, raise money and pay all debts. Done—Allingham had that day completed the arrangement, for expert valuation of the rings had more than confirmed Norwood's estimate. His cheque for Doctor Rafe was at that moment in the post, it would be delivered by breakfast time next morning. Secondly, the apology to Railthorpe—made, and most willingly accepted. Really some of these things that at one time appeared so hard that he deemed them impossible were not only easy, but pleasant of performance, or perhaps pleasant after performance. Thirdly, the amend—for here no apology was required—to Austerberry. Duly made, and accepted as by a gentleman. Perhaps the definition of a gentleman required enlarging. Fourth, the matter of young Dolomy. He would call that day. Fifth, the question of visiting Miss Lily Frettle or not? Unsettled as yet. Sixth, the acquisition of a successful practice in Cooeville: this, of course, would be a matter of time.

Between five and six o'clock he closed the office and set forth to call upon young Dolomy.

The increasing dusk hid Cooeville's angles; the cheerful lights, kindled here and there in the houses, spoke of a day's work done, of the return home of the breadwinner, and of the preparation of the evening meal. Norwood, though going to a hostile meeting, felt his heart lighten and his spirits rise. Conscience approved: he held his head high and stepped out briskly. A quarter of an hour later found him in the little office opening off to the workshop. Joe Dolomy entered with embarrassment and dislike fighting in his face for supremacy.

Norwood himself was uncomfortable enough.

"Mr. Dolomy, my calling here may surprise and annoy you, but——" he paused.

"Well?" said Joe.

"If you will allow me to explain my errand I shall not intrude again."

Joe Dolomy remained by the door, giving Norwood the room. "I'm sorry you've been ill," he said awkwardly: he paused and inspected his hands. "But I don't know why you come here." He looked up again, native kindness and hospitality struggling with his dislike of the visitor.

"It is extremely difficult to explain why I have come, and—er—indeed I must ask you to help me." Norwood hesitated: the task was harder than he imagined.

"Yes?" said Joe heavily.

"One cannot mention a lady's name," began Norwood,

"but I am sure you will understand me when I say that—that since—that lately I have seen things differently. I have changed my opinions in many matters."

Joe Dolomy looked up at Norwood with surprise dawning in his face. "How do you mean you've changed?" he asked suspiciously.

"It is painful enough to speak of my personal views and feelings in this way," said Norwood with truth, "but it is due to you that I should do so. It must be done," exclaimed Norwood in a burst of resolution. "Mr. Dolomy, when you came to expostulate with me long ago at my office I received you in quite a wrong spirit. I'm afraid, in fact I know, that I was rude to you. I ask your pardon."

But Dolomy's face did not lighten as it should have. Rather it grew darker with the struggle of feelings in his heart. "It's not myself I care about," he answered sullenly without lifting his eyes. "It's her. You know that. You could go on showing you didn't give a damn for me or any one like me," he continued, with even greater bitterness in his voice than in his words, "and it wouldn't hurt me. You don't like my sort, and fellows like me can't stand your sort."

Dolomy's feelings could not alter quickly. And in any event his main charge against this man, that concerning Miss Lily, remained unaltered.

Norwood had flushed at Dolomy's words; he was unused to an honest apology being received in such a spirit; for a moment his old belief that no decent conduct could be expected from any of his social inferiors, and least of all from a Colonial, rose in his mind, but he quelled his feelings hastily. "I understand your allusion of course. But that is hardly a matter I can discuss with you."

Distrust, however, still filled Dolomy's mind. "I don't feel too sure of what your drivin' at. Why don't you say what you mean straight out?"

Norwood flushed again. "I've already expressed regret for having spoken to you as I did," he said, and nothing, not even his lately learned lessons of humility and self-control could prevent him speaking haughtily. "And that is all I can do. Or all I should do, as far as you are concerned."

"No, it's not," said Dolomy sullenly. "And don't think you can come over me with your palaver. Besides, I don't care how you speak to me. If you speak to me same as if I was a dog, that don't make me a dog, does it? But what are you goin' to do about her? You're on'y tryin' to get out of it," asserted Dolomy, colouring darkly. "Since you've come here you'd better finish the job. What are you going to do about her?" he demanded savagely.

Norwood no longer strove to conceal his disgust. "I've already explained that I cannot answer such questions. I

considered it your due to call and explain that I—I regretted what I had said to you, but having done that I have no more to say."

"What are you going to do about her?" repeated Dolomy obstinately.

"Good afternoon," replied Norwood with contemptuous courtesy.

Joe Dolomy gazed after the departing figure with slow rage.

Norwood next morning went to his office in down-cast mood. Once more contempt for Colonials, hatred of Coeeville, and a bitterness of spirit, feelings which he had believed were thoroughly exorcised, stirred in his heart. In the absence of remunerative work he sat himself doggedly to master certain parts of the The Police Offences' Act, 1890. An usually abrupt entrance by Doctor Rafe interrupted his study and diverted his thoughts. The visitor strode up to Norwood with flushed face, thumped the table—which fortunately interposed as a barrier between them—with great emphasis, and demanded loudly. "What do you mean by it? Eh?"

"My dear Rafe," began Norwood.

"Dear, be damned," roared Rafe. "What do you mean by it?"

"Mean by what, Rafe? Really, you are rather—er—incoherent."

"You know damn well." Rafe's voice was still uplifted and rose higher in characteristic fashion as he enumerated his wrongs. "Didn't you ask me for my account? Didn't I say I'd send it in January? Eh? Didn't you agree to wait till then? Eh? Didn't I give you a list of my disbursements for you? And now"—he banged the table again.

"I admit all you say, except about waiting till January. I certainly did not agree to that."

"Yes, you did," asserted the polished physician loudly. "And I hold you to it."

Norwood flushed with anger. Doctor Rafe was certainly not a gentleman. He restrained himself from an outbreak with an effort, and sat silent for a moment. "Really, Doctor Rafe, you try one rather far. You can't object to my managing my own affairs?"

This hint was lost on Rafe. "Here's your polite letter"—Doctor Rafe used the adjective as a term of the most biting abuse. "And here's your cheque. I'll take a cheque for what I paid away on your account, but do you think I'll allow a patient—when I haven't even sent in my account—to send me a hundred guineas just for professional services? No, I'll see him damned first—even when he wraps it up in a lot of nice remarks like your letter, your *polite* letter"—Doctor

Rafe managed the sneer somewhat heavily—"What do you call it?" he pulled out the epistle referred to and hunted for the phrase—"Yes—'inadequate remuneration.' There's insult added to injury. Yes, by Jove, you call it 'inadequate remuneration' and I call it damn cheek."

Norwood rose with outraged dignity upon his face. "Really, Doctor Rafe"—but Rafe, abandoning his pretence of anger as he saw the genuine state in his friend, burst into a hearty laugh and pushed Norwood back into his chair. "All right, all right. Never mind putting on your English airs. Let it stand over till January. We'll argue it out then."

"Don't think that your motive isn't transparent enough, Rafe, and I thank you for the kindly idea of giving me time, but I've been able to arrange matters. I can pay all that I owe, and have enough to carry me on for some time."

Rafe whistled softly and drummed with his fingers on the table. "Well, I can't take anything like a hundred guineas. If you'll meet me like a reasonable man I'll take all you owe me now. If you don't—"

## CHAPTER VI

COOEVILLE, upon a mid-summer day, with a north-westerly wind accompanied by all its baleful accessories in full blast, appears, to the heated mind and dust-filled eye of the observer, no civilized or even habitable place of abode, but a spot stricken of nature and accurst: part of whose arid soil upon which the inhabitant walks reflecting and radiating to his face a hideous glare and a dry, fierce heat; part of whose still more arid soil, circumambient in the atmosphere, eddies and sweeps along in the moaning gale, gritting his teeth and eyes, dirtying his ears and hair, and going far indeed to throw out of gear his entire and necessary respiratory apparatus. Cooeville, in fact, like many great ones of the earth, has her bad days. But in the tally of the annual round they are but as one dish of one course out of the sweet and wholesome array spread before life's guest throughout the varying year, or as the mustard to the meat, trifling indeed, serving merely to heighten by contrast.

And winter and early spring fill the cup of the happy Cooevillan to the brim: with the first autumn rains the ground, bare, burnt, dusty, littered with dead whitey-brown grass, changes magically to tenderest green; the eucalypts, clean-washed, freshen the air with faint, delicate, vivifying fragrance; the creeks run; the dams in the farmer's paddocks fill up; the iron tank beside the farmer's house flows over, and in Cooeville itself the magic rain works no less its ever-new miracle; the soft and dusty road is now clean and hard

beneath one's feet; the gutters, flooded, scoured, and washed out, offend no more; the air's purity exhilarates: gratefully cold, it freshens every face; each day is perfect of its kind; a day, perhaps, of soft grey dullness, restful to the eye after the long enduring glare of summer; or perhaps the rain gently falling throughout the hours soothes with its quiet murmur, while grateful hearts rejoice and eager tongues tell of the number of points that have fallen, the benefit the crops will receive, and what a fine thing it is for the country; or if Nature be in holiday mood she will, after a night of frost, bestow a day of unclouded brilliance, when all but hopeless pessimists tingle with life at each breath of the sharp air, when the sun is warm, when the shade is cold, when all living things exult and rejoice save those members of the human race whom nothing can console, who, at such times as these, gather together and discuss with hopeful despondency the evil effects of the frost upon the crops, the marked prevalence of chilblains, and the apparent probability of a dry and disastrous winter.

Railthorpe could never walk steadily along as others did. Something would catch his eye, and, halting to consider it, his thoughts would quicken, and physical exertion was commanded to keep pace with rapid fancies till an aspect of the sky, the claret-coloured growth crowning a sapling, the varied tinting of the fields before him, would call him to a halt again.

On this Sunday afternoon he drifted irregularly along the country road, letting each fresh object call up other thoughts, letting these thoughts, chastening or whimsical, or earnest or humorous, or both or all—for the mind is as a bowl wherein many flavours may be subtly mingled and compounded—rise freely and develop unchecked, no matter to what heights of dreamy unreality or practical absurdity they might float. He lacked no company; to turn these high aspirations, these tender longings, these laughable contrarities, these delicious absurdities, into words for another's ear would be like letting the sunbeams fall upon the red cinders of an indoor fire, putting out the lovely glow.

He wished only to wander on and on unchecked, happy, care-free, the plaything of every rising thought, the slave of each changing emotion; no longer striving to be a dominant human, inspired by a single aim, struggling by will, and reason and character, to master and trample on each vagrant idea that crossed the long, the steep, the rocky, the unswerving path to the great and distant goal; but rather, freed for the time from belief in this hard, blind, narrow, successful force, to drift with absolute surrender and with spirit sentient to each sighing rustle of the wind, each noble structure raised by cloudland builders, each change of colour on the scene around him, each hint of Spring's faint fragrance, a child of Nature

alone with Nature, reflecting her every expression, meeting her every mood.

He found himself climbing the hill known as The Rocks, about two miles north-west of the township; reaching the steep and narrow ravine which, running east and west, split the hill-top into two summits, he halted panting, for the steeper a rise, the more Railthorpe rushed it.

At one part of the rift, two slabs of rock, leaning together, met at the top but separating lower down, formed an irregular triangular tunnel some five or six feet high and half as wide as its base: Railthorpe pressed his way in to where, some five yards back, the little cave ended against the steep side of another buttressing rock; sitting down on the floor of dry earth, he propped himself comfortably against the back wall and gazed out at the little section of hill-side and plain and horizon framed by the entrance of his retreat.

He knew the spot well and had sat in the same seat times without number. Though The Rocks was a favoured spot for the occasional Cooeville picnic, it was rarely visited in the intervals between. Railthorpe had come to regard the hill with the twin crests and the noble view almost as his private property. He lay there dreaming till the western sky commenced to colour.

He was late for tea on his return, a fact that Doctor Rafe, with whom, as usual, he was spending that Sunday evening, did not fail to impress on him.

## CHAPTER VII

NORWOOD, having delayed some days in doubt, had at last decided that it was his duty to see Miss Lily Frettle. But he dreaded the meeting. He felt miserable indeed when he found himself at the well-remembered front door.

"Why, it's Mr. Cherral!"—it was Miss Frettle. "Come in. Auntie's inside and so's Lil."

Miss Seamond welcomed Norwood with sincere pleasure: condoled with him on his illness, questioned him lengthily on the present state of his health, and added that Lily would be in directly. Miss Lily, in fact, had retreated hurriedly to her room, where, assisted by a candle and her looking-glass, she was settling the question whether she should go in to see Norwood as she was. For a week from that ever-to-be-remembered night when he had all but proposed to her, she had suffered much from his unexplained absence. The news of his illness and the frequent statement that he should have been under medical treatment long before he actually gave way, had explained his apparent neglect, but through all the days when rumours that he was dying floated in the air she



could do nothing save endure silently. During his long convalescence she had hoped for a letter; when she heard of his return from Warrington, she looked forward with certainty to a visit from him at once. Each evening after a most careful toilet she waited with eager expectancy; she could say nothing to her aunt or sister yet, for there had been no definite engagement: and aunt and sister, well aware of her feelings, but ignorant of the good cause she had to expect immediate attention from Norwood, refrained from noticing too much. Miss Lily's heart became sore indeed when a week passed and still Norwood had not come; tears came when alone; pride concealed her grief when with others. When that evening she heard the well-known knock at the door, the well-remembered voice in the hall, all apparent neglect and rudeness were forgiven.

Miss Lily greeted Norwood with a sweet shyness and restraint which enhanced her beauty fivefold. Norwood saw no change in her; the anxiety for him that had marked her face with care and pallor for the past three months had departed; her radiance and colour returned with the return of Norwood himself; he stayed for over an hour but no opportunity came for speech with Miss Lily alone. At last, after waiting in vain, he said good-bye. Miss Lily came with him to the door. Norwood was too set upon his plan to let the occasion slip. "Miss Lily, would you come on to the verandah for a few minutes?"

For answer she slipped her soft warm fingers into his hand and followed him outside into the darkness of the unlit verandah. He pulled the door to after him; his mouth was dry, his voice uncertain as he began, "Miss Lily, I had to call here to-night to explain—to rectify matters."

His agitation moved her. "You're not strong yet though you look so well. Is anything 'wrong?'" she whispered, as she leaned closer to him. Her fragrant presence almost unnerved him. With a sudden and painful effort he crushed all emotions and stepped blindly along the road he had marked out for himself. "Miss Lily," he said harshly, "I have misled you. I am to blame. I feel it bitterly. It is horrible to speak as I'm going to—I can hardly do it, but I must. Miss Lily, I behaved towards you as though—as though I intended to ask you to marry me. And I was wrong to do so. I was wicked—and—" Norwood, deeply moved, paused, then repeated—"I acted wickedly."

Miss Lily had drawn her hand away at his first words: now she stepped back from him and stood silent for, it seemed to him, an immense stretch of time; he could hear her quick breathing: "Oh!" she said, in a tone that cut Norwood. "Oh!" It was an exclamation wrung from her by pain. There was another pause before she continued, speaking softly

lest others should hear, but in a tone that now told nothing. "Did you come up to tell me this to-night?"

"Yes. It seemed right that I should."

"Was it—was it because you've been sick?" her voice choked.

"Because I've been sick? I don't understand."

She recovered her composure. "Is it because you've been sick that you're trying to be a better man and give up playing with poor girls just to amuse yourself? Pretending to them?"

"Miss Lily! No, no. There was no pretence. It was worse than that. I came because I wished to. You were my only friend here then, at least I thought you were, and I was led astray by my feelings."

Sincerity spoke in his voice. In the dark he felt her hand on his arm. "Then you weren't just playing with me? You didn't say to yourself, 'I can amuse myself with this silly girl till I go back to Melbourne and find someone better'?"

Norwood took the hand that rested on his arm and held it. "Miss Lily, what put these horrible ideas into your mind?"

"What you said a minute ago," answered Miss Lily with a sob. "You said you'd been wicked."

"I blame myself bitterly," answered Norwood, "because I enjoyed your society so much that I paid you marked attention—and I had no right to."

"And it's for that you're blaming yourself so?"

"Most certainly."

"And not that you were just using me to—to play with?"

"Such a disgraceful idea never occurred to me."

She came nearer to him. "You frightened me so," she said, with a tremble in her voice, "but now——" Norwood waited, but she said nothing.

"I have been wretched over this," began Norwood—he found an arm round his neck and a hot face pressed beside his. He put his arms round her. "Oh, Norwood!" A tremulous little cry ended in a sob. "Oh, Norwood, when you spoke at first to-night I thought you meant—what I said—and I hated myself. And I almost hated you. But now—that you didn't mean that—Oh, Norwood!" The tears came again. They wet his cheek. He groaned as he held her closely to him. "Don't, Norwood, don't. Oh, don't. You've done no wrong. If there is any wrong it's my fault. A girl should be more careful. It was noble of you to come and tell me this. I see now I was wrong. We must just be friends. You mustn't come here so often. I mustn't—I mustn't—I——" she broke down and wept bitterly on his shoulder. "Oh, Norwood, why did you make me grow so fond of you?"

The hour for Norwood's punishment had struck. His heart sank cold and wretched as she spoke those words of

innocent reproach. He could make no answer. She realized the self-reproach that was tearing him; she ceased to cry; presently she even managed a fluttering laugh. "You mustn't take me too seriously. I must go in, Norwood, or Lize may be coming out for me. Thank you for telling me this—dear." And she nestled into his arms. "I won't see much of you now, Norwood. And I'll always call you Mr. Cherral. Kiss me before you go, dear. Kiss me good-bye." But the effort was too much. She broke down again and clung to him as she tried to choke back her sobs.

Some twenty minutes later Norwood walked back to his lodgings a humbled, yet an exalted man. A suspicion haunting his mind until that evening that perhaps he had taken the whole affair too seriously, had died for ever at Miss Lily's sole reproach, "Why did you make me grow so fond of you." And as this ugly visitant thought vanished for all time, there rose in its place, to abide throughout the rest of his days, some faint conception of the power of woman to forgive man; to suffer in silence; to take all blame upon herself; and, with her own heart aching, to soothe his troubled conscience to unmerited peace once more.

## CHAPTER VIII

TIME had of late flowed by delightfully for Railthorpe; his first book of verses an undoubted success; a new and most interesting friend made in the person of Mr. Cherral; a continued and even increased faculty for satirically humorous verse—what more could one, happy in abundant hope, imagine or desire? "The Bard" contained only twelve sets of verses, and now in his private drawer Railthorpe had thirty more, of which twenty-one were complete and ready for publication. And subjects and ideas for fresh rhymes flowed in more quickly than he could write them down; life, even at Cooeville, swarmed with fancies, grotesque happenings, incidents absurd and laughable and sometimes almost impossible. No dread of failing imagination need beset him, for all round him lay those stores which he required, innumerable as the leaves of a tree. If he could tell to others one ten thousandth part of what he felt himself, he would do well. With him Life and Time walked hand in hand, singing to him their secrets as they went.

"Well, how's the new profession of authorship?" asked Rafe one evening.

Railthorpe could not speak of this subject with freedom to Rafe, he could not have told him that it was the chief joy of life, that writing down thoughts, which he knew others would read, relieved his craving for society and for sympathy

till he almost felt as though he had been meeting and talking with the future readers of his books.

"How do you mean, Rafe?"

"What's the size of your cheque, dammit?"

Railthorpe burst into a hearty laugh. "Upon my word, Rafe, I've never thought about that."

"Haven't the fellows who published for you sent a statement?"

"No, they haven't. I wonder why? You see, Rafe, the criticisms in the Melbourne papers were all I could ask and more, and I've never thought about the business side of it. But it's four months since publication, I suppose they should let me know about the sales. I'll ask them to."

He wrote as he had promised, and in his spare hours considered a hundred plans all dependent upon the publisher's reply.

The answer came at last. Railthorpe, actually trembling with delight, looked at it and turned it over for some minutes before opening it. But when he had read it he went hastily to his room and locked the door. Then he read the statement of accounts between the firm and himself over again. "There must be some mistake," he said miserably. "They oughtn't to make blunders like this. It's like flinging one into icy water."

He wrote before going into breakfast, posted his letter asking for an explanation on his way to the office, and worked all day with heavy heart; depression and premonition of misfortune weighed upon him; the next day passed as slowly and unhappily, but he knew that if they answered his letter by return post as requested he would have their reply early next morning. It came: he felt he could not read it in the open where anyone might see him. Going to his room again he tore the note out of its envelope: the firm, referring him to their previous letters, mentioned that he had been warned that publications of verse were unlikely to succeed in Victoria; it expressed regret at the author's obvious and natural disappointment; it remained of opinion that his verses deserved a far better sale, but where there was no market, merit was of little avail; it confirmed the statement of account forwarded to him on the 11th instant and remained——

Railthorpe took the fatal statement of account out of his drawer and went through it again. There was no mistake. Out of the five hundred copies of "The Bard" published, apart from those sent to the press and to the author, three had been disposed of. Yes, only three had been sold.

## CHAPTER IX

ONCE a year upon some Wednesday early in October does the Cooeville Pastoral Agricultural and Horticultural Society hold its show, the benefits whereof, as any Cooevillian will tell you, are many.

As the eventful time draws near, young and bachelor farmers discover that a new hat is a necessity to life, and not infrequently a tie that compels one's gaze is carried home inside the hat. Young wives, too, approach their husbands, and, even as nations, cities, and states, they negotiate an advance: the result of the wife's approach and the husband's advance is evident in the gaiety of the wife's attire to the most unobservant eye upon the great day. And daughters of maturer years, hardworking, and skilled in the kitchen, the milking shed, the dairy, the fowlyard, more easily persuade father, rarely sympathetic with the true needs of feminine nature, that new raiment, especially external, is required for them, in September, than in any other month.

For none of those therein concerned can Show Day be called a day of leisure, and for some of the exhibitors there have been precedent busy days and even weeks; in some instances indeed forethought and care being bestowed upon intended exhibits for periods running even to months beforehand. George Docker, Father Reilly's groom, has for these many days, felt the weight of a great responsibility: a prize of £3 3s. appears in the schedule for "Best Buggy and Pair," and Father Reilly's turn out, which really beongs more to George than to his master, has been duly entered. George has fixed by the date of the Show the time for the painting of the buggy, the clipping of the horses, and the purchase of that splendid new set of harness. The pair he drives are undoubted beauties, well matched in height, in colour, in action. They are the darlings of his heart, and, as the fateful month draws near, attention to their food, their coats, their exercise and medicine—a little—fills up the whole of George's busy day. Naturally he has less time than ever to give to Father Reilly, and naturally Father Reilly is less than ever the owner of his own buggy and pair. At last the day before the battle arrives, and George spends an unhappy afternoon. For to his anxious and exaggerating eye, Larry, the divvle that he always was, manifests symptoms of a slight strain of the off hind. The evening is even worse, for George gathers from gossip in the streets that a sporting doctor from Wichiwoop has brought down a turn-out that has never been defeated in his own district. This news is patiently traced to its source, a visiting groom from Wichiwoop. Him does the diplomatic George lead to the

nearest bar; and there, ordering liquors of the best be brought forth, he makes an offering and pours out a libation at the shrine of friendship; then, privily breathing in his companion's ear his desire for a true report, he demands of him, in the sacred name of Horse, full and accurate description. The companion, stimulated by numerous drinks, describes the rival buggy and pair in glowing terms, adding that the Doc has cartloads of cash, and will stick at nothin' to win.

Mr. George Docker is not the only man who passes a restless night. Mr. Bill Lewis is the husband of Mrs. Bill Lewis; who, in turn, is the chief laundress of Cooeville, and, as such, has purchased a new white shirt that she might wash, starch and iron the same, therewith win the prize for "Best Ironed White Shirt," and afterwards permit her husband to wear it should any sufficiently important occasion arise.

Mr. Bill Lewis himself, though married, takes much interest in his personal appearance; and, observing the said shirt and the beauty thereof, violently desired the same wherewith to attire himself on Show Day and wreak much mischief in the hearts of feminine beholders. But Mrs. Bill gave an emphatic veto.

After a heated argument the husband demanded the size of the shirt. "If it's a fifteen an' a narf, it's mine. D'ye 'ear? I take a fifteen an' a narf shirt, so all fifteen an' a narf shirts is mine."

The wife, overcome and routed by this pitiless logic (which she saw was unanswerable), hastily seized the subject of the war, size fifteen and a half, and rushed from the room to conceal it. Mr. Bill, grieved that the wife of his bosom should be guilty of such conduct, more grieved that he had not anticipated her manœuvre and grabbed the shirt at once, grieved most of all that he could not find it though he searched for it as for hid treasure, his proper pride allowing him to hunt for it only when his wife was out of the way. Shamed by defeat and grieved at the loss of conquests to come, he spends the night before the great holiday between sulking and sleeping, little wotting, ignorant and resourceless one, that, wrapped in softest tissue paper that will not crackle, and beneath the straw pailiassse upon their bed, lies the matter of debate which will to-morrow carry off the first prize.

Scenes that are brighter filled many a house in the twenty-four hours preceding twelve noon on Show Day—that fatal moment when all entries had to be in and placed, when the doors metaphorically speaking, were closed, and the judging began.

Miss Geoghegan enters for the dozen best scones, and many of her friends and some of her enemies, as she well knows, have entered too. Cooeville ladies are celebrated cooks; scones of a lightness and cakes and pastry also, of a variety

difficult to add to, will lie in rich profusion on the shelves of "Cookery Division" at the Show, awaiting the dread arbitrament which will bestow first, second and third prizes. Keen is the rivalry, intensely difficult the task of the judges, bitter the comments of every exhibitor save the winner of the first prize. Miss Annie Wemby, calling on Miss Tandy just before lunch, finds her somewhat flushed of face and short in temper. One cannot enter for "Home-Made Sweets" and spends all morning in the kitchen without suffering oneself, and perhaps passing the suffering on to others. Miss Yarnley finds life easier: she enters only but always for Home-Made Preserves: and having long ago selected her glass jars of marmalade, pie-melon jam, red currant jelly, and apple jelly, she spends the day before the battle in the envied ease of visiting; offering to Mrs. Hoip (Cream Puffs, Orange Cake, Victoria Sandwich), to Mrs. Wemby (Collections of Pastry, Home-Made Pickles), and to Mrs. Labby (nine entries in all), kindly prophecy concerning their own exhibits, and severe criticism on their rivals.

It is not only manly hearts and gentle bosoms that are stirred to tumult before the Show. No, even the careless mind of youth bears its share of the total weight of responsibility lying over Cooeville. Master Stan Labby, aged eleven, has a greyhound pup to enter for competition. The prize is trifling indeed—but the Honour! Too often must others suffer that one be glorified. In this case the martyrdom falls to the lot of Stan's exhibit. Unhappy pup! Daily does Stan hear of some new thing which is good for bringing a dog into exhibition form; he learns one day that cod liver oil makes a dog's hair glossy; he forthwith purloins from his mother's medicine shelf the bottle left over from when his sister was ill, and rubs the stuff vigorously all over the dog; the outraged animal rolls in the dust whereby he becomes an object horrible to look upon: Stan is distressed: the dog lies down on the bare boards of the kitchen floor leaving a greasy mark which, in the eyes of Mollie the servant at least, is also an object horrible to look upon; Mrs. Labby makes enquiries, discovers the misuse of the oil, and informs Mr. Labby. Mr. Labby has a heavy hand, and Stan is again distressed: finally, Master Dick Stenhouse, Stan's chum, hears the story, and remarks, "Well, you are a fool, Stan. What you should a done was poured the oil down the dawg's mouf, and it goes along his inside and into his hairs and he shines and shines." Stan, grieved at his error, washes the protesting pup, and, advised by Mr. Stenhouse that any oil will do, tries to force half a gallon of agricultural machinery lubricating oil, given by another much interested chum, down the throat of the still protesting pup—with disastrous results to the personal attire of Messrs. Stan Labby, pup owner, oil carrier, and pourer down of same,

Dick Stenhouse, pup holder and chief adviser, and Ted Walls, assistant pup holder.

Finally, Stan learns that brushing is the thing for a dog's coat. "Good stiff brushes is the thing, Stan." For a week the pup is brushed and brushed and brushed, till Mr. Labby who has black hair, notices light fawn hairs in his expensive and valued military brushes, and wonders if he is going grey a new way. On his learning the truth, Stan is again distressed.

Nor is Master Stan Labby alone in error when preparing his exhibit for the show. Mr. Austerberry, lover of all that is good, and a great man with the gun to boot, possesses a pedigreed Irish Setter bitch named Venus.

The competition in the Irish setter class is keen, everything must be done which will in anyway enhance the beauties of Venus, already obvious to any ordinary intellect, but not perhaps to that judge, absolutely the biggest idiot in the North-Western District. Did he not when judging last year refer to Shandy Saxon's fox terrier dog, which had just given conclusive proof of his sex, as "Nice little slut, this." Did not Dick Dobbsleigh, one of the stewards of the Dog Section, retail this jest far and wide to the mortification of the judge, who denied it hotly. But Dick Dobbsleigh couldn't invent a thing like that. It was too strong altogether. Did not the same judge the year before pass Venus, then rather young certainly, but standing out in points ahead of all the other entries? Yes, he passed her, actually, and gave the first prize to a short-headed, heavy-necked, thick-eared specimen, and the second to an animal that could only be called a mongrel. A judge like that was a curse. He shouldn't be invited to judge at all. No, by Jove, he should rather be entered as one of the exhibits, for choice in class J., "Swine."

Filled with unwonted bitterness, Mr. Austerberry nevertheless spared no thought to bring Venus to perfect condition by Show time; and the afternoon before, well aware of the importance attached by many to the way an Irish Setter is feathered, decides to curl all the feathering of Venus. To come to this decision is not difficult; to carry it out will, Mr. Austerberry thinks, be no less simple. Has he not heard of girls putting their hair in curling papers? Accompanied by that day's issue of the *Cooeville Chronicle*—nothing but the best and the very latest for Venus—he goes to the stable where Venus does inhabit and cheerfully plunges into action; deciding to attend to the tail first, he squats down beside the overjoyed Venus and proceeds to twist up a strand of the glossy, copper-red hair in a slip of paper. Venus watches with curved neck and great interest. The first curl being done, Mr. Austerberry releases his hold thereof to attend to the next one. Curl number one slowly untwists before his eyes, and Venus, much gratified by this new game, shoves a



cold and damp nose into her master's right ear in token of approval. Mr. Austerberry, bestowing an affectionate curse upon her, removes his ear from immediate contact, and twists curl number one up more tightly still. Once more it slowly uncurls. Mr. Austerberry, abandoning the precarious attitude of sitting on his heels, stands up to think matters over. Venus reaches round for the curl paper, and, sitting down, chews it with obvious realish. "Something wrong here," says Mr. Austerberry. "How the deuce do they do it?" Consideration, investigation, experiment, prove that by twisting a lock of hair up with paper and securing the same with string the curl could be retained in position; it was a long job, but his heart was in it, and at last tail and as much as possible of the hind legs were finished, and the forelegs alone remained. Venus interfered with the rapid completion of the work by coming to the conclusion that her master's close-cropped head, bent down to a level with her own, required maternal attention; she therefore insisted on diligently licking it all over; protests, rebukes, threats, had no effect; the cow-hide switch kept for punishment could not be applied the day before the Show, for it might leave marks, and Austerberry, while he worked hard at the forelegs of Venus, had to submit to her careful and extremely moist toilet-operation.

Once finished, Mr. Austerberry, retiring from the stable in a heated and damp condition, removed all traces of Venus by a thorough bath, and sat down to tea in good spirits. The luxurious laziness of a pipe and an arm-chair followed. "A good job well done is the thing," soliloquizes Mr. Austerberry in happy content.

Before going out for the evening he strolls to the stable for a last admiring glance at Venus. He strikes a match beside her; his pipe falls from his mouth, he hurriedly lights the stable lantern, its light does but confirm his fears: with that flexibility which blesses the young, and with that delicate attention to personal appearance proper to all ladies, Venus has twisted about and chewed, bitten, and withdrawn, each and every one of the tightly tied curlpapers from four legs and one tail. It has been a difficult job, but Venus knows her duty, and now she rejoices, for evidently her master has come out to praise and reward her. She stands with lolling red tongue and glistening teeth, her large brown eyes, full of adoring devotion, fixed upon her master's face. Her master, however, blind mortal that he is, remains oblivious to the beauty of this expression; he shakes his fist at Venus; forgetful of the fact that a lady (one of the highest breeding too) is present, he uses horrible language, this language he repeats several times over as he examines the fringes of her legs and tail and finds them be-slobbered and chewed. There is nothing for it: the legs and tail must be washed and dried and

some new plan for curling the feathers thought of. A bucket of warm water, a cake of dog soap, and his own towel (is it not for Venus?) are smuggled out of the house; spectators and comments alike are undesirable. In half an hour Venus is restored to perfect cleanliness and burnished dry, and her master, sitting on a box, lets his eyes rest upon her while he thinks hard for an efficient methods of curling. Curling tongs?—Mr. Austerberry left home at an early age, and is, indeed, remarkably innocent of the mysteries of the feminine toilet; curling tongs he has heard of, but confesses they are beyond him. Well, what then?—Suddenly Mr. Austerberry smites a mighty smite upon his thigh, and congratulates himself loudly. Venus, appreciating the change of tone, wags her tail, barks, and fawns upon her idol. “Those iron things! Of course. Haven’t I seen girls with a sort of gridiron running through their front hair? That’s the ticket. I’ll see Emma at once.”

But Emma has tidied up the kitchen and gone out for the evening. Miss Scatterton too is absent: the shops are shut. Mr. Austerberry casts about in his mind for remedy. Now who was the most likely—By Jove! Miss Tandy, she’s the one. Didn’t he notice at tennis the other day the front part of her hair all curly and the rest of it straight as a broom? The problem is solved and the evening is yet young. He calls forthwith upon Mr., Mrs., and Miss Tandy. Mrs. Tandy is pleased to see him and says so. Miss Tandy is also pleased to see him, but considers it her duty to inform him to the contrary: Mr. Tandy is just going out. Mr. Austerberry, who takes all that a lady may say at face value, is somewhat cast down. “Sorry if I’m in the road, Miss Tandy. I came up specially to see you too, about—about a bit of business.”

Miss Tandy feels that Romance is in the air and that Ma is in the road. After conversing with apparent aimlessness for some minutes the talk turns on the mildness of the evening, Miss Tandy observing with truth that it might be nicer on the verandah. The obtuse Austerberry, eminently an open-air man, agrees heartily, but makes no move and offers no suggestion. Finally, Mrs. Tandy, catching her daughter’s eye, receives her instructions, and, with adequate excuses, departs intent on household cares. Thus granted a private audience, Mr. Austerberry gets to business with what is, he realizes, an astonishing amount of tact. “I’m in a hole, Miss Tandy. Regularly beat. And I believe you can get me out.” Mr. Austerberry in his earnestness draws his chair nearer. “I know you can, for if you’ll excuse me mentioning it, I noticed your hair the other day. And to-night when I got absolutely stuck I said to myself, ‘By Jove, Miss Tandy, she’s the one.’”

“I always liked him,” declared Miss Tandy to herself.

' And that new way of doing my hair *does* suit my style. Win Geoghegan can say what she likes. Jealous cat. But fancying him noticing! "

" So," pursued the guileless Austerberry, and Miss Tandy hearkened unto him with all diligence, " up I came straight away."

" You bold thing! " says Miss Tandy, languishing.

" Couldn't help it," answers Mr. Austerberry. " The job's got to be done to-night."

" So like a man! " declares Miss Tandy, speaking as an expert. " Great rushing creatures! "

" Well, you'll have to excuse me, you know, but I've been messing about with her all day and I can't fix her up."

Miss Tandy, with unskilled in the management of the blundering sex, forbore to break in upon a speech of dark and apparently dangerous import. Mr. Austerberry, on the other hand, began to feel slightly awkward. Was it quite the proper thing to mention to a girl? Nothing low about it, was there? Then he remembered it was for Venus and his courage returned. He came to the point at once. " Look here, Miss Tandy, I want to make her feathers—I mean her hair, look just as yours does sometimes, all curly you know. And if you'll show me the trick I'll be obliged to you no end. I will so. And," added Mr. Austerberry, with a nebulous idea that the secrets of the toilet would be revealed only to a man of discretion, " I won't give you away. I can keep my mouth shut as well as any man."

It is a mistake to quarrel unless things are quite hopeless. " You know anything I could do for you I would," said Miss Tandy, " but——"

" I knew you were a good sort."

" Well, ask away. Don't think it's always a case of ask and have, you know. You men want too much sometimes. And Ma might come back any minute."

Mr. Austerberry missed this lead, and remained grossly practical. " Well, I don't know what you call the things, curling irons or curling pins or something, and you see the shops are shut, so I can't buy any. I know it must sound awful cheek, but I must get them to-night. If you'd lend me a couple of dozen and show me how to work the things, really, I'd never forget it."

Even Miss Tandy's thoughts could not so mislead her hearing as to make her misunderstand this request. " Curling pins? You come to me to give you curling pins? "

" I do so," answered Mr. Austerberry heartily.

Miss Tandy put this bitter insult away till her next question should be fully answered. Putting it away did not wipe it out: it not only preserved the principal but allowed interest to accumulate. " What do you want curling pins for? "

"Eh? I thought I told you, Miss Tandy. I want her to look her best—absolutely her tip-toppest for to-morrow."

Miss Tandy felt that no longer need she restrain herself. So *that* was all he came for was it, and getting Ma to go away and all, and—she rose to her feet with a jerk. Her voice shrilled angrily. "I'd like to know what you mean by coming to me to talk about your—your goings on. You and this creature you want to look so nice! And coming to *me* about it! You and this woman!"

"But look here!" protests the staggered Austerberry. "What have I said?—Oh, by Jove, what a fool I am. I don't believe I ever mentioned the dog. Look here, what the deuce do you think I've been talking to you about?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Or care either."

"It's all my fault," declares the penitent Austerberry, "I never could carry more than one idea at a time. It's about Venus my b—my dog you know. I want to curl her feathers—the long hair running down behind her legs and along her tail you know—she's in for the Show to-morrow and I've been trying all I know to curl the dashed things and a pretty mess I've made of it."

To discover that a man whom you at first believed was thinking and talking about you has really been thinking and talking about a horrid dog is sufficient to account for some slight emotional disturbance. Miss Tandy permitted disappointment to sour her. "You and your nasty dirty dogs! I wouldn't help you if I could. And coming to me for curling pins! The idea! What next I wonder! And saying you noticed I'd changed me style of doing me hair! And you never meant a word of it! Just paying compliments because you wanted something! Oh——"

Mr. Austerberry walked along the street somewhat cast down. "Made a bally fool of myself, and offended a girl into the bargain. My word, she's a spit-fire. Fairly nagged me out of the house. By Jove, I'm sorry for the man who has to put up with much of that. Hullo, here's Dwyers. I could do with a drink. Sure to be someone here."

There was. There were several. The drinks were several also. On the eve of the Show every hotel is crowded. Before half an hour had passed Mr. Austerberry found himself confiding to Miss Biddy Dwyer his perplexities about Venus and his opinion—heavily expurgated—of the judge. Busy though she might be, Miss Biddy found time to listen with sympathetic ear. As soon as she understood the root of the troubles she informed her father she must be spared for ten minutes and sent Mr. Austerberry to the private parlour. There she arrived herself a minute later and blushing produced a handful of curling pins. "Ah, Mr. Austerberry, you asked me not

to say a word of how you were fixing up the dog. You'll do the same by me now?"

Austerberry, vowing that Miss Bidy was a trump, swore that he wouldn't tell tales for all Cooeville. Thereupon did the lady, producing the pins, explain and demonstrate the use of the same to the grateful Austerberry, and to make sure that he grasped the idea, bade him apply one of the pins forthwith to his hair. Mr. Austerberry, endeavouring to obey, afforded much gratification to Miss Bidy, who became weak with laughter. Finally, she declared that she'd have to do it for him, he was that clumsy. The willing one bowed his crest, but the giggling teacher found that close-cropped hair does not permit the use of curling pins. Austerberry thereupon insisted there was nothing else for it, Miss Bidy must show him the trick on her own hair. Miss Bidy, asserting that he was a real divvle and that she knew Dad would be coming in the door that very minute, complied. Mr. Austerberry, usually quick to learn, took some considerable time to master the art of curling Miss Bidy's fringe, and, despite great care and gentleness, extracted several hairs and an equal or even greater number of subdued shrieks and squeals.

It was late that night when Mr. Austerberry, after an hilarious hour with Venus, sought his bed and slept soundly.

Venus herself, disturbed by the discovery that she could not chew off these irritating things that clicked every time her tail touched her hind legs, passed an unrefreshing night.

## CHAPTER X

MEN are in great request when making up the Show programme and appointing the staff of officials, and Norwood is asked to join the devoted band. He accepts, and is told off as one of the two stewards for Class Q, "Miscellaneous." Live stock, food, and agricultural implements, are not exhibited in this section, but almost anything else appears to find a place in it; and, moreover, nearly all its exhibitors are of the feminine sex, a fact which complicates considerably the duties of the two young men in charge.

A good steward will be at his post at an early hour. Norwood, acting on the advice of the secretary, started for the Show Grounds just as seven was striking. He found that not only were the streets already busy but something more than mere humanity was astir, something intangible but potent, a spirit of happy excitement, of comradeship, of holiday humour: animals felt it and greeted it loudly; horses neighed and whickered, sheep baa'd, bulls bellowed and cows moo'd, each tame cockatoo shrieked unceasingly, while every dog in Cooeville that day was a mere bagful of barks. Norwood had

only turned his first corner when Miss Biddy Dwyer, whom Norwood remembered meeting at St. Patrick Day's Sports, cannoned into him; she, lacking the aid of her many admirers, each busied about his own exhibits, bore in her arms an overwhelming collection of parcels, the inventory beginning with a patchwork quilt, bulky in the extreme, proceeding through nine smaller articles to end with Best Dozen Home-Made Scones, requiring careful handling. Norwood bowed in reply to her gasped, "Oh, Mr. Cherral!" and was about to go on alone when the holiday bacillus before referred to suddenly infected him; he turned back to her, he smiled, a stallion being led past neighed deafeningly. Miss Biddy's Irish terrier yapped, hysterical with joy; Miss Biddy herself showed her excellent teeth in an agonized smile. "May I assist you Miss—er——?"

"Dwyer," panted the oppressed maiden, "Biddy Dwyer's me name. For the love of God, Mr. Cherral, take this quilt that's trying to get to the dirt. Holy Saints! Don't let it fall, and those two pots of jam that the string's cutting the fingers off me something crool."

As they walked to the grounds, Miss Biddy, lightened as to the arms and heart, unsealed the fountain which rose within her mind, and turned its sparkling spray upon her companion: that quilt now, that was so badly wrapped up and him carrying it, would keep a man warm on the night that ever was, and she made it herself this last year. Mrs. Riley, her that lived out at Murphy's Flat, was a great hand with the quilt, she or Mrs. Hawke—did he know Mrs. Hawke that kep' the gatehouse near the station?—always carried off the first prize for the quilts, and though that same one that Mr. Cherral was carr'ing so neat—and don't let that corner hang down for any sake—was the first one she's ever made, still, if the judges had eyes in their heads and had ever slep' in a cold night with one of those quilts that was all for fancy to take the eye and not a bit for the cold, who could tell but what the prize ticket might have the name of Biddy Dwyer on it, and praise be to God. And if Mr. Cherral, that was such a kind gentleman, and the Steward for the quilts would see to give her a good place to hang her first quilt up, and just give a bit of a flip like, in hanging it up—not to cover and hide Mrs. Riley's quilt, God forbid, or Mrs. Hawke's neither—but just to touch it about so that the judges—poor creatures, with so many quilts in no wonder they were confused-like sometimes—could hardly help but looking at her quilt and giving the others the go-by—That was fine marmalade Mr. Cherral was carr'ing, and maybe he'd like a pot after the Show was over, though she misdoubted it would get first prize. Her marmalade was a bit dark maybe for the judges, but it ate lovely. Mrs. Labby, now, was the one to hit the judges

for jam ; she'd be getting all the first prizes ; and, glory be, here was the gate at last, and Mr. Cherral dead with the quilt and all.

The great requisites for the Stewards of Class Q, Miscellaneous, are tact, patience, and good temper. And Mr. Cherral and Mr. Tinner, in charge of this somewhat notorious Class, are busy from the moment they enter the shed. Accompanied by Miss Biddy, Norwood had just stepped in when an extremely buxom dame seized him by the arm. " Oh, where's the gentlemen that looks after us all here ? "

" I am one of them, Madam. Can I help you ? "

Norwood handed his burden of visible quilt over to Miss Biddy as he spoke. The eye of the buxom one fell on it. Forthwith she raised red face and appealing hands to heaven.

" 'Tis Mrs. Riley," murmured Miss Biddy at Norwood's ear. " Her with the quilts. A rare tongue she has."

Mrs. Riley now found the rare tongue. " God save us all, and here's a fine sight for me blessed eyes this day, the saints be good to us, and me sick-tired and waitin' here this two hours lookin' for the gentleman to hang up me quilt that's broke the heart of me comin' in wid the dust blowin' on it, bad luck to me own Mary Ellen that wrop it up so bad—— " Here Mrs. Riley drew breath and Miss Biddy tactfully melted away. But her withdrawal was not to pass unnoticed and unremarked. " And him that's here to help me not here at all, at all, but carryin' on wid one that's old enough to know better, and him carryin' the quilt of her and her not lookin' me in the face but running away behind him, the shame of it—— "

Here Mrs. Riley had once more to pause, though not for lack of words. An interested audience had gathered round, and Norwood felt extremely uncomfortable. Several other ladies with quilts showed clearly that a steward who carried the belongings of an exhibitor in his own class was guilty of gross favouritism. Mrs. Riley was just lifting up an accusing voice once more, when Mr. Tinner, who had been enjoying himself greatly, came to the front and took charge. " Now, Mrs. Riley, we can't have you flirting all the morning with Mr. Cherral. Eh, ladies ? Ha, ha ! lots to do for all of us." Mr. Tinner's vast experience of the sex and easy manners enabled him to obtain favour with the assembly forthwith : an assenting murmur rose, one somewhat excited young lady going so far as to state that there was others as wanted help besides them as had brought all their bedclothes in to take up the room as was wanted.

Another exhibitor also claimed immediate attention ; it appeared that a lady, introducing herself to Norwood as Lewis, Mrs. Bill Lewis, had a question to put and a petition to present. " Was the stewards resposnerable for all the things wunst they had 'em give to 'em ? Supposing it was a shirt

now, a best starched shirt, as was handed over to be shown for the prize, and a man as was a caution and no mistake, should come along—could he take that shirt?"

"Not while I'm alive," declared Mr. Tinner, to whom Norwood thought it fitting to refer a query of such importance. "Why, it's Mrs. Lewis. Is this your shirt? Some one after it? Well, I don't blame them. It looks a beauty. Quite safe here. So go away and be happy."

Then did Mrs. Lewis, treating Norwood as a negligible quantity, make to the all-powerful Tinner her petition: the shirt, er course, 'ad ter be showed with the front uppermost an' the cuffs well out, an' wot with a lot o' people about wot couldn't keep their dirty fingers orf of nothink same as if they was flies, it appeared to Mrs. Lewis expedient in the extreme that the said shirt should be well wrapped up in the tissue paper produced, the said wrapping to be removed when the place was cleared, and the judging began. Could the shirt and the matter be so arranged? If so, Mr. Tinner, as was always the gentleman—Mr. Tinner decreed that as it was suggested, so it should be.

The stream of exhibits flowed steadily in, each exhibit being accompanied by its owner in a state of excitement varying from mere holiday happiness to a marked crisis of the nerves. Norwood no longer despised Mr. Tinner: he might refrain from praising his address and manner, these offended him almost as much as of yore—but a man who could manage with apparent ease and without an error the touchy and highly inflammable crowd round him, was not to be condemned. Norwood, though unaccustomed to accepting directions, placed himself unreservedly at Mr. Tinner's orders, and thereby, though he knew it not, wiped away for good Mr. Tinner's dislike for him, and removed from the minds of many ladies, who knew Norwood from gossip only, the reputation he held in the country-side of being that proud he thinks we're just dirt.

Time is not kept with cruel strictness on Show Day: at twelve thirty the judging of Class Q. began, Norwood and Tinner silently following the judges and noting their decisions. Two had struck before this work was over, and Norwood congratulated himself that he was free at last. Mr. Tinner smiled upon him in friendly fashion. "I suppose you know the custom, Mr. Cherral? We've got to take the two lady judges to lunch. Which of the old girls is your fancy? I'll take the one you leave. If you ask me," added Mr. Tinner, unable to refrain from friendly conference with the man who had worked so steadily and obediently with him all morning, "there's not much choice."

When Norwood sought his room that evening he admitted to himself, that, so far from having experienced the expected



boredom, he had, on the whole, enjoyed the day, and had learnt several things from its various happenings, and even now, extremely tired and sleepy, he felt strangely cheerful.

He did not know that his attending the Show, and his work and his demeanour while there, had excited most favourable comment, and had done much to expel dislike and misjudgment from the minds of the wives and daughters all over the country-side.

Norwood had indeed, though profoundly ignorant of the fact, done the best day's work he had yet achieved at Cooeville.

## CHAPTER XI

DISAPPOINTMENT did not describe Railthorpe's feelings at the failure of "The Bard"; it was more a feeling that he had been betrayed; as though a friend on whom he had securely leant had suddenly and miserably failed him. When once the criticisms of the press had confirmed, and more than confirmed, his hesitating shy estimate of his verses, he had trusted confidently to some recognition by the knowledgeable hearts of the public; judging the warmth of feeling in others and their passionate desire for friendship by his own standard, he had glowed with the belief that inevitably many—both men and women, and they the picked characters of Victoria's people—would recognize his call, and eagerly, and with exquisite sympathy and fellow-feeling, would gratify him, and their own, ardent longing for understanding affection. He had always refused to believe that these desires were rare, or weak, or wrong; knowing he could never speak of them to Rafe—he could imagine how such self-revelations would be received by his friend—the purest joy had welled up in his heart when the press had welcomed "The Bard." If critics could enjoy it, and read a little between the lines, how much more would all the dear people who kept the world sweet by the goodness of their hearts and the wisdom of their minds help him, not because he deserved it, not because "The Bard" was anything wonderful, oh, no, not for absurd reasons like these, but just because their sweet natures would not allow them to sit cold and silent while a young voice called for aid. And when these future friends met, their mutual trust and affection would deepen as the years slipped by. This could be no vain imagining, he assured himself; all Cooeville would laugh if he confessed it, but there must be a world beyond Cooeville, "I won't believe that all the world is just like Cooeville, and I won't believe Rafe. This is not a commercial age. Poetry dead? Romance dead? Never. They live in every heart. They must."

In these happy thoughts had he lived; high hopes filling his heart, ardent desires glowing within him—until that fatal statement of account. One copy of "The Bard" had been sold to Rafe he knew, and one to Goff; that left one, only one, that had been purchased by the great unknown public, by those numerous kind hearts, by those many wise spirits, by those countless future friends, of whom he had so fondly dreamed.

The wound went deep; to none could he speak of the shattering of his beliefs; he hid his pain from all; he gave jesting answers to enquiries from Rafe, and prepared himself to so answer all who might speak to him of "The Bard," but the references to it by others were few, and the little excitement caused by the *Chronicle's* mention of a local resident having published a book quickly died away.

Gradually as the weeks passed he climbed up from his miserable and uncomprehending mood to clearness of thought; he became convinced that "The Bard" had failed, had made no appeal to those hearts that he still insisted were living in the world, because it lacked depth; it jested all the time though the jesting was mere surface play and seriousness underlay it. Perhaps he deserved the neglect that had been his portion; had he, fearing Cooeville gibes, hidden his real feelings too thickly with pretended worldliness? Had his assumed cynicism, shallow and hated quality, really imposed on people? Had he dreaded speaking out frankly? Was that how he had blundered? And the composition of light verse ceased on that night when he answered Yes to his own question. The twenty-six complete poems written with ease and delight since "The Bard" came out, he tied together and locked away. The unfinished ones he burned. And from that evening, when fresh subjects or lines or verses of "The Bard" type floated up into his mind as bubbles in the water of a spring, he enjoyed them for the moment, then let them die. The world was earnest; he must no longer hide his own seriousness, he must no longer merely hint at it. Light verses were now unwanted. And yet he loved them. But they must be weeded out. Slowly there rose in his mind the idea of a second publication—another small book, but, oh, so different from the first. Here he would hide nothing; he would speak so that none could misunderstand. These reasonings and their consequent resolution comforted him much: he felt he was no longer drifting puzzled and hopeless: he believed he had discovered the cause of what he now called the Dream-Disaster, and with the definite aim of redeeming his former ignorant error he rested almost content, writing only when he heard the call, telling no one of his plan, but secretly fortified against his own feeling of failure, and against the occasional jesting reference of Rafe to his authorship.

## CHAPTER XII

THE four months since Norwood had reopened his office had given him ample leisure during professional hours, and this he had devoted to legal study. Accepting Rafe's advice, he not only sought for knowledge in books, but attended every Court and Land Board held at Cooeville, and, though he had never a case himself, yet he learned much of legal methods and something of human nature from the Bench, from the Bar, and from the witnesses.

But perhaps it was just as well that as he walked that December evening to Mrs. Bowyer's, he could not hear the conversation of the three friends who were expecting him.

"I'm afraid no business of any sort has come to Mr. Cherral yet," said Railthorpe. "And I know a good many people are expecting him to give up and bolt any day. They don't recognize the stuff he's made of, and——"

"Railthorpe, my boy," interrupted Goff, "you're a born idealizer and I'm sorry for you. But if you must have an idol select a worthy one. An Englishman is no proper thing for a man like yourself to burn incense to."

"What makes you so bitter against the English, Goff? I don't believe you mean half you say, but whenever you have a chance you take a fling at them."

"Bitter? No. But I know them, my boy, that's why I scorn them."

"Did you say 'scorrun,' Goff?" demanded Doctor Rafe, sitting up alertly.

"Let him alone, Rafe, what do you want to stir him up for? Just as I'm asking important questions too. Goff, be sensible for once—can you pick out some fault you think peculiarly English, and tell me why you accuse the nation of it?"

"Understand now," said Goff, sitting up on the grass to speak more freely, "I don't blame the English for not being perfect—no, nor even for thinking they are. But if you ask for something especially English, I'll just confine myself to one characteristic that overtops all the others perhaps—and we'll call it snobbery."

"Define the damn thing," commanded Rafe.

"It's valuing a man by what he has, instead of by what he is." Mr. Goff sprang to his feet. "It's shutting your eyes to what you see, and saying you see what other fools tell you to see. It—it's"—the speaker's excitement increased—"it's pretence, deceiving yourself into believing ye like a man when y'only like his title or his money. It's lying to yourself and others till all the truth and love and nature within ye—"

and maybe that's little enough—has been poisoned and ye've grown into a soulless animal with mind and spirit and reason and character eaten away by insincerity—that's snobbery for ye."

"Well, Goff"—Rafe, surprised at his friend's earnestness, looked up at him in amused perplexity—"that'll do to go on with. Some Englishman must have trodden on your toes pretty heavily to wind you up for all that. Snobbery, eh? You won't find it among honest workers or decent chaps anywhere. In fact, you only get it in what Mr. Cherral—why the devil isn't he here—in what Mr. Cherral would call Society. And any one who goes into Society"—Doctor Rafe's voice told plainly what he thought of the aforesaid Society, "deserves all he gets. Society! Snobbery! They're the same thing often enough. We've heard the truth for once, and," added Rafe with marked surprise, "from a wild Irishman, too."

"I'll say this for ye, Rafe"—Goff wheeled round on him in a flash—"it's the only fault ye haven't got. Ye're an ignorant, abusive, insulting savage, and try a better man's patience at times. But there's no taint of the snob in you. Praise God for that. It's perhaps for that, and maybe because ye've saved my life once or twice, that I put up with you at all."

Railthorpe had jumped up before Goff was half-way through his original outburst, and now broke in almost stuttering with excitement. "It sounds—it sounds exactly right what you say, Goff, but never, never can I believe that a great nation, or rather the leaders of a great nation, because you're speaking of the upper classes, could be guilty of such wicked, such—such lunatic conduct. Why——"

"I'll not argue with you," interrupted Goff, "for there it is plain for all men to see. The whole nation's rotten with it."

"It couldn't be. It couldn't be. Great Englishmen stooping to that? Never!"

"Except for the lowest and the highest," continued Goff, inexorably, "social life is a series of circles. Each circle in England scorns the one below. Each circle hardly admits the existence of human beings that don't move in their own or one above it."

"Goff, really I—I——"

"D'ye hear me?" shouted Goff. "I say the highest ambition of every Englishman is to climb into the set above his own."

"What paltry rubbish! I don't believe a word of it," cried Railthorpe hotly.

But Goff was on a favourite theme. "In England, wealth—no matter where it comes from—gives social entry every-

where. But if there's anything they adore more than the man of cash it's the man of title."

"And why not look up to a man of title?" demanded Railthorpe. "I don't mean the mushrooms in Victoria who get a knighthood because of a Royal birthday, and are never heard of again. But in England, where a title means your ancestors stood out above their fellows for generations. Come now, Goff, when a man is sprung from a famous ancestry to begin with, and benefits from his birth upwards in glorious example and famous emulation, and all that modern thought can do in training and culture for nobility of mind with its distinction of manner—surely that man begins life higher up the scale than all others except his peers, surely he deserves our respect?"

"D'ye know what ye're speaking of?" asked Mr. Goff excitedly.

"Well"—Railthorpe became slightly apologetic—"I don't pretend to be learned about pedigrees and heraldry—"

"Nobody in Australia does," asserted Doctor Rafe. "Or wants to be either. A title sits as naturally on an Australian as a pair of pants on a kangaroo. Don't try coming your foreign learning over us, Goff. You and your aristocracy! Irish titles too, I suppose. Baron O'Brien and what you'd call the Juke of Be-jabers."

Both Railthorpe's earnestness and Goff's half-jesting, half-serious mood, had to give way to Rafe's pleasure at this remark.

"But, Railthorpe man, you've a lot to learn," added Goff. "The genuine aristocracy exterminated each other—all but—in the Wars of the Roses, and—well, we needn't argue about the nobility of titled descent, for titles were used by James I. to raise money, and they've been for sale ever since."

"Rubbish," said Rafe.

"I'd say rubbish too, Goff, but there's no need to. I can prove you wrong by your own words. Ah—I've got you now," exclaimed Railthorpe jubilantly. "How could such respect as you talk of—such reverence almost—be paid to rank if any ruffian with sufficient cash could buy a title as he buys a block of land? You've damned our mother race in each of two statements, and the two statements destroy each other. Oh, Goff, Goff, what a chap you are!"

Mr. Goff rose up in much excitement. "And it's me contradict myself? It's the truth I've said."

"Do you still say any title can be bought?" interrupted Railthorpe, laughing.

"Money'll do it," replied Mr. Goff.

"And in spite of that the greatest nation in the world reveres a man of title? Oh, I say! Rafe—"

"D'ye hear me now?" demanded Mr. Goff angrily. "I

say that if the average Englishman were kicked off the doorstep by a duke, d'ye know what that Englishman would do? He'd take home those trousers that bore the sacred imprint of a ducal boot, and he'd put them under a glass case, and he'd say his prayers to them every morning for the rest of his life. D'ye hear me now?"

### CHAPTER XIII

To the surprise of the harder business men of the town, Mr. Cherral still remained with them, and still his office opened regularly for those clients who never came. But Norwood was finding the struggle for business harder than he had imagined.

As each day ended with nothing done, he had said, "Tomorrow." As weeks passed, "It cannot be long." But now months had travelled slowly by, and he seemed no nearer than on the day he had re-opened his office. It was early Spring then. Spring had bloomed, Spring had warmed to Summer, Summer had faded to Autumn, and now fruitful Autumn had fallen to Winter. Winter was again rejoicing all Cooeeville, early Spring was again in sight, and still he sat alone.

Two events had within recent months occurred to remind him of the past and to strengthen his resolution not to fall back again to his old beliefs and conduct: Joe Dolomy, evidently informed to some extent by Miss Lily Frettle of Norwood's doings, had called at the office and apologized to Norwood, his obvious sincerity more than atoning for any clumsiness of bearing or expression, and something almost approaching a friendly feeling had grown up between the two men who could now each respect the other. The second occurrence woke in Norwood a feeling of guilt and of sadness;—to the astonishment of nearly all Cooeeville Miss Seamond announced that she and her nieces were removing to Melbourne.

Miss Seamond's own desire for this was given as the cause, but Cooeeville society knew better: no one believed that the aunt could have come to such a decision—or indeed to any decision—alone; and every one knew that Miss Lily had grown thin and restless and unhappy; more than one tongue spoke of the one-time attentions of Mr. Cherral to Miss Lily and of their sudden cessation, and, at afternoon teas, for a month after the news was made public, facts—or fancies—were arranged together, and motives inferred with all the skill of long practice. Mrs. Malintop thought that Miss Lily was playing her cards—oh—very well. "They say that absence makes the heart grow fonder you know, and you may be sure this move to Melbourne is meant to bring somebody who's

grown cool lately up to the mark. It really ought to. Some girls are really born little Generals."

By this time all the money that Norwood had raised nearly a year before had gone; he sent his watch and chain, the balance of his mother's jewels, and all of his own save one pair of sleeve links and three plain gold studs to Melbourne for sale, and when the proceeds were paid to his credit he found that, owing no man anything, he could carry on at Cooeville as at present for about seven months more, that was through the coming Spring and Summer and Autumn. And there an end. That afternoon despondency settled blackly around him; with a sigh he turned to his Acts of Parliament, and worked doggedly, though hopelessly, till the hour came to close the office and go home for tea.

#### CHAPTER XIV

RAILTHORPE stole softly from his room, where the lamp still shone, into the little garden. Though midnight had struck two hours ago, weariness or sleep were alike far from him. The breeze that rustled the trees blew chill upon him, for Spring had only begun; but breeze and chill were unfelt, as, sitting on the old stump that served as a garden seat, he lifted his eyes to the glowing stars above him. The face had aged much in the year that had gone since the publishing of "The Bard," but now it was lighted up with happiness. There was reason for the late hours; for the indifference to fatigue, to cold; for the flood of joy that floated him far from Cooeville: the feelings that swelled his heart were the echoings of the lines he had just written, and they spoke, he knew, the highest truth to which he had yet attained. Though he had dreaded lest he should again publish immature and mistaken work he had not written slowly, for he could never write at all save in gushes.

Turning from rhyme to blank verse for his deeper and crowding thoughts, he had discovered, to his humble and grateful delight, that he was more than at ease in this great measure; it welcomed him; yet it had not been in his mind to venture on it till the evening when suddenly the idea of the second book had been born; the lack, not of company, but of companionship, that had oppressed him of later years had increased and so weighed upon him that he had felt unable to keep silent further. Assured that this feeling was wrong, believing fiercely that the world was inhabited by noble hearts, and by many a one longing, like himself, for true and understanding friendship, he saw in a flash a man suffering from loneliness like himself, not by the necessity of circumstances—Railthorpe turned hastily from the thought of

writing about Cooeville and its starving solitude—but through wilfully debarring himself from human society; he saw this man go out into the world—as he himself longed to do—and there discover, as inevitably he must, those true and comprehending hearts that lived and moved and worked all through the world, ennobling it and all whom they met, earning for themselves, and pointing out to others, the joy that life should hold in spite of the grief, the loss, the unknown, that surrounded every human spirit; this man passed out from the unhappy gloom of solitude and his own thoughts into the world around him; he heard voice after voice speaking of the varying emotions of the heart, and, at the end of his day of mingling with his kind, the man returned home, freed from the evil numbing poison bred from solitude, stirred by affection for his kind, stimulated to nobler living.

Railthorpe had vowed to write nothing in this second book which he called "A Day" save what he felt deeply, and knew to be true: the opening lines fulfilled this resolution to the letter, he had written them on the night when he first conceived the plan of the book; with ease, almost without thought, the words of the central solitary figure had overflowed from his heart on to the paper before him.

"Sorrow the lot of life, and solitude  
On each upleading path : on th' lower walks  
Not unaccompanied travels man indeed,  
Nor without company of voices loud  
And intermingled revelling : but a friend  
He shall find never ; to whose trusted ear  
Confessions of the acted past, the hopes  
Of forward plans, complainings, prophecies,  
Are given with moved heart, while he returns  
Like confidence and love. Rare fellowship,  
More dreamed of than encountered."

The man continues his unhappy musings.

"The paltriness of life ! A gift unasked.  
What do we here ? We see the present grief  
Merging in that to come, and evermore  
The passing day binding another weight  
On to the load we bear. Is history  
A tear-stained past : and is the true surmise  
But the repeated tale ? The two bridged o'er  
By this complaining self ? "

He broods over the ills of life.

"Love enters not into all lives, nor Fortune  
Opens her hands before them. Beauty and Truth  
Have removed far indeed. Are there such things ?



The dreamers start, and call their gods to witness,  
 What are their clamoured gods, and where rule they ?  
 If here, where is their justice ? See abroad  
 The meanness and the insolence of wealth :  
 The loud-voiced coward still preserving sway  
 With promise and with threat : the stained faith,  
 And the dulled honour which we may not note :  
 Ah, how preferment high drifts kindly clouds  
 O'er the unsightly past : the gleam of gold,  
 Brighter than e'er the fabled stone that lit  
 The fisher's hut, dazzles the eye profane,  
 Or shines but on the virtues of its lord,  
 Or is itself the potent alchemy  
 Transmuting what it touches ; clear-eyed Truth,  
 An uninvited guest where'er she speak,  
 Intrudes—no welcome found ; Humility  
 (Save by those meek who test her golden use  
 With practised application, or by those  
 Who wear her as a garment for set times),  
 Is struck from the list of virtues : Good Report  
 Has for her mother favour——”

Then weary of his thoughts he turns savagely on himself.

“ And I but sit me down and feebly fret !  
 I cannot right myself, much less the world,  
 Impotent sympathy ! Can callousness  
 Supply the want of hope ? I am alone :  
 Far from rich-hearted worth. I feel as one  
 Standing upon a solitary cliff  
 Of barren isolation, whence he views  
 Large o'er a stony tract : nor finds he there  
 Or comfort, pleasure, peace, response, nor hope.”

He longs for escape from himself, and declares that he will go out among men again.

“ Would that I had release  
 From the dominion of unrestful thoughts  
 That close me in ; by strong soliciting  
 I have called round me every gloomy sprite  
 That broods with weary self : a baleful troop,  
 Summoned and suffered, quiet entry made,  
 And once admitted, from their sympathy  
 Usurped my native power, and have held rule  
 This many a day, while tedious hour on hour  
 Drew toward the unrefreshing night.”

He passes out from his room into the dawning day.

“ The drowsy world  
 Is swinging into light. Her habitants  
 Awake to life. Hark, I hear voices—voices—

*A voice.*

“With eager feet let us arise,  
And hasten from the pris'ning room,  
Till free beneath the general skies  
We pause before the breaking gloom.”

He hears the voice of religion at prayer, and wonders,

“He speaks as one would answer. Can it be ?  
Through every age beliefs have filled the place  
Of the resultant truth. Men hear the story  
How a god sought man on earth, and lived with him,  
And taught what is, and what should come, and died,  
And by his death proved love : and after rose  
And showed eternal power.

The tale begins

In the dim start of time, and has no end  
Till Death's unanswerable call shall sound,  
And we pass on to proof. And are these words  
Devised by priest and prophet for their ends,  
And held to fill the void ?—if we but knew—  
If we but knew,  
Then mysteries are higher workings, and  
We bow to rule, not chance.”

He hears man glorying in his powers, and he comments hopelessly,

“He speaks, poor worm, as he had climbed his clod,  
Looking down an inch on others. The framing tongue  
The credulous ear, and the warped fancy stale  
Stamping the thing a man. 'Tis wonderful  
What we will still believe. The human ear  
Is never closed, so it be folly speak,  
Or praise, or gratulation. We economize,  
Now every man's his fool.”

In his day's walk voices speak on all sides, and the traveller finds in them the contradiction and injustice of the world.

Inextricably mixed

Seem to me good and evil, and rewards  
Are lacked, or gravely wronged. Virtues may fade  
Unheeded and unsought, or may become  
The trumpeted theme of song, at barest chance :  
And staining crimes, unless stripped naked, bar  
No path to power or praise. Is life  
A thread on which are strung the unflawed pearl,  
And ruby of rich light, with rubble base ?  
A band that holds together rue and rose,  
With sorry nettle mingling, plucked and placed  
By Chaos, primal King, still holding sway,  
Over this world so wise ?

What is the end ?

Who is our guide, and where the way ? To what  
Shall we give heed and credence ? Where, oh where  
Will all paths meet ?

Take life's best gift, and test it to the full !  
Then turn aside and weep : for ah ! how sad  
To find at the root of all dead emptiness !

We cry

For brighter light, more light, and having it,  
Find deeper shadows thrown.

What can we grasp

From the o'erturning leaves of that great book  
Whereof we are a part ? The shriek of pain,  
The moan of slow disease, the sob of grief,  
The wistful sigh after a vanished face,  
—Turn, hear the hearty voice of happiness,  
With laughing interludes and whisperings soft,  
And honest hand meets hand, and over all  
The Heavens breathe benediction. Hear again,  
The soiling curse dropped as he jostles by,  
The bloodless sneer, the shallow judgment, and  
The unheated gratulation. Look below,  
Fulfilled desire falls not to the worthy, but  
The evil man strengthens himself and rules  
A world worth deserted."

With the approach of evening he feels the soothing influences  
of the hour ;

"The sun sinks fast, and with the day's old age.  
The calm and resignation of the time  
Breathe in the air. The hush of evening's rest  
Stills the wide tumult of the human heart  
And whispers peace at the close,—so might it be !—  
To a siege of doubts, and fancies frail, and hopes  
Springing like frequent bubbles in the glass,  
And failing full as fast."

And he meditates on all he has heard that day.

"What I have heard to-day

Is but the splashing of a single drop  
In Time's majestic current, which sweeps on  
Around me now unheard ; while I stand by  
And grieve for all to change. Oh fool, dull fool  
To sit and brood and brood till smouldering thought  
Fire me to madness while the infinite  
And trivial rule in turn, or rack me hard  
With often rule together.

What escape  
Lies from this grief, or does necessity,  
Inexorable Queen, decree we should  
Conquer complaint, nor seek to pierce beyond  
The given limit of the mysteries, and  
Spur faithful on? Shall we, poor mites,  
Sit laughing at the inevitable, and  
'Voiding what blows we may, bear silently,  
And pass we know not whither unafraid?  
Enough of this poor theme! Here little lies  
Of ease, or of solution.

The present time  
Shows tasks that call us loudly to go forth  
And answer thought with action. Never yet  
Has good done died. If I can help one heart,  
Inspire one weary mind, defeat a wrong,  
Lay bare a scheme, destroy a lie, or find  
A brother to my help, one life at least  
Has lost its barrenness. If many tears,  
More need to dry them, and where'er grief bides  
There lies our work."

Still sitting in the silence beneath the stars, Railthorpe asked that, come what might, he should in his life know at least one sympathetic friend, and should be enabled himself to help at least one other of the human race.

## CHAPTER XV

"It was a great winter, Tiny, and this weather is tip-top for summer. I never felt better myself"—Mr. Hoip swelled out his chest, smote it vigorously, marked time, and swung his arms with much energy—"but you haven't been yourself for a long time, Tiny. You wear yourself out. And you don't enjoy life—or——" Mr. Hoip stopped suddenly.

"Yes, Will. Go on. I don't enjoy life myself or let you enjoy it either. Is that it?"

"Oh, come, I say, Tiny, you know, I only said——"

"I heard what you said, thank you, Will. You needn't repeat it. I'm not likely to forget it."

Mr. Hoip waved his hands helplessly at his wife. "You look after me too much. It'll do you good to be away from me for awhile. You need a holiday, Tiny. You do really. We both do," declared Mr. Hoip sagely, in one of his unfortunately truthful moments.

"You speak as if you were tired of me."

Mr. Hoip, voluble of protestations and denials and explanations, sought desperately to convince his wife that she misjudged him, but finally abandoning the attempt in des-

pair, he turned to his former theme. "I heard to-day that Mrs. Geoghegan was off for a month at the seaside—you're chummy enough with her, Tiny—why shouldn't you go with her? Eh? She'd be glad enough. And you're run down, you know you are, too much headache, feeling everything too much——"

"How often have I asked you not to swing about the room like that, Will? I feel *that*, I'm sure. It's enough to upset anyone."

Mr. Hoip, who had been walking up and down the room and working his arms, paused, abashed and contrite. "There you are, Tiny," he remarked in a hushed and soothing voice. "Just as I say, feeling everything till it hurts you. That's what gave me the idea," continued Mr. Hoip, forgetting to be hushed and soothing, and mastering his arms and legs with difficulty. "Look at all the fun you'd have if you went, sea-bathing, cool breezes, picnics, paddling," enumerated Mr. Hoip, falling in love with his idea as he expounded it. "By Gee, Tiny, it'll set you up, you'll come back brown and plump and able to enjoy everything, and you won't have a fault to find—I mean"—Mr. Hoip corrected himself hastily—"I mean——"

"Never mind explaining, Will, I quite understand. But you needn't trouble to arrange my movements for me. You know very well it's impossible. Who would look after you if I went away? And besides, Will, you can't afford it, and—and I don't know that I want to go away alone."

Mr. Hoip, full of his scheme, missed his wife's hesitation and affectionate suggestion. "Pooh, pooh, Tiny, don't you worry about the cost. I can run it all right, and if it cheers you up it'll be money saved in the end. You go, Tiny, and have a high old time. I'll pull along splendidly without you—for a while," exclaimed Mr. Hoip loudly, in answer to his wife's gaze—"just for a while, Tiny. I'll miss you horribly of course, you know I will——"

A week later Mr. Hoip, just back from seeing off the 7.30 a.m. train with his wife in it, opened his front door boldly, noisily; partly to ease the vigour that surged through him, partly to enjoy the delight of doing it unchecked; there could be no protest, "Oh, Will, you always come into the house so explosively." He strode down the hall with equal boldness and somewhat increased noise; there could be no complaint, "Will, I suppose you can't help it, but you're so racketty." He kept his hat on, none could rebuke him for wearing it in the house. He tipped it over the back of his head, there was no one to tell him how vulgar it looked. He burst open the dining-room door and slammed it behind him, he felt he must slam a door or burst; he opened the door again and re-slammed it joyfully; he repeated the action with increased pleasure.

He pulled to the fireplace the arm-chair that his wife believed should be enjoyed by visitors only, he took from the couch the forbidden cushion and performed the equally forbidden feat of pitching it across the room into the chair; noticing with true happiness that he had rucked up the hearth-rug, he sat down, he looked round, smiling with an exquisite sense of security; he put his feet on the fender—prohibited act! He stuck his hands in his pockets—worse and worse! He whistled—in the house too! He kicked the fender and rattled the fire-irons as he rose—so unbearable! He poked the empty fireplace vigorously—such a silly habit! He put the poker back on the wrong end of the fender—so untidy! Sitting down again he jumped up—so sudden and disquieting! He tramped about the room happily—so restless and upsetting! He swung his arms, he punched the air—so childish! He danced about the room, grasping a chair as a partner he pushed the table from its place and waltzed about (—so ridiculous!) singing as he did so.

“Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do,  
For I'm half crazy all for the love of you——”

—letting his spirits run away with him! And finally he fell into the arm chair—(couldn't he even sit down like other people?) almost breathless. Tipping his hat still further back, he, though yet unbreakfasted, lit a cigar—filthy thing!—and murmured with great affection and propriety, “Well, Tiny's a good wife, bless her, but”—he glanced round the room with its chairs disarranged and its hearthrug ruffled up and its table askew—“thank Heaven for all its mercies.”

Mr. Hoip worked cheerfully at the office throughout the day. Mr. Wemby called in the afternoon. “Just about knock-off time, Hoip. The wife thought you might like to start your spell of batching by taking tea with us to-night, and then we can have a game of bowls—early tea to-day. Eh?”

“By Gee, yes. A fine idea.”

“You know that letter from the Werrimac Hospital that the Club got—that everybody got?” said Mr. Wemby, sitting down for a comfortable chat. “It seems the Mayor's going to call a public meeting to discuss the whole thing.”

“Is he? There'll be some fighting at it. Good thing for you you take the same side as I do about it. Eh, Wemby?”

Mr. Wemby took his friend's jest seriously. “Well, you know, Hoip, speaking as man to man, and I hope I may say as sensible men, and as friends, Hoip——”

“Rather!”

“I think that we always would take the same view, you know. We—we—we're bound to.”

"Wemby and Hoip," declared Mr. Hoip himself with noisy enthusiasm, "against any two."

"It'll be a big meeting," said Mr. Wemby, harking back and wagging his large head—"a big meeting. And I don't know that we'll come to any agreement. You see there are four churches to be represented besides a lot of other bodies, and somehow—" Mr. Wemby screwed up his face as his mind probed the matter deeply—"somehow the churches don't agree as much as you'd think they might."

"I suppose so," agreed Mr. Hoip absently.

"I don't believe you're really interested, Hoip," declared Mr. Wemby in playful sorrow. "Now if you Presbyterians——"

"Well?" asked Mr. Hoip as his friend paused. "What about us?"

Mr. Wemby cared far more for Mr. Hoip than he did for the Church of England. Mr. Hoip cared greatly for Mr. Wemby and not at all for any church, nevertheless the two friends delighted in occasional theological combats.

Mr. Wemby had only to shake his head once over the errors of the Presbyterians, for Mr. Hoip, whom no man could accuse of Biblical bias or deep patristic learning, to shake his twice over the state of the Church of England at Cooeville. On the other hand, if Mr. Hoip, whose theological views were apt to be local and personal, offered adverse criticism upon Mr. Snodleigh, then would Mr. Wemby, breathing heavily, suggest that the Presbyterians would do well to put their own house in order first.

"You're a great fighter for your church, Hoip," admitted Mr. Wemby. "I must say that. You're a—a regular—" Mr. Wemby hesitated—"a regular Presbyterian," he concluded triumphantly.

"Well," said Mr. Hoip, getting out of his chair to stand on the hearthrug and straddle his legs in determined fashion and inflate his chest aggressively. "I mayn't know much about religion and all that, but, by Gee, I'm sticking up for my church."

In this remark Mr. Hoip unwittingly crystallized the mental attitude of the major portion of Cooeville's churchgoers.

"But it's dry work talking about churches," continued Mr. Hoip; "do you think we could pick up Jessington anywhere? I wonder where he is?"

Mr. Wemby pondered seriously over this query. "Do you know, Hoip, I daresay we—we might find him up the street. Do you think—eh, Hoip?"

"The very thing!" declared Mr. Hoip, welcoming the unspoken suggestion and slamming the door of the safe with a bang. "Not a bad idea. You've a great head on you sometimes, old man."

Mr. Wemy beamed upon his friend. "Well, do you know, Hoip, sometimes—only sometimes you know—I think I have."

## CHAPTER XVI

NORWOOD'S third summer at Cooeville was half over; he decided that either it had so far been a cool one, or else he had become inured to the climate; in fact, it suited him. The dry heat of summer, the crisp and bracing winters, a climate which for at least six months of the year was above reproach: the open-air manner of life, necessitating a walk between office and lodgings four times daily, the evenings on verandah or in gardens, the regularity of the physical life, had improved Norwood's health till he marvelled at himself.

His friendship with Rafe had deepened; the intimacy between the Ormerods and himself had increased, he had met the daughter who had been so long in England, he often spent a week-end at Warrington, and now he was invited there for the whole of the approaching Christmas holiday week.

Reflecting on his new feeling of vigour, on the many interests he was finding around him, Norwood declared to himself as he walked about his office that morning that if he could but acquire a practice he might admit that Cooeville possessed many attractions.

A short burly figure halted in the office doorway. "I don't suppose you know me, Mr. Cherral, but I'm Martin Dwyer."

Norwood's attention awoke alert and ready; he had seen the man's face in the street often enough. Was this the long-awaited-for client at last?

—"Dwyer of the Corner Hotel, y'know," added the visitor.

"I've known the building for some time," said Norwood, "though not the owner till this moment." Norwood, having learnt that no one was contemptible merely because Australian, was fast acquiring the power of chatting pleasantly, even if briefly, with people whom he would, in former days, have treated with cold silence.

"It's not the owner talking to you now," said Dwyer, with a deprecatory grin, "I wish 'twas. I'm only the licensee. Mr. Thriddlerley's the owner; and a hard man he is. Though I've heard you're not afraid to stand up to him, Mr. Cherral." Mr. Dwyer's grin now became one of pure enjoyment. "Bad luck to it that I missed being in Court when you gave it him. But I heard of it. I heard of it. I'm told you just chewed him up and spat him out again like dirt. And dirt he is.



But I'm talking to you in confidence, Mr. Cherral, you're my solicitor now. You won't give me away?"

Norwood's acquaintance with colloquialisms had of late increased tremendously.

"I should prefer you not abusing your landlord, but you may be sure that nothing said in this room will be repeated outside."

"That's right," said Dwyer. "That's right. I'm a bit of a sporting man, Mr. Cherral," he added after a pause, "and I like a flutter. I know what Mr. Dobbsleigh can do in Court, and I don't know what you can do. So when the police give me a bit of blue paper I said to myself, 'If Mr. Cherral can talk like that to old Thriggerley just by himself like, how could he deal it out in Court with a good case for a client behind him. So I want you to defend me, Mr. Cherral.'"

"It's a peculiar method of judging forensic ability, but that doesn't matter. You wish me to defend you? Against what?"

"Against them damn police," exclaimed Dwyer much aggrieved. "It was all right when Sergeant Sullivan—good luck to him wherever he is—was here, he gave a man no trouble. But now with this teetotaller in charge—Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Dwyer, throwing out his arms in a moving appeal to his solicitor—"Do you think there's any justice at all—at all in a Government that'll make a Sergeant of Police out of a teetotaller?"

"I—ah—really, I have not considered the question," answered Norwood seriously.

Mr. Dwyer, much impressed by this calm judicial announcement that even such a query might possibly have another side and require looking into, gazed at his solicitor with the look admiring, slightly adulterated by the look quizzical. "You're a great man, Mr. Cherral," he said at last, but the amount of doubt in the tone cancelled the compliment.

"Let me hear what the charge is."

"Now it's this, Mr. Cherral, and me daughter Biddy is mixed up in it, and when I told her I'd give Mr. Dobbsleigh, that's had many a guinea from me, the go-by and see you, Mr. Cherral, 'Praise God,' sez Biddy, 'it's him that helped me with me quilt, and him a nice young man——'"

"Yes. Yes. I should be glad to hear the facts of the case."

"It's the fax I'm giving you then," answered the unmoved Dwyer.

Norwood soon had all that he thought essential on his notes. "Have you the summons?"

"I have that." Mr. Dwyer produced a somewhat soiled and crumpled Copy Information and Summons.

Norwood read it through. "It's to be heard on Tuesday

three weeks, that is the first day the Police Magistrate will be sitting next year."

Mr. Dwyer grunted and remarked. "I don't know the man."

"It wouldn't make any difference if you did."

Mr. Dwyer expressed his fixed belief to the contrary by winking at the ceiling.

"As your daughter will be the chief witness I must hear what she says."

"She's away this few days," said Mr. Dwyer. "She'll be home Saturdee. Ye can have her Monday afternoon."

"That will do very well. Leave me the copy summons."

Dwyer's visit was welcome indeed. When the new client had gone, Norwood rose and walked about the little room too excited to sit still. A client at last, a chance to appear in Court at last, and, though it was only the Court of Petty Sessions, the Police Magistrate would be on the Bench alone, so there could be no fear of the bias, or ignorance, or insolence of the local Justices. Taking down the volume of Acts containing the Licensing Act, 1890, Norwood read the charge in Dwyer's summons through again, found the section under which it was laid, and began with sincere interest to work up the case for the defence.

## CHAPTER XVII

IN a meeting of Borough Councillors presided over by the Mayor a certain weight hangs in the atmosphere, due no doubt to psychic emanations from the power, authority, and intellect, of the assembled leaders. In a meeting of a Friendly Society, open to the public, a certain dignity is observed throughout the proceedings, lest the admitted public should think the members of the Lodge and the matters dealt with were alike of little import; while in the meeting of a Friendly Society *not* open to the public, where admission can only be obtained by the happy ones initiated in the word or grip or sign, where the dread unexercisable powers of him upon the chair or throne or dais or master-seat are backed with all the terror of blind-fold oaths, vows, promises, wooden spears painted blue, and wands painted white, in these fearsome conclaves it is fair to assume that awed silence for the most part, or weighty words or acts of heavy significance, rule throughout the meeting.

Upon a deep consideration of these separate facts some estimate may be formed of the total solemnity, the aggregate dignity, the combined profundity of aspect, which weighed, apparent to the meanest observer, in the meeting in the Town Hall that evening, convened by the Mayor by gen-

eral request to deal with a circular letter from the Board of Management of the Werrimac Hospital, the institution to which all Cooeville's hospital cases were sent.

Mr. Wemby had prophesied truly that it would be a big meeting; delegates or representatives from every Society, Lodge, Council, Church, or Club, in the district, each of which bodies had received a copy of the letter, filled the stage and front seats; the public-spirited citizens of Cooeville, and some others, crowded the rest of the Hall.

No sooner had the noise of the crowd entering subsided than Mr. Cunder rose and moved with loud voice and aggressive manner that "His Worship the Mayor take the chair."

Mr. Snodleigh, upon the stage, said, "I am sure it affords me very great pleasure to agree with our friend Mr. Cunder. Though His Worship the Mayor is not a member of the Church of England, yet he is, perhaps we should assume on this occasion, a very capable man, and I think it is perhaps right that at a meeting of this kind the official head of the ratepayers should preside. It is a matter of importance that we should meet in the spirit of unity and in the bonds of peace at a gathering of this kind, a gathering where there are represented so many different bodies and all grades of society, yet where the main idea, the mother idea—if I may so speak—in the minds of all present is the sacred cause of Charity, a cause which the Church has ever at heart"—the reverend gentleman here delivered an eulogium of considerable length upon the beauties of Charity, despite a growing restiveness among his hearers, and the short but suggestive remark of Mr. Cunder, who barked out "Time."

Mr. Snodleigh was proceeding when Mr. Plowright, after a whispered conference with the Mayor (Mr. Sackell), rose, and, rubbing his chin reflectively with the back of his hand, remarked quietly but in a voice that more than filled the hall, "Beggin' your pardon for interruptin'; gentlemen, but I take it there's a good deal to be done this evenin', and I take it the sooner we get to it the better." (Cries of "Hear, hear," from many.) "As we can't do nothin' till we have a chairman, and as Mr. Cunder has moved the Mayor take the chair and Mr. Snodleigh has seconded it——"

"I have, my dear Sir," answered Mr. Snodleigh. "And I was about to say when you—ah—interrupted——"

"So now," Mr. Plowright continued, "I ask all those in favour of the motion"—a shout of "Aye" from nearly all in the hall—"To the contrary?—Carried. Mr. Mayor, will you declare the meetin' open, and let's get to work."

Mr. Snodleigh, remarking sharply, "That is precisely what I was about to do," resumed his seat; and the Mayor taking the chair, poured out a glass of water and drank it to cool his somewhat heated feelings. "Gentlemen," he began,

“ this meetin’ bein’ now jewly constituted, we’ll be able to get to business. The objec’ of this meetin’—well, this’ll tell any of us as don’t know.”—He read the lengthy letter from the Hospital Committee which set out in detailed fashion the need of more accommodation, and suggested that either the main ward be repaired and slightly enlarged, or better still that, in addition to mere repairs, an entire new wing be erected. “ So there you are, gentlemen, there’s the two proposals the letter lays before you, one costin’ more ’n twice as much as the other,” continued the chairman, heartily glad when the reading aloud by a bad light was over. “ The letter’s nigh a month old, what with holidays and one thing and another, and I don’t suppose there’s a man here but knows all about it and has made up his mind on it.”

The Chairman’s suggestion that everybody had already decided which scheme to support was correct. Everybody had, more than three weeks ago. The economic plan of repairing merely had heavy backing, so had the liberal scheme of a new ward.

“ The whole thing,” the chairman resumed, “ boils down to this.” His Worship lifted his clenched left hand, crooked little finger and hugh double-jointed thumb projecting, and sawed it argumentatively up and down at his audience. “ Are we like sensible business men a-goin’ to find the money to put the hospital in repair——”

“ That’s the plan,” interjected Mr. Plowright.

“ Order. Order,” cried Mr. Snodleigh.

“ I’ll attend to the matter of keepin’ the meetin’ in order,” declared the Chairman, glaring at Mr. Snodleigh—“ I say that’s the first plan—and the best plan too”—the Chairman was forgetting that impartiality demanded of his position, “ I say that’s the best plan.”

“ No! No!” shouted Mr. Hoip.

“ Question,” said Mr. Cunder loudly.

“ Order,” commanded the Chair.

“ The best plan, easy,” said Mr. Plowright, and remained unrebuked.

“ There’s the other idea for them as likes it,”—the Mayor strove to regain the judicial tone—“ and though I may have my own views about the thing, yet while I’m in the Chair I’m here to act without fear or favour to any man. Whatever we do there’ll be a big lot of money wanted, and I suppose—ah”—the Chairman sighed with relief as a neat phrase for rounding off his speech came to mind—“ that everybody here is willin’ to put his shoulder to the wheel and his hand into his pocket. Now, gentlemen, the matter lays before you.” (Applause.)

Mr. Cunder, small certainly, but of an uprightness of figure fatiguing to behold, loud-voiced and dominating, was on his

feet in an instant, he stood tweaking his moustache fiercely, as was his wont when roused, coughing short, loud, and important coughs that plainly demanded respectful silence and rapt attention. When the happy Hoip saw the self-appointed leader of the Liberals in possession of the floor he could restrain himself no longer, seizing his friend Jessington's stick he pounded the floor therewith. "Hear, hear, Cunder. Hear, hear." The Liberals joined in full cry. Mr. Hoip, now absolutely fizzing with excitement, sprang on to his chair, snatched Mr. Wemby's hat from its rightful head, and, mounting the borrowed hat upon the borrowed stick, held it aloft at full stretch wagging it rapturously and cheering lustily the while: the Liberals lent their voices to a man. Let none suppose that the Economics (known to the Liberals as the Patchers) sat silent by: each section yelled its loudest, and those few who belonged to neither side concealed the fact behind vigorous howls. In ten minutes the Chairman, somewhat assisted by the fact that many were tired of cheering, restored order.

Mr. Hoip, feeling that he was indeed a born leader of men, resumed his seat; discovering in a moment that he had lost Wemby's hat, his elation departed, he fell apologetically on all fours, and peered and raked feverishly among the surrounding chair legs and human feet. Mr. Cunder, who accepted the recent tornado as a slight tribute to his worth, remained rigidly erect, attending ferociously to his moustache till that dead silence, required or considered suitable for his oration, had fallen upon those around him. He waited perhaps a moment too long, for the voice of Mr. Thriggerley, the strong leader of the Economics was heard. "Mr. Chairman——"

"I'm first," Mr. Cunder's voice was resonant indeed. "Mr. Chairman——"

"Yes, Mr. Thriggerley," said his Worship.

It is well known that the Mayor of any Australian township is above party bias; the grandeur of the office inspiring whoever may be elected to that high seat with intelligence, impartiality, and nobility of character. Mr. Cunder, however, no doubt somewhat confused by recent events, including an energetic ten minutes at Shandy's just before the meeting, passed this fact by, and in warm terms and strident tones accused the Chairman of incompetence, intentional discourtesy to him (the speaker) and prejudice plain for all to see, on the question before the meeting. "No favouring. That's what I say, If you do. Out you come. Competent man needed here."

Mr. Thriggerley, calm in the consciousness of rectitude and the Chairman's friendship, remained standing but silent.

"I don't take no notice of what's said by them as ought

to know better," affirmed the Chairman loftily. "I've been elected Chairman to-night as Mayor of Cooeeville, and if anyone thinks at my time er life I can't conduct a meetin' I tell him he's a——" (Uproar.)

Some of the more peaceable upon the stage, including Mr. Trewhella, the Reverend Mr. Snodleigh, the Reverend Hector Cosh (Presbyterian Church), the Reverend Amos Penno (Methodist Church), busied themselves in soothing the feelings of his Worship, while friends of Mr. Cunder devoted their attention to him. Mr. Cunder was not a man to retire with easy grace before a public rebuff, but Mr. Jessington's remark, drawn from his experience of Court methods, that it was the last speech that told, not the first, received hearty corroboration from others; the plan of defeating the enemy by letting them have their own way appealed to many, and, after much explanation, to Mr. Cunder himself. By the time those on the stage had prevailed with the Chairman, those on the floor had won over Mr. Cunder, and when the Chairman rose, peace fell. "Gentlemen, at a meetin' to discuss a matter relatin' to the sacred cause of charity"—the critical hearer might discover in the Chairman's words an echo of what had just been dinned into his ears by leading and professional peacemakers—"I look to you all to assist me in maintainin' order. I ask you to deal with the matter in—in"—there was an audible prompting from the back of the stage—"in a Christian spirit, as our friend Mr. Trewhella says. I call," concluded his Worship, interpreting the Christian spirit to mean that his own enemies should give way, "on Mr. Thriggerley, what had the floor a bit ago, to speak to the motion."

Mr. Cunder, veiling his dark stratagem of getting in last beneath an assumption of dignity truly portentous, sat down. Mr. Hoip, depressed because that hat was still missing, ceased crawling about among people's feet like a lost dog looking for his master, and sat down too.

Mr. Thriggerley pointed out as many reasons as he could think of against the suggestion to build a new ward, and the Economics applauded at short intervals. He moved that the meeting approve the plan for repairs only.

Mr. Dobbsleigh seconded the motion and repeated some of the reasons.

The hour for Mr. Cunder to act had arrived: he arose; he coughed; he swelled; he tweaked his moustache; he also spoke. "I move. We do the thing properly. No half measures about me. Build a new ward. We can pay. The whole district helps. This business of patching. No good. Fit for old clo' men."

The Chair: "I must ask the speaker not to go insultin' them as don't hold with his views. And while I'm in charge

of this meetin' he's not a-goin' to do it, nor anybody like him."

Mr. Cunder: "I say. Old clo' men. Free discussion. I give my views. Anybody don't like them. Go outside. Won't be missed. I say——" (Uproar.)

The Chairman pounded the table, and made inaudible remarks apparently of a heated nature, Mr. Jessington shouted in Hoip's ear. "Cunder's had one drink too many." Mr. Goff, tied by stern duty to the press table on the stage, glanced longingly at the tumult and suppressed with the utmost difficulty a whoop of general defiance. Mr. Wemby, breathing hard, patted the howling Hoip—who needed no encouragement—on the back.

At length order was restored, the more serious element of the audience insisted on it, and the chairman, strongly backed, called on Mr. Cunder to withdraw all remarks of an offensive nature. Mr. Cunder unfortunately persisted in regarding his Worship, not as the Chairman in charge, but as a leading Economic, and proceeded to justify Mr. Jessington's criticism by refusing to withdraw anything whatsoever, and by repeating his former statements with vast aggressiveness. But the meeting had now blown off steam and was ready for honest work: Mr. Cunder found no favour save with a few; Jessington earnestly advised him to obey the Chair: Mr. Wemby, impressed by this, looked inquiringly at Hoip; Mr. Hoip, even more impressed, instantly became grave, and poured voluble advice into the ear of the still defiant Cunder.

The Chairman repeated his request, adding that if Mr. Cunder didn't withdraw his words he'd ask him to leave the hall, so that them as had come to do work for charity shouldn't be interrupted and abused. Mr. Cunder, wrought up by his potations, by excitement, and now by outraged dignity, replied that: "He moved that the Chairman's ruling be disagreed with." (Sensation.)

After a pause of uncomfortable silence the Chairman declared that the motion lapsed for want of a seconder. Mr. Cunder stared challengingly round the hall looking for one to rise and champion his cause. He looked in vain, and in an access of indignation he jerked out, "I object. Conduct of meeting. Monstrous," and, with unimpaired dignity, stalked to the door.

The President of the Shire of Cooeville then moved as an amendment that an effort be made to raise funds for a new ward, nor did he spare the citing of facts rendering this desirable.

Mr. Jessington briefly seconded the amendment.

Then, the meeting having thus settled down to serious business, did man after man arise and give his voice and arguments on motion or amendment.

The President of the Australian Natives' Association spoke; Mr. Snodleigh, Mr. Cosh, Mr. Penno, and Father Reilly spoke; Mr. Trehwella (Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows) spoke; representatives of four other lodges, of the Cooeville Pastoral Agricultural and Horticultural Society and of other bodies spoke; it seemed to Doctor Rafe, sitting at the back with Railthorpe and Norwood, that every man in the hall made a speech, and that each speech was worse than the last.

It was all but eleven o'clock when the meeting broke up; the battle had been long and hard, but the result was indecisive, for the resolution finally come to was that a strong canvass for funds should be made through the district, and according to the response would the Werrimac Hospital have repairs merely, or a new ward.

"Phew. Let's get out of this, I need a change of atmosphere," declared Mr. Jessington as they left the hall.

"What do you think, Hoip?" asked Mr. Wemby, looking at his watch, "shall we—do you—are you going straight home, Hoip?"

"Well, you know, I was thinking of it, but—ah—there's Cunder you know. Don't you think we ought to look after him perhaps, eh? He might be up at Shandy's," said Mr. Hoip, in the tone of one by no means sure. "And——"

"Extraordinary!" declared Mr. Jessington with much gravity. "So he might. Let's go up and look for him."

On the way up Jessington gathered in Doctor Rafe and led the way joyously to the bar parlour; there, strangely enough, they found Mr. Cunder who had, it was evident to the most unobservant eye, been endeavouring to cool his fiery wrath by applying thereto cool liquids. The treatment had so far been unsuccessful, but Mr. Cunder more erect, more abrupt, more hectoring than ever, was evidently bent on continuing it.

Doctor Rafe, much cheered in spirit by the fact that the meeting was over and there could be no more speeches, ordered drinks for all forthwith. Mr. Jessington, announcing, in imitation of the Egyptian Queen, that it was his birthday, then took charge of the gathering, and was in the midst of a burlesque toast when many others from the meeting, including Mr. Bowyer and three of his mates all carrying their instruments from band practice, which had been cut short for the meeting, crowded into the bar and parlour.

"I say, Hoip"—Jessington drew his friend aside—"we want a place to ourselves to-night. Shall we take the judge's room and make a night of it?"

The apartment referred to was an upstairs drawing-room, rarely used save when some high official was resident for the time being at Shandy's.



"Well, really, you know, why not? Wemby, old man——"

"I must come too," said Mr. Wemby, getting ready to laugh, "to—to take care of Hoip."

"I'm with you," asserted Mr. Cunder, when the suggestion reached him.

"Shandy," said Mr. Jessington, "we want the judge's room for the evening—Hey, Shandy, wait a minute—come up and see about the drinks. Hoip, will you look about and gather in half a dozen of our friends, Wemby——"

"Do you know, Jessington"—Mr. Wemby breathed hard, partly from pleasurable excitement, partly because he was thinking—"there's the piano in the judge's room, and I saw Bowyer and some others with—with a cornet and things, why—why shouldn't we have a real good concert?"

Mr. Jessington highly approved of the idea. "You're the best man in Cooeville for a birthday-party. Fetch 'em along."

"A musical evening!" exclaimed Mr. Wemby, as fifteen or sixteen of Cooeville's citizens climbed the stairs. "Ah, do mi so do," sang Mr. Wemby gently. "Never mind about my hat, Hoip, it may turn up, and if it doesn't——"

"Fact is, I should have kept my eye on it," explained Mr. Hoip. "Fact is, you must let me get you a new one—yes, you must, Wemby—and you can't catch a cold to-night, so there's no harm done. We haven't had a frolic for months, and old Jessington's in good form, and we must look after Cunder"—Mr. Hoip's spirits were fast rising under the influence of his surroundings, "and—fact is, we must shake things up a bit."

"Here we are. Open all the windows, Shandy, and get the drinks. Now Brethren," Mr. Jessington rapped with his stick on the table, "we must guard this room, consecrated to the rites of good fellowship, against all intruders. Cunder, let this be your charge. For each and every improper member of society you admit you will be fined drinks all round. You hear me, Cunder?"

Mr. Cunder dragged his chair over to the door. "The man. Tries to get past me!"—he tweaked his moustache vigorously—"Sorry for him. Jessington, rely on me."

Others, who did not take either Mr. Jessington or themselves as seriously as Mr. Cunder, had made themselves comfortable and the master of the revels was endeavouring to restore order when an angry exclamation followed by the crash of breaking glass caused all to turn their eyes to the door. Mr. Cunder, carrying out the humorous Jessington's orders to the letter, had seized the portly Shandy as he entered bearing a tray full of glasses, and, upsetting the tray in his onset, was now fiercely endeavouring to throttle the landlord of the house.

In Cooeville, it is one thing to enjoy in social fashion a

glass with a friend; it is quite another to retire to an hotel to drown one's wrath in solitude as Mr. Cunder had done; and it is still another and a much darker matter to exceed.

Shandy, removing with ease and one hand the small Cunder from dangerous contact, handed the tray to the one nearest him, and rubbed his head with his disengaged hand.

"What the devil are you doing, Cunder?" demanded Jessington.

Many voices rose in reply, but the Chairman silenced them and turned to the culprit.

Mr. Cunder, as a full explanation, hiccoughed.

"Here's a nice thing!" Mr. Jessington was much disgusted.

Mr. Cunder, released from Shandy's supporting grip, sank into a chair and blinked.

"What the deuce does he want to go drinking for?" asked Jessington angrily. "We can't have him here. Look at him."

"It—it"—Mr. Wemby spoke more in pity than censure—"it's not a pleasant sight."

"He's been going it pretty strong since about ten o'clock," volunteered Shandy, offering an explanation which was perhaps hardly required.

"Shocking," said Mr. Hoip.

Mr. Bowyer, a man of few words, blew a deep and die-away groan upon his euphonium to express his feelings.

"Well, there's only one thing to do"—Jessington rose briskly, "what room can he have, Shandy? We'll throw him on the bed and he can sleep it off. Cunder's goings on are too strong for us, eh, Wemby?"

A chorus of assent arose and Mr. Cunder, now almost asleep, was carried out and laid upon a couch in a small spare parlour.

"Now, Brethren"—Mr. Jessington again rapped the table loudly to restore order. "Now, Brethren, as that little lesson is over—I'm sure I hope Doctor Rafe will lay it to heart"—as every one knew Rafe for a teetotaller this remark appealed to the gathering—"I move that our esteemed fellow townsman and irrigation agent, Shandy, resume business on the usual terms. All those in favour," added Mr. Jessington, "will remain silent. Those against will first say 'Aye,' and will then be tossed out the window. Now then?"

Loud applause broke out, and Shandy, grinning largely, retired to replace the drinks upset by the disgraced Cunder.

"As our departed friend Shandy—soon may he return—who does not belong to this our worshipful body has now retired," resumed Jessington, "I call upon our legal and learned friend Cherral to explain the objects of this meeting."

"Really I have no idea," Norwood's obviously genuine

astonishment, his innocent reply, and the marked English accent, gratified the others greatly. Mr. Jessington alone remained grave. "Our aforesaid friend," he declared solemnly, "is hereby fined in drinks for the crowd for not rising to address the chair. Order is heaven's first law and must be maintained. Wemby, do you feel up to a song yet?"

An hour or so after midnight Mr. Jessington, announcing that he felt much better, declared the meeting adjourned *sine die* and, assisted by Shandy Saxon, marshalled his party, homeward bound. Affectionate farewells were spoken beneath the stars: Mr. Wemby and Mr. Hoip invariably walked home together, but that evening Mr. Hoip insisted on a long and hearty hand shake. Mr. Wemby, deeply touched thereby, put his left hand—his right being still firmly grasped—on his friend's shoulder and said in a hushed voice, vibrant with emotion, "A great evening, Hoip."

Mr. Hoip squeezed his hand. "Shall we, my dear fellow"—Mr. Hoip spoke as one struck by a fresh idea—"shall we"—he squeezed Mr. Wemby's hand once more—"shall we go home together?"

Mr. Wemby realized that it was heart calling unto heart, and that he must rise to the event: he returned his friend's hand clasp. "Always, Hoip," he declared. "Always."

"I should like, my dear friend," said Mr. Hoip gravely, "to prolong the happy hour by inviting you to a bite of supper with me, but I'm afraid—domestic matters—my wife's health"—he turned away. "A great affliction, Wemby, my dear friend."

"Don't give way," implored Mr. Wemby, himself much moved. "Don't give way, Hoip, old man. I know. I sympathize. I'll tell you what—drop in with me and have a biscuit and—and a nip before you go home, it will do you good, Hoip. You—you need it."

Mr. Hoip recovered. "I will, Wemby, I will. You're a true friend."

"Upon occasions such as these," observed Mr. Jessington, "England—represented by our friend Cherral here—England expects that every man this night will help his brother. Are we all here? Geoghegan will look after me"—this was a polite way of stating the reverse—"Wemby, you keep Hoip in order"—the two friends still standing with clasped hands exchanged a significant pressure—"and Rafe will attend to those who need him. The rest of you," concluded Jessington, "can go home in a bunch. Bunch it, you beggars."

"Beg pardon, Mr. Jessington," said a new voice, and Constable Mullane appeared amongst them, "but does Mr. Cunder belong to your little lot?"

"Mullane," replied Mr. Jessington with dignity, "he does not. Speaking on behalf of myself and of this small

but select band of—of Rechabites whom I am taking on a tour of the pubs in the town that they may learn the horrors of hotel life, I say—I say—Geoghegan, what do I say ? ”

Mr. Geoghegan, who was hunting desperately in a somewhat confused mind for some adequate explanation of his late hours and elated condition wherewith to satisfy his wife, could give Mr. Jessington no help. “ Officer, Mr. Cunder has no connection with us,” said Mr. Hoip firmly. “ If you require co—corroboraton I refer you to my friend Mr. Wemby—Wemby, may I refer him to you ? ”

“ He seems to be taken bad just across the road,” explained the policeman. “ P'raps you'd see to getting him home.”

“ I move,” said Mr. Jessington, “ that we become a view jury and inspect the body. Let's hold an inquest.”

This suggestion was well received, and Constable Mullane led them round the corner and across the road to the spot where Mr. Cunder, on the warm dry earth, cuddled up against a garden fence, lay sleeping the sleep of the overcome.

Mr. Jessington, helped by the brilliant moonlight, made careful inspection. “ Waterlogged,” he announced decisively. He rose and gazed at the sleeping one. “ Alas, my brother ! ” he exclaimed.

“ What will Mrs. Cunder say ? ” asked Mr. Geoghegan, himself not untroubled by a somewhat similar question.

“ He—he did the Liberal cause a lot of harm,” declared Mr. Wemby.

“ So he did,” agreed Mr. Hoip. “ He should be punished for it—eh?—don't you think so, Wemby? And for this—this”—Mr. Hoip gazed with profound solemnity at the erring one.

“ This—this lapse,” supplemented Mr. Wemby.

Mr. Hoip, much gratified, shook hands with Mr. Wemby.

“ What shall we do to him ? ” enquired Mr. Wemby

“ Shall we—shall we ”—he paused to think.

“ Brethren,” announced Mr. Jessington, “ it is, as you say, meet, right, and proper, that this our mistaken brother should be chastized for making a beast of himself. And I've thought of a plan. I appeal, brethren, for your assistance in the carrying out of the same.”

“ No man shall appeal to me in vain,” asserted Mr. Hoip. “ No, nor to you either, Wemby.”

Mr. Jessington drew aside Bowyer and his three bandsmen friends, and communed with them softly awhile: then with large grins the four musicians—Mr. Cooper first cornet, Mr. Clark second cornet, Mr. Daley second tenor, Mr. Bowyer euphonium—took their stand according to Jessington's orders beside the sleeper.

“ Brethren,” declared the master of the ceremonies, “ you

will at the word of command march past the body in slow time. Immediately after I strongly advise all hands to leg it for home as hard as they can in the order hereinbefore arranged. All understand?"

A chorus of assent followed.

"All agreed?"

The chorus was repeated.

"Now, Bandmaster," said Mr. Jessington—the players lifted their instruments to their lips—"at the word 'Three,' give it lip. Brethren, fall in. Now then"—he beat time *largo* with his stick—"One—two—three——"

Over the body of the recumbent Cunder and through the sleeping town of Cooeville there wailed and moaned the strains of the Dead March.

## CHAPTER XVIII

"PERHAPS the luck's changed at last, Cherral," suggested Rafe, as they walked down the street together at the close of the day a week later. "Dwyer's a good sport. Pull his case off and you'll make a name straight away."

"I hope to what you call pull it off, Rafe. On the merits, and I think from the legal point of view as well, Dwyer's defence should succeed."

"That's your style," said Rafe heartily. "Even if the Bench is dead against you and wipes our friend Dwyer out, you put up a damn good fight. The crowd like it. Perhaps you don't want the crowd on your side though"—Rafe tried hard to conceal his grin—"they all belong to the working-classes you know. I mean, Haw, don't cher know."

Doctor Rafe's assumption of the traditional and ultra-English manner and accent pleased him greatly, and even amused Mr. Norwood Cherral. "I want to have the crowd on my side, Rafe. You know that very well. Really, that sounds a most peculiar thing for me to say. But it's undoubtedly true."

"It's damn good sense," asserted Doctor Rafe. "That's why you think it peculiar. I suppose," added the polished physician reflectively, "even Goff would admit that you can knock sense into an Englishman, if you catch him young, and knock hard enough, and keep on knocking."

Norwood laughed. "I don't know when I'll satisfy you, Rafe."

"No more do I," admitted his friend.

To-morrow was the great day: Norwood welcomed its near approach; there was none of his former nervous dread of speaking in public, rather a feeling of solid pleasure in the prospect of arguing a matter which he thoroughly under-

stood, before one who would at once comprehend his grounds of defence and would appreciate the decisions quoted in support. The contest to-morrow morning would not really be the police against Martin Dwyer, but Norwood Cherral, as he now was, fighting against Cooeville and its dislike for him as he once was, and as Cooeville still believed him to be.

A hasty footstep sounded in the outer room of the office.

"Look to that now!" cried Mr. Martin Dwyer, entering abruptly. "I'm that wild, Mr. Cherral, I could kick in a hogshead of beer." He took off his hat. "You'll excuse me now, but I'm damn wild, and that's the God's truth of it." He fanned his heated face with his hat. "You'll not plead me case in Court to-morrow, Mr. Cherral."

Norwood looked at him in surprise. "But you have engaged me to appear for you. What has happened? Have the police withdrawn the charge?"

"They have not then," declared Mr. Dwyer emphatically. But he concluded in a different tone. "I'm engaging Mr. Dobbsleigh to do me work to-morrow. So you'll do no more for me, Mr. Cherral. Understand that."

The man spoke ill-temperedly. Was he sober? Did he intend to be insolent? Was the old belief true after all—was any Colonial inferior? However, whatever the cause of Dwyer's conduct Norwood decided at once there was only one course for him. "Very well, Dwyer," he said quietly, and rose to end the interview. "Good afternoon."

"Have ye nothing to say?" demanded Mr. Dwyer hotly.

"Nothing," answered Norwood, with a return of his old distant manner.

Dwyer eyed him curiously. "And what'll you be chargin' me? I suppose," he added, with what seemed a mixture of fear and spite, "you'll not pop it on to me just because I'm leaving you?"

Norwood gave the matter no consideration. "You need have no anxiety," he replied with unconcealed contempt. "As I shall not appear for you I shall charge you nothing."

Mr. Dwyer gazed at Norwood with an expression of complete puzzlement. "Ye'll charge me nothing?" he asked incredulously.

"I have said so already. Would you prefer it in writing?"

The sneer apparently cut deep. "I would not," cried Dwyer, rising from his chair. "I would not." He moved about with restless indecision.

"You would oblige me," repeated Norwood, "by leaving the room."

Mr. Dwyer took no notice of him; on the contrary he sat down again. "Look to that!" he cried. "It's a gentleman you are, Mr. Cherral, a real gentleman. You'll not

give me away if I tell you all about it, Mr. Cherral? No you won't, I'm sure of that. D'you know why I'm leaving you, Mr. Cherral?"

"It is a matter of no importance."

"Ah, I don't blame you for bein' wild about it. But it's not me, Mr. Cherral, it's not me. I'm backing you from this time out. On the quiet. I'll explain to you. Now what d'you think of the man that owns me hotel?"

"I cannot discuss the matter."

"Let me tell you now. Me lease is up in twelve months, and Mr. Thridderley, me landlord—ah, and landlord to many a wan besides meself—and me, we've been arranging a new lease for another five years. But there's nothing in writing yet, more's the pity, and when he heard you were pleading me case for me he wouldn't give me a lease, no, not even an extension for twelve months till I could look round me like. I cud see from what he said about you, that you bein' me lawyer give him offence, an' what cud I do? Even if you win me case—and he says you'd lose it—I fling away me new lease. I asked him straight if I went to Mr. Dobbsleigh or Mr. Lambton cud I have the lease we'd agreed on, an' he said he'd consider it. So I must leave you, Mr. Cherral. But it's not because I want to. And I'll not let ye charge me nothing. Ye've seen me an' Biddy if ye've done nothing else, an' now that ye don't want to make me pay for giving you up, the matter of a pound or two sha'n't stand between us." He dived into his pocket and pulled out a handful of cash.

But Dwyer's explanation had changed Norwood's feelings: the disappointment of losing his client and his chance remained, but he no longer blamed Dwyer, and his spasm of contempt died out. "I quite understand your position, Dwyer. I am obliged to you for calling to explain. But I decline to accept any fee."

Mr. Dwyer spent some time in trying to make his former solicitor accept a fee, but Norwood, for reasons he could not define, was resolute in his refusal, and Dwyer, much puzzled, left him with the re-iterated statement that he was a gentleman, a real gentleman.

That evening Norwood, though not an observant man, found several things forced upon his attention when he sat down to tea. Though no extra places were set at table—indeed that evening the other two paying guests were absent—yet the variety and number of dishes more than doubled the usual quantity. The solicitude of Mrs. Limmering's manner had increased in equal proportions. Her general rule was to pour out the tea, contribute two or three innocent and obvious remarks to the conversation, and then settle down to the business in hand. To-night, she apparently lacked

appetite herself, but was bent on Norwood enjoying his meal. "Here's some bacon and tomatoes, Mr. Cherral. I hope you'll come back for more. We had it because you always seemed to enjoy it a little, though it's a small meal you make at any time, I must say. And there's pancakes to come. I heard you say you liked pancakes one day, so I had them specially. Minnie made them herself. And I sent down to the baker's for these buns. They're quite fresh, but be careful how you bite. I got a stone in a bun one day and I thought I'd broke a tooth. We want you to make a good tea to-night. Minnie said——"

"Now, Ma!" interrupted Miss Limmering with sharp warning.

Mrs. Limmering filled not only Norwood's cup but much of his saucer, passed them to him, raised her eyes to the ceiling, and sighed deeply.

"Now, Ma!" said Miss Limmering again.

Norwood felt that the social atmosphere also differed from the one that had prevailed throughout his long residence at Mrs. Limmering's. The daughter's demeanour showed intensity rather than alteration. Her usual practical and decided bearing had passed into an aggressive manner that made her take her cup as one might seize a weapon, and bite her bread and butter as one attacking an enemy; she sat alert and upright, absolutely radiating defiance. She also sniffed at frequent intervals. But evidently Norwood was not the one to be defied, nor even her mother.

Several times Mrs. Limmering, supporting herself with a premonitory sip of tea, was on the point of speech, but a tart, "It can wait, Ma," or, "After tea, Ma," from the other end of the table produced silence, a further shaking mournfully of the head, and several sighs interspersed with attentions to the teacup. Norwood, thinking the matter that troubled them a private one, forbore alike comment or enquiry, and withdrew immediately the meal was over, but while he sat on the verandah looking through the just delivered Melbourne morning paper, Mrs. Limmering joined him.

Norwood put down his paper at once. But though Mrs. Limmering talked a great deal she had apparently nothing to communicate. She appeared ill at ease. Her remarks moved heavily from subject to subject without any sequence of thought, and Norwood decided to retreat. Mrs. Limmering stayed him as he rose. "I hope you've been comfortable here, Mr. Cherral?"

"Quite so, thank you."

"You haven't ever thought of looking about for another place to stay at?"

"Certainly not."



"Oh," said Mrs. Limmering feebly. "I thought you might have. Is there any news in the paper?"

Norwood handed it to her. "You can pick out what interests you." And he rose again.

"No, no, don't go, Mr. Cherral. I—I—you're sure you've been comfortable here?"

"I have, most certainly. Is there anything you wish to ask me?"

"Yes. I mean no—at least—Oh—It's quite nice out here this evening, isn't it, Mr. Cherral?—No, no"—as Norwood made to leave, "I can't do it. Minnie, Minnie, come here. I want you."

Miss Limmering appeared from the dining-room looking remarkably grim. "Well, Ma, have you told him?"

"No, Minnie. I—I—you tell him, Minnie."

"I thought so," observed Miss Minnie. "It's not a nice job, is it? Mr. Cherral, you know this house belongs to Mr. Thriggerley?"

—"Er—yes. I believe I have heard you say so."

"Well, it does. And he doesn't like you."

Norwood remained silent.

"And he's been hinting to Ma the last month or so that he didn't like her having you in his house, but Ma didn't see it at first, and when she did she wouldn't do anything."

"Who I take as paying guests is my affair," said the mother with dignity.

"And he wouldn't do any repairs that he always did before," continued the daughter. "The bath-room window's broke this three months and you know it. And the floor's a disgrace. And if that wasn't enough he told Ma when she was up last Saturday to pay the rent, that he wasn't satisfied with her as a tenant, and she must go or else pay a higher rent."

Norwood's indignation was rising, but he waited till Miss Limmering should finish her story.

"Ma's lived here ever since Pa died, and it upset her dreadfully. So I went up to see Mr. Thriggerley. There was no beating about the bush with *me*"—Norwood believed this—"I said to him straight 'So it's because we won't turn Mr. Cherral out that you've raised the rent on Ma?' And of course he wouldn't say yes or no right out—Oh, you men!" Miss Limmering apostrophized the whole sex with great bitterness. "He talked a lot of stuff I couldn't make head or tail of about a landlord's duties, and depreciation of property and so on, so I said, 'If Mr. Cherral goes will you mend the bathroom floor and window and leave the rent as it is?'"

Miss Limmering paused.

"Let me say at once"—began Norwood—

"Wait till I finish," said Miss Limmering. "And that

man"—it was Miss Limmering's bitterest epithet, and she brought it out with a tang, "do you think he could be honest to save his life? He went on talking about if depreciating influences were removed he might reconsider the matter, and a lot more. I knew Ma couldn't leave here, there's not a house to suit us, so I said, 'You give it to me in writing, and I'll speak to Mr. Cherral myself.'"

"I assure"—began Norwood again—

"You wait till I've done with him," said Miss Limmering, who had begun to enjoy her report on her landlord. "Do you think he'd do it? Not him. I stuck to it, but the best I could get out of him was that as soon as the house was empty—that meant you"—she stuck out a finger at Norwood, "he'd come down to see what repairs were needed, and he'd have a talk with Ma about the rent. He said perhaps it could stay. And Ma was upset properly. But I said to her, 'Ma, you're between Thridderley and Mr. Cherral. It's like the devil and the deep sea. You know we must have this house, and Mr. Thridderley knows it too. You must speak to Mr. Cherral.' And Ma's been trying to for the last two days. Haven't you, Ma?"

But Mrs. Limmering, moved by her liking for her lodger, shamed by being forced to ask him to go, overcome at this lengthy recital of all she had lately endured, was crying softly into her handkerchief. Miss Limmering, endeavouring to restore the balance of the family emotion by becoming harder than ever, sat rigidly upright, and, sticking her chin out aggressively, gave two defiant sniffs at the world in general. "No, wait till I've done"—as Norwood endeavoured to speak—"I said to Ma, 'When there's only one thing to be done, do it. And when there's something got to be said, say it.' And Mr. Thridderley's coming down to see about the repairs to-morrow evening, and if the house isn't what he calls empty, a nice chance we have of getting the repairs done, let alone about the rent. So I said to Ma this morning, 'Mr. Cherral's got to be told before the day's out, because Mr. Cherral's a gentleman,' I said, 'even if he is a man, and,' I said to Ma, 'will you do it, or will I?' And Ma wouldn't let me—"

"I thought I'd break it to him gently, Minnie," sobbed Mrs. Limmering.

"That means more nicely than I'd do it," said Miss Limmering with vicious pleasure. "So Mr. Thridderley—oh, he's a real man—he's coming down here to-morrow and though Ma doesn't want you to go—"

"No, indeed!" sobbed Mrs. Limmering corroboratively.

"And," added Miss Limmering stirred somewhat beyond herself and cutting her mother's lamentations short, "I wouldn't mind you staying on myself—though you are a man, you're not such a nuisance as most of 'em, and we might

get worse here"—this was an admission indeed—"still Mr. Thriggerley's set on getting you out of here, and it's his house and there you are. So now you know." And Miss Limmering, who had made the longest speech of her life and was roused from her customary calm, sat back into her chair with a jerk and put her feet together with a stamp.

"I regret exceedingly that you have been exposed to this persecution," said Norwood. He had restrained his anger for fear of disturbing Mrs. Limmering still further. The fight was to be between Thriggerley and himself; these poor women must have nothing to do with it. "I wish you had mentioned the matter to me the moment you first suspected it, and, indeed, Miss Limmering, you could have spared yourself the pain of telling me this and merely asked me to go at once. There was no need I assure you to—er—reveal your private affairs. I would have left without this explanation."

"But I wouldn't let you," said Miss Limmering.

"Of course not, Mr. Cherral," added the mother.

"I'll remove to the hotel at once, of course. I can pack my suit case now, and as my presence is—er—dangerous to you, perhaps you could pack my other things and send them down to me."

Mrs. Limmering moistly promised him several times that the greatest care would be exercised in packing, that nothing would be left out, that she'd see to the washing and ironing of anything dirty herself, and if any buttons wanted sewing on—Miss Limmering, disdaining tears herself, shook hands with Norwood, and, as she watched him going down the road, sniffed the sniff of defiance to nearly all men, and to absolutely every landlord.

Shandy Saxon made no difficulty about taking Norwood as a boarder; the slight Norwood had inflicted on him nearly two years ago had long lost its sting. Any friend of Doctor Rafe's was welcome at the Cooeville Hotel, and indeed a nodding acquaintance had existed between Shandy and Norwood for the last twelve months.

Next morning Norwood attended Court as usual. For nearly eighteen months now had he, as an unengaged spectator and observer, taken his seat at the Bar at the weekly Court of Petty Sessions and at the quarterly sittings of the County Court. Mr. Dobbsleigh conducted the defence in Dwyer's case. He quoted none of the decisions Norwood had digested, and after a two hours' hearing before a large and attentive crowd the Police Magistrate inflicted a fine of £5. Norwood resented the decision as though he himself had been unjustly convicted. A sound Bench, a large public attendance at Court, an excellent fighting case which he knew he could have won—and pride compelled him to sit there with expressionless face listening to Dobbsleigh arguing in general

terms without quoting authorities, missing the vital point of the defence, and, in fact, throwing the case away.

It was an indignant Doctor Rafe who burst into Norwood's office that afternoon. "What's the meaning of this, eh? I suppose you sacked Dwyer because he wouldn't touch his hat to you? Why the devil should he? Or, perhaps you didn't like to act for the chap because he's what you'd call a publican, one of the lower classes. Oh, dammy! Look here, Cherral, I thought you'd thrown all that rubbish overboard." And Doctor Rafe, fuming violently, sat down and immediately got up again.

"I think, Rafe, you are unnecessarily offensive. You should learn the truth before speaking like that."

"Why, isn't that the truth? What else could it be?"

"Dwyer transferred his legal business to Dobbsleigh because Thridderley his landlord told him to."

"Well I'm damned!" said Doctor Rafe.

He sat down and considered the matter, repeating his statement as to his own condition. Norwood said nothing. At last Rafe broke out. "I beg pardon, Cherral. I've been blaming you, though I couldn't believe you'd really sacked your client. So it's our friend Thridderley, is it? Well, for dirty little spite commend me to our leading townsman. Of all the"—here Doctor Rafe put into speech his views concerning the character of the one in question, winding up, "I know you don't care for some of my favourite words, Cherral, but you must admit they just describe the"—and here the speaker went into the matter thoroughly once more.

Rafe's immediate apology quenched Norwood's indignation; the relief afforded by a friendly and sympathetic presence was great. "For once, Rafe, I can't say honestly I object. You can say what you like about the man. And Dwyer lost his case after all."

Doctor Rafe hit the table a mighty thump. "Cherral, old man, do you know that's the most decent thing you've ever said in your life. We'll make a man of you yet."

He smote the table again. "But that's not the point. I'll spread the news about Thridderley. He needs a damn good showing up, and, by Jove, I'll see that he gets it."

"No, Rafe, you can't. Dwyer told me in confidence. And I only repeat it to you because you're to be trusted. We can't mention it. But that's not all," added Norwood, and he related his last evening's interview with Mrs. Limmering and her daughter and informed Rafe of his change of residence.

"I wasn't down at Shandy's last night for a wonder," replied Rafe. "Well I'm damned! Bullying and nagging a pair of women to spite you!"

When Rafe had gone Norwood, with a growing feeling that he had made a mistake in trying to live down his first failure

in Cooeville, and with a sense of impending disaster, took down Armstrong on Mining and a Digest of Victorian decisions and studied, wretched but dogged, till tea time.

## CHAPTER XIX

"Look here, Cherral," exclaimed Rafe, bursting into his friend's office in his usual fashion next morning, "look here"—Norwood wondered what had excited Rafe or put him in a bad temper, he couldn't be sure which—"have you got any sense at all? Or any pride?" demanded Rafe, his voice rising. "Eh? Have you now?"

"It is not an easy question for the one concerned to answer, but since you insist on it, Rafe, I believe I have."

"Well then, show it," commanded Rafe loudly. "Show it."

"In what way, Rafe? What do you accuse me of now?"

"I don't accuse you of anything much yet, but I will if you don't do what I ask about this. Now let's get to business, Cherral. You answer my questions like a man—you haven't made a bean to speak of since you came back after your bout of typhoid, have you?"

"No."

"And there are always these continual expenses mopping up any savings a chap may have."

"Certainly."

"And—and, in fact, funds must be running pretty low?"

"To you, Rafe, I can say what I could not to others. I can pay my way at my present rate of living for about another three months, and then"—he stopped.

"And then what?"

"I decline to think about it, Rafe. Even with you I cannot discuss it."

"Ah, ha. That's just what I was coming to—you're not very flush with cash, and here's this damn Thriggerley trying to drive you out of the town."

"It almost looks as if he'll succeed," said Norwood, despondently.

"Of course he'll succeed," asserted Rafe roughly. "He's got the dibbs and you haven't. And it's the dibbs that count. He's bound to win—unless"—Rafe hesitated and then came out with a rush—"unless you have a bit of sense and take some stuff from me."

Norwood had been deeply hurt at Rafe's brusqueness, but now his face cleared. "So that is what you've been leading up to, Rafe. Thank you very much. You certainly have your own way of making a kind offer—"

"So you'll take it," interrupted Rafe. "That's all right."

I thought you might have learned a little sense at last, and I'm glad to see you have."

"Excuse me, Rafe, I didn't say I accepted your——"

"Yes you did. Now listen to me, Cherral, before you go making a damn fool of yourself. I had a decent lump in the bank a week ago, and now all these cockies' accounts are coming in and I'm damned if I know what to do with the stuff. So, like a decent chap, have a little sense for once in your life and take a hundred."

"You mustn't think I don't appreciate your kindness——"

Doctor Rafe was so angry that his glasses fell off. "Now listen to me"—he groped about the table—"where are those damn things?—when I want a bucketful of bleat I'll tell you. What I want just now is for you to take a cheque and say no more about it."

"You know I must decline, but believe me——"

Doctor Rafe restrained himself with an effort that actually creaked. "It's only a loan, Cherral. I'm not offering you a present—no damn fear. You can pay me back later on, and interest too if you like—strictly business. It's no good shaking your head. Don't be so damned obstinate. And," added Rafe, bethinking himself of a good argument, "remember you must beat Thriggerley. Come on, Cherral, you're not going to let yourself be beat by Thriggerley. He's a grocer, you know," explained Rafe, making an attempt to fit the argument to the man, "he's only a damn grocer." Doctor Rafe sneered so heavily that his glasses fell off again. "You know he is. So come on, take a hundred and beat him. Eh?"

Norwood had been grateful when Rafe first made the offer, but he was really moved at this insistence. He knew his friend was not in the habit of pressing a favour upon any one; the slightest negative hint was enough to send off in a huff one so touchy and testy. And now——

"Rafe, I am so obliged to you that I would break a good many rules to let you have your own way. But not in this matter. I can't, it would be nothing less than dishonesty to accept a loan that I could never pay back, but believe me——"

Doctor Rafe let himself go.

## CHAPTER XX

NORWOOD had spoken truly when, a week before, he had said to Rafe that he declined to discuss what he would do when his funds ran out; he would not even think the matter over by himself: some eighteen months ago he had decided to stay at Coeeville and succeed there, and stay on he

would. He took up the Transfer of Land Act, 1890, to settle down to study, but before he had read two sections a client appeared in the state of considerable indignation.

"Perhaps you can make something of this, Mr. Cherral. It's a bit above me. A thing like this to happen to me!" And Mr. Trewhella handed the paper he held to his solicitor.

"'In the Court of Petty Sessions at Cooeville,'" read Norwood. "'In the Western Bailiwick. Between John Thridderley, Complainant, and Moses Trewhella, Defendant. Goods and chattels sold and delivered eight pounds seven shillings.' Well, it's meaning is plain enough. I suppose you've read it."

"I've read it half a dozen times. What does the man mean?"

"He means that he wants you to pay eight pounds seven shillings for goods sold and delivered. Did you buy these goods."

"Of course I did. We storekeepers are always getting anything we're out of from each other."

"Well, why haven't you paid for them? What's your defence to this summons? I suppose you have a defence or you wouldn't come to me?"

"Now that's sense," remarked Mr. Trewhella with apparent surprise. "And I only came here for law."

Mr. Trewhella, good Methodist and tireless local preacher, could not abstain from regretting that such a fine young man as Mr. Cherral did not belong to the Methodist Church where his talents as a local preacher and an earnest exhorter could have full play. In the English Church, thought Mr. Trewhella, no one gets a chance except the minister, and even he can't have much of a fling.

But Norwood's next words jerked the local preacher's mind to mundane affairs at once. "The defence you speak of to this summons may seem good to you, and yet be bad in law."

"No fear of that, Mr. Cherral. Not if there's any justice in law." And forthwith Mr. Trewhella entered upon a full, detailed, and somewhat lengthy explanation. Norwood, dismissing general irrelevant statements, cross-examined his client closely about the particular matter set forth in the summons: at last he sat back and shook his head. "It seems to me one of those unsatisfactory cases of oath against oath. You paid him money admittedly due on one account, and he has taken it as part payment of another account that you dispute."

"That's it, Mr. Cherral, in a nutshell. He's been trying to get what he calls the fencing account that I don't owe—not a penny of it—for the last four years. I get his bills for it every quarter. But he's never sued me for it because he

knew I'd beat him if he did. So now he's trying to get at me this way."

"Of course, Thridderley will claim that part payment on that account is an admission of liability by you."

"Well, I look to you, Mr. Cherral, to pull the case off for me. How can he say I've admitted owing that old fencing account by paying part of it when I never paid part of it at all? What I did pay was another account altogether, in full. If you let Thridderley beat me——"

To describe such a catastrophe was impossible. Mr. Trehella felt that speech was vain.

"It has very little to do with me. Evidence—that's what the Court will want. And you have none. You paid a certain sum, no receipt has been sent to you——"

"He said the bookkeeper would make one out in the morning."

"You haven't demanded one——"

"Expecting it every day, Mr. Cherral. I was expecting it every day."

"And that's over a month ago. The evidence seems against you."

"I can't help that, Mr. Cherral. I'm an honest man. I obey the command: "Owe no man anything," and when I'm asked to pay what I don't owe I'll fight it. Yes, I'll fight it to the end. Turn the other cheek, yes, I'd try to do that—to anyone except Thridderley. But give in to a summons like this—for an amount I don't owe? Never, Mr. Cherral. Never. I try to walk according to the Book, and hard enough it is in business sometimes. A humble follower I strive to be but a doormat I am not—for Thridderleys to walk their boots over." Mr. Trehella, greatly stirred, mopped his heated face.

"The hearing is before the Police Magistrate fortunately. And we've three clear days to get ready. It's fight or pay——"

"Then it's fight, Mr. Cherral, as hard as you can."

Norwood required no stimulating to make him work at the case for the defendant in Thridderley *versus* Trehella, and he had learnt by now that to many in a township the local court supplies the place of the theatre and the music hall, that anything done there was inevitably noted of all and discussed later on: that a slip made in public was never forgotten: that any sign of nervousness, confusion, or ill-temper was recognized as a weakness; and that the manner in which one spoke was, to all save the Bench, more important than the matter: though he scorned to use the court as a place for advertisement he knew well that the public eye of Cooeville had seen him appear in its arena twice, and on each occasion his disdain for his opponent and for the Bench had been openly shown, and so had his ignorance of Petty Session rules and



procedure; on each occasion, too, he had been defeated; it was time that all these impressions on the public mind were altered: and there was only one way to do this—in the same place that he had exhibited lack of learning and of self-control he must now show both the calm assurance of certain knowledge and some professional fighting ability.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Any applications to make to the Court?” asked Mr. Jessington from his desk below the Bench four days later. “Close the Court. Court’s closed.”

The Police Magistrate left the Bench. Mr. Jessington slammed up the Register, the crowd that filled the Court broke up with a buzz. Norwood allowed Mr. Dobbsleigh and his client Thridderley, both obviously excited, to leave by the solicitor’s exit first, he followed in a minute with Trewhella. Mr. Trewhella had been hard put to it to contain himself in Court when the verdict was given, and now the moment they were out of the public gaze he seized Norwood’s hand and shook it warmly. “Mr. Cherral, you fought like a man, Sir, and you had right on your side. I knew we would win—though there were times this morning, Mr. Cherral, when a man’s faith was sorely tried.—But what a victory!”—he insisted on shaking hands again. “Thridderley’s claim dismissed! And two guineas costs against him!” Mr. Trewhella rubbed his hands joyfully. “I think his Worship got the length of our friend Thridderley’s foot, Mr. Cherral. When you were getting all those little things out of him—oh, he tried hard to keep you off, didn’t he—and Mr. Dobbsleigh got that wild! Did you see his face? White with rage he got! I saw His Worship paying particular attention to what you were getting out, Mr. Cherral, and he asked those few questions himself to make sure.”

“You were fortunate, Trewhella, in having the Police Magistrate on the Bench.”

“You would have won it for me, Mr. Cherral, no matter who was on the Bench. You explained the facts that clear, Mr. Cherral, and left nothing out. I was checking you. I could see at once we must win. And Mr. Dobbsleigh—ha, ha—he didn’t like the way His Worship pulled him up, did he, Mr. Cherral? No man would like being spoken to as sharp as that. But he deserved it, Mr. Cherral. You put him in his place more than once or twice, and so did His Worship. Mr. Cherral, Sir, I’ve been a Rechabite this thirty year—touch not, taste not, handle not, and here’s the hotel, and for the first time in my life I wish I could say to one as is a man and a brother, take a little—at my expense—for the stomach’s sake, which would not be sinful and is needed I believe. It’s been a long morning, Mr. Cherral”—Trewhella looked at his

watch—"a good three hours. But I can't ask you, Mr. Cherral."

Norwood's first visitor that afternoon was Doctor Rafe. He strolled into the office, stuck his hands in his pockets, leant in negligent fashion against the mantelpiece, and gazing out of the window with expressionless face, whistled softly to himself.

Norwood looked up. "Good afternoon, Rafe."

Doctor Rafe broke off to say, "Same to you," and then resumed his whistling.

Norwood smiled. "Have you nothing to say, Rafe?"

He got no reply for a minute or more, and then Rafe broke out with his usual flare of anger when he thought that he was required by convention to offer a few pleasant or graceful words. "I suppose you're waiting for me to congratulate you? Then you can damn well go on waiting." And Doctor Rafe, throwing as much insolent defiance into his whistle as possible, continued his tune.

Norwood smiled again: he had appreciated of late some of Railthorpe's chaffing of the polished physician on the subject of his manners. "I assure you I'm not, Rafe. Indeed, such an idea didn't occur to me."

"Good job for you," growled Rafe: then, becoming mollified, as he discovered that no politeness was expected from him, he ceased his irritating drone, sat down, and began to discuss matters with relish.

## CHAPTER XXI

NORWOOD had done more than earn two guineas when he appeared for Trewhella to contest Thriggerley's claim; he had destroyed at once the general belief that he was a peculiar and unreliable man, conceited, ignorant, and ill-tempered. At the hearing before the Police Magistrate with Dobbsleigh and Lambton at the Bar, and a large and unusually select audience filling the Court, his manner, naturally restrained and dignified, his cultivated voice and speech, stamped him immediately as an educated and well-bred man; while the first difference of opinion on a legal point between Mr. Dobbsleigh and himself showed that he was not only willing to fight, but knew how to handle his weapons. Mr. Dobbsleigh, expecting an easy victory, was annoyed to find his first few gibes unnoticed; he intensified them somewhat, still Norwood disregarded them, but raised a point of procedure which Mr. Dobbsleigh at once characterized as rubbish, and was proceeding on his way when the Police Magistrate asked Norwood on what he based his objection. Norwood quoted his authority at once. Mr. Dobbsleigh pooh-poohed it; the Magistrate

referred to it, and upheld Norwood's contention; Mr. Dobbsleigh made the mistake of arguing loosely and lengthily in the face of a clear ruling against him, when stopped by the Bench he made the graver mistake of further increasing his tone of personal reflection on Norwood, and was sharply pulled up by the Bench. Throughout the case, which was a long and bitterly fought one—for Dobbsleigh was by no means an easy man to abash or defeat—Norwood never raised an objection that he could not support on good grounds. Mr. Dobbsleigh argued in general terms and in many words without direct citation of authorities. Norwood spoke briefly but incisively, and had a reference ready to confirm all he said: such a contrast could not fail to be marked by the Bench, and even the audience of laymen could see that one man was upheld by the Magistrate on every occasion when there was a difference of opinion at the Bar. Norwood's unruffled demeanour in the face of Dobbsleigh's frequent interruptions and assertions told even more in his favour; and Goff gave, in the next issue of the *Chronicle*, a full report of the case under "Court of Petty Sessions" and in the "Local Items" devoted a complimentary paragraph to "the winner of one of the hardest fights our local Court has heard for many a day."

"A nice damn mess you've made of things now, Cherral, I must say"—Rafe burst into the office the morning after the battle in apparent excitement. "Do you know what you've done?"

"I cannot say that I do. What is it you're referring to?"

"Don't you know anything about it? Why the devil don't you keep your ears open?" demanded Rafe with loud superiority. "What? Haven't you heard really?" The speaker was obviously delighted. "The cows fell out after your little job at Court yesterday. Yes, they fell out properly. The wasps are stirred up, Cherral, and the blanks are set by the ears, and there's hell to pay generally. So now," added Rafe, suddenly becoming extremely serious, "you know all about it."

"Well—er—Rafe, I'm sure you mean to be explicit"—Doctor Rafe's fresh-coloured face became a rich crimson—"but I didn't exactly gather"—Norwood hesitated.

Rafe's crimson deepened to a dusky hue; then, abandoning the attempt to maintain self-control he blew up with a loud report and thumped the table in an ecstasy of pleasure. Norwood's astonished gaze appeared to afford him further gratification.

"It's all right, Cherral." Doctor Rafe settled his glasses. "Merrie England for me. Nothing like unsmiling dignity. I wish Goff was here. But if you haven't heard all about

yesterday I've got some fun for you. Thridderley didn't like being knocked out yesterday."

"One can understand that."

"He couldn't blame himself of course, so he blamed his solicitor—at least he and Dobbsleigh had a devil of a row in the afternoon. Where were you that you didn't hear about it?"

"I was here till about half-past five, and then I went to the hotel. I was here again all the evening reading."

"See what you miss by not being sociable. I believe our two friends had a real old slanging match. It would be all cry and no wool with those two miserable devils, though," said Rafe regretfully. "I'd give a fiver to see Dobbsleigh and him pasting each other." Doctor Rafe was compelled to bang the table again. "I'd give a tenner, dammy. Cheap at the money."

"You sound quite blood-thirsty, Rafe."

"Dobbsleigh's a decent enough chap in a way"—Norwood disliked this remark; for Doctor Rafe to praise such a vulgar, insolent, and ignorant fellow was wrong. "But," continued Rafe, "he's a damn loafer at his work, and he's not been too clean a sport lately."

"I dislike him extremely, Rafe. I would rather not discuss him."

"You're a rum chap. The more I dislike a fellow the more I like discussing him. Don't mention this outside, Cherral—Dobbsleigh belongs to the local poker school and he's a very slow pay; in fact, he's so very slow lately that I'm wondering if he means *not* to pay. If that's his game," declared the acknowledged Cooeville authority on all matters of card playing, "out goes Mr. Dobbsleigh from our pleasant little meetings."

"I wonder Rafe, at your fondness for that game and—er——"

"And the people I play with, eh? Well, when all I can see is a pair of twos I wonder myself sometimes, but when I'm sitting behind three fine fat kings I don't worry about wondering why I play. I just raise 'em. Gently, Cherral. Gently does it." Doctor Rafe enjoyed himself heartily for a few minutes. "Never mind about poker though, Thridderley's better game just now. He went off to Melbourne by this morning's train, and if there's a chance of an appeal in your case, Cherral, he'll take it. I'll bet he's gone to see the best solicitor he can find in Melbourne."

"I doubt if any honest legal opinion would advise what you call an appeal, Rafe; the decision was given on a question of fact."

"Well, that's your look out. If you're sure of belting him out again I hope the fellow does appeal. But you can

lay all you've got that if there's a chance to make trouble in this case, our gentle friend will take it. Neither he nor Dobbsleigh dreamt that you would win; in fact, I heard that Thriggerley never expected Trewhella to fight the thing at all."

It was an agitated Trewhella who hastened into Norwood's office next Monday morning. "I suppose you thought you did me a good turn when you beat Thriggerley for me last week, Mr. Cherral? And I thought so too. I admit that." Mr. Trewhella sat down, got up again, mopped his face and dried his hands carefully with a large handkerchief of dingy hue, and once more sat down, only to rise immediately. "But I'm afraid it's going to be the worst day's work ever done for me yet. Why couldn't I let well alone? It would have been cheap to pay him what he asked and be done with it. I shouldn't have gone to law, Mr. Cherral. It's a judgment on me. Thriggerley compelled me to go with him a mile—I mean he asked me for eight pounds seven I didn't owe—and I should have gone with him twain—I mean it would have been cheaper to pay up. There's a lot of sense in the Book, Mr. Cherral. Though what time a man is led away of his own lusts and enticed and is puffed up with pride which goeth before a fall he doesn't think so." Here Mr. Trewhella who had been moving restlessly about the room subsided into a chair.

"But what's the matter, Trewhella? What are you talking about?"

"Yes, Mr. Cherral. I forgot I hadn't explained. Oh, Mr. Cherral, it's awful. Me a criminal! Here, read that."

Norwood took the sheet of pale green paper. "It's an information laid against you by Thriggerley, for hearing on—ah—Tuesday three weeks. What's this"—Norwood's face grew angry ". . . the informant who saith that the defendant on—such a day—in the said Court of Petty Sessions in a certain case wherein this informant was complainant and this defendant was the defendant and in which case by an act then in force it was required that facts, matter or things be verified upon the oath of some person having in such case taken the oath so required did knowingly, wilfully and corruptly—"

"I never did, Mr. Cherral. Corruptly? Never. If I was to die to-night, Mr. Cherral—"

"Wait a minute, Trewhella—'did knowingly, wilfully and corruptly—'"

"Never—!"

" . . . upon such oath depose to certain false statements as to certain facts as follow: that the said Moses Trewhella was never in the shop of the said John Thriggerley upon—such a day—and never spoke to the said John Thriggerley upon the said day in the said shop when in truth and in fact he was

in the shop of the said John Thridderley upon the said day and did speak to the said John Thridderley upon the said day in the said shop and is therefore deemed to be guilty of wilful and corrupt perjury.' ”

Norwood laid down the document. “ This rises out of the case last week. ”

Mr. Trewhella carefully dried his face and hands again.

## CHAPTER XXII

ONCE more Norwood had professional work and once more he gave it his whole attention: immediately after his first interview with Trewhella he sent a full statement of the facts to the legal firm in Melbourne that he had appointed his town agents, and asked for the advice that their long experience could supply; daily did Trewhella call to discuss matters; and at almost every visit he had something fresh about the case to tell his solicitor.

“ I've found out something, Mr. Cherral. ” Trewhella sat down and nervously rubbed his hands together. “ Thridderley tried to get Mr. Dobbsleigh to take up this case against me and he wouldn't, so then he went off to Melbourne and got his lawyers there to go against me. And they say he's got Mottram engaged to appear against me at the Court. I'm told Mottram charged him a hundred guineas before he'd agree to come up here. ”

“ I heard that Mr. Mottram had been retained against you, Trewhella, but that needn't alarm you. My Melbourne agents write to me that it's a foolish blunder getting a man like that, one of the leaders of the Melbourne bar in jury work, to appear at the preliminary hearing. I've told you already that this first hearing has nothing to do with the question of whether you're innocent or guilty. If there's enough evidence to make it worth while sending the case on to a jury, the magistrate must commit you for trial. ”

“ It's all very well for you to say being committed doesn't mean anything against me, Mr. Cherral, but you know very well everybody'll say I'm guilty if I'm sent to be tried by a judge and jury. No, Mr. Cherral, this wicked persecution must be stopped at the start. I'm not a rich man, but you must get the best man in Melbourne to fight for me at that first hearing you talk so quiet about, cost what it may. I wish I'd known, Mr. Cherral, I was to be put to all this expense. I've just paid away all the spare money I had. But ”—Mr. Trewhella brightened—“ I got something worth double what I paid for it, a real bargain, a new hearse, Mr. Cherral, a beautiful thing, really a picture, a pleasure to look at—— ”

Trewhella was by no means the only man to call at the office about the case. As the days went by Norwood was more and more astonished to find how highly this village grocer and undertaker was regarded. Many influential Cooeevillans called to offer assistance in any way that Norwood might suggest; people stopped the solicitor for the defence in the street for the same purpose, and nearly all spoke in Trewhella's praise.

"I don't know whether he's called you 'brother' yet," remarked old Mr. Dolomy, "but he believes in all men bein' brothers. More'n believes in it too. He acts it. If a man's stuck bad luck he can always get stores on tick from our friend Moses, and if the luck keeps on bad there's no 'account rendered' sent in."

"When a fellow is always throwing chunks of the Bible at you it's as well to watch him carefully," observed the godless Jessington, "the odds are a hundred to one he'll take you down, and our friend Trewhella is a trifle fond of talking about a cup of cold water when the average man would thank him more for a long beer. But in spite of suspicious practices in that respect, I trust the old chap. Do you know what I found out by accident? Trewhella has an idea the Bible says we should give one tenth of what he calls our substance to the poor—he may be right, I never see a Bible except when I'm swearing someone—but do you know, Cherral, he sets aside a tenth of his income every year and gives it to charity?"

Even Rafe, not given to commendation, added his note to the chorus. "If you can't get that chap off on a charge of perjury, Cherral, you'd better shut up your shop. He'd rather flute from a pulpit than hold four aces at a poker school—sounds impossible, doesn't it?—but he's a straight goer. And if he does bleat like blazes about some things, he keeps quiet about his own good deeds."

A week before the hearing, Norwood sent the brief to his town agents for counsel; they chose a rising young member of the junior bar—Mr. Gray—already known as a hard fighter, and arranged for a conference.

On the great day the Court was packed; Cooeeville would have come just to look at Mr. Mottram, the great Mottram who had held a brief in almost every important jury case for the last ten years. But the crowd got very little from Mr. Mottram, for he, after opening his case, had little to do save ask questions of Mr. Thriggerley and the two witnesses that everyone now knew he was calling; and as it was a case for depositions, the evidence of each witness had to be taken down in writing by Mr. Jessington and read over to that witness when he had finished and before he signed it—a slow and wearisome way of conducting a case, and one that puts out any sparkle there might be in it—except when it comes

to cross-examining. And Mr. Mottram had no chance to cross-examine, for all the witnesses were his own. But Mr. Gray had this right; and when Mr. Thridderley had given his evidence in answer to Mr. Mottram's questions, the young barrister rose to see what he could do with the most important man in Cooeville. Mr. Thridderley, who had heard Mr. Dobbsleigh and Mr. Lambton cross-examine witnesses scores of times, saw at the very first question that Mr. Gray didn't know his business.

"As a man with the extremely large business you mentioned, Mr. Thridderley, I suppose you possess a splendid memory?"

Ha, ha, John Thridderley, Esquire, J.P., could see through a trap so badly set as that, this young city lawyer that thought himself so smart imagined he could get the witness to swear he had a wonderful memory, did he? Oh, yes! And then make a great fuss every time the witness couldn't—or shouldn't—remember something. No, thank you, we're a bit too sharp for that sort of thing at Cooeville. You want me to say I've a marvellous memory, do you? Well, of course a man that knows the game never admits what the cross-examining lawyer wants him to admit so—

"I don't say that I've a good memory. If you knew anything about business"—Mr. Thridderley's tone to the boyish-looking young fellow at the Bar was lofty indeed, many of the dense crowd of Cooevillans in Court felt that that young feller was up against a man too good for him when he tackled Mr. Thridderley—"if you knew anything about business, you'd understand that day books and ledgers and letter books and so on, save a man trying to carry things in his head—and making a mess of it."

"But, Mr. Thridderley," the young barrister persisted, "if I'm told you have a good memory, if I say you have an excellent memory—won't you admit it?"

Why, this was childish. "I say I have a bad memory," asserted Mr. Thridderley, "if anyone told you different they were laughing at you. Or"—he frowned as he thought Mr. Gray's informant might be Trehwella or his solicitor—"they were telling you lies."

"Do you mean to say you'd call the man who told me you have a splendid memory, untruthful?"

"Yes, I do," declared Mr. Thridderley, glad to have the chance of hitting out at one of his two enemies.

Mr. Mottram, the wily fighter of many battles, glanced at Gray, then at Mr. Thridderley, and swore humorously under his breath.

Mr. Gray, apparently worsted in his first round with the witness, gave up that point, and turned to the question of the old disputed account between Mr. Thridderley and Trehwella. After ten minutes of this he broke off.



"By the way, Mr. Thriddlerley, you said in your examination in chief that you had two witnesses."

"I did."

"And what have they been called for? What are they going to say?"

Even Mr. Mottram smiled at this question as he quickly rose to object to it, and the Police Magistrate as quickly ruled that it could not be asked. Mr. Thriddlerley's opinion of this barrister, that Trewhella and that stone-broke fellow Cherral had brought up to badger him, grew almost contemptuous.

"I press the question, your Worship," Mr. Gray addressed the Bench, "or at least for some sort of an answer to it. There is more than one thread to be followed through these book-keeping matters, and if either of the other witnesses is Mr. Thriddlerley's accountant it may save him being cross-examined at length on those points."

"Well, that puts a somewhat different view of the question," said his Worship. "Witness, as to any evidence on your bookkeeping——?"

"I can answer anything about the accounts," replied Mr. Thriddlerley, who did not care to have Railthorpe—a milk-sop who might say too much—in the box. "The other two witnesses," he explained, with some condescension to Mr. Gray, "will only swear that they saw Trewhella talking to me in my shop on the date in question."

"Thank you," replied Mr. Gray, "now for these accounts."

It was a long and uninteresting business, in which counter books and ledgers were produced and quoted and had different pages put in as exhibits, and marked. The adjournment for lunch came before it was over.

Lunch seemed to change Mr. Gray. During the morning he had simply applied to Mr. Thriddlerley for information, and had accepted what he had been given with apparent gratitude and without open comment. But now he commenced to publicly piece together statements made by Mr. Thriddlerley at quite different times during that long morning. And, strangely enough, they frequently did not agree; and, still more strangely, that young lawyer put questions about these self-contradictions in such a way—a disgraceful way Mr. Thriddlerley considered—that whatever answer was given only made matters worse. Mr. Thriddlerley grew more indignant. This fellow Gray was not only a most impertinent and dirty-minded little lawyer, suggesting all sorts of nasty things against a man that stood first in all the district, but he was an irritating blockhead, as well, he'd never stick to a subject; he'd ask a few questions and then—not having brains enough to finish the job—he'd fly off to some

other subject. Here he was again talking about the other witnesses and——

"I understand from what you told my learned friend this morning that one Roy Boston is to be called as a witness on your behalf."

"Yes."

"He is one of the hands in your shop?"

"Yes."

"And the date of the alleged perjury is some weeks ago. Of course you've talked over this case with Boston?"

"Of course I haven't."

"Oh, I don't mean every day—but just discussed things and gone over the points once or twice."

"I see what you're driving at. But I haven't told Boston what to say."

"Of course not. But just a little chat——"

"I don't chat with Boston. Do you think I'd ask him anything about this case?"

"Well, I'm asking you to tell me."

"I tell you, no. I've never said a word to either of the witnesses, Boston or Male. I'm not that sort of man."

"So you swear you've not spoken to either of them about this case?"

"Not a word."

"You're quite sure?"

"Yes."

"And you understood the question fully?"

"Of course I did."

"You're not making a mistake are you?"

"No. I am not."

"But you know what they're going to say?"

"Of course I—No, I don't. Let them speak for themselves."

"You said, Mr. Thriddlerley, that on the day set out in your Information Mr. Trewhella spoke to you about an account just outside your shop?"

"He did."

"And, as you and he were talking, you both stepped just inside your shop?"

"Not just inside—well into it."

"You say you have no feeling against Trewhella?"

"Certainly not."

"If people say you are laying this Information merely out of revenge because Mr. Trewhella defeated your claim in a civil case—well——?"

"I say they're evil-minded scandal-mongers."

"There's been a long dispute between you and him over that fencing account, years of it?"

"That's his fault."

"But you say that even before you sued him for it and he won the case you had no spite against him?"

"Certainly not."

"You haven't been lying in wait, so to speak, for the last three or four or five years to catch Trewhella tripping, with the view of making him suffer?"

"I'd scorn the action."

"Of course you would. Did you expect at the moment when you and he stepped into your shop a few weeks ago, that the point whether you were outside or just inside would ever be a most important matter?"

"Not at the time."

"Did you take especially careful notice of the fact of where you were, with the view of tripping Mr. Trewhella up if he ever denied it?"

"Of course not."

"Or call Mr. Trewhella's attention to the fact that he was inside?"

"Certainly not."

"Or call any other persons attention to that fact?"

"No."

"Or look carefully round to see what other persons were present so that you could call them as witnesses and prove Trewhella wrong, if he ever denied——"

"I never even looked round the shop. I've no idea who was there at the moment. I swear it. I'm on my oath now."

"Exactly," said Mr. Gray with a certain dryness, and he began looking through some papers in front of him.

"Yes, Mr. Gray?" hinted the Bench.

"You remember that you swore positively that you have had no conversation with your two witnesses about this case, that there wasn't even a mention of it between you?"

"I say so again."

"And you obliged me this morning by telling me that their evidence will be that Mr. Trewhella was in your shop on that certain day."

"Well, what about it?" Mr. Thridderley was becoming angry and aggressive.

"But they couldn't have told you what their evidence was going to be, because you've never exchanged a word with them about the case?"

"No—er—that is"—Mr. Thridderley saw something ahead of him, he couldn't quite say what, but it wasn't anything pleasant. What was it he had said in the morning? That fellow Gray was a most confusing fool, really one had to think carefully before giving any answer at all.

"Yes?" said Mr. Gray after waiting. "What?"

Mr. Thridderley remained silent.

"That is correct, isn't it?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Thridderley angrily, unable to follow up the matter he was hunting for in his mind.

"And you couldn't have guessed that they must have seen Mr. Trewhella in the shop, could you?"

"I might have, in fact——"

"Yes?"

Mr. Thridderley cleared his throat but gave no answer.

"You've sworn you didn't look round the shop on that occasion; in fact, that you didn't know who was in the shop, or who wasn't?"

Mr. Thridderley glanced indignantly at his own Counsel for not coming to his aid. But Mr. Mottram was busy writing.

"Well, Mr. Thridderley, you swear that you've never spoken to these two employees of yours on this matter, you swear that their evidence is going to be that they saw Mr. Trewhella in your shop on a certain date?"

Mr. Thridderley's feelings grew almost too much for him. What had questions like this to do with the case? He was there to prove that Trewhella had committed perjury, he wasn't there for anything else. He certainly wasn't there to be pressed about this and worried about that. What on earth had all those questions this morning about how he kept his accounts and the way he managed his business and the wages he paid and the way he acted to Trewhella years ago got to do with perjury? Why didn't Mottram come to his help and stop that insulting young guttersnipe that Trewhella and Cherral had filled up with all sorts of lies about a man that could buy the three of them put together a dozen times over. Mottram had better be careful. Mottram had opened his mouth pretty wide for a fee before he'd come up to Cooeville, and now that he had come he wasn't doing anything for his money. Mottram was nothing more or less than a — loafer. And that old ass on the Bench was just as bad. He was paid by the Government to do his work, and there he was sitting on the Bench and letting that Gray do just what he liked; in fact, he was backing Gray up, for that time before lunch when Gray'd gone a little too far and got the very proper answer, "You mind your own business," that Police Magistrate—a pretty magistrate he was!—had come down on him sharply—on him, John Thridderley, Esquire, J.P. The whole thing was disgraceful. That Cherral, and that snuffing, canting, humbug Trewhella, by — they'd smart for this day's work. Yes, by — they would.

Every Cooevillian that the court-house would hold felt that Mr. Gray was now making up for the slow and uninteresting morning Mr. Mottram had given them. Farmer Brown, still in debt to Mr. Thridderley, joyfully nudged the township-dweller Smith (who after years of struggle and interest-paying

had just given up the attempt to buy his own home and had sold it to Mr. Thriggerley at a heavy loss) in the ribs. At the next question by Mr. Gray, as Mr. Thriggerley wiped his neck and face with his handkerchief and cleared his throat, Smith trod on Farmer Brown's foot to call attention to the point. But Farmer Brown was not in danger of missing a point. Not at all. He returned Smith's significant pressure, and, catching his eye, winked delightedly.

"You couldn't have just guessed that your two witnesses saw Mr. Trewhella in your shop, could you?" asked Mr. Gray.

Mr. Thriggerley cleared his throat again.

Farmer Brown nudged Smith violently.

The Police Magistrate looked at Mr. Thriggerley expectantly.

"Now, Sir," said Mr. Gray harshly, "Do you ask this Court to believe that you laid—and swore, Sir—swore, an information for perjury against a reputable citizen without knowing whether one single witness could support your statement?"

"They said to me they saw Trewhella, I meant I didn't ask them to swear to anything."

"So they volunteered the information?"

"Yes," declared Mr. Thriggerley, believing he saw in this suggestion a way of escape. "Yes, that's what I meant. They volunteered it."

"You ask us to believe that these two men of yours, who couldn't know you intended to charge Mr. Trewhella with perjury, came up to you and said—they made a duet of it, I suppose—'Please, Mr. Thriggerley, we saw Mr. Trewhella in the shop on such a day?' Do you ask us to accept that statement?"

Mr. Mottram objected, and the Magistrate upheld his objection, to this question. Mr. Thriggerley breathed more freely. But Mr. Gray promptly turned his forbidden query into several allowable ones, and Mr. Thriggerley found himself in worse case than ever. Hedged in on every side by his previous evidence, he was, by degrees and in spite of frequent and desperate efforts to explain away other statements, driven to admit that in January last he had sued Trewhella for an account which he knew Trewhella disputed: that Trewhella had defended the action and had won it; that he (the witness Thriggerley) had at once come straight from the Court to his shop, had there called the two witnesses, Boston and Male, up from the shop to the office, and there questioned them as to whether they remembered seeing Trewhella in the shop on a certain day.

Mr. Gray then turned to the question, why had he spoken to these two and to no others. Again Mr. Thriggerley hedged, again he tried to explain, but the longer he fought the worse the final result.

No, he hadn't picked on them by instinct. No, he hadn't been told by anyone else they had seen Trehwella. Yes, he had said he had not noticed them when he himself was talking to Trehwella. And at last. "Well, perhaps I did notice Boston and Male in the shop when I was talking to Trehwella. I can't say."

But this was far from satisfying Mr. Gray. Applying the scalpel of dissection to the body of Mr. Thridderley's evidence, he laid bare matters before hidden.

Cooeeville spent a delightful two hours listening to its leading citizen being compelled to admit fact after fact, which he would rather have kept to himself: some, indeed, he did keep to himself, for a while, by denying them; only to be attacked sideways on the very same matter later on by questions that led on to other questions, and other answers, till Mr. Thridderley found no way out of the maze of contradiction except to admit that he might have made a mistake—that time.

Mr. Thridderley was not a hypersensitive man; and he knew well his own power in Cooeeville, and that it could not easily be overthrown; but he had never endured such a cross-examination before, and he resented it the more bitterly with each exposure.

Having dealt with the question of the two other witnesses, Mr. Gray went to the question of the accounts between Trehwella and himself; from these to other dealing between the two men; bringing out, in spite of earnest efforts on the part of the witness, that Mr. Thridderley had, on four occasions, behaved with marked animus against Trehwella, and had endeavoured to injure his public standing.

At last Mr. Gray had finished. Mr. Thridderley drew a deep breath of relief as Trehwella's Counsel sat down. Farmer Brown and Smith whispered to each other with grins of no ordinary magnitude.

Mr. Mottram gave his client a chance to explain away one or two of his worst blunders to Mr. Gray, then the most important man in Cooeeville was allowed to come down from the witness box. He sat down just behind Mr. Mottram and the solicitor from Melbourne, who also—at no small cost—had been brought up to Cooeeville to make as sure as possible of success in the prosecution.

The evidence of the two counter hands was soon taken, and the case for the informant was finished.

Mr. Gray rose, "May it please your Worship——"

Counsel for the defendant had, following his instructions, fought the case from the beginning, not to get matters in order for a successful defence before a jury at a later date, but to crush the charge of perjury at the outset by securing its dismissal at the preliminary hearing. His address to the

Bench aimed at the same result. He reviewed all the evidence carefully, declared that without intending any slur upon the honesty of the two witnesses, Boston and Male, it was evident enough they were underpaid and overworked by the Informant Thridderley; they were mere lads of no special brightness or strength of memory; and, a most important point, they stood in some awe of their master; that these facts would undoubtedly weigh with a jury, and that really the whole case turned upon Thridderley's own evidence. And forthwith Mr. Gray proceeded to anatomize the statements on oath of the informant. He spoke for nearly an hour in all, but to those who had followed the case the time seemed short.

"And now for the last matter I want to point out to your Worship. In this case Thridderley, a man proved vindictive and untruthful, asserts that on a certain day Trewhella was in his shop, Trewhella, a man admitted to stand high in the opinion of all who know him—save Mr. Thridderley—says he was not in Thridderley's shop on that day. These two men both live in this small town, they pass up and down the one main street daily, perhaps a dozen times daily. Trewhella was—at all times important to this matter—in Thridderley's shop often enough; in fact, it was difficult to say forty-eight hours later on what day he had been there, or had not been there." Mr. Gray paused. "Now what does that amount to?" He paused again. "To a question of *memory*. Would any jury regard it in any other light? And here, your Worship, is the point that I have kept to the last, though it came first in my cross-examination. What memory has the Informant Thridderley? Out of his own mouth let him be condemned. "I have a poor memory," swears Mr. Thridderley. Pressed on this point, he emphasizes the fact, "The man who says I've a good memory is telling lies," he declares. Now, your Worship, this case is, I confidently assert, one in which everything turns on Thridderley's evidence. I assert further that the direct conflict of statement between Thridderley and Trewhella as to being in Thridderley's shop on that day or not, is a question of memory and nothing more. I quote Thridderley's own assertion, that his memory is not to be trusted, and I submit that—apart from all the other points just reviewed by me—this one admission by Thridderley is sufficient to destroy his case. No jury would hesitate to acquit. On the face of the evidence there is nothing to lay before a jury that they would not laugh at. I ask that the Information be dismissed."

Mr. Gray sat down. A burst of applause broke out at the back of the Court. His Worship angrily ordered the police to enforce silence, and turned to his notes.

It was now long past six o'clock, and all Cooeville should

have been at its tea. But Cooeville, present at that moment in Court, would not have gone away just then even though by remaining they should lose tea and breakfast and dinner as well.

His Worship coughed. "I confess there is a difficulty in deciding this matter, but my course seems clear. The evidence of the chief witness was unsatisfactory. Most unsatisfactory. But apart from him, the two other witnesses, the lads Boston and—er—Male, gave corroborative testimony, and their evidence was unshaken." Here his Worship went into the evidence of each witness. "What view a jury might take of the whole affair," he at last concluded, "I can't say. The informant's evidence—however, the depositions will be forwarded to the proper authorities, and it is for them to decide whether the accused should be required to stand his trial. The only point I may decide is whether there is a *prima facie* case or not. In my opinion there is. And therefore I have no option but to commit." He paused, "Mr. Gray, as to the defence?"

Mr. Gray rose. "Subject to your Worship the accused reserves his defence."

"In that case accused will be committed. As to bail?"

By arrangement the committal was made to the Supreme Court Sittings to be held at Ballarat on that day fortnight, light bail was fixed, and was at once forthcoming.

## CHAPTER XXIII

RAILTHORPE had wasted no time in publishing "A Day"; he had not asked Rafe to read the manuscript and advise him: he knew that, so far from the book making any appeal to him, Rafe would on the contrary condemn the writer heartily.

More experienced now in the matter of producing a book to the public at his own cost, Railthorpe knew that in a small volume the cover is the most costly part; he sent the book to the same firm of publishers, asking the price of an edition of only one hundred copies with a paper cover; when he found the charge was small compared with his first experience—though it took the balance of his savings—he wrote to proceed with the publication at once.

He admitted that "A Day" far from satisfied him, but he felt that while he remained in Cooeville he could do no better. "I know many of those rhymed verses for the different voices don't ring true, but how can I write of happiness and friends and—and"—even in his own mind, when alone, and in the peace and privacy of night, Railthorpe could not approach with bold directness the subject of love,



to him so exquisitely holy, delicate, fragile—"a sweetheart, when I've only lived in Cooeville where these—these things mayn't be found. Some of those rhymed verses are poor enough, but they're my best just now. I can't write on such subjects here. When I get away into the world— And at least all the blank verse, and that's the important part of the book, is right. It's true. It's myself. These other men and women who feel exactly as I do, who think exactly what I've written down, can't misunderstand this book as they did 'The Bard.' This book doesn't wrap things up in irony and pretences of all sorts. It speaks straightly. If it could possibly be that 'A Day' and the—the appeal in it—is treated like 'The Bard,' then I'll have to believe that I'm all wrong, that Rafe is right, that all the world that I think so beautiful is just Cooeville over again, and that the only people in it are more Thriggerleys and Sackells and—yes, I'm not disloyal to say this—more Rafes. But it isn't. It isn't. I *know* it's not. I feel right through me that friends and beauty, beauty of nature, beauty of character, are in the world richly scattered about. Cooeville is not the world. It can't be."

When the book was published he noted the date and promised himself that he would wait two months before asking the publishers for a statement.

The press criticisms were favourable again; but press criticisms were not what he asked, he wanted personal ones now; he would have rejoiced to hear Rafe speaking about "A Day" even though he condemned it, to know that Rafe had read it would be something; but Rafe made no sign; save a few jesting allusions by others who had obviously seen nothing of the book, no one in the district took heed of 'A Day,' save Goff. There may have been some talk about the fact—widespread locally because mentioned in the *Chronicle*—that Railthorpe had published a second book of verse, but none of this came to the author. The year that had elapsed between the issue of "The Bard" and the finishing of "A Day" had passed more quickly for Railthorpe than those two months: throughout that year two heartening comforters had been his—hope, and a purpose. But the purpose was completed with the completion of the second book, and hope, during those two long drawn months, faded slowly. For post after post, day after day, week after week, dragged by, and yet not a single letter, not one word came from those unknown but beautiful spirits whom he had trusted to make his friends.

Railthorpe was growing desperate. Of late months the talk of others—of Rafe, of Jessington, of Goff—that had at one time excited and charmed him, had lost its attraction, he knew what they were going to say before they said it; the frolics that not long ago had been entered into with such zest had lost all flavour, one was just the other repeated over

again ; while thinking over and writing "A Day" he had withdrawn himself from his former companions : he felt now that never again could he go back to them with his former delight.

At last the self-imposed period of delay was over ; the two months had expired some days ago, he had written to the publishers for the statement ; it should come by to-morrow evening's post.

He had no leisure throughout the day to hope and to fear and to forecast good or ill ; for Mr. Thridderley was going to Ballarat by the afternoon train, and piled work on to his clerk during the morning sufficient to keep him out of mischief for several days to come, nor did the master do it pleasantly : in one of his worst moods he had the whole staff, from Railthorpe to the youngest driver, in fault and soundly rated before noon had struck. Railthorpe could well understand why : to-morrow Mr. Trehwella was to stand his trial for perjury ; many Cooeville men would be going away by the same train as Mr. Thridderley, but they were, to a man, Trehwella's supporters and sympathizers. Mr. Thridderley, in fact, was on the unpopular side : he stood there alone, and he resented it. "I'll be back to-morrow night if the rotten court gets through its work in decent time, but God knows how long it'll take to put a half-hour's job through. Don't make a bigger — mess of things than you can help while I'm away. Try to do a little honest work for once. You know my address. Wire me for instructions if anything unexpected turns up. Don't waste money though. You needn't send a thirty-word telegram if the cat has kittens."

The air seemed cleaner when he had gone. Railthorpe was glad of the excess work ; anything to keep him from thinking. That night he could not sleep, and though the postman never came before eight, Railthorpe was in the garden when five o'clock struck.

The mail was late that morning : it was half-past eight when the man bearing the canvas bag came round the corner. Railthorpe went out to meet him. "Yes, Mr. Railthorpe, one for you."

It was the expected reply, the envelope bore the firm's name on the flap. Railthorpe hastily returned to his room and locked the door, he tore out the statement, and the accompanying letter. One glance was enough.

"Ah, ha, I see yer," said one of the counter hands an hour later as Railthorpe walked into the shop, "takin' an extra hour in bed 'cos the boss is away." He chuckled, then added as he noticed the late arrival's face. "It don't seem to have done yer much good though."

Railthorpe made no reply ; he hardly heard the words, for in his mind one sentence was repeating itself again and again. "Only three sold. Only three sold."

## CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN on the return from the trial at Ballarat by the evening train Norwood and Mr. Trewella stepped out of the carriage at Cooeville, Norwood, for one, was not surprised to find the railway station thronged. The arrival of the daily train from Melbourne is, to many, the event of the twenty-four hours, but he was deeply astonished to find his arm seized by the large hand of Mr. Bill Plowright, who, grasping Trewella with his other hand, irresistibly impelled them through the station gate to the street; the crowd there was dense; so was the dust; Bill Plowright gave a stentorian yell, "Here we are." Forthwith the crowd began to cheer; Norwood saw through the dust the new hearse—the pride, the darling of Mr. Trewella's heart—and wondered if a funeral were meeting the train; still held in the powerful grip of Bill, Norwood and Trewella were piloted past the hearse; a strange groaning, grunting, and tootling, rose beside them: Norwood looked round.

"It's the Town Band," shouted Bill.

Mr. Trewella, President of the aforesaid Town Band, nodded comprehendingly. Norwood, still completely in the dark, left himself of necessity in the hands of Mr. Plowright, and that gentleman led them to where Senior Constable Jones stood officially and stiffly erect, but warmly welcoming.

"Marshal 'em, Sergeant," shouted Bill.

In five minutes the Marshal was back, the drummer gave a heavy "pom pom pom," and Senior Constable Jones, stationing himself three paces to the right of Norwood and his two companions, led off, as the band broke into its favourite march, with a well-drilled stride; the unresisting Norwood, helpless in the grip of Mr. Bill Plowright, found himself heading the exultant escort.

It was a great procession. First came the arm-in-arm line of Norwood, Mr. Plowright and Mr. Trewella; close upon their heels the somewhat deafening Town Band thumped and blew its hardest: the new hearse, covered at every available point with Mr. Trewella's counter-hands and drivers all cheering lustily, came next, the usually sedate horses demanding skilled management owing to the efforts of the heavy-handed drummer. Mr. Trewella was one of the Trustees of the Manchester Unity Independent Order of Odd Fellows; it was therefore most fitting that the members of that lodge should march in gallant array immediately after the crowded hearse: as Mr. Trewella held office in the Ancient Order of Foresters as well, this antique body also joined the happy throng: and a large proportion of Cooe-

ville's population lent their presence and their voices to make the reception of the returned Trewhella a complete success.

Norwood, almost choked with dust, found himself halted before the Mechanics' Concert Hall. As Trewhella and he were led inside, such a stream followed them through the double doors, that the place was filled full by the time Norwood had been conducted to the stage and forced into a chair beside his client, facing the assembly. A score of Cooeville's leading men had joined them on the platform, and, without any waste of time, Mr. Dolomy stepped forward: "Gentlemen, we all know what an anxious time our friend Trewhella"—cheers, in which the speaker took his part—"we know what he's been through to-day, and I should say if there's one place more'n another he wants to get to this very minute it's his own home, and if there's one person he wants to see more'n another it's his wife"—loud cheers. "So if we really want to be kind we mustn't keep him long. We'd all like him to know it's for that reason that the public dinner we thought of having here to welcome him to-night was given up. It was me that sat on that idea till it was give up, and if our guest wants to blame anyone for what might seem like a stingy welcome, he can just blame me that's the oldest friend he's got here, I dessay, by many a long year. But the objec' of this meetin' of some of our guest's friends is not only to welcome him back, but to assure him that there's not a man in this here hall to-night, there's not a man in Cooeville, I'll say there's not a man as knows him, that believes for a moment the charge that's been laid against him"—loud cheers. "It may be some solace to him that the judge—when he'd only heard half the evidence—wouldn't even let the case go to the jury, but told 'em to acquit our friend at once, I say that may be a comfort to him, but it don't affect us at all. It don't matter what judges or juries or the likes of them may say, we all know that he couldn't a done it"—cheers. "It's not in him"—prolonged cheering. "Him being by bad luck a Rechabite—many a time have I tried to convert him and lead him to an honest glass—him being, as I say, a Rechabite, and an obstinate one at that, we had to have the meetin' here, instead of inside a—a better place"—laughter. "As it is, we just tell him now that we wish him well, and that as soon as he's gone home we'll adjourn and drink his health in spite of him—and not only once either. Now gentlemen, I know there's a couple of hundred or more of you all burstin' to make a speech and tell our friend and brother what you think about him, but he's fair knocked up I dessay, and we ought to let him go. Let's work off our feeling—because I'm nearly burstin' too—by singin' 'For he's a jolly good fellow'—even if he is a teetotaler. Where's a singer to start us?—Mr. Wemy?"

As the cheers and shouts that followed the hearty bellowing of the song ceased, Mr. Trehwella rose and walked forward. He found himself choking and speechless. The crowd broke into cheers. Still Trehwella, much overcome, could not find his voice. Turning round he seized Norwood, pulled him forward, and sat down himself, leaning forward and covering his face with his hands.

For a moment as he looked down upon the packed audience containing many still hostile to him, Norwood hesitated. Suddenly something swelled in his heart, the thought of Trehwella and what he had endured during the past weeks swept out of his mind all thoughts of self, he stepped forward, and spoke boldly, "Mr. Dolomy, Gentlemen, Mr. Trehwella wishes me to thank you on his behalf for this public demonstration of your belief in his integrity. If anything can heal the wound inflicted on him by recent events, this warm assurance of friendship and continued esteem among those who know him best should effect a cure. So much I say for Mr. Trehwella. For myself, if you will allow me, I should like to add—lest any should misunderstand me—that Mr. Trehwella did not call on me to reply for him as his solicitor, as, so to say, his paid agent, but as one who has been compelled to observe him closely throughout a lengthy period of deep trouble, and who has from that come to respect and to admire him. As it is desirable for Mr. Trehwella's own benefit that this meeting should come to an end now, I beg to suggest that we celebrate the triumphant vindication of our friend and close this meeting with three cheers for Moses Trehwella. Hip—hip——"

The crowd supported the speaker warmly.

## CHAPTER XXV

NORWOOD walked to his office next morning a new man; Trehwella had been acquitted by law, and honoured in his own town; Thriggerley had been defeated. The bad name which Norwood had earned for himself by his first five months in Cooeville he had now redeemed, he had built up with weary toil and far more weary waiting an enduring and rapidly rising reputation for professional ability; and, far above that, for personal integrity. The long fight was over; success had begun.

Yet for all that when his first caller that morning—Doctor Rafe—flung into the room, almost upsetting a chair in his haste, it was evident to Norwood that he was extremely annoyed. Really Rafe was a most extraordinarily touchy fellow. What was the matter with him now? He must be gratified by the result of yesterday's trial, and really ought,

as a mere matter of courtesy, to congratulate his friend on such an important and popular success. But here he was with flushed face and angry expression beginning to thump and bang the table as he always did when he was indignant or highly delighted. And he certainly was not delighted just now, he was really scowling horribly. What was the matter with him?

Doctor Rafe did not leave the wondering Norwood long in doubt. "Here's a nice thing, Cherral. I didn't think you'd stoop to this. No, I'm damned if I did. I didn't think an Englishman of all people would sink to—to—to such depths."

Norwood was mystified. "My dear Rafe——"

"Didn't you tell me that you believed in professional etiquette? Didn't you say that Dobbsleigh and Lambton were bounders or something like that for breaking it every day? And now you—the man that preaches about etiquette and so on—Oh——!"

Norwood felt rather uncomfortable. "I see what has upset you now, Rafe, and really I must admit that after the train came in last night the proceedings were—were——"

"No wonder you're stuck for a word," asserted Rafe loudly. "I may be only a poor damn Colonial, but have you ever seen me prancing down the street——"

"Come, Rafe. I admit that what occurred last night was most unusual. In fact, in calmer moments, one looks back on all the proceedings from the time the train came in, with some surprise, but——"

"Look here," said Rafe savagely, shoving out his face at Norwood, "did you walk down the street at the head of that damn procession last night, or didn't you?"

"I was just going to explain, Rafe, that I was completely taken by surprise at the station. Indeed, before I had time to consider I found myself taken charge of by Plowright and——"

"Well, I hope you're ashamed of yourself, that's all. There's a fearful lot of yarns about you all over the town—none of them nice ones either. I'm damn glad I'm not an Englishman who's strong on etiquette and all that sort of thing. Now are you ashamed of yourself, or aren't you?"

"Well, really Rafe, I'm not quite sure by what right you speak in this fashion and insist on an answer to your rather—er—to your question. But since you insist, Rafe, I—er—No, Rafe, I am not ashamed. In fact, I decline to be. And," added Norwood with dignity, "as we evidently are at variance on the subject, pray say no more about it."

"Oh? Won't I?" Rafe's indignation increased. "You think you're going to choke me off in that way, do you? So you're not at all ashamed, aren't you? Not even of

marching about the place, hobnobbing with a blacksmith and a grocer?"

With any one else Norwood, by maintaining silence, could have forbidden further argument, but he felt he owed too much to Rafe to treat him as he certainly deserved. "I would prefer to drop the subject, Rafe, but since you persist I assure you that last night I quite forgot that my associates were tradespeople."

"Oh, you did, did you? Well, come on now, own up—would it have made any difference if you'd remembered?"

"No, really I cannot say that it would. Last night was perhaps an exception to ordinary rules. You must remember, Rafe, that there was a good deal of excitement in the air."

"All very fine," said Rafe violently, "but that's not the worst. You not only head a procession—the whole thing was against the law, I believe—but you arrange for the band to meet you. Look here, Cherral," continued Rafe, controlling his anger and subsiding to calm argument. "Do you think that's a professional method of advertising yourself? Because I don't. And I find a lot in the town agree with me. A nice chance you've given Dobbsleigh, I believe"—Rafe commenced to grow hot again—"that you consider yourself a bit above Dobbsleigh, but I've heard more than one say as I came down the street that Dobbsleigh may blow his own trumpet a bit, but he doesn't hire the whole band to turn up at the station and disturb the town every time he wins a case. No, Dobbsleigh's a professional man and tries to act like one. I must say that for him. He doesn't stoop to cheap advertising!"

For a moment Norwood thought his friend was joking: he smiled, "I know how fond you are of what you call pulling my leg, Rafe, but——"

"Don't imagine I'm playing the fool this time," interrupted Rafe fiercely. "You should hear what people are saying about you. I haven't told you half. I didn't want to hurt your feelings, but if you treat the whole thing as a joke——"

Norwood was obviously perplexed. "Rafe, what is the matter with you this morning? I hoped you had come in to congratulate me. You have told me often to throw away my ideas concerning the—the lower classes and I really did so last night. Trehwella is a fine fellow. I hoped you might be there and approve of what I did."

"I knew nothing about it till to-day—out at a country case till early this morning."

"Well, Rafe, I've taken your advice and you mustn't blame me on that account."

"There's a limit, Cherral. Damn it all, there's a limit. I don't believe all I hear, but where there's smoke there's

fire you know, and I certainly heard some startlers this morning."

"My conscience doesn't accuse me much, Rafe. Let me hear all these reports you hint at."

"Don't worry about my being too delicate to pass them on to you. I think you ought to know them, so that you can give a public denial—if your conscience will let you. To begin with I'm told you were damn well sprung when you fell out of the train."

"Sprung, Rafe?"

"Been in the sun then, well oiled, loaded up, drunk, dammit. Don't pretend you can't understand English."

"If any such report is really going about, Rafe, it is scandalous——"

"Going about!" shouted Rafe. "I like that! Why, the whole town's ringing with stories of that—that disgusting exhibition. They say Plowright had to use all his strength to hold you up—horrible state you were in, he says, blue paralytic."

"Rafe, really this is——"

"Oh, I've heard about you, my boy. I must ask Goff to keep it out of the paper. And as if that wasn't enough you must needs go to a meeting and consort with all the rag tag and bobtail of the whole damn district. Talk of currying favour with the lower classes. Oh"—for a moment Doctor Rafe's feelings choked his speech, he turned his back on Norwood's stare of horrified amazement, and coughed loudly.

"Well, Rafe, if you are in earnest——"

"What!" shouted Rafe.

"Well, then, Rafe, since you're in earnest, it shows how grossly one may be misrepresented. I need not assure you that these reports are gross slanders."

"Weren't you at the meeting after all? The liars told me you were."

"Er—yes, Rafe, I was at the meeting certainly, but——"

"At that meeting!" interrupted Rafe with loud scorn.

"I must say, Cherral, I thought better of you."

"Really, Rafe—of course you're exaggerating the affair—but I thought you advised me to—to mix more freely with people, with what I used to call the lower classes—I've given up that expression now, Rafe, and I believe you'll approve of my doing so—but the first occasion on which I carry out your advice to the letter—perhaps a little beyond it I admit—you appear to be quite indignant. I wish I could understand you better."

Rafe, however, was apparently quite unmollified. "Wait till I finish, and you'll see why I can't back you up. No, dammit, some things are too strong, over the odds altogether. Hold on, let me finish—I've kept the worst till the last—"



I didn't mean to let this out but since you pretend to be so innocent and won't be ashamed of yourself—It's not enough for you to parade all round the town with a hired band and a hearseful of horrible damn howlers"—thus ungraciously did Doctor Rafe describe Mr. Trewhella's happy group of lustily cheering assistants—"it's not enough for you to upset the whole town to advertise yourself—do you know three old ladies had hysterics last night, you damn well scared the wits out of them—and after that you must go to a meeting and make a speech—had to be held up I'm told and nearly cried—as maudlin a damn spectacle as ever the place saw, they tell me—no, wait till I finish, though I don't wonder you're blushing—but after your meeting—now it's no use denying this, dozens of 'em can swear to it—you must needs climb up on that hearse yourself——"

"Rafe——"

"... with your damn belltopper over one ear——"

"Rafe——"

"... and drive all over the place, yelling and whooping and cursing and——"

But Mr. Norwood Cherral could stand no more. "I believed at first that you were joking, but as you assure me that you're not—and indeed though I can see you've dressed things up a little for my benefit, I know how grossly this town gossips and twists the true facts about——"

Doctor Rafe had been growing rapidly a deeper and deeper crimson: now he could keep serious no longer; shouting with laughter he banged the table, he stamped on the floor in an ecstasy of mirth, his glasses dropped off, and he himself fell into a chair.

Norwood gazed at him in amazement and then coloured slowly. "I think, Rafe, you carry your notion of humour somewhat far. When you give me your word I must accept it implicitly. But——"

Doctor Rafe, still extremely red in the face, was feeling round for his glasses with tears in his eyes. "Look here," he said, as he groped blindly about the floor, "I'll apologize if you like—there. Where the—oh!"—he rose, settled the glasses on his nose, and chuckled. "You did a damn good job yesterday, and your little speech capped the thing nicely, I hear. I was only bluffing you. If the town's fluting about you it's only saying what a fine chap you are. But if you could only have seen your own face. Oh, dear! Oh, dammit!" He laughed again, then suddenly became grave, "Well, Cherral, I believe we've knocked all those damned silly English ideas out of you at last. We've made a man of you, dammy, and it's up to you now to go in and win."

## SECTION III

## CHAPTER I

COOEVILLE, when Norwood first knew it, had no great ambitions, and no apparent probability of rapid growth. Only one mine, it seemed, was going to succeed; and as for agriculture, too many acres of inferior land lay scattered through the district for it ever to be the busy centre of heavy harvests. But even before Norwood had settled there, the words "chemical manures" had been heard in the land; and that movement had begun which, though unnoticed at the time, worked mighty changes. Artificial fertilizers alone worked many miracles; better agricultural methods, and better agricultural implements, helped the farmer still further, and more and more acres were put under cultivation each year. Land commenced to creep up in value; the district grew steadily wealthier; and standard of living rose rapidly on the flowing tide of success; new blood, attracted by increasing business, swelled the population, increased the trade competition, and badly injured two or three comfortable local monopolies; the comforts of life were insisted upon, the respect of the Cooevillan for his town increased; the old members of the Borough Council, men who had proclaimed their satisfaction with the water supply, with the inadequate drainage system, who had opposed all progress, were gradually weeded out; a new reservoir built among distant hills gave a full quantity of clear water in place of the clay-coloured, evil-smelling, and dangerous abomination that Cooeville had endured so long: each success added another; the township, in fact, once looked on as belonging to the backblocks, grew to be the busy centre of a thriving district.

"Mr. Cherral in, Smith?" asked Doctor Rafe, pausing at the glass-pannelled swing-door which made the outer room of Norwood's office more dust-free and private than of yore.

"In, Doctor," answered Mr. Smith, Managing Law Clerk, "but engaged."

"He's always engaged. Well, tell him he can have a country trip with me to-morrow if he likes. I'm going out to Murphy's Flat at ten o'clock. Let me know if he can't come."

"I can tell you now, Doctor: he's going out to Warrington to-night for the week-end." Mr. Smith suppressed a smile with difficulty as he spoke: at least he suppressed half of it.

Doctor Rafe, in spite of himself, imitated Mr. Smith.

"Dammy, I might have thought of that. Oh, beg pardon, Miss Benton. I didn't see you."

Miss Benton, the stenographer and typist, smiled her forgiveness from behind the pigeon-holes across her table, and, when Doctor Rafe had gone, expressed her opinion to Mr. Smith, that she believed the Doctor had seen her all the time. Mr. Smith, a man of few words, merely replied, "Typed the two copies of that lease yet?"

Miss Benton, who held views differing from those of Mr. Smith on the use of the tongue, tossed her head slightly and settled two brooches, two bangles, and one errant lock of hair, before remarking in a slightly acid voice, "They're not wanted till four o'clock."

The high place, however, which the subject of sentiment held in Miss Benton's mind overcame her pride, and in a tone of friendly badinage she observed, "I saw you smile when you said where Mr. Cherral was going."

Mr. Smith gave no reply.

"I suppose it's true what they say?"

Mr. Smith behaved as before.

"Oh, well, I hope they'll be happy."

Mr. Smith repeated his previous performance. Miss Benton bit her lip, then, with her opinion of Mr. Smith vividly expressed on her face, turned to her table and typed viciously.

Saturday afternoon, when the country folk come into the town, is a busy time, but Doctor Rafe, instead of remaining in his surgery, had, according to his wont, come out to join the throng: attracted by the crowd outside the business premises of Mr. J. Austerberry, Auctioneer and Stock and Station Agent, he pushed his way through the densely filled rooms to the rear, where what had once been a back-yard was now—by the erection of a rostrum and a semi-circular row of benches facing it—an open-air auction room.

"Now, gentlemen,"—Mr. Austerberry was evidently half way through his harangue—"you all know this farm and you all want to get it. You needn't pretend you don't. No one but a man like Mr. Thriggerley, who can afford to go and live in Melbourne, would sell this land at such a low reserve and on such easy terms. The way farms are making fortunes for their owners you won't be able to buy land here soon for love or money."

"And yet you're selling every week, Jack," suggested an old farmer.

"Of course I am. I'm selling every week for those who've made their pile, so they can afford to give the land——"

"At eight pound an acre," interrupted another. The crowd, greatly pleased that one of their own class should get home on the auctioneer, guffawed loudly. A chorus of chaff delayed the smiling Austerberry. "Call that giving land

away?" "You won't get eight pound an acre for this lot, Jack." A red-faced old farmer, who had left Somerset for Australia in the digging days of the fifties, said heavily, "If you get 'hree pound you do well." This brilliant and subtle stroke of old Bill Rigg amused the crowd hugely, one might have thought no jest could tickle the audience more, had not the auctioneer's reply, "It's not your farm I'm selling to-day, Bill," brought down the house completely.

"I take it our friend Mr. William Rigg starts the bidding at three pounds an acre," said Austerberry, as soon as he could be heard. "Anything for a start. Three I'm offered, three I'm offered, three pounds, three——"

"And ten," said a voice.

"Three ten, three ten, seventy shillings, at seventy shillings—gentlemen, I needn't tell you now's your chance. This is Mr. Thriddlerley's last farm here. When I've knocked this down to some lucky man, you'll have to scratch about to find any more land offering on such easy terms—four, four, four I'm offered, and ten, four ten, four ten, ninety shillings, five, five pounds—in five shilling bids now, gentlemen, five pounds, five, ah, guineas, five guineas——"

Ten minutes later the block was knocked down to Mr. Badgery at six pounds eighteen an acre.

Norwood found Rafe in his surgery when he called at half-past four. "Smith gave me your message, Rafe, I'm obliged for your offer, but——"

No one could say that Rafe was annoyed because his friends declined the offered Sunday drive, nor that he was jealous because his friend's time and interest had lately been absorbed in professional matters and in visiting the Ormerods, but for all that he now sat back looking by no means amiable. "All right, never mind declining with thanks and all the other damn etceteras. We've knocked a lot of nonsense out of you, but that English politeness—it's as hard to get rid of as Bathurst Burr."

Norwood smiled. "Thank you for that too."

Doctor Rafe grunted, then, looking with critical disapproval at his visitor, he observed, "As one who knew you in your better days, Mr. Cherral, when you were indeed a true-born Englishman, I grieve to state that you're fast deteriorating. In fact, you appear to me to be turning into a damn Colonial. You're paying an afternoon call on me I presume, and you've got the cheek to rig up in a sac suit and a billy-cock hat."

"You were always a difficult man to please, Rafe. You gave me no peace till I gave up the frock coat and silk hat and——"

"What's that in your hand?" demanded Rafe loudly.

"Yes! You may well try to hide it."

"I assure you I was not concealing it, Rafe, I——"

"It's no use trying to slip the *Bulletin* into your pocket, Cherral. Here's a nice state of things! The man who wouldn't touch it with a pair of tongs a while back, goes about nursing it now. If you take that out to Warrington, they'll disown you."

"Really, Rafe, I only bought it to read the leader you recommended to me, and I'm not taking it out to Warrington. It's not a Sunday paper, to say the least, and, in any event, the Ormerods would not approve of its tone."

"And you do, I suppose, you dissipated ruffian. Then why don't you read the thing through and pick out your own pet bits? Why must I spoon-feed a man of your age?"

"Thank you, I find a little of it now and then quite enough."

Doctor Rafe relaxed his censorious mood sufficiently to grin. "It's too strong meat for your—haw—superior palate. Goff was right when he said a man must have a broad outlook and a sense of humour to enjoy the *Bulletin*. So you'll never get your full sixpennorth of fun out of it."

Norwood smiled. "One may admit some of the claims you make for it, that it's the only Australian paper with an Australian policy and that all the young wits of Australia write for it, but——"

"But you can't appreciate it, eh? You're more at home discussing with old Ormerod the—haw—iniquities of the lower classes and the—haw—Labour party, don't cher know?"

But Norwood, inured by long use to Rafe's gibes, smiled again.

"You're looking deuced well pleased with yourself," growled Rafe. "I suppose you'll be 'dining' to-night instead of just having tea. And you'll be rigged out in full dress for it, so you ought to be happy."

"It is certainly very pleasant to indulge in the old customs again."

"You'd better be off. You won't have more than an hour to dress up in if you don't hurry. Oh, by the way, Cherral,"—Rafe tried to conceal a smile—"I reported you as a first class life to the A. M. P.—though why you want to insure your life—a death policy too—I can't see. You've no one dependent on you and you're not married. "But," continued Rafe, very seriously, "though I told the Company you were all right, I feel it my duty to tell you that I diagnosed a slight affection of the heart. This communication, Cherral," added Rafe, with deepening gravity, "is strictly in confidence, but for all that you have my full authority, as your medical man, to pass the glad news on to—to the young lady who has caused the mischief."

Doctor Rafe's gravity disappeared, he thumped his desk in great enjoyment, and ordered his friend to hasten forth at once that he might have ample leisure to arrange his tie.

## CHAPTER II

MR. Wemby rubbed his plump hands together cheerfully. "Hoip is coming home to-night, Mother, I think I'll just go up to the station to meet him. I told him I'd be the first Cooeville man he'd see, and, in fact—he—I—we have a little bet on it, that I won't be up at the station at all."

"Well, as it's for Mr. Hoip, father, I suppose you ought to go for once; and betting, too, I wish you wouldn't, for if you once start, where you'll come to who can say, and there's quite enough gamblers here, what with hearing about the men that go to the hotel and play cards, so sad I think, at all hours, and Doctor Rafe, too——"

Mr. Wemby was in ample time for the train; as he passed the far end of the Bowling Green fence he paused to breathe pleasurable breaths of air delicately scented by the freshly cut and watered lawn. "It's a fine green and does us credit. It's more appreciated too now that the town's growing so. And Hoip and I will be playing there to-morrow evening, if it doesn't rain."—He stumbled over something on the path—"What's this?" He kicked it gently and found it soft; he struck a match; a man lay face down close to the fence. Mr. Wemby turned him over; the heavy breathing and the strong reek of alcohol proclaimed that the man was not injured nor ill, but drunk. Mr. Wemby held the match to the man's face. "Dear, dear! What a shame! What a pity!" He spoke in tones of surprise and sorrow, and hastily blowing out the match stood considering. "I must get the Doctor. Nobody must know. We must get him shifted before the train comes in, and people come down this way."

Mr. Wemby was a heavy man and no longer young, but at something between a walk and a trot he hastened to Shandy's.

Yes, the Doctor was there. Was he wanted?

Rafe came out hastily from his game of poker.

"Anything serious, Wemby? I'll never forgive you if it isn't. I've been sitting stiff all the evening till ten minutes ago, and then luck changed."

"Come with me," answered Mr. Wemby, and outside he explained with what breath he had left the reason of his call.

Doctor Rafe swore with bitter disgust and anger. "You'll keep this quiet of course, Wemby?"

"That's why I came up for you, Doctor. Nobody must hear of it."

"We can't walk him along, Wemby. I'll knock up the groom and get a buggy. I'll drive myself."

"And I'll go down and wait beside him, Doctor. I want

to help the poor fellow he—he's not been himself for a long time."

"He's been a damn fool for a long time," answered Rafe savagely. "But it's no good talking now. Even when we've got him in the buggy we can't take him home. He'd better come to Bowyer's with me."

"That's very kind of you, Doctor. I'll go down and watch him. We haven't any time to lose. The train's almost due."

Mr. Wemby had not long to wait beside his find. Rafe drove up in five minutes, and between them they lifted the helpless limp figure up, and Rafe tumbled it none too gently into the buggy.

"Hoip will be disappointed," said Mr. Wemby listening to the train drawing into the station, "but I—I—really I can't help it." Climbing up himself he held the swaying bundle in the seat, and Rafe whipped up the horse for Mrs. Bowyer's.

"If anybody sees us," said Wemby, as they carried their charge through the gate with its red lamp revealing them, "they'll think it's just—just a patient, Doctor."

"Wish it were," said Rafe curtly.

"The surgery, Doctor?"

"No. My bedroom. Here we are. I'll manage alone now. And—er—I'm obliged to you, Wemby, for keeping the thing quiet and coming to me."

"I—I wish I could help him, Doctor. It's hard to know what to do." Mr. Wemby's face showed his troubled thoughts. "Don't you think he needs some—some good advice, Doctor?"

"He'll get it," answered Rafe grimly. "Good-night."

When Wemby had gone Rafe straightened out the huddled figure on his bed, unlaced and removed its boots, partly undressed it, and covered it up. Then he stood looking at the result of his labours with conflicting emotions. "You poor, silly, damn, weak fool," he said, and anger and affection mingled in his tone.

Perhaps some note in Rafe's voice reached the sodden brain, vibrating some chord of memory silent these many months between the long-estranged friends, for the sleeper opened his heavy dilated eyes.

"Can you hear me, old man?" asked Rafe softening.

Railthorpe's eyes closed again in drunken stupor.

## CHAPTER III

DOCTOR Rafe woke his guest before eight o'clock next morning. "Drink this, it'll pull you together."

Railthorpe obeyed without comment and lay back again. Soon after Rafe returned with a big cup of tea: he found Railthorpe now properly awake.

"Did I come here last night?" he asked with averted eyes.

"No, I brought you. Never mind about last night. You've got your day's work to do, and it's eight o'clock now. Drink this tea before you go."

Railthorpe gazed out of the window. "I ought to tell you, Rafe——"

"Never mind going into things now," interrupted Rafe. "You'd better get up and dress. You can't have a bath because nobody knows you're here. Mrs. Bowyer thinks the tea's for me. Just keep your mouth shut about where you spent the night."

"But, Rafe, I want——"

"I don't care what you want." Doctor Rafe's dislike to being thanked remained as strong as ever. "Make yourself look as respectable as you can, and then get off the premises."

Doctor Rafe departed, but opened the door to add, "And come back in the lunch hour. You'll have a head on you, and perhaps I can make it easier."

But Railthorpe did not appear at lunch time, nor in the afternoon, though Rafe waited till three o'clock. Nor did he come in the evening, nor next day. When four days had passed Rafe met him in the street. Railthorpe tried to avoid the meeting but Rafe followed him. "Will you look into the surgery to-night, Railthorpe? If you don't, we can have it out here."

"I'll come," Railthorpe spoke wearily. "I wanted to save you trouble. But if you insist, I'll come."

"All right. Half-past seven. If I'm out wait for me."

Rafe was not out that evening; Railthorpe found him waiting. "I know all you're going to say, Rafe, and it's useless."

Doctor Rafe eyed him angrily. The years had marked Railthorpe heavily in their passage: his face, no longer fine cut and eager, but fattened and coarsened, seemed a fitting seat for the dull expression which ruled there: the spring had left his step: erect confidence had gone from his carriage: he walked heavily, he looked heavily, one would say he



thought heavily; his shabby dress and exterior matched the apparent shabby spirit within.

"Look here, Railthorpe, I want you to pull yourself together. I can help you to some extent with drugs and so on, but the real help must come from you. You must call your will up. You're not really a dipsomaniac, you're just a steady secret soaker—and why I don't know. There's no bad family history from what I can learn. You used to live a clean life. What——"

"It's no good, Rafe, you're quite wrong."

"Am I wrong when I say you'll go to pieces altogether if you let yourself go any further?"

"Yes, Rafe, you are. I went to pieces altogether before I started going downhill at all."

Rafe drummed irritably on the table. "You know what the end will be?"

"The end? That came long ago. You're talking to me as though I couldn't resist drink if I wanted to."

"Could you?" asked Rafe bitterly.

"Certainly," replied Railthorpe listlessly. "But I don't want to."

"I've heard them talk like that before," answered Rafe angrily. "There's not one of them but is sure he could break himself of the habit, only for some reason or other. But none of them do. If you can, why on earth don't you?"

"There's no reason why I should. And there are some reasons—such as they are—why I should not. But——"

"Would I be presuming too much if I asked for one or two of these—these reasons?" Only with an effort did Rafe stop himself from breaking out forcibly.

"You wouldn't understand them if I told you." Railthorpe's tone remained as dull as before. It was evident that he spoke merely as he thought, and that he had no intention to offend.

But Rafe flushed angrily at his words. "Of, of course, if it's something too superior for my low nature——" he stopped abruptly. And it was not often that Rafe suppressed a remark to save his hearer's feelings.

"Look here, Railthorpe," he began again—

"It's no good, Rafe. You can't convince me. Do you think that I didn't foresee all this years ago? I'll give you no promises, because I don't mean to reform. If I wished to, there would be no need to ask me. There's no motive to urge me, and you can't create one."

"There's such a thing as self-respect," suggested Rafe dryly.

"I killed mine deliberately long ago. Nothing can bring it back. But we're simply arguing in a circle. I'll go now,

but there's one thing I want to ask you first, I hear Jean Malintop is down with pneumonia. How is she, Rafe?"

"She's bad if you must know." Rafe's annoyance with Railthorpe was increased by this bringing to mind a case that was giving him much concern. "But that's nothing to do with you. The thing is will you take a grip of yourself and try to pull up." For nearly an hour Rafe reasoned with his foretime friend: he argued, he explained, he pointed out consequences, and finally unable to break through Railthorpe's genuine lack of interest in himself and his future fate, Rafe stormed at him and swore heartily.

But he spoke in vain.

#### CHAPTER IV

A FEW days later Railthorpe, in obedience to a summons from Rafe, hastily excused himself from the shop for the rest of that afternoon, and walked quickly to Mrs. Malintop's, filled with forebodings. He found Rafe, whom he had not seen since their last long and unhappy interview, waiting impatiently at the front gate. "I don't know whether I'm doing right or wrong, Railthorpe. Are you all right? I'd be inclined to change my mind even now, but I don't think anything you can do will make things worse."

"Oh, Rafe, is Jean sinking?"

"Not a case for sinking," snapped Rafe. "At least, no, she's not—yet. Now have you got yourself well in hand? No fear of your getting excited and making a scene is there, if I let her see you?"

"Is it likely, Rafe? But let me know how she is, and what I should do. Is there any hope at all? Did she send for me?"

"Do you think I'd let any one near her with her heart in its present state unless I had to? Of course she asked for you. And I wouldn't allow it for a moment, but she's so set on it that to refuse it will do more mischief than a visit from you. And nothing can hurt her much now. But I don't like it." Rafe, seldom suffering from indecision, was evidently much disturbed. He gave Railthorpe careful instructions concerning what to do and what to avoid, repeated them, made sure they were understood, and even then paused irresolute. "Mrs. Malintop understands about it," he said, as they went to the house. "She knows the state her niece is in. I told her last night. She knows it's a mistake to give her the strain of talking to you, but she sees why I'm doing it, and approves. Now remember——"

Railthorpe walked softly towards the bed. "At last,

Douglas!" said Jean. "Sit down beside me. Facing me. So that I can see you." For a moment Railthorpe thought how well she looked; her eyes were bright, her cheeks were flushed, the right more so than the left, but as he regarded her and listened, he noticed that her voice had lost its slow, full richness, and that her quick and shallow breathing punctuated her speech every moment with a short moan for each breath she expelled. He looked affectionately at her, and, remembering Rafe's orders, waited for her to speak. As she returned his glance, profound tenderness filled her face, banishing her anxious expression, and, despite the painfully working nostrils, sweet serenity shone in her gaze. "I must be short, Douglas. But it is hard to speak. Harder than I thought." She lay silent for some time. "Douglas, promise me something."

He leant forward with eager assurances.

"No, wait. A habit, an evil habit. Is growing on you."

He reddened deeply.

"Oh, it hurts me more to say than you to hear it. If you knew how it hurt. It's been spoiling your character. Your rich character. Douglas—to sink to such a vice!"

Railthorpe listened with shame. "Jean, don't excite yourself. I lost all I cared to have, and that wretched stuff sometimes made me feel I still possessed what I've really lost. Sometimes it deceived me and brought back—at least it seemed to bring back—the thoughts I used to have, great and hopeful and happy thoughts, Jean. And when a man hasn't a friend in the world, Jean, what does it matter?"

She turned her eyes on him: to the pinched anxiety natural to her illness was added the horror of what she saw in her mind's eye. "Not a friend? Is it as bad as that?"

Again Railthorpe flushed. "Forgive me, Jean. I forgot you when I said that. I've always been forgetting you. And you've always thought for my good. When I look back I can see that."

"Then you'll promise?"

But Railthorpe did not make direct answer. "It's not what you think, Jean. Don't believe I love drink. I hate it. But, oh, Jean, when I was eighteen I meant to do so much before I was twenty-one, and then so much more before I was twenty-three. And now!—Look at me now. And I've done nothing. The things I thought I could do were not the things they wanted here. Cooeville wouldn't take the only things I could give. And the gifts I held out in my hands and begged the world to take—it scorned them, Jean. I spent my life in waiting, waiting, month after month, hoping each day, Jean, year after year, hoping, hoping. But no one wanted me. A word would have saved me, Jean, but no one cared to give it. And hope died, and the gifts

rotted in my hands. And I began to rot too, Jean. My character rotted away from the day I gave up hope—Why, here's an instance of it, Jean. A few years ago would I have bothered you, lying ill and in pain, with my hopes and my troubles? I'm that hateful, selfish, whining thing, Jean, a beaten man."

"But you will promise now?"

Though she listened with sympathy to all he said, she returned to her request with gentle insistence as soon as he ceased.

"Jean, it's easy just to say 'I promise,' but it's a big thing to carry out. I'll promise you this, Jean, never to make a beast of myself with it again."

The pain in her face deepened. "Do you rely on it? For happiness? Oh, Douglas! My body is sick. But my mind is clear. I see the risk for you. So sensitive, so quick. Don't play with it. Promise me."

Railthorpe hesitated. Whatever else he had lost, his sense of honour remained. He could not lightly give an undertaking such as this, for it must be kept. He looked at her, about to explain, and found her eyes dwelling on him: her expression silenced him. Was it fear? Could it be scorn in those eyes that had never looked at him save with kindly gaze? Could it be contempt? He stayed his speech; he sat silent, looking at the floor.

Jean considered him gravely. "I must tell you. Do you know how ill I am? Aunt has been crying. She's never cried before. They won't tell me. But I know. I shan't recover, Douglas. That's why I see so clearly. I've nothing to think of but you. I made them let me see you. Because of that."

"Jean, you mustn't talk like that. If you let morbid thoughts fill your mind you're not giving Rafe a fair chance to pull you round. We all hope to see you about again in a few——" he met her glance, and his eager protestations trailed off. How could he lie to her while she looked at him like that? What was it in her expression that silenced him? It was not reproach. No indeed, nor anything unhappy, rather something beautiful and noble, before which weakness and self-pity retired abashed.

"I see I must tell you." She lowered her eyes and rich colour flooded her face. When she looked at him again, her tenderness was no longer suppressed. "It's not easy, Douglas. But knowing—knowing we mayn't—we won't—meet again. Did you never guess, Douglas? All these years? Look at me, Douglas."

A vague sweet thought stirred Railthorpe's heart; he gazed at her with understanding dawning in his mind.

"Poor boy!" she said. "Poor blind boy! He never

knew. He never thought. Yes, Douglas"—she saw from his face that he knew her secret at last. "Yes," she lowered her eyes with sweet shame, and once more a lovely colour ran over her face. "Yes," she whispered, "I—I care for you. I always have. When we were boy and girl together you were my hero."

Railthorpe sprang up in an uncontrollable burst of emotion. "Oh, Jean! Oh, Jean!"—Rafe's grave warning sounded in his ears. He stood forcing himself to self-control. But he was hard put to it to restrain himself; he saw in a glance the past years of his life; his early dissatisfaction with Cooeville; his rooted belief in the beauty of the world, in the nobility of human nature; his discovery that he could write; his large and spreading hopes; his complete failure; his solitude; his despair; and Jean, she to whom in his boyhood he had carried his hopes and fears, she to whom he could always speak freely, she whom he had so neglected of late years, whom he had never valued as he should for was she not of Cooeville?—all these years she had carried in her heart that sympathy for which he had so longed, that love of which he had only dared to dream. The divine flame that had burned in her heart so long and so secretly fired that moment an answering spark in his own soiled and hardened spirit: it caught, it kindled, it burned; a purifying blaze, eating away the weakness and self-deception within, cleansing and warming to life emotions lying cold and poisoned; manhood began to return.

"If I had known! If I had only known! Oh, Jean, live through this——" he paused, Rafe's gloomy prophecy in his mind.

"It's because that mayn't be, Douglas. That I insisted I had to see you. That—that I could speak to you. For I could not bear"—her eyes filled, "I could not bear to go. Without letting you know. That someone cared for you. Had always cared for you."

"Oh, Jean, what a fool I've been! Dreaming and moaning over my fate, and all the time you—Jean! Jean! Can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you?" she smiled through her tears. "How little you know. Forgive you? All my happiness has come through you." Divine affection shone in her eyes as she gazed at Railthorpe with transfixed face.

"And I never knew, Jean. I never thought of it. It never came into my mind. How cold I must have seemed, Jean. What a bragging fool! Always looking to the future, always longing to get out of Cooeville. Always going to do great things!"

"Yes, Douglas. I've been so proud of you. When I go your first book—though you gave me a copy I bought on

too—and though it didn't seem like you at all. When the papers praised you so. I cried for joy."

Railthorpe turned away. So it was Jean who had bought that third copy. He dismissed the thought as unworthy, and turned to her again.

"And when 'A Day' came out, Douglas. That was more like you. It was true. I had known always that you could write like that. But I wanted the world to know too. And I was so proud. And then—and then——"

"Never mind about me, Jean, think of yourself for once. I've neglected you so and yet you can forgive me. You ought to hate me."

"Don't say that, Douglas. Don't talk of hate. There's no room for it. And now that I've told you. My only regret is for my boy. My poor boy. There'll be no one to understand him. And he needs understanding so much. My poor, sensitive boy!" Her voice crooned over him in love and sorrow.

"Jean, you know I used to bring all my troubles to you, you were always my comforter. But I hadn't the sense—I hadn't the heart—to see, to feel what you were to me then. But now, Jean, now"—he struggled to maintain self-control.

She smiled and laid her hand soothingly upon him.

"You know, Jean, that I used to think it must be the highest happiness to have one whom you could speak to even as you thought, and who would do the same to you. One whom you loved—sweetheart or friend—and who loved you in return. And I used to wonder why I had not what so many have." I used to nurse my grief, and it was no grief at all. All the time you were here, Oh, Jean, now that I see more clearly, what a poser, an actor; what a self-deceiver I've been!"

For a moment physical pain sharpened her features and altered her expression; once more she mastered it, and turned her shining eyes on Railthorpe, "I knew. I knew. If only I could have helped you. To be happy. I would have been happy too. I only wanted your happiness. Your success. And don't abuse yourself. Though it's like you. You're no poser. No actor, Douglas. But you need sympathy. Sympathy. Appreciation. Encouragement.—Even a little guiding. It's part of your nature. You must have them. And there's no one to give them. My poor boy!"

"Don't speak of me, Jean. I don't matter. It's you. What can I do for you?"

In spite of pain and weakness a trace of shy mischief crept into her answering smile as she half whispered, "You've never kissed me yet, Douglas."

Railthorpe took her caressing hand, and kissed it reverently. A gentle knock came at the door, and the nurse's voice. "Mr. Railthorpe, Mr. Railthorpe, the Doctor wants you."

"I'm coming," he called. He bent forward. Jean raised herself a little to meet him. "No, no, Jean. Rafe told me you weren't to lift your head. It might cost you your life." He kissed her fondly, and drew back to rise.

"What does it matter now? I've told you, Douglas. I love you. I love you," she said, and suddenly sat up, threw her arms round Railthorpe's neck, drew him towards her, and kissed his brow.

He felt her head drop back helplessly, her arms slipped from his neck and fell on the bed as she gave a gentle gasp: he laid her tenderly down and gazed eagerly at her face. A half smile beautified her expression—but her stillness—had she fainted?

He shouted for Rafe who in a moment stood beside the bed.

A minute later Rafe closed her eyes: drew the sheet gently over the calm face; and, obeying in silence Railthorpe's imperious gesture, left the room, closing the door carefully behind him.

## CHAPTER V

FOR a week after Jean Malintop's death Railthorpe did his day's work for Mr. Thridderley's manager. But he did little else. He had spoken truly when he said he had no love for alcohol; but it is poor humanity's lot, through strength of evil habit or through weakness of will, to turn to its tempter, and embrace where it loathes. And Railthorpe had to fight his battle. And it was no easy one. Previous excess in stimulants had injured his health; their sudden absolute withdrawal without medical alleviation threw him into mental depression; the shock of Jean's death had left him physically feeble; and grief and remorse wrung him at the impotent thought of how different her life and his might have been.

Doctor Rafe, disgusted and angered by Railthorpe's refusal to attempt reform, had left him alone. But a habit cannot be given up in Cooeville without the change being unknown; Rafe heard such observations one evening as sent him to the little cottage at once. He found Railthorpe sitting in the dark in what had once been his garden, but was now a neglected patch of weeds. "Why the deuce didn't you come up to see me?" demanded Rafe angrily. "I might have saved you half the battle."

Railthorpe made no reply, and Rafe, striking a match glanced at his friend's face, and at once blew out the light.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Goff, I want you to help me," said Rafe, bursting into the Editorial room of the *Cooeeville Chronicle* nearly a week later. "It's Railthorpe. I know you like him or I wouldn't ask you. He needs stirring up. He needs more than that. He ought to have a damn good shaking up of some sort—a pleasant sort you know, he's had about enough of the other.—He ought to go for a holiday—a little of that travel he used to flute about."

Mr. Goff put down his pen and regarded his visitor gravely. "And what do you want, Rafe?"

"I want him to take a month at the seaside—in some boarding house with plenty of people, and excursions, and walks, and flirting, and so on. He must have company, and good company too. You'll give me a hand, Goff?"

"I'll thank you for coming to me. And how much do you want?"

"Eh? What? Money?" Rafe's voice climbed up indignantly. "Do you think I'm asking you for a cheque? Well I'm damned!"

"You'll let me share the pleasure of sending him off, Rafe?"

"No, I won't," asserted the polished physician angrily. "That's my job. What I ask from you is a loan of that damn wheedling Irish tongue of yours. Will you persuade him to go?"

A twinkle appeared in Goff's eyes. "Ye've a way wid you yourself, Doctor Rafe, that some of us find it hard to resist. An insinuating man you are then," declared Mr. Goff gravely. "And subtle as any beast of the field—a rampin', mad, snortin' bull-buffalo for choice. Why not ask Railthorpe to go yourself?"

"I'll leave it to you, Goff," answered Rafe hastily. "You're the man for this piece of work. It takes one damn fool to talk another round."

Goff smiled appreciatively. But he still had something to discover. "Well, you ask him first, Rafe, and if he's proof against your delicate coaxing then I'll add my voice to yours. You'll find he'll give way to you. Why should he refuse?"

"Because he's an independent, obstinate young fool," shouted Rafe angrily. "That's why."

"But you must try it first, Rafe. A little of your gentle persuasion——"

"No chance, I tell you," declared Rafe loudly. "He won't look at it."

"Ah, so you've tried it?" Goff had the information he



desired and laughed at Rafe's unintentional admission. "And he wouldn't go for a long holiday at your expense? That's surprising now. And I'll go bail you put it to him diplomatically."

"I told him not to be a damn fool," growled Rafe, his manner not at all sweetened by Goff's obvious amusement. "And I'd tell you the same only it's a waste of time."

"Ah, look at that now. A man refusing an offer after that fine argument of yours. It's wonderful!" Mr. Goff looked at Rafe with innocence and nothing else in his expression.

"It's all very well for you to talk." Rafe had to laugh himself, "But you try your hand and you'll see. The fact is"—Rafe settled down for a confidential gossip—"if I ever had any influence with Railthorpe, I've lost it. He won't even argue a thing out with me now, and you know he used to be keen on following every idea up till everyone else was full up. Now he just says I'm wrong and won't even give a reason. Passes me out as if I were a dog. And damnify if I like it—or understand it either. Do you know I asked him a fortnight ago to chuck drinking, and he told me frankly he wouldn't. He let me say every damn thing I could think of, and took no notice of it, wouldn't answer me back, just said he'd go on drinking, and he had his reasons. When I asked him for his precious reasons"—here Doctor Rafe was compelled to give vent to his feelings by thumping the table—"what do you think he said?—That I wouldn't be able to understand them!" He banged the table again. "What do you think of that, Goff?"

"I'm inclined to agree with him."

Doctor Rafe adjusted his glasses; stared severely at Mr. Goff; and remarked with every evidence of sincerity that he was damned. Finally, he added. "Well, I must own up that Railthorpe's upset all my estimates about him. A few days after telling me he wouldn't give up drinking, he decides that he will, and calmly drops it on his own hook. And suddenly. Never comes near me, never tells me anything about it, just drops it. How the devil he did it I don't know. I didn't think he had it in him. He must have had a hell of a time. If he'd been a little worse he'd have run into D.T.'s. But he didn't. And he kept on with his work too. I heard by accident that he had turned teetotaler and was looking deuced sick, so I hunted him up, found the poor chap in a devil of a state. No sleep for a week, nerves absolutely twittering. And he was prepared to sit there and grin and bear it. He's a silly, proud, damn young fool, but he's got pluck enough for two. I must say that. I never credited him with much, but if you dig down deep enough it's there all right."

"You never thought highly enough of him, Rafe."

"Well, perhaps I didn't. The man who can go through

what he's put up with for the last week or two and never a squeak out of him—well, dammy, there's something in him."

Goff regarded Rafe with surprise and a certain good-natured scorn.

"But you get him away for a month, Goff," continued Rafe, "and I believe he'll be all right. I'll give him full directions what to do, and what not to do—he mustn't think for one thing. I forbid that absolutely. None of your solitary walks and so on. And when he comes back I've an idea. He needs a change of work as much as anything."

"He does that."

"And some prospect ahead of him to work for."

Mr. Goff rose, excitedly. "What is it, Rafe? What have you thought of?"

"And," pursued Rafe, declining to shorten his preamble, "Thriddlerley never paid anyone a decent screw yet."

"Come to the point," cried Mr. Goff. "Ye rambling, discursive, gossiping old woman."

Doctor Rafe put his hands in his pockets, tipped his chair back and grinned. "Nice weather we're having. Aren't we, Goff?"

Mr. Goff shook his fist at his visitor. The visitor softly whistled a Salvation Army hymn tune. Mr. Goff said something that would not ever be sung in a hymn. Presently Doctor Rafe's desire to explain his idea made him relent. "It's Austerberry, Goff. Don't you see? He's doing so well that he needs a sort of head man there, and Railthorpe's just the chap. Austerberry'll be glad to have him—I saw him last night. By the way," added Rafe, as he rose to go, "there's one thing going to happen soon that will affect Railthorpe a good deal, though I doubt if it can hurt him—his aunt's breaking up fast. When she goes he'll be quite free. I used to think it a good job she tied him to this place, but——"

"You're a calculating heartless ruffian, standing there calmly discussing the impending death of a poor old woman."

"Well, we've all got to go—and I don't suppose the old body and Railthorpe have a single idea in common. She's the narrowest old soul you could imagine."

"Did you know his mother, Rafe?"

"She died long before my time. The father was a medical man, you know. He came here in the early days, fell in love with a local girl, married her, and they were both dead in a year, I'm told. He was thrown out of his buggy and broke his neck and next day she brought our man into the world and died. The aunt brought Railthorpe up, so to stick to her was the least he could do. But no one would dream they're related. She was born here and wouldn't leave it for the world, and he—well, he was born here too, but——"

"But he's never belonged here, Rafe. And that's the difference."

"All right, have it your own way. But Railthorpe must have put up with a good deal from that quarter. She's an appalling old girl from some points of view. If her sister were anything like her, Railthorpe must take after the father. Perhaps he was a dreaming, poetic, useless sort of a character."

"That'll do, Rafe. Don't say anything against the dead. Who knows but what they may hear?"

"All right, Goff. I forgot. Well, I hope there are better times ahead for Railthorpe."

"Perhaps you're not all bad," said Mr. Goff reflectively. "At least we'll say you're not as bad as you look—though that's a poor compliment too."

## CHAPTER VI

SINCE Railthorpe had come to himself after his last words with Jean Malintop, he had endeavoured to order his life wisely. Physical health had been somewhat restored after his long holiday; but not all that he had once possessed had been given back to him by Nature. The thoughts that had before-time filled him with delight came no more; that vivid interest that had once kept him thrilled with the beauties, the joys, the sorrows of life, had departed during the dark years just behind him. And now he began to feel that these emotions should return, only by slow degrees, perhaps, but something of them there should be. Yet, when, on his return a month ago, he had opened a book, one of those collected thoughts of a choice master-spirit with whom he had before communed as an adoring and eager pupil, he had found no pleasure in it. Each evening since then he had taken up one of those volumes, in earlier days so highly valued, and never yet had he been able to read it. He had believed interest would revive; he had waited for it; he had changed the subject matter of his reading again and again, turning from poetry to prose, from history to drama, and the result had never varied. His interest would not wake. He asked himself—Was his love for all those matters he had once deemed the priceless treasures of life merely dulled by neglect and misuse, or was it wholly dead?

Goff arrived at Mrs. Bowyer's somewhat late that evening; he found Rafe on the lawn extended at full length upon a rug. "Nice time to come," commented the courteous host. "I didn't ask you here for a bed." Mr. Goff rolled the speaker, who was too lazy to resist save by a protesting curse, to the

edge of the rug, and lay down in the middle. "Railthorpe, can have this side when he comes. Where is he?"

"He'll be along directly. Dammit, Goff, give us a little more rug. Right. I asked Cherral to come up to-night but he was busy."

"I'm glad of it. He'd not fit in to-night."

"You don't like the chap because he proved all your out-breaks against the English wrong every time. What was it, Goff? They'd had their day, and they'd crumple up if you hit them a clout, and they'd no brain nor soul—no damn thing at all."

"I'll let you talk——"

"Because I've got you beat. Why, dammy, you haven't a leg to stand on. No brains, eh? Well, Cherral's the leading man here at law, and law's a hard profession——"

"Ye misquoting, thick-headed——"

"And they couldn't stand up to trouble when it came along. By Jove, Cherral had enough troubles of his own. And he stood 'em all right. And you pretend to know anything about the English! I don't believe you ever saw England. A damn fine prophet you are! I wish Railthorpe were here to listen to me giving you the best showing up you've had since your Dad caught you stealing his last potato out of his pet bog, and chased you out of Ireland. Yes, by Jove, that was what happened. And when you crossed over—a stowaway of course—the English wouldn't admit you. No cholera, small-pox, or wild damn Micks, admitted to menace old England's peace and plenty—that's in the Magna Charta, I think—so you try to get even with that great and noble nation by telling silly damn yarns about them that no one but an Irishman would believe." Doctor Rafe was much taken with this discovery.

"You'll be full of words this night," suggested Mr. Goff coldly.

But Dr. Rafe was enjoying himself too much to reply.

Suddenly Mr. Goff sat up too. "I thought to leave you in your ignorance, to let you lie there with pitying contempt, ye discordant, cackling—what's the poor grass done to ye that ye'll be punching it that way?" But his question was unheeded. "Poor thing!" remarked Mr. Goff to the garden in general. "It's what he calls his sense of humour. God help us!"

"Got anything more to say, Goff?"

"When ye've done bellowing, may be."

"I fixed you that time. See what comes of running down your rulers."

"Oh, Rafe man, you must be thicker than usual. Cherral's done what I said he would. He's fulfilled my prophecies. Why, ye short-sighted savage, the very faults I pointed out in the English—and he has them all—they help him here."

"Eh? How do you mean, Goff?"

"Just look at him and how he wins here. See how seriously he takes himself. He must. It's in the blood. And man, it goes down with them wonderfully. Of all fine things Goldsmith wrote that definition maybe is the best—'Gravity is a mysterious carriage of the body to hide the defects of the mind'—That hits the nail on the head. No Englishman could understand that, let alone think of it. It takes an Irishman to write in flashes of revealing lightning like that. And how the English love this pompous, humourless, ignorant gravity. Goldsmith knew that too. Thick as an Englishman is, an Irishman can see through him."

"I'm not going to fight Merrie England's battles," observed Rafe lazily.

"That's another thing ye'll see in Cherral, that lack of forward-leaping intelligence, of power to grasp a new idea—it does him no harm. Law's a conservative profession. It doesn't progress. It walks by precedent, and that suits Cherral fine. He hasn't got to think for himself—and a good thing too. He's only to tell his client what another man thinks. And he can do that, and do it well I'm not denying. But put him at work where a real mind must do real thinking and bridge over blanks in our knowledge by imagination, and where would he be then?—put him at science, literature, art—and where are you?"

"I'm all in a garden fair listening to a damn bleater, I think," hinted Rafe, his interest commencing to wane.

But Goff had allowed Rafe to talk himself out and now insisted on a like privilege for himself. "And don't forget he'll never have a sense of humour. And what a help it is to be a humourless numbscull! Humour lets a man see himself as he is. Man, that shock would be fatal to every Englishman. No, Rafe, by English standards a jester is never taken seriously and a wit is never trusted. Ah, if they only knew how humour and earnestness run together—but they won't, Rafe. No English ever will." Goff sat up and shook his friend. "You can't deny, Rafe, that Cherral's helped by the fact he wouldn't see a joke if he met it in daylight."

Doctor Rafe grunted.

"It's a pig you are, Rafe."

It was Doctor Rafe's turn to sit up. "You can bleat till you're black in the face, Goff, but you can't wipe out the fact that Cherral has come out top here. And he's an Englishman. And the English generally come out top in whatever they tackle."

"As to Cherral, Rafe, I admit all you ask. He's persevering, he's brave, he's well-bred, he's succeeded here and he'll continue doing it, and succeeding won't spoil him because the foundations of rightness are in him, and they're well and

truly laid, so no matter how much success you pile up on him he'll not upset nor break down. Now does that certificate of character for your pet satisfy you?"

"And yet he's an Englishman!" remarked Rafe with heavy irony.

"Ye great Goth. What I'm saying is no high praise. It's true of any reasonable man of his own class and nation. But wait for what I'm coming to—for all these sound qualities—and they're more sound than high—I say your man could never rise to any height of emotion, to any passion on a noble scale, no, nor to any gradeur of intellectual grasp."

"Rubbish," asserted Rafe loudly.

"You're sinking into a fat and purse state of mind, Rafe. Tell me now, you believe in material success, don't you?"

"Do you think I'm a damn fool?" Rafe spoke testily. "Show me a man who doesn't and I'll show you a failure or a humbug or both."

"And yet the noblest spirits have been what you'd call failures."

Rafe's interest was never difficult to rouse. "There's something in that," he conceded at once. "I was talking of the average man."

"Look at Edmund Burke talking to empty benches in the House of Commons. Look at——"

"Burke be blowed," interrupted the polished physician. "But I admit that if you're too—too damn spiritual——"

"Oh, Rafe! Too damn spiritual!"

"Intensifying epithet merely," declared the unabashed one. "You know what I mean. So get on."

"Why then, Rafe, d'ye see, by admitting that a noble soul will never succeed in this world, and couldn't accept success if he won it, I prove at one stroke that the English are failures because they succeed so well. And——"

Doctor Rafe ruthlessly interrupted Goff by demanding, "Why isn't Railthorpe here? He said he'd come. I hope the young fool hasn't been getting into mischief."

"It's small faith you have in your friends," declared Goff scornfully.

"Faith? Faith is the explanation ignorance offers. And you know, Goff——"

"I know Railthorpe and that's sufficient. And I'd wish him to know that I think so. To see that others trust him to the full—his friends at least—is more to him these days than meat and drink."

"All very well to talk," growled Rafe, half ashamed of his own suspicions, but far indeed from confessing his feelings.

"It's to be pitied you are"—Goff showed some anger.

"What you can't understand—for it's too high—you call

wrong or weak. Railthorpe's an idealist. And you—what's your ideal of life?"

"Three meals a day and my job," answered Rafe with indignant bluntness, then cooling down as quickly as he had heated up he went on, "I know you hold that Railthorpe's out of the usual, Goff, and perhaps you're right. But let's be practical. What good has the poor chap done with it? Either to himself or to anyone else? Eh?"

"He's done much, and I'll prove it. We've been talking of your friend Cherral, now which do you think has got the more out of life—Cherral or Railthorpe?"

Rafe snorted with disdain. "The answer's easy——"

"Doctor, Doctor, you're wanted, please," Mrs. Bowyer came down from the front door. "There's a message from Mr. Railthorpe. His aunt's very bad."

"And there's why he didn't come to-night, Rafe," said Goff.

But Doctor Rafe was too busy fixing on a bicycle clip to reply.

## CHAPTER VII

WHEN Mr. Austerberry was elected Mayor of Cooeville he realized that the estate of bachelorhood had occasional disadvantages: having no wife of his own with whom to take counsel, he accepted cheerfully the next best thing and sought aid from the wife of another. And Mrs. Labby entered heartily into the game and brought her husband with her. This select committee decreed that the new Mayor should take up his social duties and inaugurate his reign by holding a reception. Mr. Austerberry, equally divided in spirit between pride and fright, asked that he be coached in his duties beforehand, and further, that upon the eventful night he should be supported by the near presence of Mrs. Labby. The laughing lady promised to be within call when needed. Supported so excellently, Mr. Austerberry felt at rest, peace filled his bosom and ideas his mind: he grew ambitious: why not wind up the Reception with a dance? Why not, in fact, have a Ball as well as a Reception? A Ball was something he could understand, whereas, had not Mrs. Labby advised it, he would have considered a Reception a highly abstract, artificial, and unsatisfying affair. He humbly suggested his desired addition, remarking that expenses need not be kept down. Mrs. Labby, carefully advised by Mr. Labby, consented; but let it be understood that the dance winding up the evening should be subsidiary to the Reception.

One section of Cooeville at least appreciated the fact that there was to be a social gathering just before the Ball; no maidenly bosoms were agitated over the question of when to arrive on the scene of action; they had not to choose carefully between going too early, and thereby being con-

spicuous, and appearing just a shade too late, when all the men had filled their programmes. A Reception first? What could be nicer than an hour or two of meeting and chatting in the ball-room before any dancing could even be thought of, except, of course, in the little matter of arranging for partners?

Miss Yarnley, however, who has romped through many years of dancing without losing her love of it, has now reached that stage of mature maidenhood when she always solves the problem of partners by making up her list beforehand. She knows every man admitted to Cooeville society, and exercises the privileges of friendship with unswerving aim. Being one of that happy number who constitute the inner and elect circle of local aristocracy, she obtains a programme of the ball as soon as it has been settled, and, kind of heart, proceeds to distribute her favours. "I've kept five and nine for you," she informs Mr. Tinner in the course of a chat about the ball, two days before it is due.

"Ha, ha! Really now," replies the somewhat staggered Mr. Tinner. "Five and nine? I'll make a note of it."

"Oh, Mr. Dolomy"—by accident she meets Joe at the Post Office on Wednesday afternoon when there is no delivery of letters and all Cooeville calls to collect its correspondence, "you'll be dancing at the Mayor's ball, won't you?"

"I s'pose so," admits Joe, who cannot even yet be at ease with ladies in daylight and in working garb.

"Well," continues Miss Yarnley brightly, "how many dances do you want me to give you?"

Joe regards his hands which bear traces of that morning's work. There are people all round him; he cannot escape; perhaps some of them are listening; perhaps all of them are both listening and watching; but Miss Yarnley is inexorable; Joe continues looking at his hands; a faint idea steals into his mind that he wishes he were dead; a second idea that it would be better if Miss Yarnley were dead drives it out; he welcomes the second idea; he smiles. She smiles responsive and raps his chest briskly with her parasol handle as she says archly, "I can't let you have too many." Joe's smile departs. She is not dead. On the contrary, he admits to himself, being a man with no polish of diction, she is alive and kicking. "Oh, I don't know," observes Joe slowly.

"All right," replies the rapid tactician, "three and eight for you. You can remind me at the Reception. I'll see you there."

At Miss Scatterton's, however, excitement runs high upon the great day. Mr. Tinner, in tremendous spirits, endeavours to whistle as he shaves just after tea, and has to borrow some cotton wool from Mr. Beeston. His evil star having thus commenced its reign, he discovers that of his two dress shirts, one is in the wash—this he partly surmised—the other has a



large stain of brilliantine on the front. Mr. Tinner looks at his watch. It is 7.30. He considers. The shops are shut. He rubs his head, but no idea springs responsive. He consults Mr. Beeston, his chief friend at Miss Scatterton's.

Mr. Beeston, not possessing evening dress himself, is overcome by the humour of the situation.

Mr. Tinner goes further along the passage and consults another friend. This gentleman also finds more cause for mirth in the matter than Mr. Tinner can discover, but finally declares that he is "not going to tog up for the thing," and produces a dress shirt which has been worn once only, "and hardly shows it," adds the owner. It is an inch and a half bigger in the neck than Mr. Tinner desires, as he discovers when he tries to put his collar on, but another visit to the owner results in the production of a proportionate collar, and when Mr. Tinner is fully arrayed an inspection by the owner aforesaid results in the verdict that "he's fit to wear any man's shirt." The marked exposure of a long and thin neck, however, leads to the critical addition. "You're trained a bit fine, I think."

During the evening other, and perhaps less kindly, eyes observe the joyfully devoted Tinner and his garb; and Mr. Goff, to whom Mr. Tinner has revealed all, goes so far as to state to Doctor Rafe, "When I first saw Tinner to-night, he looked all neck, and skinny neck at that, something, d'ye see me now, between a moulting ostrich and a scalded giraffe, with a grin at one end and a hole in his socks at the other."

His Worship found his task easy and pleasant. It was the first large gathering of Cooeville's citizens in their just rebuilt Town Hall; a Mayoral Reception was a new thing: all Austerberry's friends went to assist their man; his few enemies attended lest any one should think they had no right to come; and His Worship, standing beside the central step up to the stage, had, as he himself expressed it, "to handle a large yarding."

There was no doubt the evening was a success; in different parts of the throng opinions were freely given. Mrs. Malintop observed that "some husbands were so good-natured, and Mrs. Labby—really"—with raised brows and brilliant smile she drew a long breath through parted lips, "it might be called Mrs. Labby's Reception." His Worship the Mayor referred to the affair as "My little beginning." Mrs. Johnson (formerly Miss Annie Wemby) declared it was sweet. Miss Geoghegan thought it was just divine. Doctor Rafe said it was a damn nuisance.

Mr. Austerberry had, declining to confine himself to the ratepayers of the Borough merely, sent forth invitations under his own hand requesting various people outside the narrow confines to attend his first venture into social-civic life, and

his requests were not made in vain. The President of the Shire of Cooeville and all the Shire Councillors were there; rather late in the evening, Mr. and Mrs. Ormerod arrived, and, having greeted their host, remained as of right on the platform converted for that evening into a drawing-room. Mrs. Malintop, herself one of those seated there, observed instantly an intangible something radiating from somewhere, and without loss of time traced it to its fount. Why, it was the group not far from her—the Labbys and the Ormerods. Let no qualms of excessive modesty, no feelings, quixotic in the extreme, of ultra and overstrained refinement, cloud the astute mind or weaken the working power of the smile appertaining to this lady, chief among Cooeville's matrons, feared foe of all who, through lack of understanding, perverted morals, and vast selfishness, desire quietness and privacy, and, through a morbid, mistaken, and mischievous idea that their private affairs concern themselves alone, would, so to say, slink through life, lurking privily in secret places. Leaving Mrs. Wemby, while that friend was still in the middle of a remark—a situation that was, indeed, Mrs. Wemby's normal waking state—Mrs. Malintop joined the Labby-Ormerod group, who welcomed her—Mrs. Labby with a mischievous smile, Mr. Labby with a wink to Mr. Ormerod, and all of them with an immediate change of topic.

Well up in the front of the hall, for men of financial importance should always be reminding others of their presence or they might be forgotten, Mr. Sol. Lee, having buttonholed Mr. Dolomy, was engaged in his favourite social pursuit of ventilating a grievance. Councillor Dolomy listened to him with characteristic and grave patience. Mr. Tinner, on the other hand, who had been speared as it were, by the relentless Lee and brought to the ground when in full flight from one fair flower to another, hearkened but fitfully, casting longing glances at distant scenes, and answering one of the Bank of New South Wales' most important and troublesome constituents with uneasy laughs; and words, courteous indeed, but not germane to the matter. Alas for the trammels of business policy. No worthy member of the Bank's staff at Cooeville may at any time vigorously assault, slay, dismember, and throw to the winds of heaven the disconnected anatomy of an important constituent. But Mr. Tinner longed with feeble ferocity—for anger was alien to his heart—for ten thousand thunderbolts to smite the detaining one, or at least that Mr. Lee—a man with a fine account of course and a bit on fixed deposit too—would let him go.

In the supper-room opening off from the main hall the caterer and his satellites moved about the many tables covered with refreshments, while in the foreground stood other tables adorned with glasses and with bottles, varying in size from the

soda-water (small) to the whisky (Imperial quart); there, too, strangely enough, were gathered some of Cooeville's leading citizens.

"This beer," said Mr. Cunder, touching the bottles in question with interest, "feels cool." With expert hand he opened one, poured out and drank a glass in an obviously merely sampling manner, and, having thus with bold facility broken the ice, opening the bottle and the ball so to say at one move, and having further certified to all anxious and enquiring spirits that not only was the time ripe for a drink, but the liquor was ready, he glanced round and, assuming the duties of host in the absence of Mr. Austerberry, caught Mr. Wemby's eye and demanded with customary loud curtness, "Have a drink?"

Mr. Wemby frowned anxiously; he also shuffled his feet; Mr. Wemby did not want a drink; Mr. Wemby believed that no one save Mr. Austerberry could properly offer him a drink that evening in that room; Mr. Wemby felt that Cunder shouldn't try to drag him into this sort of thing; but Mr. Cunder was a dominating sort of person, and his bold gaze held one spell-bound; Mr. Wemby shuffled his feet again and wrinkled his face up more unhappily than ever.

"Here we are again!" exclaimed Mr. Hoip, executing a tumultuous entry accompanied by Doctor Rafe and Mr. Jessington. "Hullo, Wemby, I've been looking for you."

The clouds lifted from Mr. Wemby's face; he smiled; he stood still, he felt at rest.

"Hoip," said Mr. Cunder strongly, "join us."

"Rather. We'll drink his Worship's health," declared Mr. Hoip, remarkably springy as to the legs. "He deserves it," Mr. Hoip swung his arms and marked time joyously.

Mr. Wemby became unhappy again. Was Hoip capable—was Hoip going to—? He frowned anxiously.

"Beer of whisky?"

"Where's his Worship?" Mr. Hoip glanced round. "Eh? Isn't he here yet? Well, I think he ought to be, you know. I'll wait, Cunder, thanks."

Mr. Wemby beamed, again.

"Austerberry won't mind. It's here to be drunk," asserted Mr. Cunder. "Come on, Hoip. You won't? Very well. Your loss."

"So Railthorpe's begun moving at last," said Jessington. "Well, it's about time he left Thridderley's. He's been there long enough."

"And a bit over," added Rafe.

"He'll be a jolly good man for Austerberry too," pursued Jessington.

"When does he start his—his new work, Doctor?" asked Mr. Wemby.

"Day after to-morrow," answered Rafe. "And he shifts into his new home at the same time."

"It's true then, Doctor?" Mr. Wemby was obviously rejoiced. "I heard he was to board at Mrs. Bowyer's with you, but I wasn't quite sure if it was true. It's an excellent thing, Doctor. Really an excellent thing. Don't you think, Jessington, we ought to drink the Doctor's health and Railthorpe's too?"

"Evenin', gentlemen," said Mr. Dolomy, as he passed with Mr. Trehwella. "The next man we make Mayor'll have something to live up to, eh?" He indicated the generously filled tables. "I'm just taking Trehwella along for his favourite tippie."

"There goes a—a—" Mr. Wemby paused for a descriptive phrase, "a worthy couple."

"Pair of decent old birds," admitted Jessington, "though Trehwella's rather on the soapy side for my taste, too much talk about turning the other cheek and so on. Eh, Rafe?"

"Trehwella's right enough. But it's no good being too humble and wishy washy. It doesn't help religion either. My idea of a Christian now," declared Rafe, warming to his theme, "is a fellow, straight and a clean thinker and as humble as you like, but still a man who—when there's any need for it—can stick his fist under the other fellow's nose and say, 'You go to hell, you——.' That's the style, eh, Jessington?"

Mr. Wemby watched Rafe and Jessington stroll off together. He made no attempt to follow them, for indeed he had plenty to do at that moment; with puckered brow and pursed-up lips he was engaged in a mental struggle to reconcile the definition of a Christian given by Doctor Rafe, for whom he had a warm personal admiration, with that given by Mr. Snodleigh, for whom he had a certain official respect.

The Reception was over: the Mayor had made his speech: two other gentlemen of civic importance had addressed the assembled ratepayers: the supper had been enjoyed, and those guests who did not care to remain for the dance were preparing to leave. Active hands seized the chairs and small tables littering the floor, and in ten minutes the ball-room was ready.

But not all the men remaining for the ball were dancing. Doctor Rafe seeking refuge and ease upon the stage, for the ladies had sought the floor of the hall, found there Mr. Goff and Norwood. Mr. Wemby, somewhat breathed by the ascent of the stairs to the stage, arrived a minute later, and subsiding heavily on to a lounge he inquired, "Has Hoip been here, Doctor? I told him to look for me here."

Mr. Hoip had shrunk from none of the duties expected of him that evening; he had attended the Reception; he had conversed with various people; he had, at the Mayor's request,

drunk the Mayor's health; prompted by friendship he had then drunk Mr. Wemby's health; he had applauded the Mayor's speech loudly; he had joyously carried supper round to others, and afterwards eaten his own with much zest; he had danced every dance till that moment, and now having just heard some news that Wemby ought to know, forthwith he sought his friend and flung himself upon the lounge beside him; before Wemby had time to speak, however, Mr. Hoip discovered that he himself required not rest but exercise, and jumping up, he marked time vigorously. "Wemby, old man, have you heard"—he noticed the group of Norwood, Goff, and Rafe, some little distance away. "Why, here's the man himself." He advanced to Norwood, who rose.

"Of course you've heard the latest, Wemby?" asked Mr. Hoip. "Cherral, you must allow me to offer my congratulations, hearty ones too. I hope you'll be as happy as—Wemby?"

Mr. Wemby rose ponderously. "Mr. Cherral, I'm sure—but, Hoip, you must tell me—Mr. Cherral, you know that any good fortune falling to you must—must—gratify me—must gratify all your friends, but in this case I'm—I'm in the dark—Hoip, why don't you help me?"

Mr. Hoip smote his friend heavily on the back. "What! Haven't you heard it? Well, it's only been announced this evening—Mr. Cherral's engagement you know—Miss Ormerod."

"Mr. Cherral," Mr. Wemby beamed and puffed and shook hands with Norwood and then with Hoip, "upon my word this is delightful. I beg to congratulate you, Mr. Cherral. Hoip—" Mr. Wemby's ordinary rich colouring deepened as a humorous idea entered his mind, grew steadily, and finally flowered in the remark—"Hoip, who'd have expected this?" And Mr. Wemby's laugh—which had been stirred, loosened, and on the way for some time—reached the surface. Mr. Hoip, repeating his own good wishes, again smacked his friend's broad back. "He looks as pleased as if he'd just got engaged himself, doesn't he, Cherral? Well, when's it to come off?"

But Norwood, having accepted their good wishes, was making his way back to the Ormerods, and Rafe and Goff, who had spoken to Norwood about his engagement earlier in the evening were talking apart.

Mr. Wemby wagged his large head solemnly. "Cooeeville may have grown, Hoip, nobody knows that better than you and I—the boys of the old brigade, eh, Hoip?—but Mr. Cherral has certainly grown with it. You remember when he came here first?"

"Rather," assented Mr. Hoip, bouncing himself up and down in a sitting position on the lounge.

"It—it was understood then that"—Mr. Wemby hesitated—"well, to you, Hoip, I can say—in confidence of course—"

"Strict confidence, old man," agreed the complaisant Hoip. ". . . that Mr. Cherral was not well off."

"It's a fact," assented Mr. Hoip. "Stone broke. And a lot of other things besides. Remember how he treated Shandy?"

But Mr. Wemby declined to stray aside from his line of thought to unpleasant matters. "Yes, Hoip, between ourselves there's no harm in saying that Mr. Cherral in those days was—was not doing well. He was not a successful man, Hoip. We may fairly say that. And look at him now!"

Mr. Hoip's admiration for the Cooeville resident under discussion always required a little outside stimulus before he could grow really enthusiastic. But now Wemby was praising Cherral—good old Wemby—and anyhow when a man was just engaged one shouldn't be hard on him, even if he were a cold-blooded fellow with a good deal of the snob in him—and to Miss Ormerod too; the Ormerod's were a nice family, fine people, an influential family in fact, and of course all their influence now would go to help Cherral. Yes, Cherral was really a decent fellow, "not my style at all, but we can't have 'em all cut on the one pattern, and he's certainly got on here. There's something in him, Rather! He's a successful man without a doubt. Fact is, he deserved to succeed; fact is, he's a fine fellow, and if he is a bit reserved—well, perhaps, he can't help it. It takes all sorts to make a world, and when Wemby approves"—"Yes, old man," said Mr. Hoip, his belief in the many and now obvious excellences of Mr. Norwood Cherral acquiring strength every moment, and his admiration therefore rising rapidly, "yes, it's just as you say. He started at the bottom of the ladder here, and he's climbed up it all right."

Mr. Wemby squeezed his hands together reflectively. "It's not only about his business I was thinking, Hoip, but there's a—a—" he paused.

"Rather!" declared Mr. Hoip, now thoroughly acquiescent. "Just what I was going to say myself."

"There's a something in his character, a—a bedrock, Hoip, that's the word"—Mr. Wemby's perplexity of countenance disappeared. "There's a bedrock in him that you can rely on. And you know, Hoip"—Mr. Wemby grew serious again—"that's a great thing. A man who—who has no bed-rock in him—well"—Mr. Wemby pondered obviously, "when things go against him he—he crumbles up."

"That's the style," asserted Mr. Hoip. "You've hit the very thing, Wemby. Hard as nails—that's what we've got to be. And energetic too,"—Mr. Hoip marked time vigorously and swung his arms. "You'll admit the energetic, old man?"

But the two friends were far apart in thought. "But

about Mr. Cherral, Hoip. This engagement is"—he considered heavily—"It's an important step. It's a—a sort of—of a climax," said Mr. Wemby with his usual burst. "That's what I mean, Hoip. Think of what he was when he came here first, and look at him now, a man that all respect, with a fine practice——"

"He's raking it in all right," agreed Hoip.

"And a stake in the district as you might say, Hoip," continued Mr. Wemby, "for he's bought that block on the Darebin road and he's going to build you know, and now this engagement to—" Mr. Wemby puffed himself out a little and drew himself up—"to the only daughter—the only child—of the leading people of the district——"

Mr. Hoip, now absolutely enthusiastic concerning Mr. Norwood Cherral, his character, his achievements, and his prospects, turned some to his ebullient energy to patting Wemby's back. "Bravo, old man, you sum it up like a judge. You ought to be on the Supreme Court Bench. Mr. Justice Wemby. It sounds jolly well. Eh?"

Mr. Wemby's plump face creased up in smiles.

"There, Doctor?" called Austerberry, as he climbed the side steps to the stage. "Oh, and you, Goff? Come along. And you and Wemby and Hoip." His Worship the Mayor appeared to be highly pleased. "I've struck a little patch here of just the fellows I want. I'm mustering a few of Cherral's friends. You've heard the news of course? I'm asking them meet in the supper-room in five minutes and wish him joy. A rather nice idea, eh?"

Though Doctor Rafe was a human being and not a limpet, he was obviously taking every possible physical means to attach himself to his chair, and his chair to the floor; he sank back, and, so to speak, put forth all his powers of adhesion to prevent removal.

"No, Austerberry. No, dammit. What's Cherral done to deserve that?"

"It's all right, Doctor, no long speeches, just a few words of good wishes and so on. Come on. We can't do without you; in fact, I thought of calling on you to support my remarks."

Doctor Rafe, looking fierce and unutterable things through his thick eye-glasses, sat back, settled himself down, and took a firm hold of his chair.

Mr. Hoip on the contrary welcomed the idea vociferously. "By Gee, that's just the thing, eh, Wemby?" Mr. Hoip swung his arms joyously. "Off we go. 'For England, Home and Beauty.' Shakespeare. Eh, Austerberry?"

"I'll leave it to you, Hoip," replied his Worship cheerfully. "You're more up in books and things than I am."

Mr. Goff caught Rafe's eye. "Mr. Hoip, ye'll allow me to say that for apt and accurate quotation—just hitting the

nail on the point, d'ye see me—ye'll be standing head and shoulders above us all."

"It's a true bill," added Doctor Rafe. "Regular Shakespearean scholar."

At this praise of his friend Mr. Wemby beamed delightedly. Mr. Hoip himself characteristically took his tone from the atmosphere around him. The Mayor had praised him—a sound man, Austerberry;—Goff had praised him; even Doctor Rafe, never flattering in his remarks, had praised him, every body seemed to be praising him, really, modesty apart he must be—he filled out his chest, and carried his head well up. "By Gee, I know a bit," declared Mr. Hoip.

## CHAPTER VIII

RAILTHORPE wandered slowly about outside his cottage: round him lay the cool darkness of an early summer evening; in the distance he could hear the band playing in front of the Town Hall, welcoming all comers to the new Mayor's Reception; no fear of interruption disturbed him, Cooeville was engaged elsewhere that night. In his own house silent emptiness reigned, for that afternoon had seen his aunt's funeral. He made no show of grief: of late he had been able to think and to see clearly; and the greater the clearness, the greater the horror of his thoughts and the more terrible his visions. He saw what he had been; what he might have been; and what he was. Not the entire failure of his aims and hopes now stung him, but the death of self-respect; and so great was his remorse and so deep his despair that nothing could affect him further. The more others congratulated him on his improved fortunes the more did he realize how little mere monetary success meant to him, how little it could replace or restore a man's finer nature: he felt that all now left within him was merely power sufficient to realize how irremediable his loss; and in terrible language he declared to himself that he was a man walking about with all his baser parts alive, but within, all that which alone redeems the flesh, lay dead, and rotting.

And now he felt that some answer to all his questioning and searching stood at hand. He pressed forward seeking it; the small hours of the morning had come when, baffled and weary, he went to bed.

He woke before dawn with the knowledge that in his sleep his mind had continued reviewing his life, and that, in his dreams, he had seen clearly the way of escape. Ah! He lay back with a gasp. With the sudden understanding that his aunt's death cut the last tie that held him to Cooeville he



saw the destined path. He made his decision instantly. To lie still longer was impossible; rising he walked feverishly about outside, maturing his suddenly-formed plan; fatigue, mental lassitude, indifference, fell from him; he stood amazed at himself for not recognizing before what remained for him to do. Had not the road he had followed led on to this, till now there lay before him a clear way running straight to the appointed goal?

As he found the answer to all his puzzles, to all his fears and indecision and hopelessness, he marvelled at himself that he had not foreseen it long before. So clear, so inevitable was it, that to see what he must do, and to resolve to do it, was the work of the same moment.

But there was much to be performed before he could carry out his plan; and before he could put the many necessary matters in order he must attend to the ordinary duties of that day.

From the opening of the shop till nightfall he worked at the office with the lad who, on the next day, was to step into his place; in the evening he came back to finish alone all matters in hand; by ten o'clock his work there was done; he wrote a brief note to the Manager of the Emporium concerning two purchases he was making from the ironmongery department of the shop that night, selected what he required from the stock, and, leaving money to pay for them on his desk with the letter, he locked up the Imperial Emporium for the last time, and, with indescribably emotions, hastened to his own cottage by the empty back street.

No thought of wavering weakened his resolution; but the preceding night had brought him no rest; peace of mind he had not known for years; the long day of concentrated attention at the office tended to a reaction when his thoughts were free once more; and from the moment of his great decision there had been lying on him the heavy weight of the step he was about to take; when he entered his dark and lonely home that night a black despondency fell swiftly on him; it unnerved him, it carried him down through grievous and shuddering descents to the black depths of that dolorous abyss men call despair. He lay upon his bed, helpless, alone, unavailing remorse for the past, shaking his body, driving his mind to madness.

Slowly the unchecked gust of feeling passed, and when the first hour of the new day struck, he rose and composed himself, for he had much to do before dawn should come. By his directions Mrs. Bean had spent the day at the cottage, and now scrubbed and tidied, the old home required no attention at the hands of one, who about to leave it for ever, must see it to his liking before he closed the door behind him for the last time.

His letter to Rafe gave him some trouble ; the one to Goff, though longer, was easier to write.

His books he hastily packed in the kerosene cases he had provided for them : handling those books was touching an unhealed wound, he avoided seeing even the titles as he hastily fitted them together into their places : he nailed up the boxes, addressed them to Doctor Rafe, and his night's work was finished save one matter, itself the hardest of all. He emptied the drawer that held his writings on to the table. He had intended to throw them all into the fireplace and burn them without looking through them, but now, strung up to feel no fatigue, and with a definite knowledge of what the next few hours were to bring forth for him, he sat down to those pages which held a clear history of his life. He took up the packet containing the completed light verses, and read one after another. How young he had been when he wrote those ! Only a few years ago by calendar, but a lifetime in change and decay. The second packet was unfinished light verse, sometimes a poem complete, but left for a final revision, sometimes an odd stanza : these too were read through and put in the fireplace. A mass of unsorted papers remained, all his unpublished serious verse. For long he sat beside the fireplace, going through the sheets of manuscript ; he strove desperately to regain the emotions with which he had written each one of these many lines, to live again in one of the many moods the verses represented, to feel once more the thrill of vivid joy with which the creator-poet pens his offspring lines. But that night his spirit had no wings wherewith to soar : folded, disused, neglected, draggled, soiled, they could bear him aloft from Cooeville into the shining secret places no more ; his former thoughts, once to him so burning, transporting, he could now read with cold heart and dull mind. He felt that at last he was able to fulfil his aunt's frequent wish that he " would be like other people." He was able to obey Rafe's repeated instruction, " Don't feel things so much." He could no longer be called by Cherral, " Peculiar." At last he had become what they all advised.

He gathered up all the remaining pages, heaped them in between the hobs, and set fire to them ; then bowing his head upon his arms, slow, heavy sobs shook the body inhabited by a spirit that acknowledged its decay.

An hour later, Railthorpe, after a toilet Pharisaically elaborate, freshly shaved, just from his bath, and dressed carefully in fresh linen and in his best clothes, walked out of the house into the night, and turned into the road which ran down the main street. In the dry north-west of Victoria, though the summer days may be hot, the radiation on clear nights can bring down the temperature amazingly ; a difference of as much as 70° has been observed within the twenty-four

hours; the day had been warm, but now the air blew chill upon Railthorpe; yet though he had passed the last two nights almost without sleep, and one day almost without food, though he had been working hard and suffering much, and was even then freshly chilled from his shower, the coldness of the hour just before daybreak was unfelt; the tension that his resolution called for increased as the time grew shorter. He posted his letters and continued his way; dawn was about to break as he passed up the silent main street; the smoky lamp hung out over the bar door of the Cooeville Hotel seemed strangely futile, dirty, and garish, in the faint pure light and sweet air of the rising day; where the road branched off to a neighbouring township Railthorpe left it, and headed north; in the street where the better residences were he passed the block of land where the new home of Norwood Cherral was to be built. "He has it all," thought Railthorpe, "friends, respect, a home, success. But what Nature gave him he kept and improved, while I threw away all that was mine."

He walked faster as he reached the outskirts of the town. "I will wait for the early train." He told himself.

That cold dullness of heart and mind which had so oppressed him, began to lift and break; but the beauty and solitude of the early dawn, felt by him now with cleansed spirit served only to kindle to greater heat the smouldering fire which, commencing in years gone by, had eaten away with slowly growing power his hopes, his ambitions, his beliefs, his manhood. Not all who fall by the wayside in the onward struggle of life know this flame, the feeling of failure; but those who, fallen from high resolve and beautiful intent to paths too base to name, who understand with sad and certain knowledge what they have been, and with the last flicker of that noble light which beforetime filled their life with celestial radiance see what they are, to these, richly gifted, and in their fall weighted by their gifts, it is given to endure in silent agony the ceaseless progress of that deadly blaze.

Railthorpe walked faster and faster; his weakened body protested; panting, he pressed his hand into his side; but the agony of poignant shame burning within him overwhelmed so enormously mere physical pain that it no longer existed; triumphant for once over all material circumstances he drove his body on: as he reached the long ascent to the Rocks he forced himself still more, bending forward till almost on hands and feet. He reached the higher of the two summits: scaling the huge block of stone that topped the eminence he drew himself up and looked down: Cooeville and its district lay before him as an unrolled map.

He stood with heaving chest, staring at the distant still-sleeping township where all his days had been spent; his early

days when life, filled with buoyant happiness, was in itself a thing of beauty, surrounded with wonders daily in fresh discovery, all tending onwards, inevitably, magnificently, towards some greater glory, vague, nebulous, not yet understood; but, as every thought and every feeling proclaimed, the great, the supreme, the one eternal prize, to be bravely striven for and nobly earned. Gazing up now to that height of earnest youth, immortal longing, and high desire, he saw with purified vision and wider gaze his long and fatal descent, stretching from when loneliness and despair, first possessed him, to the precipice at whose ultimate foot he now lay, a broken man.

The rising sun flooded the land with level rays; from the top of a lofty gum farther down the slope two magpies fluted their matin song with exquisite warbling melody; nearer at hand a kookaburra flew with heavy silent flight to a dead tree standing up gaunt and gray, and, lifting his beak, began the rich full-throated "Ker-r-r-r-r, ker-r-r-r-r, ker-r-r-r-r," prelude to his shouted laughter; bird after bird, impelled by joyous emotions, chirruped and twittered and sang; the softly veiling mists thinned away from low-lying land and valleys; the morning clouds lying on the eastern horizon broke up and melted to transparency, floating into the invisibility of light.

And even as Railthorpe stood there his burden of sad memories lightened and fell from him: hardness melted from his heart: bitterness was washed out of his mind by a sudden wave of his old nature returning; gazing at the wide domain beneath him, beautiful in its green growth, glittering with dew, scented with the subtle fragrances of the dawn and shining in the clear cold air beneath the early sky, his pristine feeling of gratitude for the glorious beauty of this world welled up once more within his heart; his old love of his kind rose as a tide, scouring and washing away for ever from soiled shores all defiling litter.

Slowly the shadows shortened. Time passed by. The distant outlines grew sharper. He heard faintly the long shriek of the early train as it neared the dangerous level crossing just before the station. It was the time he had appointed. Clambering down with heart pounding thickly, he sought his old haunt, the small cave formed by the two great rocks leaning against each other. Walking by the end of this he sat down, leant back upon the buttress of rock behind him, and looked out on the view of hill-side and distant scene framed by the narrow triangular entrance to his retreat. He rested there for some minutes till he had regained his calm. A breeze ran over the bending dew-weighted heads of the tall grasses that carpeted the ground up to the rock itself; a young rabbit loped into the scene with that peculiar gait it shows in its progress when undisturbed, hopping awkwardly as though

its hind legs were too long; halting, it nibbled some grass, jumped a few inches, and couched with erect ears. Railthorpe settled himself back and more at length upon the ground.

"The beauty of the world! And the loneliness!" He added almost in a whisper. "I cannot bear it. I cannot bear it."

He took his last purchase at Thridderley's shop from his pocket and turned it over in his hands.

"I hoped to help so much. And this is all there is left for me to do. Yes, this is all for such as I am now."

He nerved himself; he drew a long breath; he lifted what he held to his breast.

The shattering report crashed out between the rocks.

THE END.



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