

Warygrove

EX LIBRIS



828

B41h

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

CHESTER-BELLOCS

The Green Overcoat

Mr. Petre

The Emerald

The Haunted House



An early portrait of Lord de Beurivage (then Mr. George Huggins) as an open-air merchant of vegetables and orchard produce in 1883

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

BY
HILAIRE BELLOC

With Illustrations by
G. K. CHESTERTON



NEW YORK • *Harper & Brothers* • LONDON

1928

THE HAUNTED HOUSE
COPYRIGHT, 1928, BY HILAIRE BELLOC
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
FIRST EDITION
M-B

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

An early portrait of Lord de Beurivage (then Mr. George Huggins) as an open-air merchant of vegetables and orchard produce in 1883	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	<i>Facing page</i>
The brothers at Rackham	20
Aunt Hilda settling everything	38
Neighbour Hellup and Neighbour Jake	56
“Our younger hostesses”	60
The Ancestor	68
Progress of Sir Harry Murtenshaw, Knight, to his ancestral home	70
John Maple as Lieutenant Allegri	78
The atheist Gaul	122
“Twenty thousand pounds? You haven’t got twenty thousand pence!” said Aunt Hilda	130
Fond embrace of Hilda, relict of the late William Maple, Esquire, of Rackham Catchings in the County of Sussex, and Amatheia, wife of George, First Baron de Beurivage (pronounced Bruvish)	146
Lord Hambourne is astonished at the modern habits of the fifteenth century	156
Mr. Corton reads <i>The Spectator</i>	188

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Facing page</i>
John Maple explains his plan	194
Growing nervousness of Lord de Beurivage . .	226
Lord Hellup accepting from Lord Hambourne the interesting scientific discovery that motor-cars are less susceptible to psychic influence than horses	236
Partial, but representative deputation of the domestic staff of Rackham Catchings protesting against the Headless Thing	238
Unaffected emotion of George, First Baron de Beurivage on the appearance of an historic figure	242
Distraction of Lord Hambourne on being offered the usual terms	248
Effect of the other world on Miss Broom, housemaid	250
Solid satisfaction of Mr. Pretherton at the pressed pace of Columbus	256
Genuine pleasure of Columbus on observing the haste of Mr. Pretherton	258
Wifely protest of Amatheia, Lady de Beurivage, at the unworthy treatment of her lord . . .	268
Hilda Maple admits that she is a sinful woman .	270
“Hannibal! . . . I mean, Hamilcar!”	272

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

CHAPTER I

IN the English County of Sussex, upon the clay thereof, and upon a slight eminence of that clay, stood and stands a squire's house called Rackham.

Rackham is a common enough name in that part of the world, attached to perhaps half a dozen widely-different places and things; downs, woods, fields. But no one had ever bothered to call Rackham anything extra to make it a special Rackham. Rackham it had been and remained during its three hundred years as a cell of Lewes Priory and its four hundred of various lay owners.

Its master at the end of the nineteenth century was a certain Mr. Henry Maple, of a good ordinary position, born to no great fortune, but a sufficient master of his countryside.

By birth he was what one might expect, a great-grandson. A Maple who had begun as a smith and cattle dealer and had gone on as a general broker, sometimes advancing cash to his fellows and sometimes making a lucky purchase and sale in stock, had bought out the former immemorial squires of Rackham when George III. was king. Those whom he had bought out were an impover-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

ished line, whose founder (a Lewes tallow chandler) had got it, rather more than a century before, after the Civil Wars, from a ruined cavalier family, which, in its turn, had been started by a scullion in Thomas Cromwell's kitchen, who, yet a century earlier, had nobbled this parcel of his master's loot during the great break-up.

So you see that Rackham was just like scores and hundreds of its kind up and down England, and possessed, after the fashion of any one of the others, by a very amiable man, a gentleman (which is saying a great deal), a man formed by Public School and University, and having behind him two generations of Public School and University, and three of sufficient wealth.

Rackham was a rather absurd looking house, but dignified. Half of it was the original Elizabethan living house, with a few stones left of the earlier monastic building and great oak beams for its framework, but transmogrified by eighteenth-century additions and internal changes. From the lawn in front you saw at one end two low stories of wood and plaster, a tiled roof above that; at the other a brick wall pierced at regular intervals by a particularly ugly set of windows. At the back, looking north, was a dreary stucco addition of kitchens and offices, greenish with damp weather. The later half of the house, all brick, had been added, as had certain changes in the older part, before 1790, by the fortunate smith and cattle dealer. The stucco offices to the north had been

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

built by his son during the high corn prices of the Napoleonic wars.

Inside, the house was what you would expect from such a history. Nothing whatever told you, even in its oldest part, that there was work many hundred years old, save the few stones of the monastic building at the base of a wall, certain beams still exposed in the servants' quarters, a box room, and one of the smaller bedrooms. The other beams had been covered long ago with plaster ceilings. Some of them had been cut clean away to raise the height of the living-rooms after the later fashion. There was a bathroom with hot and cold water, which was thought a fine new thing in the middle of the nineteenth century, when it had been fitted up. There was a small, rather dingy hall; a passage running from this to the various living-rooms; one simple staircase for the family, with rather nicely carved oaken banisters, and a very much worn and very ugly carpet. There were plenty of books and plenty of pictures—pictures of all sorts and kinds; many a bad water-colour by ladies of the place, living and dead; a few portraits in the drawing-room, one of which, almost black, was reputed to be a Gainsborough. The house was comfortable, it was homely, and it exactly suited its master, who was, in the first years of the twentieth century, a man of about forty, very much liked in the neighbourhood, and with something of a reputation for scholarship; a widower with one young child—a boy called John.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Thus lived Henry Maple, on what he felt, as all such men feel, to be ancestral land descended to him from beyond all human record; and in sober truth possessed by his own blood for a good deal more than a hundred years; which is quite a long succession for such English land.

He was part of it: of the outlook from that slight eminence towards the Downs ten miles off along the southern sky; of the rather dishevelled little park (if you liked to call it that) with its ill-kept gravel way and its little lodge at the gates; of half a dozen farms which had provided an income sufficient for his father and grandfather before him, and the rents of which heavily reduced during the depression of the 80's had since remained unchanged; sleeping, like most things in that good world. Part of him also were the two or three horses in his stables, the two or three vehicles, and particularly the little brougham in which he drove to the domestic country station three miles off, where the very asphalt and palings seemed to talk with the Sussex burr and to think of London, forty miles away, as a place utterly remote.

London was not properly part of Henry Maple's life. He had his club, of course, for which his father had put him down when he was born, just as he had put him down for his Public School and for his College. He used it perhaps twenty times in a year.

The staff of Rackham was consonant with all

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

the rest. A butler of much the same age as his master, and of twenty years' standing, knowing the names of wines, but far more familiar with beer. A lad who cleaned boots, ran messages, and took the blame for mishaps; a few maids; a fixed, elderly cook called Mrs. Marwell, and a kitchen-maid; and she that had been the child's nurse, and still was after a fashion (even after he had begun to go to a Preparatory School). She was kept on, and would be kept on till she died.

There was Rackham; and (one would have said) the benediction of God upon it. I knew it well enough.

The first thing that began to threaten such unchangeable things with change was an unaccountable creeping oddity in the relation of income to expenditure. Henry Maple, in the intervals of his reading and his quiet entertainment, heard of it vaguely as "these times." It might also be called certain new habits of a changing age; rather more travel, a few more visitors, farmers coming shame-facedly and very privately to ask for some small reduction in rent, or rather heavy piece of repair, which was granted as a matter of course; coming again a year or two later to ask for another, which was also granted as a matter of course, but at last with a little misgiving.

The century was thus nine years old, and his lonely, affectionate little son, of whom his father made a close companion, was nine years old also, when Henry Maple realised that there were a

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

good many things he ought to have done to the house and did not from lack of funds—wear and tear come so gradually. He was used to the fences beginning to look tumbled down, and to a good deal of grass on the few paths; for the gardener was getting old, and not over lively.

Henry Maple had grown used also to an overdraft at his bank; though he was rather disturbed when, a few years earlier, the manager had told him in a pleasant conversation that it would be well to fix a limit—and did so. But he got used to that too.

He very reluctantly and in rather haphazard, expensive fashion mortgaged two of the outlying farms; then a third. There came a moment when he had a little difficulty in meeting the full interest, though it was in the hands of a family lawyer who was as much a part of his life as anything else, and had jogged along comfortably enough with him. But he did at one moment in the year 1905, rather suddenly, need £1,000.

It had not occurred to him how easily his younger brother, William Maple, a London solicitor in good practice whom he saw fairly often, could meet the case, or how willing he would be to do it. It was William Maple himself who suggested the thing (how he could have heard of the embarrassment Henry was at a loss to guess, and, indeed, did not waste much time in guessing). It was after a quiet dinner which the two brothers had had together, when William was spending a

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

week-end at Rackham, that the proposal was made, and the elder brother accepted it with real gratitude.

A second thousand followed, and a third. William came oftener—a frequent guest. He had married a handsome, rather pushing wife of a birth like his own, the daughter of the Dean of Lamborough, the grand-daughter of a large coal-owner of the Midlands; a woman who liked to know the world and whose increasing acquaintance with sundry rich people and other sundry talked-of people in London increased, very much to her husband's content, and not a little to his advantage.

Henry Maple had no great liking for his sister-in-law. Her worldliness jarred on him and she knew nothing of the things he loved. But he never thought of her unjustly. He invited her frequently enough, and they were fairly good friends.

William Maple was what Henry would no doubt have been if Fate had compelled him (as it never did) to earn his living. But in the twenty odd years since their common boyhood the difference in habit of mind and activity had become pronounced. William was precise and methodical; not unjust, but long grown incapable of anything unbusinesslike or slack. A bargain was a bargain, and a contract a contract; and the results of it, if they were turned out to the other man's loss, were the other man's look-out. He could no more separate his family from the rest of the world in this

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

general view than he could have separated one set of figures from another in the jottings of his notebooks. These he kept carefully from year to year; no one saw them but himself, and they did all the work that the most elaborate keeping of accounts can do in a large business.

It was natural enough in Henry's eyes that his brother should be easy in the matter of interest and allow it to be added to the main debt. It was natural in William's that this attitude on his own part, which was not ungenerous, should yet be precisely regulated and never allowed to breed confusion.

The losses on all English agricultural work continued; the new habits continued with them; the slightly increased expenditure; the vague idea permeating Henry Maple's mind that the old state of affairs was the natural and permanent one and would in due course return.

He knew roughly—after a few more years had passed—that his total indebtedness to his brother had now come to £7,000; he knew that the interest had fallen into arrears—to how much the total of the new interest on those arrears might amount he had but a very rough conception, and he did not dwell upon it.

When it had been suggested by William that the mortgages on the farms might be taken over, so as to make one simple body of all the obligations, he was more than willing—it kept things in the family. The fixed figure in his mind of

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

£7,000 thus became £10,000; and the arrears of interest crept on. There was one or two further loans, and one fine day in 1913 William thought it only right to have a clear statement, and go into everything in detail with his brother. It was thus upon a Sunday in August, a year before the quite unimaginable war, that the critical moment came.

William had turned over in his own mind during the previous week what he would say and do. He had everything fixed, tabulated and arranged.

William Maple had prospered; he had bought one of the dignified old freehold houses on the river in Cheyne Walk, spending on it rather more than he would have done, perhaps, had not his wife urged him. The house was becoming something of a centre in London for people who wrote and painted and were talked of, for the more important people who had gone into politics, and even for a few of the very much more important people whose point was their new wealth. Mrs. William Maple had decided that the time had come for a proper house in the country as well; but her husband, for all his success, hesitated at the expense. It was Mrs. William Maple who suggested that the opportunity lay ready to hand in Rackham.

“Henry will never marry again,” she had said. “The longer he keeps that place the more it will go to pieces. I don’t believe that boy, John, will come to any good with it. He’s a nice bright child

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

and I am as fond of him as you are; but I see what the end of it will be.”

And William, after a rather long pause, had agreed that she was right—at any rate as far as his brother’s incapacity for management was concerned, and the probability of a break-down if things continued as they were.

There was no need to do anything harsh or unpleasant, Mrs. William had said. After all, what with the capital sums advanced and the really absurd arrears of interest, and the interest on those arrears—let her husband remember that he very often had to find that himself, when he was making new investments, and depending upon the bank—the total must be getting close on £18,000.

“Not quite that,” William Maple had answered.

“Well!” Mrs. William had taken him up with a rather sharp sigh, “close on it, anyhow! And we can’t afford it—you know we can’t. Besides which, as I say, it would be a blessing all round; and there’s no need to do anything harsh or unpleasant. You can suggest some arrangement. Henry might travel for a bit, on whatever more you could let him have, and we might pay him rent for a while and then see what could be done when we had room to turn round.”

“Yes,” her husband had answered, “Yes . . . Something of that sort could be done . . . Certainly.”

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Something of that sort had occurred to him also, Had it not? Vaguely? All but £18,000 was due: allow Henry another £2,000 odd. After all, as land now was, £20,000 was a very fair amount to allow for Rackham: if anything too much. There was an enormous amount wanted doing to the place—he was already beginning to think of it almost as his own. As for his wife, she was there in spirit already; ordering the place about, renewing it from cellar to roof, and a squire's wife, as she should be. Moreover, she was the good angel of poor Henry, and of his unfortunate little son. She was saving them from a terrible future.

William had sat up late that night in his study, getting all the papers in order, setting down the main figures in an exceedingly clear and plain fashion. The next day, he had invited himself to Rackham, and the day after he had driven from the station in the old brougham behind the old horse with the old coachman, up the dilapidated drive, to the door which had not been painted since the triumphant conquest of the Boer Republics, and the nasty slump in Chartereded.

So there William Maple was, on that Sunday evening of August, 1913, sitting over brother Henry's wine and making himself ready for an explanation.

"Is that the same port?" he said.

"Yes," Henry answered, taking up his glass and looking through it at a candle.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"I thought it had gone off. Father laid it down the day you got into the Eight," said William.

Henry nodded.

"There is no reason why it should have gone off, though it wasn't a particularly good year. Anyhow, it's all right still."

The curtains were not drawn, the big ugly windows of the dining-room were open to the warm August night. The mahogany reflected the glass ware and the silver. Henry's eye rested, unseeing, upon the crest the fortunate smith and cattle dealer had arranged for, more than a century ago. It was a scene unchanged; just what it had been for the last thirty years and more, as far back as the two men could remember, save for the slightly dingier tint of the walls and the irregular, patchy fading of the red damask of the curtains. Other little details William now oddly noticed, though Henry could not have told him they were there: one of the bell handles had gone from the side of the fire-place leaving an iron stump, and poor old helmeted Minerva upon a bracket (Italian she had been, and brought over after the French wars) had lost the tip of her nose.

The silence could not go on for ever, and William braced himself to speak. It was no great effort for him, after all. He had had to do such things twenty times before, though never in such surroundings nor with the difficulty—slight to him, but still present—of imperilling the associations of childhood.



The brothers at Rackham

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"Henry," he said rather too suddenly, "I want to talk to you about your own affairs."

"Yes," said Henry gently. "Yes . . . what?"

He had no particular dread of what was coming; he thought it might be another loan, and that would not be unwelcome. There had been another little trouble. The water-mill absolutely must be seen to, and he was afraid it would cost a good deal. George Barrett, the miller, had spoken of it twice.

"Henry," continued William, "I think the time really has come when we must take stock."

It was not quite what Henry had expected. He looked up rather startled and a little bewildered. But he felt the justice of it. After all, they had not "taken stock" at all at any time. William took from his mouth the end of the cigar he had been smoking and ground it slowly on his plate. He felt in his pocket for papers, but thought better of it. Looking down at the cloth, so as to avoid his brother's eye, he said:

"The total amount, Henry, counting the arrears of interest, you know, is £17,324 odd." He paused a minute—"£17,324 . . . odd." Then he pulled out a half sheet of paper which he had hesitated at just before, pushed his plate aside, spread the figures out before him, and repeated, "Yes, £17,324 14s. and 3d."

What had floated in Henry's mind for so long was a fixed figure in large print—£10,000. And after it—in a sort of blur—something or other that

might be a few thousand more. £17,324 pulled him up. It was a good deal more than he had bargained for. Then he remembered sundry odd sums which, after all, he ought to have added to that £10,000. There had been the cleaning out of what they called "the Lake" but the villagers "the Pond"; and yet—now he remembered it—there had been the big subscription which he had thought only right for the building of the new bit on to the church. That was years ago and somehow or other he had not connected it with the main debt. And then, of course, arrears did mount up. After all, 5 per cent. on £10,000 was £500 a year, was it not? And there is interest on that interest when it is not paid. Yes, it was right enough, no doubt. Such was the course of Henry's rambling mind, before which now stood a new figure, large, dominant, £17,324.

"Yes," he said gently, looking up a little timidly, "yes, William, I am sure you're right. I'll look up my figures." He had not an idea where they were, nor whether he had them all. £17,324. I'm sure you are right."

William began scribbling at the paper meaninglessly with the point of a little gold pencil he carried on his watch-chain.

"You know, Henry, to tell you the honest truth," he said, "I could not go beyond £20,000. I will be quite plain with you. We have never had any secrets from each other. I am not badly off. I don't say I am. But what a man is worth

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

is one thing, and the free money at his disposal is another. And Hilda, you know—not that I blame her—but she likes to have her house full of people . . .” He paused.

“Yes,” said Henry gently, “yes, she’s the wife of a rising man. She’s quite right.”

“Well, you see,” went on William, with his eyes still averted from his brother’s, and scribbling away furiously making circles round and round that figure of £17,324, “the fact is, that I can’t help thinking you and I might come to an arrangement which would suit both of us . . .”

“I don’t doubt it, William,” said Henry gently, and with some admiration in his voice. He had no idea how these good business men got on; he felt about them a little as he had felt about the big boys in the Eleven when he had been a little boy at school. “You have always been very generous to me, William.”

“I don’t want you to say that, Henry,” said William, decently and soberly. “I wish I could have done more. At any rate, there it is. And quite honestly, I shall not be able to go beyond £20,000.”

What now stood up in Henry’s mind out of the mist was the fact that there was a margin, a margin of well over £2,000, which he characteristically put down as “about three.” He was just going to suggest something about that margin, and how useful it would be to him, when William spoke again.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"Henry," he said, lowering his voice by a tone or two, and speaking more slowly, "I don't want to seem to be giving advice; but I am more used to precise business perhaps than you are; that is inevitable, seeing the different kind of life I have had to lead . . . But . . . I am rather afraid that if we do not look out, the next few years might be disastrous to you."

"Oh," answered his brother uneasily, "things are bound to turn, you know. Only this morning I was reading that wheat had gone up another 2s.—it's true it's the time of year for that, but . . ."

William interrupted him firmly, looking him straight in the face for the first time in all his conversation, and bringing his right hand firmly down upon the table.

"My dear Henry, *no*," he said, "*no*. I have seen any amount of this kind of thing. Honestly, it can't go on. It's your business, of course; I don't want to interfere. But it would relieve me (and I know I am doing right in suggesting it) if you would undertake the only form of retrenchment you can."

"What?" said Henry bewildered and alarmed. "Sell the place? William? Sell the place? Sell Rackham?"

"Oh, no!" answered William a little wearily, but trying to use a soothing tone. "No! No! No! Nothing tragic! But why shouldn't you see that the place is properly kept in good hands, and you yourself *travel*? Travel with the boy?"

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

You used to like travelling, and it would do *him* all the good in the world, at his age. A gap between the Preparatory School and the Public School does no harm, and he is just in the years when a boy takes in what he sees. It is astonishing what one can save if one travels for a year or two."

"Travel?" repeated Henry, as though in hesitation. He had loved what little travelling he had had when he was young; the word appealed to him. But the ties of his own old place suddenly called him back, as did the now deep rut of daily habit into which his middle age had fallen.

"I couldn't bear to let it," he said sadly, shaking his head. "I couldn't let Rackham. Besides, who would take it? Who would keep it up?"

"My dear fellow, I didn't suggest that you should let it exactly. I have an idea, and I want to put it before you, and I want you to think it over really carefully. There's no hurry. I would look after the place. I could be here off and on the whole time, week-ends and what not. I have got the means and I should like the job. I am fond of the country, you know; and Hilda . . ."

"Do you mean—*live* here?" said Henry.

"Well, my dear fellow, only off and on, of course, coming down from London. But it would be kept up and cost you nothing, and I would see that it was more or less put to rights, you know. It is a good idea. And I would set what sum you liked, in reason, as my rent to you against

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

your interest as it falls due. And then your farm rentals would come to you—at least, they'd be set against the interest also."

"The rents don't come to much now," said Henry gloomily.

"No; but come—it makes a difference. And you know when one is in a place one always does something to keep it going and even improve it. And, you know, as for the balance, I mean *up* to £20,000, as I said . . ."

"Yes, yes," answered his brother, a little shortly. Then he mused. William followed up. He rose from his chair and paced the room.

"Look here, Henry," he said, "the long and the short of it is that something must be done, and surely this is the sensible thing to do. You know you like it as far as the travelling goes; it would be delightful for the boy; and then perhaps when the time comes things will have taken a turn for the better." For it was William now who chose to be vague. He was restless, and sat down again, once more looking his brother in the face. "I have told you, Henry, and surely you must see it, there *must* be a crash if you don't look out. Living abroad wouldn't cost you a half—not a third—of what it costs you to live here, and I'd take it all over—just for the time; and it will save the boy's schooling as well. There's everything to be said for it, and nothing against it. Come! Think it over."

There was a very long silence. By the end of it

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

the elder brother had taken one of those curiously rapid decisions which the undetermined do take when they are brought up suddenly against realities.

He simply said:

“Very well, William.” Then he sighed, and added: “Yes . . . I think you’re right.”

Another silence followed, during which the younger and more prosperous man felt like an exhausted swimmer who touches the shore with his feet. His speech was lighter when he resumed.

“Well, I am heartily glad of that, Henry. I thank God for it. I do really think it is the best thing. It is obviously the best thing. If you had seen what I have seen . . .”

“Yes, I know,” said Henry gently. “I know.”

“My dear fellow, we see tragedies in my business which . . .”

“Yes, I know,” said Henry again. “I know.”

“Two years, say, or perhaps three; we could talk about that in good time. There’s no sort of hurry.”

“There’s no hurry, of course,” said Henry. “But I would make it this autumn. These things had better be done soon if they’re to be done at all.”

His tone was not hopeless, nor even cheerless: he knew that he would have to face a very sad day, but it was natural in such a man to expect an early return of all that he had known.

“I’ll go south,” he said. “It won’t take you

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

long to make out the thing in black and white, will it?"

"Oh, we shan't need anything very formal, letters will do," said his brother. "I tell you what," he added, "you had better have that balance of £20,000 pretty soon, so that you can make all your arrangements before you start; and then we'll draw up some idea of what annual balance there may be between the rental and what is due, you know, and we'll estimate the rest of your income—there is still a good wad of father's German Government loan untouched, isn't there?"

"Yes," said Henry simply. "I've still got that, it's in the bank at Lewes. They never brought in much—I don't know how much—about £400 I think—or £450. I don't know."

"Well," answered William, "it's only the usual first-class government loan rates, but anyhow, German stuff is as safe as gold."

"Yes," said Henry.

"You will find the margin ample," his brother assured him. "Things will be all quite simple." They were beginning to seem quite simple to Henry.

He remembered how cheaply he had travelled in the past, and how he had enjoyed the little places and the simple habits. He thought of a year of his own boyhood with his own father in Italy just after the unification. He began to make pictures in his mind of his boy's delight at the mountains and at the beauties of the new lands.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

“Yes, yes,” he said. “It’s the best thing. Write me the letters when you choose, and I’ll look over them.”

And that was the way in which Rackham began its fourth transfer—but, after all, remained under the same blood.

CHAPTER II

IT was early in the month of June, 1914. Henry Maple was in Switzerland, not the tourist Switzerland which he hated, but the pleasant southern slopes of the Jura overlooking the plain, with the great mountains to the south.

He was happier than he had been for many years—happier even than at Rackham. The recent fret of embarrassment, the almost daily shifts and worries, were ugly memories already faded. In the early part of the year he had gone back to England alone, and found Rackham already so nicely set in order by his wealthy brother that he knew not whether to be pleased at its renewal or pained at the change. But on the whole he was more pleased; for after all, it was more like the Rackham of his childhood.

The provision made during the months of his absence had been ample for his very few needs. The boy was getting good teaching at Solothurn, and learning French and German thoroughly; in the autumn he would go on to the Public School his father and his grandfather had gone to; he might spend part of the holidays with his uncle, but most (he hoped) here in the Jura with himself. For they had grown very close together during this little not unpleasant exile, and the lad

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

was coming to have something of a hero-worship for a father who was always tender to him, always understanding, and seemed to know so very much and to be able to show him all that was to be discovered in that new world of travel from which they had just settled down. He was spending perhaps a quarter of what he had spent in Sussex—he had even saved! And if William had punctually paid himself his dues, he had as punctually remitted the balance of the rental and dividends to the Bank in Berne.

There came the threat of war and the ultimatum to Servia, but Henry Maple had read too much and knew too much of the past to believe that war would come.

War came; and the crash had upon this refined, scholarly far-too-detached character a strange effect of not unwelcome isolation. His vague hopefulness was still premanent; he had never liked the Germans; therefore he was sure that they would soon be beaten. He was secure where he was, and victory would only be a matter of a few weeks.

The Marne confirmed his judgment. Victory went on being a matter of a few weeks. But in the autumn came a letter from William, explaining why the next remittance would be considerably smaller than the last. The German dividend, of course, had failed. He must not mind if there was a certain irregularity in the payments. Everything was at sixes and sevens, and it was

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

not at all easy to transfer money; but he could manage it. He hoped Henry had saved a little, and that the occasional inevitable delays and the necessary diminution of the total would be bearable until peace should come—for William agreed it could not be long delayed. As for the boy, he had better stay safe where he was—he was getting excellent tuition, and it would not be too late to go on to his school in England when peace came. He had seen the headmaster and it would be all right—a few months wouldn't matter. And after all, John was barely fourteen.

Yes; Henry had saved a little, for the first time in his life (and how proud of it he was!). The lessening of income was a nuisance, but it hardly meant more than that the saving stopped, and that he had to take a little more care of his very modest expenditure. He secretly rejoiced at the suggestion that his son would not have to leave him permanently just yet, or have to attempt to rejoin him during the holidays under the very difficult conditions of war-time. Of course, John would go to school a little late, but he comforted himself by remembering that, after all, he would have the boy with him so much longer, and that was a great delight. The delay postponed for the lad one great advantage, but it gained him others. It was a very good thing for a young Englishman to have known other countries and other languages well as a boy, and things would right themselves somehow.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

So it went on through the better part of 'fifteen. Remittances came sufficiently often and of sufficient amount to keep things just barely going; but no more. Victory was due almost any day—though, it's true, it was getting late. Towards the end of the year Henry Maple began to feel he knew not what difference in his gentle vigour and in his hopefulness. It was as though the world were losing its taste.

He put it down to the war—but it was not the war. 1916 went by, and that internal enemy, whatever it was, took more and more of the man's life. Yet he put it down to nothing but the restrictions and fatigues and anxieties of the time. The progress of the disease was slow, his son hardly noticed it. To boys of his age a man of over fifty seems very old, and that his father should now no longer be able to take the long walks he had, or to read quite so long at a time, seemed to him nothing but the natural process of age.

So it went on for two years more. Twice Henry had made the resolution to get back home to see if—late as it was—the boy couldn't be got to his school. Twice he had abandoned that resolution. The increasing difficulties of travel appalled him, and it must be admitted that a stronger motive was his clinging to John's companionship. His brother's urgent appeals to him not to move, the assurance that he was better where he was, and sundry hints in the letters, hints which es-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

aped the censorship, that England might not be quite secure confirmed his lethargy. His increasing weakness did the rest. He would wait till the war was over—still confident that it would be over “almost any time now,” and over in the right way.

* * * * *

On the 2nd May, 1918, not for the first time, but hardly for more than the second time in Henry Maple's life, he was pulled up sharply against reality. A telegram came from Hilda, saying that William had died suddenly—a letter would follow.

The shock fell on a man much nearer death than either he or his child had imagined. He went down a further step in the descent out of this life. He had been really fond of his brother; too grateful for a generosity that had been very much more like an investment; and he was bound—as such natures are—by the common memories of childhood.

But there was a good side even to that, and it put some light into the mind of the dying man—for dying he now was, though slowly. After all, John was the heir. William had died childless. John was the heir: not only to dear Rackham and its impoverished fields, but to that solid fortune which William had created—always subject, of course, to Hilda's life-rights: that was only just.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Henry honestly admitted to himself that he had never liked Hilda; she was too loud for him. He used to say to himself, that she was not quite a lady. But he would be just; of course she ought to have the usufruct of the greater part as long as she lived. It was only right. Never mind: John was the heir. Henry knew of himself, by this time, that he was dying: but John was the heir, and all was well. The boy was nearly eighteen, they must be thinking of the University soon: the war could not go on for ever; and in a way it was a sort of providence, was it not, that poor William should have gone when he did? And yet, no, that was a thought he must put away. William would have looked after the boy, anyhow . . . It had better be Oriel. He did not know how Oriel stood now, but he had been at Oriel himself, and that was reason enough. Oriel it should be. He had everything arranged.

He made no doubt at all as to what William's will would be, though he had been too delicate to discuss it with him those five years before, when they had last met; it would be the normal will of an enriched, childless younger son standing thus in a landed family; there would be the life interest for Hilda—perhaps large—but the rest of the income would accumulate for the boy until he was of age; and meanwhile there would be an allowance for his education. Perhaps Hilda would be made guardian; he would regret it, but he did not mind. He could not think long on these

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

things: he could not concentrate. He awaited the papers.

Instead of the papers, only a couple of rare letters came through from his sister-in-law, but all that late summer of 1918 went by, with the war now at last manifestly closing, the turn of the tide, the Armistice. At the end of the year Hilda herself, too soon after a message announcing her coming, was in the sick man's room.

She stayed exactly two days in the little house on the slope of the Jura, just gracious to her nephew, just sufficiently affectionate to her brother-in-law, and no more. Mrs. William Maple was a business woman, and she had come to talk business.

And the business was this. William Maple had left everything to her absolutely. That was the first point. Yes? (putting up her hand) surely he did not suspect her? She would do her duty, and she knew what her duty was. But so far as the legal terms of the will went, there it was. That was how it stood. It was not her doing. She had known nothing about it till it was read. Henry must remember it was her husband's money, and, for her part, she thought he had done rightly.

So much for that. Now about Rackham.

She changed her tone somewhat when she came to this. She was not exactly ashamed, but she was just a trifle embarrassed. She owed it to herself to do what she had to do, but she did not like

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

doing it. However, these things have to be done, and she was as brief as she was clear.

Rackham was gone; hopelessly gone; William had spared his brother the worry of too much detail. He had very generously provided much more, really, than the difference between the rents and the interest could possibly have covered; she had all the papers in due order, and she had brought with her the accountancy document with a mass of other papers, which her sick brother-in-law had neither the energy nor the clearness of mind to follow. He listened patiently as she spoke—yet not despairingly. He still had something of that hopefulness in him which had been at once the curse and the alleviation of his not unhappy but most unfortunate life: for such men trouble rather their descendants than themselves.

Hilda made the position plain enough. If she had been—what she thanked God she was not—a cold, calculating sort of person, there would have been nothing for it but to sell Rackham; it was not entailed, and even so, she would have lost thousands on the deal. But she was not like that. She assured him she was not like that. She was willing to lose and to take Rackham over as it stood in cancellation of all debts. She was glad to make the sacrifice. She would not dream of disturbing his illness with pressure of any kind. A will of his in her favour was one way. If he disliked that, she wished to be generous; she would

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

make it a purchase. She would accept it against the debt.

Henry heard her, and he saw no way out.

"You will do the right thing by the boy," he said. "He's the only child. Hilda, you will do the right thing, of course?"

She assured him of that; but what the right thing meant was left vague, as everything had been left vague in Henry Maple's life. It mattered little anyhow, she thought; Rackham was hers to dispose of, and there was still long life before her. The right thing by the boy meant, let it be hoped, some regard for his proper upbringing: then, of course, he would stand somehow vaguely at Rackham, so long as Rackham was their home, as the heir. So let it stand at that.

* * * * *

When the end came (it was the foul winter of '19 that killed him) it came rapidly enough. But just before that end Henry Maple rallied singularly in intelligence and decision. It was like that little return of the flood in certain heavens before the final ebb. It was as though he had a task to perform.

Such men postpone: but now there could be no postponement. He spoke to the boy.

"John," he said, "you know that I have been very ill, and you have seen me getting worse." He looked at the tall boy—the tall young man,



Aunt Hilda settling everything

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

he seemed, for the first time, in his father's eyes; strong in his eighteen years—and understood how true it is that children are a mitigation of the memory of death. Something far stronger than his own youth was there: as tender, but more sturdy, and (he secretly hoped) more obstinate.

“Yes, Papa,” said John. He took his father's hand where it lay upon the rug of the invalid chair, as a woman might have done. “But you will get better.”

Henry Maple slightly shook his head.

“I have not told you—I have not allowed any of these good people here to tell you—the doctor was quite right; he knew all about it from the beginning, and he tells me that it is coming to the end.”

For the first time in his young life John Maple felt that shock of emotion which suddenly whitens the face, and he knew that his heart had stopped beating for the moment. He could not prevent a convulsive clutch at his father's hand. The old man looked at him with all the affection of the past in his eyes.

“Sometimes, John dear,” he said, “I think I have not given you a fair chance. Then I say to myself that, after all, it was the war, and we were wiser to stay where we were. It has been very happy here.”

“It has, Papa,” said John.

“You have not been lonely, boy?”

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"Never," answered John, truthfully enough. "I like our friends here, and the two Englishmen as much as any. Charles is going to Oxford next term . . ." Then he stopped abruptly. It was amazing to him that he had forgotten in those few words the blow that had fallen, and suddenly, in spite of himself, he began to cry. His father stroked his hand.

"It does no harm to cry, boy. It's all the better. You will feel it less later. It had to come. But I have a great deal to tell you. You know we have become much poorer?"

"Well, yes, of course, Papa. I don't know much about these things, but we have lacked nothing."

"No, dear boy, but it is not Rackham. Do you remember Rackham well? You must—you were over thirteen, and big for your age, when you left it."

"Yes, Papa," said John, still sobbing. "I remember Rackham!"

"Well, John, it is very difficult to say, but I will try and say it. Technically—legally—I suppose that is the right word—Rackham is not mine any more."

The boy looked bewildered. That Rackham had been theirs, his father's, and his father's father's, and so on, and would be his in his turn, this was a thing he had taken for granted as part of the universe. That idea had no connotation

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

of wealth in his mind. It was the very stuff of his thoughts. The Maples and Rackham were one thing.

"It could not be helped. I did my best. You know, land went to pieces. . . . Your uncle was very generous; he was, really. We should not have been here, even, but for him. Honestly, John, your Aunt Hilda has been generous too. I can't deny that."

"What do you mean by generous, Papa?" said the young man, a little hardly.

"Why, my dear," the other answered, sighing, "I owed her husband, and therefore I owed her, after her husband died, more than I could pay; more than there was anywhere. There was a German investment of your grandfather's—did you know that?"

"No, Papa."

"Well, it's gone, of course. I lost it by your uncle's advice; he said it was as safe as gold; but after all, he could not tell. No one could tell."

"Papa," said John Maple, asking a question of this sort for the first time in his life, prompted by he knew not what odd premonition of the future, "what was the sum owed? How much was the money claimed? How much would be needed to . . .?"

His father looked at him with a long look.

"You're thinking of getting Rackham back?"

"Oh, no, Papa," he said, startled. He had no

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

conception of such powers. He could not even imagine himself earning. "I only wondered."

"Well, well," said Henry Maple, falling back into his vagueness, "your aunt will do the right thing. When I am gone, John, go straight back to her . . . You want to know . . . what the sum was?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said John. But something fierce in his voice belied the words.

"My dear boy, it is easily told. The first sum, you know, the actual sum, I don't mean the interest—was £10,000. One bit after another . . . it began during those bad years . . . I saw corn sold at Lewes market for 10s. a sack . . . Anyhow, your uncle was really generous. He was, indeed. He never pressed and the interest ran, without his ever saying a word about it . . . And then, at the end, when what with that, and some expenses or other . . ." he hesitated, as though his memory was working ill . . . "oh, yes, on the church, you know. Well, it wasn't £20,000 . . . But your uncle was generous, boy, do believe it. He gave me the balance making it up to £20,000. That is what we have had over and above some of the rentals since we have been here . . . There will be £300 or £400 for you to take in the bank when . . ." He would not say the words.

"It was £20,000 altogether?" said John.

"Yes," said his father. "But, you know, when your aunt came she had all the papers in order,

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

and there's no denying she had a right to a lot more than that."

The son was silent: he was growing older with every moment of this.

"*She* was just, too, John, believe me. They kept the place very well. It looked twice what it had been, though a little strange . . . when I went back there . . . Anyhow, it's hers now."

"Hers?" said John. "Oh, don't bother, Papa. Don't trouble. I ought not to have asked you."

"Yes, dear boy; it had to be. Strictly, she could have made me sell. But in her odd way she's generous too, I think. Though I can't pretend that I ever . . ." He would not complete the sentence. But from that moment the boy had an unpleasing image of the woman in his heart.

"It was her right, John, and she'll do the right thing by you. She has no children, and it's bound to come to you. And, you know, you are to go to Oriel? She'll see to that. I make no doubt she'll see to that. Settle it with her. And your allowance, my dear boy . . . and . . ."

He ceased, under a sudden spasm of extreme fatigue.

"I must stop now, boy."

His son kissed him upon the forehead, and thought it oddly cold.

"It's late," the father added, almost in a whisper. "Tell Marie to come up. I'll get to bed."

And next morning young John Maple, waking late, alarmed that his father had not rung, went

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

to his door, and knocked, and heard no answer. That father was dead.

* * * * *

The English friends in the place told the lonely boy what he should do, but he was already almost competent to act. Cut off though he had been from the life of his kind, he had a singularly mature power of decision, and it was nerved now by a strange, tenacious feeling in which, as in a composite picture, were inextricably entwined the beloved memory of the face which he would never see again for ever (every detail of the funeral remained vivid all his life)—a profound sense of wrong done him, and a vague, quite formless, but astonishingly strong intention of *action*—what action he knew not, nor how it should be performed, nor where. Even in one so young, sudden and overwhelming grief adds to the vividness of life intolerably. By so much as he dwelt—more than in real experience itself—upon his father's voice, gesture, everything—by so much was he acutely, violently sensitive to harsh alien things.

His aunt had not come out for the funeral. She seemed to show an intolerable indifference. Bad as the immediate post-war conditions were, it was inexcusable. The letter he had received from her struck him like ice; though that woman had never written unkindly in her life, yet also she

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

had never written kindly. The journey home in those strange, interrupted days of the spring of '19, with the delays and the broken glass in the carriages and the sleepless nights, felt like an approach to some doom. What would it be like? What would Rackham be like? What would it have become? He had a fairly clear memory of the place, though he had not seen it since he was a child—for five-and-a-half years. His father had told him very vaguely and in a few sentences that it “looked twice what it had been”; but he evidently did not like to dwell on any description. He had pictured to himself one or two consolations—meeting again with Corton, the old butler, and the rest of them—he supposed they were all still there—the familiar odd disjointed front of the house, half brick, half timber; the rank grass, the neglected field beyond the rusty iron palings, the ill-kept lawn which were for him not decay, but Home.

His first shock was at the station.

It was not the old brougham that met him, the old horse that he remembered; it was a car, too smart for such a place; and the driver, of all things in the world, a Frenchman, demobilised and (by some strange snobbery of his aunt's) smuggled in: imported by the favour of some Parliamentary friend of hers.

The drive was too short. The old ramshackle lodge was gone, and there was, in its place, a Queen Anne cottage of the worst type. The drive

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

was twice as broad as in the old days. The gravel of it clean and new. Then, at a turn, in a moment—the evening still light—he saw Rackham.

But was it Rackham? The front was all timber now. And no one could say whether it was all new or all old. It seemed new, made falsely old. The windows were old-new, anyhow; for they were criss-cross lattice. It made him think of the few times he had seen stage scenery, when he had gone with his father into Berne to the play.

Corton was there when the door opened. And for the first time in so many days he rejoiced a moment in the warmth of the old man's greeting—but in what surroundings!

The old hall had gone; the next room had been knocked into it. He could have believed it the lounge of an hotel for its garishness. There were strange beams, artificially rough and artificially darkened. There were pictures on the wall which he had never known. All looked new, most abominably aping age.

He was in an ill mood by the time his aunt received him. But that first evening things went quietly enough. She did her best—it was a poor best, but she could do no better. She was precise, she was worldly, she could not bear things to be casual and unfixed; and she was (wrongly) convinced that the boy before her was but a repetition of his father—of whose goodness she had felt nothing, for whose vagueness and slackness she had had all the contempt of her kind.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

I say, it was a poor best; and for a week—she thought it well to allow a little time before any business should be talked—the tension grew.

The breaking-point came one evening after dinner in the drawing-room—furnished after some antique fashion which John could not understand and hated—when Hilda Maple, in a tone which seemed to him rather like the commands of an official than converse with one's kind, began to give him her plans for his future. He was to have so much—not an insufficient allowance—paid thus and thus; he must account for it. She had seen the authorities at Oriel and the rooms he would have. She approved of the rooms. Perhaps she would have preferred Christ Church, but it was his poor, dear father's wish (she said that as though his father's wish was necessarily less worthy than her own—after all, poor Henry had been at Oriel, hadn't he?).

John made no answer. He listened with increasing anger in his heart.

"They wanted you to read history," she said, "but I said you would rather read law. You would, I know. Your uncle would have said that. He always said that he wished he had read law himself at the University. He said that it would have saved him three years. And you know, John, you will have to have a profession."

John sat up in his chair and leaned forward slowly towards the April fire.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"I shall not go to Oxford. I shall find some trade," he said, in a slow, determined voice.

"What do you mean?" answered his aunt sharply.

"What I say," answered her nephew.

It was not a courteous beginning in her ears, for she felt she was being enormously kind. After all, she owed him nothing; it was the other way round; she had lost by him and his.

"What you say?" she cried, almost angrily. "What you say? I don't understand you!"

"I have got £352 left, Aunt Hilda," he said, still refusing to meet her eyes and looking straight into the fire.

"Well?" said she.

"It's enough to turn round on," he continued.

"Good heavens, boy! Do you understand that you're not yet nineteen? D'you think you are of age? What can one do with three . . . really, I don't understand what you mean!"

But in that young mind a very firm determination was growing up. He knew nothing whatever of the world. But he was prepared to learn it, and to learn it alone, as soon as might be. He said no more. She questioned; she spoke so strongly that with a woman less careful of herself there would have been a storm. But she got no more out of him.

There followed two days in which neither said much. Hilda Maple did not reproach herself, but she was a little anxious. She thought herself

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

capable of any situation: but this was new. On the third day John told her of his determination.

He was going to London. He would give her his address the moment he had one; he begged her to let him be. He was sure of himself.

There passed rapidly through his aunt's mind the alternatives before her, and before him. She saw them clearly, as was her talent, and she made the decision, which was perhaps the only one she could have made.

He might go. She would not oppose his going. She was still determined to do her duty in so far as he would meet her—she had a strong sense of that—there was nothing petulant about the woman, nor any danger of sudden moods; she had the virtues of the worldly, and their kind of strength. It was a simple issue—either to use the law—which would be odious, and would mean a permanent breach in little more than two years' time (for she rightly guessed the obstinacy of that deep-voiced, clear-cut, sturdy figure) or simply to let him run the length of his tether. She prophesied no disaster; she had the judgment to think that upon the whole there would be none; though there was a hidden sneer in her mind as she thought of what occupations this pig-headedness might drive him to. She told him there would always be a home there when he needed it; at heart she felt relieved of a burden.

John, on his side, felt a weight lifted too. And young as he was, he moderated.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"I certainly don't want to quarrel, Aunt Hilda," he said. "And I cannot help telling you that I am grateful to you. You see, when I have made up my mind——" he talked like one ten years older, and anyone with a better sense of humour than Hilda Maple could hardly have helped smiling—"when I have made up my mind—I can't even think of myself as changing."

So it was settled. They agreed for a fortnight's interval in which he should meet his father's friends of the neighbourhood, and take some advice as to where he might get rooms in town—as to what he should look for then.

John Maple saw and heard and learnt much in that fortnight; and all he saw and learnt and heard further hardened him in his anger and his resolve.

For one thing, he discovered the odious word *Catchings*. It seems that Rackham had been rebaptised "*Rackham Catchings*." Disgusting black-letter buffoonery!

He had first come across it in the village shop, where the young man with whom he had played as a boy was all obsequiousness to the heir of such wealth, and had said, bowing and smirking, over a parcel, "Shall I send it up to the *Catchings*?"

"To what?" John had said sharply.

"To the *Catchings*, sir—*Rackham Catchings*? Your house, sir; leastways, Mrs. Maple's house."

"Oh," John had answered. "Yes, *Rackham*,

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

of course. Where else should you send it?" And he had turned abruptly out of the familiar door.

After that he noticed the odious thing in the address of letters arriving. On the first day he had occasion to write a note he found it on the paper heading. He saw in the *County News* that some show or other was to be opened a fortnight hence by Mrs. Maple of Rackham Catchings. He was beginning to get it on the brain.

And certainly there had been plenty of Catchings added to Rackham. To his mind, in those few days during which he still lingered, the new sham timbered front was the Catchings and the beastly sham panelling and sham beams of the new rooms, and the odious antique furniture, and the silly Wardour Street pictures deliberately darkened—all these were the Catchings. He went over them one by one, listing them in his mind, and grimly delighted in the coming luxury, distant or near, of tearing them out by the roots like a lot of bad teeth.

It was a state of things that did not make for better relations, though John was careful to keep off any questions on the novelties, even on the absurd novel name. He would learn its origin in due time. Meanwhile upon anything that mattered he was stubbornly silent, and sufficiently talkative on things that did not.

Aunt Hilda played her part well enough, determined as he was, and successful as he was, in preventing an open quarrel. On the day when

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

she bade him good-bye at the door, and made him promise to write and to return often to visit her, she rejoiced that she had not broken her word to the dead man. She had done her best. And if anything went wrong with John, why she was always there to help. But there is no denying that she was relieved.

As for John, though he had left Rackham silent, he had fallen into a new mood as the train approached London. Her friends and his father's had given him introductions and he had been told of good and reasonable lodgings; and he had those few hundreds and scores of pounds in his pocket, which are a fortune on the threshold of one's twentieth year.

But quite unchanged in his heart as he travelled still stood the image of the old Rackham, the real Rackham. And those hurried facts which his father had passed over as though they were too painful for him—sums of money: the real sum owed—£10,000, or say £12,000, £13,000 at the very most—yet £20,000 claimed. Well, £20,000 it legally was and £20,000 he would adhere to.

That £20,000 he would find, make, somehow, somewhere.

At his age £20,000 is like a million, but at his age, also, a million may be found, made, somehow—somewhere. That £20,000 hardened in his soul and became the permanent furniture of it.

CHAPTER III

How young people fall on their legs no one knows—least of all themselves: no more than cats thrown off a roof. Those who have gone out into the world on their own before they were twenty know that it happens, and that is all they can say.

It happened to John Maple. He went through the string of those adventures which all such lads go through, indifferent to the squalor because he was too young; delighted with the uncertainty, and buoyed up by the novelty of his life. It happened to him also (as it happens to all such) that he was never cut off from his equals in real life as such are cut off in melodrama. There was nothing about not darkening doors again, or shaking dust off feet. He went down often enough to Aunt Hilda's (thinking himself a noble fellow enough for tolerating Rackham). He made better and better friends with Corton, who always thought of him as the only true Maple. He met his aunt's friends. His father's old acquaintances looked him up, and asked him out in London. If you had taken a couple of weeks out of the boy's life and followed it hour by hour, you would have found such a mosaic as only an early experi-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

ence of that strange kind knows—there are plenty of us alive to-day who have known it and can remember it. John Maple came to know them all.

Lodgings chosen for their peculiarity, their isolation; a single bare room overlooking London from the height of an old building; a basement; a dusty studio; one changed for another. Odd acquaintances from the most different sorts of worlds. Broken-down actors, young men trying to find work, and trying to forget the time when they were soldiers. Pompous hosts in huge great mausoleums of houses (bad speculations on the Crown property at Kensington—white elephants). Dull Bohemian nights in Chelsea. Much more interesting revolutionary nights sandwiched between foreign and domestic spies in reeking cellars off Houndsditch. One or two really interesting parties in the houses of such people, for instance, as Charles Baker, who had been his father's friend for years before the exile, and who was still in Parliament and still ridiculing it, but whose real point was that he could paint; or tea with another friend of his father's of very many years' standing, Lady Pattle, the widow of the Admiralty Judge. There he met everybody—and there, incidentally, he met Bo.

Lady Pattle liked pretty well everything, but if she liked one thing more than another it was people who could talk crisply and dress crisply. She liked them best when they were least Eng-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

lish; and she liked them best of all when they were American.

Now God in His providence had at this very moment provided for Lady Pattle, and for England, precisely what was most needed in this line.

Hamilcar Hellup had not begun life upon a few copper coins, still less had he walked as a barefoot child into New York, because he could not afford to ride. He had been born of a very good family—that is to say, of a family that had plenty of lineage (ten generations of it since the first settlers); moderate in fortune; once Puritan, now atheist, in religion. He had been brought up with the other lads of the village under that fine tradition of social equality which for so long was, and still is, in unspoiled places, the tradition of the United States. He had made a large fortune without selling any material objects that anyone had ever seen, dealing shrewdly in paper. He had never cheated anyone, to his knowledge. What is far more remarkable, very few people had cheated him; or, at any rate, very few with impunity.

His delight was to escape from New York and return at too brief intervals to the place of his birth: and there his confidant was a playmate who had remained poor and cunning on the soil, one Hiram Jake. Hiram Jake remained in Hamilcar Hellup's vision the symbol of his own people, and years later, when he stole back home on brief escapes from England, to talk of Mayfair to Hiram

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Jake over the broken fence of that citizen's lot was cold water in the desert to the millionaire.

When he was a little over fifty he became a widower, and was left with an only child, a girl called Isabeau, then twelve years old, and to enjoy, at eighteen, yet another fortune from her mother. His whole life changed. He gave up the accumulation of further wealth—and therein was wise, for he had an enormous lump of it. He came over to Europe with his daughter. First he travelled with her to many places he himself had seen in his former journeys; then he put her back into a school in his own country; his wife would have wished it.

While Isabeau was thus growing up American, her father, fully realising, what he had known at the back of his mind since first he had seen the country, that England was the place where rich men should come to die, made his arrangements to settle here.

Nearly seven years had passed since then, and Isabeau, whose name had very naturally contracted into Bo, was on the point of coming back to England, when Hamilcar Hellup (he had been Hamilcar J., but he had dropped the J.—wherein again he was wise) was first pestered by our hungry politicians to pay them money for a peerage.

Now Hamilcar, being an American, knew all about such things. The Press of his native country had told him far more about English politics than our own Press ever tells Balham or Tooting.



Neighbour Hellup and Neighbour Jake

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

He knew all about the politicians, with their tongues hanging out for money—and he preferred to keep his money to himself. Therefore had Hamilcar been standing on guard, like a wicket keeper with the gloves on, for now some years: ready to catch each attack on his purse and throw it back. Hitherto he had succeeded. Of the last begging interviews, two had been attempted by a tout of the Prime Minister of the day, very clumsily done, without a proper introduction; the fellow simply rang the bell and sent in a card. He was shown out; or, as Hamilcar put it, thrown into the street. But appetite in politicians is over-mastering, and Hamilcar's wealth was notorious, illustrious, quite un-concealed.

The next attack was delivered in his club. It was delivered by an old gentleman who had bothered him about a lot of other things. This cadger was (to change the metaphor) deftly cut through the slips. But the third attack came, only two days later, in the shape of a florid young man in the Government, with whom he got on like a house on fire. It was quite late in the evening during a party in Merton Street, when his under-secretary suddenly asked him whether he would meet yet another politician at lunch next day. Hellup very foolishly consented; and there suffered a most brutal hammering, a torture of direct insistence that he should pay. But there was plenty

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

of hard wood in Hamilcar Hellup, and he stood firm. There was nothing doing.

What did the trick was Lady Pattle. Lady Pattle had got to know him just after he had landed. She was a dab at that sort of thing, and she had managed it sideways, getting him kidnapped to tea in her house under the guard of her niece and a Lord Chancellor in a large motor. She had him by the Christian name within a year. She was not for hurrying things. He was taking her advice during all the second year, and still more during all the third year; and he had rarely found it wrong. Lady Pattle it was who told him quite solemnly, after now six years of acquaintance, that he ought to buy. Lady Pattle it was who broke down that iron resolve and made Hamilcar Hellup a peer. No other: Peggy, Lady Pattle.

Let me cast no suspicion on that honoured name. She took no commission. She had been specially urged by no one. It was principally from Hamilcar himself that she had learnt how he had set his teeth, and was becoming obstinately proud as well as amused in turning the politicians down. She desired to do only what might be good for him, for she was really fond of him—and she advised him to yield. Her arguments were sound. The Prime Minister was asking nothing exorbitant. A dozen new peers had paid him from twice to ten times as much. Hamilcar was very rich, and he would not feel it. It was not as if he had run

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

after them; they had run after him; and really a peerage was a solid advantage—especially for an American.

“Not Home,” was Hamilcar’s comment; and Lady Pattle had answered sharply, “No, but you are not living at home.” Whereat Hamilcar had sighed, for it was true. And in his heart he longed for the wooden houses and Jake, the playmate of his boyhood, and to see the smoke rising from his own land, and after that to die.

“It is not,” she said, “as though you had a boy to take it on after you. That would be a nuisance. But it will certainly help Bo. She’d like it. She’s been too young so far to know what it means; but she’d like it now. And it’s great fun, remember. You go and hear the debates and if you like you can join in. Anybody can. Then, it helps you abroad: on the Riviera especially, and in Paris too. Still. Even to-day. It won’t last, but be an English peer while it lasts.”

“Raises prices?” said Hamilcar.

She shook her head.

“Not at the kind of places you go to. They couldn’t raise them.”

What clinched the matter—nothing less would have convinced him—was the battery she brought up at the end of this memorable conversation.

“If you don’t pay that little bounder off and have done with it, you’ll be plagued for the rest of your life. He’s worse in opposition than in office,” she had said. What that meant Hamilcar

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Hellup hardly understood; but he understood well enough the wisdom of cutting worry. And that very week he bought the peerage. One thing, however, he stuck to; he would not change his name. They tried hard to make him, but he was adamant. The Hellups had been Hellups too long to change, and Hellup he remained.

Therefore, when Bo came over from her school, and when Lady Pattle presented her at Court, and when, with her straightforwardness and beauty and (to be quite just) her hardness, she had duly impressed herself upon London, she was the Honourable Isabeau Hellup. Why she was not Lady Isabeau Hellup was explained to her, and she was reluctant to accept the explanation. Then did she begin with a great verve a career of conquest; and her father was prouder of her than of any deal he had ever made in his life: not excepting the original great Paramount Paper Merger, in the year '95.

Bo had armed herself, as must every woman who proposes to conquer, with a dog—by name Lovey-Lad, by nature swift and terrible, strong to seize and to tear, strong also to growl, and of the bulldog breed. He became, in the few hundreds of newspaper pictures which appeared on both sides of the Atlantic, her cognitive sign, as is the Lion that of St. Jerome, the Dog that of St. Roch, the Eagle that of Jupiter and St. John, and an open Bible spread under the left hand that



"Our younger hostesses"

*Pleasing sketch of the Honble. Isabeau Hellup with her dog
Lovey-Lad; from the pencil of Mr. Louth and appear-
ing (syndicated) throughout the Press of
England and America*

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

of the late Queen Victoria at a certain epoch of her reign.

All guessed—some had arranged—whom Bo was to capture. There were titles in the list—the more knowing ones had particularly good foreign titles to put forward. There were also great untitled lumps of money, still knocking about unmarried. There were even a few of the minor Exalted Personages. Lady Pattle herself, though she was no fool, could not help, being a hostess and a woman, having fixed plans of her own. She had settled on and pinned down and labelled young Lord Ockley, because he had no money, because he was nice, and because she knew him: three very good reasons.

But these good people reckoned without the Hellup blood, which was good, tested stuff; they had reckoned without its particular qualities in Bo; above all had they fatally reckoned without the Bow and Quiver of the Little God—the Unconquered in Battle—who perpetually scatters the arrangements of possessing men, and falls like a bolt into the midst of riches.

It had amused the Little God to bring Bo up against John Maple, and John Maple up against Bo. It had amused him to shoot at them both; first from a distance, to try his bow; then good and hard at short range. They were already quite certain each of the other, before either of them was quite certain who the other was. They were both married in heaven—or whatever the process

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

is—I mean, they had both known about each other from all eternity, while Bo still had no more definite knowledge of John than that somehow or other he was connected with “that Mrs. Maple,” and was perhaps vaguely the heir to a Manor House somewhere or other, with English lawns and oaks, and all the rest of it: no title—at least, she thought no title. She had not yet thought much one way or the other about anything connected with him, except that she knew his soul as she knew her own: and liked it more.

As for John, he knew she was the daughter of one of these American lords, and he did not honestly try to distinguish between them. But he had liked her father. He liked the crispness, the exceedingly well-brushed close short white hair; the equally well-groomed short white moustache; the humorous, keen eyes and all the rest that goes with the type. He liked the short sentences, the lively metaphor, and he liked the man’s certitude in himself. It was as well. For considering how fiercely John Maple loved that tall infant he might have hated the rival affection even of her father. And considering how much Lord Hellup doted on his daughter, he might most furiously have disliked anyone else claiming her.

That Bo had a great fortune was present in John’s mind, but occupied no place there. It is often like that. He knew her fortune was there, as one knows that a big cloud is in the sky. It did not occupy his thoughts as being anything

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

prominent, still less as having any effects. For remember, he was still very young. If he had thought of it at all it would have worried him, I fear. But he did not think of it.

In the adventures of John Maple there had been one very simple motive running through, which was to earn a living: though he put it to himself not as earning a living, but as earning, making—*getting*, anyhow—a certain fixed sum of money, to wit, £20,000, wherewith to buy back Rackham.

Aunt Hilda had, in the interval since John had come up to town to make his way, gone from bad to worse. It wasn't enough for her to call the old place Rackham Catchings; she sometimes used "Catchings" by itself. And when John protested against *that* innovation (as he had done on one of his last visits) she had poured out a torrent of horrible antiquarian stuff which she had got from an archæological society, and which boiled down to this: that once, in one of the older title deeds, the word "Catchings" appeared; it seemed to have been used for some part or other of the estate. She was proud to add that they had also found a certain Sir Harry Murtenshaw mentioned in a letter (undated, but in a handwriting of the sixteenth century), and that in this same letter there was mention of a Catchings. It was true this last Catchings was in Norfolk; but that didn't trouble Aunt Hilda. She had already established her legend. The true name of Rack-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

ham was Rackham Catchings, or even Catchings alone; and it had descended to the Maples and so to herself diversely, by heiresses and marriage, from Sir Harry Murtenshaw, Knight; a courtier of Gloriana's, a jewel in the crown of the Virgin Queen, an Elizabethan.

With John's movements among the rich Aunt Hilda was insufficiently acquainted. She kept in touch with him, and she was vaguely pleased to know that whatever tricks he was playing in private to make a living—and on these she did not yet inquire—he was at any rate, to the world, her nephew and his father's son. If he appeared to be living in London instead of in Sussex, she liked to have it put down to his—or rather her—opulence. And if he had to refuse many engagements, if he mysteriously disappeared for days at a time, why, that was again a proof of his ample leisure and power to choose his own recreations. She knew, of course, and she half envied, the way in which she heard him talked about, though it annoyed her more than it pleased her when, in that world which had been his father's, they asked her (as they often did) whether she were not a cousin. For the truth is, that Aunt Hilda did not know the rich as well as John did. Still, there were few whom John knew and whom Aunt Hilda had not at least heard of: not many houses where John was intimate and she had not at least called. She addressed Lady Pattle by her Christian name, and had more than once been called Hilda in return.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Two warm friendships Mrs. Maple had made in that world—one with Lord Hellup, who quite frankly admired her; one with a certain Lord Mere de Beurivage—or rather, with his wife, Amatheia, whom she had piloted through many straits and narrows. For the wife of Lord Mere de Beurivage had to learn the intricacies of high life rather late, as indeed had her worthy husband. Fortune had come upon him with horrible rapidity, like a shell, after his fiftieth year. It was not till the first war Coalition Government that he had appeared as Sir George Huggins. It was not till the second war administration that he had come—by the usual cheque—to adorn the House of Lords. His creation dated some months before Lord Hellup's. He was senior to Lord Hellup in the proud hierarchy of our nobility: senior by half a year.

Though Aunt Hilda could not but revere her dear Amatheia's husband and have a strong attachment for Hamilcar Hellup, neither of these noblemen, with wife or daughter, had happened to be at Rackham on the same occasions as her nephew. She had learnt in roundabout ways that the Hellups knew John and liked him, though she had not a suspicion of the growing affair with Bo. As for Lord and Lady Mere de Beurivage—either they had not come across the young man at all in the Great World, or if they had, they had forgotten it: he was no apparent help to climbing folk. To put it in Lady Mere de Beau-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

rivage's simple English phrase, when Hilda had cast out a feeler about it, "Your nevvv? Not as I knows of, Ilda dear. But there, bless you! faces I knows, but names I disremember." Or as his lordship had put it with equal simplicity, "John Miple? Wot? Sime nime as yer own? Not as I can call to mind. But lor! There's so many of 'em!" A sound judgment.

Such was the ambiguous situation—John on the fringes of Aunt Hilda's push; Aunt Hilda's wishing that she was really received as John was received. So John was asked with sincere affection to Rackham, but not too often. When he came he played up, and he even helped Mrs. Maple when she came to London in her abhorrent task of adding further and more heavily to the Catchings—for some purpose of her own which as yet John could not divine. It intrigued him.

That fixed idea of his that he would be master of Rackham sooner or later led him to tolerate every grotesque purchase and addition, and to help her whole-heartedly. It made him know more about the place . . . and he was free to be rid of the whole mass of that rubbish when he should reign.

He accompanied her when she went to Burton's studio to inspect the absurd carved animals that were to appear on the stone pillars of the new gate. He gravely approved her choice of the new gate itself, when it was foisted upon her in

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

the Euston Road—a sham Venetian horror in new iron, and (oh! my God!) not even forged, but cast.

He did more. He helped her to buy the Ancestor.

The Maples, as he knew, had ancestors of a sort. They had the cattle dealer. They had his son, the worthy Georgian squire who had sat for the county. Indeed, they had a portrait of him in his wig extraordinarily badly done by an artist of the local town whom the gentry patronised in those days.

There were even other ancestors at Rackham, as ancestors go—for ancestors in such houses do not mean *real* ancestors, but any collaterals. One was a captain of Nelson's in his uniform and the other was a very rich lady whom that captain had had the good fortune to marry after the wars. There was also a horrible dingy thing which used to hang in the schoolroom, and which John could vaguely remember someone having told him as a child was "your great-aunt Jane."

These had been good enough for Rackham. But they were not good enough for Rackham Catchings, and Hilda Maple sailed forth in quest of something more worthy. She set out on the uncharted sea to discover Sir Harry Murtenshaw, Knight.

She sought him, just in that place where Oxford Street merges into Holborn, in a shop where she had had the good fortune to find many things al-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

ready: a shop belonging to a gentleman of Esthonian extraction called Curzon; at any rate, this gentleman (who appeared in person) had the selling of the goods, and, on this occasion, after so many others sold to Aunt Hilda, of the Ancestor. And a very good Ancestor he was. Aged in time, though newly cleaned, painted on canvas which an expert would have ascribed to our own day, but set in the proper kind of old frame and duly sooted, fumed, and with nothing to give him away.

He had a square, solid face, not unlike a pig's, well pleased with itself, and a square beard to match; and he was dressed in a period which was either the very last days of Elizabeth or the very first days of James: a man of about the same age as Shakespeare, but without his genius. He cost Aunt Hilda surprisingly little, though surprisingly more than he was worth. Whatever name he may have had in real life he was now, for *her*, Sir Harry Murtenshaw, and she was always very careful to explain that he was not a real Maple. Which was indeed the case.

He was, for *her*, the founder of the family in this sense; that it was through his daughter, the heiress of Rackham, that the Maples had come into the property: a touching piece of family history. It had been a love match; and that was very touching too.

Then, to the unconcealed annoyance of her nephew, she tacked a ghost on to Sir Harry. At



The Ancestor

Sir Harry Murtenshaw, Knight; by Holbein

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

first a vague ghost, it turned more precise and became a young relative of the knight's, who had died a romantic political death.

In a fine innocence upon the date of that eminent Hun, Hilda Maple accepted the assurance that the portrait was by Holbein, and Sir Harry Murtenshaw, bluff Englishman that he was, and stout supporter of the Elizabethan (or Jacobean) settlement, was carried out by two assistants of Mr. Curzon's to be packed for delivery to Rackham Catchings. He was heavy. He was large. He had to go out sideways. He travelled, finally, upside down: but it in no way affected his imperturbable humour.

John Maple had helped his aunt to choose the picture; had warned her that Sir Harry was no ancestor of his, whatever he might be of his aunt's husband; had received the naturally sharp reply of that lady to such a comment; and later, when the great founder of the fortunes of Rackham was unwrapped, had helped to choose the part of the panelling into which he was to be incongruously forced, frame and all. He presided over the dining-room, as an ancestor should, the new dining-room—which was also the old. For though it was the new dining-room in Corton's phrase, and in John Maple's the sham dining-room, everything had been done to make it the oldest dining-room in Sussex. When Hilda Maple told her guests that the picture dated with the room, and that the panelling built around it was

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

its contemporary, she was not strictly truthful. For whereas the panelling was of early 1918, Sir Harry (as I have established by deep research) was painted by a starving Frenchman in Soho as long a time back as 1893.

Anyhow, there he beamed over the Refectory table, the antique chairs and all the caboodle, with virile if somewhat vacuous determination in his contented eyes. It was men such as he, Aunt Hilda would explain to her guests, who made us what we are. And God have mercy upon us all! For we also are liars, my readers, yourselves not excepted.

Pray let my reader remember this also (if I may so burden her memory) that the Ancestor was but the last of Aunt Hilda's purchases—and she had outrun the constable.

The gentleman of Esthonian extraction, Mr. Curzon, had let the Ancestor go cheap—at thirty-seven times what he paid for him. But he had sold Aunt Hilda valuable expert advice, paneling and chairs as well, and tapestries which were not tapestries, and Jacobean silver of the last few years (with Hall Marks let in) and Elizabethan four-posters, Victorian on the carpenter's side, and even bibelots and fraudelquins; not to speak of franfreluches and negligeeables. And for a long time past Mr. Curzon, the Esthonian, had not been selling these to Aunt Hilda for cash, but for sundry promises of cash in time to come. And these bore interest. For of such is the Kingdom



*Progress of Sir Harry Murtenshaw, Knight, to his
ancestral home*

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

of the Esthonians—or, at any rate, of the Curzon sort.

* * * * *

I have digressed. I have been misled by the contemplation of Sir Harry Murtenshaw, Knight (from the brush of Holbein—with a Jacobean ruff and trunk hose).

Let me return to the adventures of John, and these shall be brief.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN had started with his little nest egg of £352, but it would not last for ever. He had had the wisdom to begin earning at once. He first took chance jobs at writing for next to nothing. Then he helped a friend to read proofs. Then he catalogued a library (extremely badly), but at any rate with a good knowledge of French and German—which was useful—at 30s. a week. Then he put in a short time, through the kindness of one of his father's friends, as assistant to the agent of an estate; but there he was paid no wages, the experience was held to be a sufficient reward, so that could not last. Then he spent a rather longer time, under an assumed name, in a curious little venture with a chance acquaintance of his, a man of the stage who had a tiny capital; it immediately dissipated in a cabaret show which failed. It was bad, but it would have failed even sooner had it been better.

At last, having earned in rather less than a year somewhat under two hundred pounds and having spent at least two hundred and fifty, he put in three splendid weeks at sea without wages, but lodged and fed and gaining time to think things over. He had come across the poor owner of a

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

small, old and ill-found ketch which traded with odd cargoes in and out of London River, pottering up the creeks of the East Coast, and sometimes standing across for the Hook or Ostend. John had a way with him, and persuaded this acquaintance to let him sign on for a round voyage across the North Sea and home by the East Coast ports, picking up chance loadings and making what she could for her owner: her Mate and Captain sharing. He was to grub with those officers in the after-cabin, under one of those many odd titles whereby they excuse a supernumerary on board. His presence delighted neither. He found the Old Man surly and the Mate hostile. Yet he enjoyed himself hugely; and there it was—of all places in the world!—that he discovered his talent and his earning power, for we each of us have a talent—a saleable talent, I mean—and happy is the man who discovers his while he is yet young.

The Mate and he were together in the cabin of that aged ketch during a long wait outside Harwich for the tide. The Old Man was smoking on deck watching for the turn. The Mate was more sour than ever that evening, jealous of such a super-cargo, with his white hands and gentleman's accent. Yet it was the Mate who, there and then, brought John his good fortune, as enemies often do. John Maple was standing by in the dark corner of the little stuffy place, lit only by a swinging oil lamp, with no sound but the dull plash of the shallow water outside, and in his exas-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

peration at something worse than usual which the Mate had just grumbled at him, he muttered to himself a word not polite, but said in such a low tone that he hoped it could provoke no quarrel. What it did provoke in the Mate was an attitude quite unexpected. That worthy looked up with a sudden startled air, and said in an awed tone, "What was that? Didn't you hear summat?" and with that he peered furtively askance into the darkness.

"What was that?" said John Maple, rather surlily, thinking he had been challenged.

"I 'eard a voice!" said the Mate in scared religious tones, and John, looking at him, saw that he had gone quite white.

Those of the Unseen Powers who were looking after John's affairs shot into his head the right thing to do, though he hardly knew why it was the right thing to do. He turned his face round again slowly away from the Mate, put his hand to his temple, to cover his features, and again gave that slight muttering; to be correct, it was the word "Swine!"

He heard something like a muffled shriek from the Mate:

"There it goes again! It said 'Mine,'" moaned the Mate, now glaring wide-eyed at the darkest corner of the cabin, where the reflector of the lamp threw a deep shadow behind its smoky light.

"Whose? Eh? 'ose? Am I 'is? What 's 'ee mean?" The Mate may have been drinking or

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

may have knocked off, which is worse still for the nerves. But there was no doubt as to his mistaking the direction of the slight sound which had terrified him.

John Maple had discovered in those five minutes how easy it was—for him at least, or in the right surroundings—to ventriloquise.

“I dursn’t hear it again,” whispered the Mate.

John Maple could not refuse to oblige, and he obliged for the third time. The Mate sprang up all tense and said, trembling, that he didn’t like it.

“What don’t you like?” said John Maple, pleasant and friendly, to show that the quarrel was forgotten.

“Voices,” said the Mate scratching the little swinging table with his nails nervously. “Don’t you ’ear nothin’?”

John Maple paused.

“Yes, I think I did,” he said slowly—which was true enough.

It was the First Episode, and a very slight one. It had no immediate sequel.

On the return voyage (they carried bricks) John Maple was again successful, not only in the cabin, but once at night on deck, when the Mate and he had gone forward together; and again, when he had helped to see whether there was any shifting in the hold (for a cargo of bricks can work wonders if it shifts), the Mate heard voices. This time the voices had something to say worth say-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

ing. They touched the Mate on his immortal soul, the immediate perils of life, and advanced a strong premonition of death. The Mate had fled up and aft, steadied himself with a glass, and sworn at the end of the ordeal by all the gods below London Bridge he would not sign on that vessel again.

The Old Man was not superstitious. He had many of the qualities of wood: not only its toughness, endurance and colour, but also its lack of sensibility. John wondered whether this new-found talent would work on the non-superstitious.

Well, it had not that fine "first night" success which the Mate had enjoyed; but it was beyond expectation all the same.

The Old Man heard very clearly a voice from his own bunk. He was on the other side of the cabin at the time, though, it is true, his attention had been directed to the couch. The voice, far off, ghostly in the darkness, reminded him of the day when he had so nearly drowned (through no fault of his own, but rather of Islington port), and warned him of approaching trials. Had the Old Man remembered to whom he had lately recounted that drowning episode (the only adventure of his life) he might have had suspicions. As it was, he had none, for he told the story so often that he could not remember who last had heard it. All he knew now was that a whisper from the other world—from A Spirit that knew his past—had bidden him remember and beware. It affected him damnably.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

His face did not go as white as the Mate's had done, for it started with a handicap of fixed mahogany, but it was changed when he looked round at John and asked him, as the Mate had asked him, those few days before, whether he had heard anything; and once more John truthfully said he had. Then the Old Man asked him point-blank whether he minded—as after all, he had done him the favour of taking him aboard, and he was only a young chap—whether he minded sleeping in his, the Captain's, bunk that night, and giving him his own bunk. And John had accepted with all the goodwill in the world. He even said it was an honour.

When John Maple landed from his short but memorable and very happy cruise (for he had loved the sea, though it was his first experience of it), he had no idea that there was a living in the talent he had discovered—if talent it were. At first he only thought it amusing that by suggesting to another person where a voice was likely to come from, and then keeping one's features still and talking within one's mouth, one could make the voice seem to come from out of nothingness. Then when he tried it on with chance Bohemian friends in London he found that not everybody could do it as well as he: and most of his friends could not do it at all. Then came the day when Percy Spegel (so he chose to spell his name for the moment), hearing him practising the trick during a little supper at the *Lord Milner* in

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Puffin Lane, watched him with fixed eyes, wherein any expert demon might have discovered avarice, tenacity, fraud, and other varied characters consonant with his enormous tie-pin.

Percy Spegel appealed to his constant parasite, whether John Maple had not a marvellous talent? To which the parasite agreed. Whether it was not a pity that such talent should be wholly untrained? To which the parasite also agreed. Whether it would not be a dreadfully expensive thing to train that talent? To which the parasite abundantly agreed. Whether he would not probably be a loser if he attempted to put John Maple on the Halls? To which the parasite said, he certainly would be. Whether one was not foolish, out of mere enthusiasm, to risk such loss? Which the parasite said was only what one would expect of a good fellow like Percy.

The upshot of it was that John Maple found himself prepared to sign a contract of a sort he had never seen before, but familiar enough to those who live and die by the Halls, wherein he was to earn nothing for so long—a short period enough—and after that what looked like a very large sum every week.

John Maple knew nothing of what the outgoings of this profession are, or of its temptations. He very luckily accepted, and that was why his first steady employment—about a year after his return to England from his father's death-bed—was in the singular capacity of Lieutenant Allegri,



John Maple as Lieutenant Allegri

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

the world-famed ventriloquist. But such is the gulf between the two worlds that no one among the rich whom he saw at his leisure had an idea of the escapade; and no one among the Bohemians had an idea of his acquaintance with the rich. He had fewer nights in which he could go out, but he did go out sufficiently. He kept his contract free; he would not be bullied: and he was so good that he could make his own terms and times.

The truth is, that if John Maple had been what young men of family in this situation never are, and that is, devoted to his one talent, he might have become rich. There are small fortunes made in these things. He might have bought back Rackham after God knows how many years, if he had cut himself right away from everything but slaving, and forgotten every name but his own false one on the Halls.

It was after a very short time as Lieutenant Allegri that he bought for his own pleasure a couple of dogs and trained them to do tricks. Then he had added to their number and taught them more tricks. Then (since he now knew the trade) he determined to change over, and in spite of Spegel's passionate appeals to heaven, he convinced that expert, who knew human nature if he knew nothing else, that he must take his choice between losing his own profit, which was considerable, or accepting John Maple in the future as

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Don Herado de Madero and his Troupe of Performing Dogs.

It was not as good as the ventriloquist show, but it drew better, for the public is fond of dogs, and Spegel had put it about that it was all done by kindness, not to say coddling: and the little brutes certainly looked very happy as they ran about wagging their tails and doing things which proved them wholly indifferent to pomposity. They barked also, most winningly, to order, and grinned in the most endearing fashion.

There, then, was John Maple's singular situation at the moment when, in that other life of his, he and Bo had met and made certain one of the other. He had told her secretly of his profession; and he had given her useful tips about Lovey-Lad, for he had become an expert upon dogs. That Lovey-Lad had recognised in him a mysterious Master of Hounds raised him enormously in Bo's eyes. It is to be believed that one of Don Herado's troupe met Lovey-Lad in the park and had loyally exalted the powers of his lord. For certainly John was the only male human being to whom Lovey-Lad deferred; and Lovey-Lad was the only being on earth whose opinion Bo respected.

* * * * *

But why had Aunt Hilda taken all this enormous trouble about the Catchings? Why the

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

new beam let into the ceiling, adzed, blackened and chipped and dated 1487? Why the Ancestor? Why the panelling? Why the antique chairs? Why the heraldic animals? Why anything? Why, why the new family ghost? It's true *that* cost nothing, but the more solid stuff cost a great deal. Why all this expenditure?

Had John Maple known more of the world, and wholly lost his innocence, he could have answered, as you and I can answer, that there are only two explanations of such feverish changes, when an old house is pulled about and made vulgar. Either the Vandal has more money to spend than she knows what to do with, or the Goth is embarrassed. Either the barbaric hand is filled with the ruining gold, or the savage heart is tortured by perpetual demands for payment from creditors and is salting for a sale.

Either Aunt Hilda was spending money wantonly, or she was desperate for money.

Well, it was the latter. Aunt Hilda was up to the neck in worry. She didn't know which way to turn.

When people change and rechange, and pull down and destroy and theatricalise, you can tell which of the two motives is at work by a simple test. If they act spasmodically, first putting this up and then taking it down, changing an ornament from one place to another, pulling out a wall and then regretting it and putting it back, they have too much money. If they pursue one plan,

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

continuously, and load it with detail they are fighting debt.

Aunt Hilda was fighting debt.

Aunt Hilda was making a new Rackham and a new Catchings for the sake of some purchaser heaven might send her. For Aunt Hilda must find a purchaser or burst. And that was the truth.

William Maple, that careful business man, had left things in order when he died. He had added appreciably to the value of the house and the estate. He had allowed his wife to cover the brick part of the front with a false veneer of half-timber because that at least gave it uniformity with the older part; and he had allowed the new fake to be toned down artificially so as to marry with the old. That also seemed reasonable. More he had not allowed. But Hilda Maple, even before his death, was already talking to her occasional guests about the antiquity of the place, and what wonders would be revealed when all the old wood could be uncovered and the later work which hid it could be taken away.

Her husband had not been dead two months when, in spite of all the difficulties in getting work done during those last days of the war, Aunt Hilda lashed out. Even then—my reader will remember, if she is old enough—people with a pull could get things done. It was the moment when one of the most luxurious of the new houses near the south coast in Kent was being built by a politician. The difficulties of life were not with the rich in

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

those spring days of 1918, and though Hilda Maple was not in the heart of that old gentry which had once governed England, she was already close in touch with some of the new vulgarians who were now beginning to govern England. Her friendship with Amatheia de Beau-rivage alone was enough to get her the necessary labour. It was enormously expensive, of course, but she was full of her new fortune, and she began to tear down the structure of the house within, and to ornament, and to build.

At the same time she did another thing, not unusual in women suddenly possessed of capital, still less unusual in times when all values are jumping up and down like the little ball in the circle of the roulette. She gambled.

But Hilda Maple, like thousands of others in those days, was gambling against the politicians, the peace-makers, the bankers, and the international spouters of the millennium. They could see what was in the game, for they held and stacked the cards. She—and the thousands of others—could only see the backs of those cards.

There had come a moment—and that in a few months—when all was lost and she had nothing to fall back on but Rackham itself, and Rackham she must sell. Perhaps when she had spoken to her dying brother-in-law she had honestly intended not to sell; but necessity knows no law, and she excused herself to herself by the memory of what she had told him; that she had a legal

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

right to sell. But the selling of a house, like the selling of a boat or the selling of one's own soul, depends on external effects. We "go on our clothes," as a great American Leader of Modern Thought has said. A boat sells on its paint and its brasswork. A house sells by what furniture and faked wood and "period" front it can show.

Rackham might barely fetch its £20,000, for its own true worth; but let it become Rackham Catchings and be varnished and vulgarised enough (not that Hilda Maple thought it vulgarised—she thought it vastly ennobled) and there was no knowing what it might fetch—especially from the right kind of purchaser in these extraordinary times, when men stepped out of the gutter on New Year's Day and were in the House of Lords before Christmas.

Therefore it was that Aunt Hilda had gone on building, pulling down, ageing new wood, owing increasing sums for expert advice and goods from the antique dealers, and in general playing the devil with Rackham.

She had got the house into the illustrated papers three times already; first under "Our Elizabethan Heritage"; then under "The Quiet Homes of England," and then under "Minor Great English Houses, No. 51: Rackham." She herself had haggled a little over the "Minor." But there she was wrong; they ought to have haggled over the "Great."

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Aunt Hilda was not without commercial sense. She had on the occasion of the last photographing purchased two peacocks and chivvied them on to the lawn before the people from London snapped the front. She had even borrowed from one of her few really important friends an enormous photograph of a Royalty, in a vast silver frame leaning backwards, which she draped and propped up on a little table, to go nicely into the picture of the boudoir—little knowing that the word boudoir had long sunk out of use. But if it comes to that, each of us is out of fashion to others. Our English society has divided into something like those moving ways at the old Paris Exhibition of 1889: one stream is moving at one pace, one at another; and there still survive gentlefolk who say “napkin,” side by side with those masters of our modern world who say “serviette.”

Let me leave the boudoir and the photographs and all the rest of it and get back to the Debt.

Aunt Hilda was embarrassed. Damnably! Hence the purchases in London; hence the antiques; hence the Ancestor. That activity of hers which had intrigued poor John Maple was plain enough. He would have been less angry with his aunt had he known the causes of her perpetual extravagances.

If you desire to know the amount of Aunt Hilda's embarrassment, I can tell it you simply enough. It was, at the moment when she was

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

adding her last efforts to Rackham, £17,000—and a little more. She had the cunning common to those who lose money—and make it. She picked up ideas on sharp dealing by listening to conversation around her. She had learnt the tricks of the share-shufflers. Therefore she had continued recklessly. Money was never made to-day by work or saving. The bigger the overdrafts the better, and loans raised in Jermyn Street were quicker and handier than mortgages. She would make Rackham Catchings glorious in the eyes of possible purchasers—Jew, Rastaquouère, new War Lord, Yankee millionaire—anybody. Then she could sell it, untrammelled, for three times its worth and five times what she had spent on it. The money-lenders would get back their loans and interest. There would still be a large balance over, and with that balance she could buy herself a sufficient annuity to live the life she desired. But she must act quickly. Interest mounted up and heavy pressure had begun.

It is unfortunately true that men pursuing various trades will conceal their activities under various names. The Esthonian gentleman, Mr. Curzon, who had sold Aunt Hilda her Ancestor and so much more, had already (as plain Charles Blunt of Bristol) advanced her money on note of hand, and as Mr. de Vere of Jermyn Street advanced her more money to satisfy the clamourings of plain Charles Blunt. Now Mr. de Vere of

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Jermyn Street was beginning to press. But she would sell Rackham and all would be well.

Such is the heart of woman that she told herself all this was quite fair to John. He would be her heir—the fact that she would have nothing to leave him did not alter that. She had made him an honourable offer to send him to Oxford, and he had refused. She was perpetually asking him down to Rackham, and wasn't that kind of her? Indeed, he did not come half enough. Well, perhaps John was too proud. She respected him for that. It was the Maple blood—Aunt Hilda by this time had come to believe that she herself was a Maple.

So there it was. Aunt Hilda with the hot breath of the pursuer on her neck; John hating these insane renovations and gewgaws; the purchasers advancing with open mouths and simple smiles.

For purchasers Aunt Hilda had—or believed she had. And in these her faith held fast.

I have told how dear a friend she had become of Amatheia Lady Mere de Beurivage, and of her husband, late Sir George Huggins; and now there was something even warmer in her heart (and certainly something warmer in his) for that first-rate man of business, Lord Hellup. To neither, she believed, would Rackham be indifferent now that it had the Catchings. And as competition is the soul of commerce, she hoped for sixty—she made certain of fifty—thousand pounds, from the one or from the other. Even fifty thousand, for

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

what was, at the most, a twenty thousand pound proposition, was Good Business.

* * * * *

Meanwhile John Maple was pegging away, irregularly but lucratively, with the performing dogs for a livelihood, and with an increasing circle of rich friends for a life.

He had three names. He was John Maple in that world of the people who do nothing and have pale love affairs and go their weary round of the Riviera and the Country Houses and all know each other by their Christian names. He was Don Herado de Madero on the Halls. He was Henry Pelton—a name like any other—for his Bohemian world, including Spegel. One might have thought that it would be worth Spegel's while to track him down and find what he did in the big gaps which he left in his engagements; and so it would have been worth Spegel's while. Later on there might have been blackmail, and blackmail is a staple of the Spegels. Yet Spegel did not take the trouble, simply because he accepted too facile an explanation of John Maple's absences and disappearances.

His judgment was that the Pelton whom he knew, the Herado de Madero of the Dogs, suffered from quite incurable drinking bouts. His experience of quite incurable drinking bouts—it was extensive, for it covered about half the people

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

he had exploited in his wicked little life—was that they must be left alone. So when Don Herado (or Pelton) told him that the dogs would not appear next week; that he must cut out next Friday; or that Saturday and Monday were washed, Spegel made all his arrangements accordingly. For Pelton was a great asset, however irregular. Old ladies who still vote Tory will tell me, no doubt, that John Maple was thus necessary on the Halls at his own terms because “blood tells”—the blood of the original cattle-dealer and smith. Their twin brethren who make money as Labour leaders in the House of Commons will say, on the platform at least, that John Maple was privileged and favoured because he had gentle blood—the blood, again, of the smith and cattle-dealer. But I say that he could do what he liked, cut out days, shift engagements and live in two worlds because he had talent, and because on the top of that he was determined to have his own way. Also because Spegel only cared for money, and because people who only care for money will give any amount of rope to those whose genius they can tap.

Here, then, was John Maple these few years after the war, making good in his curious way; earning much more than he spent, leading two lives, proud, and possessing already a solid balance at the bank, firmly affianced in soul to a great heiress who had as firmly affianced him, and

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

neither of the children really appreciating where money came into such affairs.

In John Maple's mind, more prominent even than Bo, stood dominating and overwhelming a figure—the figure of Twenty Thousand Pounds—the Lump that would redeem Rackham. In the mind of Bo there stood John Maple. Anyone might have told these two children that all was at sixes and sevens with their lives. On which account, the wise, might foretell that these two lovers would win, and that the enormous incongruities of their lives would be triumphantly reconciled.

CHAPTER V

AT this very unfinished phase in John Maple's affairs, with none of the slats joined and no apparent possibility of making things fit in, but with a very successful prospect in the only thing that matters to a boy of his age, and a double talent and the chance of using it, there came yet another of those invitations to Aunt Hilda's. He had been there quite often enough at week-ends during the last year, and it had been impossible to hide from her that he was earning his living in some obscure fashion upon the minor stage. Though no one else in her world knew it. She had shuddered, and refused to hear any details. He would get over this craze of independence, and anyhow, he was her nephew, and he knew everybody and he could behave himself.

She told him to come down on the Friday if he could. He let Spegel know his wish, for Spegel needed him more than he needed Spegel. So he made it the Friday. But first he appointed to meet Bo and talk it over, because he had been told that Lord Hellup was going to Rackham Catchings.

They met in her club, where they might talk in peace.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"Bo, you're going down with your father to Rackham again, and this time I'm to be there."

"Sure," said Bo, stroking Lovey-Lad's head with an intense affection and gazing into his eyes.

"Did they tell you?"

"Yup," said the beautiful girl.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Didn't see you; didn't want to; didn't have to," was the sufficient reply.

"I'm not complaining; only you see, I should have been startled if I had got to Rackham and found you there and not known."

"I was looking for that startle," said Bo.

"Yes," said John, rather masterfully, "but you've got to think of me. She doesn't know that I know you or your father."

"She will," said Bo simply. "He tells her everything."

"I go the day before you," said John.

She nodded. He pulled his aunt's letter out of his pocket.

"Look here, Bo, who's this other person—this Amatheia she speaks of? D'you know her?"

"Nix," said the young lady simply.

"Same here," answered her lover.

"We pass," Bo concluded, and sighed.

"Well, she's to be there, and her husband—God knows who. And there's Lord Hambourne—I think that's all. I know all about *him*. He was the psychology expert during the war. He's a don at Oxford."

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Bo put both her elbows on the table, in the corner where they sat apart, framed her large face in her hands, and gazed largely on her lover. Then recollection came into her eyes.

"Amathea?" she said. "That's old Mother Bruvvish."

"What?" answered John. "Do you mean to tell me that Aunt Hilda has fallen to that?"

Bo nodded.

"That's her," she said. "I remember now. She's the only Amathea in London. She's gotten a sausage neck."

"What on earth makes it worth their while to go to Rackham for?" said he.

"They're hunting," said she.

"Who's hunting?"

"Mother Bruvvish and Pop are: both hunting."

"Hunting what?" asked John, a little startled.

"Not Aunt Hilda?"

Bo's mouth became more quizzical.

"One of them is," she said, "but they're both hunting. Leastways, one's fishing."

"Fishing for what?" said John Maple again, a little tired.

"Fishing for Rackham, that's Amathea," said Bo, dropping her voice and leaning backwards.

"Good God!" said John.

"You're right," said Bo. "Appeal to Him. Call on Him. He might hear."

John's face was crossed by a look of pain, and Bo responded at once.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"It's up to you, Dog-Man," she said.

"What's up to me?" asked the Dog-Man.

"The bluff," said Bo, nodding. "It's not a mammoth bluff, neither."

"What bluff?" said John.

Bo grew impatient.

"Why, you cough in with your third offer," she said. "You know you're famished for the place."

"Bo," said John, too seriously, and almost tragically, "I had meant to save every penny, to work myself old, and then to go to Aunt Hilda with the money. When you tell me that your father and Old Huggins are after it . . ."

Bo held up her finger.

"Get it right, boy," she said. "Pop's not crazy for the house, but he'll be guided. D'you get me?"

"No," said John Maple bluntly, "I don't."

Bo sighed at the obtuseness of men: but it was a safeguard (she thought) all the same, so she went on patiently and contentedly:

"The Proud Dame of Rackham can obtain of the Baron, my father, what boon she craves, fond youth. He'd refuse her nothing, wouldn't Pop. Wait till you see him with her. 'Sides which, he's told me."

"Good God!" said John again, but more emphatically and with troubled wonder.

"Don't pray too much the same," commented the Damsel, "it takes the pep out." And she looked at him benignly and in quiet triumph.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

John's head whirled. Things were coming altogether too quickly. And how could Bo already know such things when he, the son of the house, had noticed nothing? It offended his pride.

But if John were wise he would rejoice to learn so early in life what most men learn too late: that women know the secret workings of the mind; that men do not; that women are the informants of men, and that the wisest men are those who learn through women.

"And what does Aunt Hilda say about it?" was John's next question when he had recovered from his shock.

"Not much yet," said Bo. "Pop's shy. He's not said anything. But he will, and if he finds that buying the place at her price is a persuasive, why, he won't look twice at her figure; I mean her demand, her estimate. Though I guess it's hell-high."

A cataract of consequences was pouring before John Maple's mind. Aunt Hilda as a mother-in-law was a formidable prospect. But then—a consoling recollection—Bo could stand up to six mothers-in-law of her weight. . . . But if Lord Hellup nourished such plans of belated re-mating, that would mean his living at Rackham. . . . No. . . . Perhaps Aunt Hilda would angle for the money first—and get it. Even so Lord Hellup was in the market, and how could he, John, compete with a man so wealthy and in

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

such a mood? If the other millionaire was after it the thing was hopeless.

"You're sure the Huggins' are after it, Bo?" he said at length.

"*She* is. Lady Mere de Beurivage is—Amatheia is. She doesn't hide it. She's talked of it all around. That's how Aunt Hilda knows."

"Well, then," said poor John, "it's all up. The price will go to anything if they're both after it, and I'm down and out," and he leant back in despair.

Bo smiled at him serenely.

"You've got to be after it too," she said. "Name your price."

"Do you mean . . ." John began incredulously, with a rising anger in him, "that you are offering me . . . ?" He remembered—for the first time in weeks—the fortune her mother had left her.

"Nope," answered Bo imperturbably. "I'm not offering any damn thing. You're offering, Jacko."

"But I've nothing," said John.

Bo sighed wearily.

"I'll tell the world," she said, "that you're Dumb Dora's little brother. Books buy before they sell. But this dazzling boy sells before he buys. Leastways, Isabeau Hellup does. Yes."

"I don't understand," said John.

"So?" cooed Bo sympathetically. "Well, now, catch this: Buy with the money you've got, if

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

you've got it, and you have to do without your money. But buy *without* money, and there's no expense at all. All good. D'ye get me? What's the Catchings worth?"

"For heaven's sake, Bo," he exploded, "don't call Rackham 'the Catchings!' . . . I don't know what Rackham's worth now they've spoilt it, and I don't care. I shall pay twenty thousand when I've got twenty thousand; that's the very most conceivable that anyone can say I owe Aunt Hilda—or rather my Uncle William, her dead husband—and I've a right to Rackham for ever when I've paid that back. I'll pay that, and not a penny more—when I've got it. . . . God knows when—but when I've got it. . . ."

"You've got it now, boy," said Bo.

"You mean . . . ?" said John, frowning, suspicious again that she was hinting at helping him.

"Naw, I don't. I don't mean me and I don't mean Pop. I mean that any man that got Rackham Catchings—beg pardon, Rackham—for £20,000, has got all that and perhaps £10,000 more, perhaps another twenty more thousand. Got it in his lill' wallet." And then did Bo with hereditary talent explain to this child of an English squire how purchase is made without money, and how in the modern world we buy not with what we have but with the folly or the error or the precipitation of others. If he got his aunt to accept £20,000 for the house in Sussex, and if the option was firm, and in writing, not even the cau-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

tion of the most cautious lawyer would boggle at finding the £20,000 for him on such security.

“But she won’t fall for it,” went on Bo, shaking her head. “We’re all fools, and Aunt Hilda’s a large one; but not that out-size. No, *boy!* That kind’s got to be made to contract.”

John saw daylight.

“I shall offer Aunt Hilda £20,000,” he said firmly, “and somehow or other I’ll see that she gets it—and not a penny more. And I’ll see that I get Rackham when that’s done.”

“Bold Babe,” said Bo gently. “Don’t I wish I could bite off a bit of the under-write!”

But John knew nothing of such jargon.

Then did that businesslike young person get up without a word, go across to the writing-table and come back with a wad of large blank paper, an ink-pot and a pen.

“It isn’t headed,” she said—she thought of everything. Then she began to write and murmured the words for his enlightenment.

“THE HOTEL SPLENDIDE.

“That’s where you’re writing from, Jacko. You’re getting on.

‘DEAR AUNT HILDA,

‘We have often spoken of this matter and I am afraid it wounds you . . .’ (It does wound her, doesn’t it, Jacko? Poor old thing then!) ‘I’m afraid it wounds you. But you know my own feeling and I cannot be silent further upon the

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

matter. That is why I write this. I want to get it down in black-and-white. You know, when I first offered you £20,000 for Rackham you only laughed at me.' She did, didn't she, Dog-Man?"

"I should rather have called it Scorn than laughter," said the Master of six Hounds. "Hot, withering scorn. She said I hadn't got twenty-thousand pence."

"That's a lie, anyway," answered Bo. "Why, the ring you gave me was worth more'n that." She made a rapid calculation of the pounds in twenty thousand pence on the blotter and then shook her head. "No, not a quarter. Anyway, you're worth more than twenty thousand pence, Jacko?"

He nodded.

"But no £20,000 yet awhile. No matter. On with the dance. Let joy be unconfined," and she continued writing.

"I now make you a firm offer of £20,000 for Rackham. Ten per cent. on acceptance, the balance on completion; or alternatively an immediate three months' bill for same on signing enclosed.

"Your affectionate nephew."

She looked up triumphantly.

"That's what's called the Covering Letter, Jacko."

John Maple gazed at her in awe.

"At your age!" he said.

"It's all straight, Jacko. I got it out of a book

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

—oh, I forgot—” and she wrote the word “Enclosure” on the top left-hand corner of the document, “and it’s best,” she added, “to get a little star of red paper, gummed, with the word ‘Enclosure’ and stick it outside the envelope. They all do it.”

John Maple’s awe increased.

“Now for that enclosure, Jacko. Oh! It’s dead easy!”

She wrote on another sheet, again murmuring her words:

“MY DEAR JOHN,

“I have your letter. After full consideration of your offer of £20,000 for Rackham I have decided to accept it and hereby do so.

“Your affectionate Aunt.”

“Then, Jacko, she shall sign on the dotted line.”

“Bo,” said John Maple honestly, “I’m frightened of you.”

“Which is as should be. Now, Jacko, you take these papers, and when you get out go straight down and get ’em in triplicate and mail the top copy to Aunt Hilda—with the enclosure. Keep the two others. She’ll get that letter and that enclosure before you reach there. She’ll get it first mail tomorrow—and then you can take her first reactions. It’s always useful. We come in the next day; and then the plot thickens. Will you obey, Dog-Man?”

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"Oh, yes," said John Maple in a whirl, "I'll do what I'm told, but why should Aunt Hilda accept?—with all that other money before her?"

Isabeau Hellup leant back in her chair gazing away from the papers before her through the club window at the park with folded hands. Her face had changed and taken on religion.

"I hope the Almighty won't be hard on me," she sighed. "Rackham's yours morally, isn't it, Jack?"

"Yes," answered John Maple doggedly.

"Then I guess I'm doing right—we're doing right, I mean. . . . You remember when you told me you'd acted the ventriloquist? You remember how you made the chimney talk that night at the Bakehams'?"

"Yes," said John.

Bo leant forward and spoke in a lower voice.

"You remember Aunt Hilda wanting a ghost at Rackham, and how you told me and how angry you were? This winter? Just after you'd left her?"

"Yes," said John, "I can't bear to think of it."

Bo lowered her voice almost to a whisper.

"*We'll haunt 'em!*" she said to him. "We'll haunt 'em good and hard—and *then*, Jacko," she leant back again with a conquering smile on her face, "*then* Rackham's yours for the asking."

"I don't understand," he said.

"You will," she nodded.

She looked at the watch on her wrist, which

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

was of a most extraordinary shape, six-sided and set round with an enormous number of very small diamonds; its dial also was far too small. She rose with abruptness and tugged Lovey-Lad to his feet. They went out together.

"Well, Jacko," she said by way of delicate leavetaking in the street, "we meet again in the Khyber Pass." It was a phrase she had learned from a book. She did not know that it dated. And off she sailed.

As for John Maple, he did just what he was told. He went to the Splendide. He begged a wad of their paper. He dictated both documents to the goddess of that roof who transcribes upon her typewriter the correspondence of guests. He signed the letter and posted it with its enclosure to Aunt Hilda. That was the Thursday. On the morrow afternoon he was due to go down to Sussex. But Aunt Hilda would already have had his letter before he came. She would get it by the first post.

He would have time "to take her reactions" before the morrow should bring the three lords, the two millionaires and the light of his own eyes to what he was more than ever determined should be their home.

Of Lord Hambourne John did know something, for one of his boyhood's English friends whom he had made in Switzerland and who had gone to Oriel was always laughing at him. It seemed that they called him "Hambone"—not

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

a very subtle jest, but sufficient for a victim of that calibre. It also seemed that they did not like him. They thought he was a cad. They thought he spied upon them. His stammer they forgave, for that went with his profession. But what they did not forgive were sundry paragraphs in the Yellow Press of London concerning the university, which came—as they had got to know in a round-about manner—from that distinguished professor. They were not fond of his charlatanism either. There is charlatanism and charlatanism; and a Professorship of Psychology was more than the ingenuous undergraduate soul could stomach. The youth of Oxford suspected that it was impossible to profess Psychology—it was enormously right. They did not know that even in that department of humbug Lord Hambourne had not read a tithe of what his continental colleagues would have read. But they had a vague feeling that there was something wrong. And there was: as there is with the history, the philosophy, and a good many other things connected with that ancient seat of learning.

He puzzled a little over why Aunt Hilda should have asked so poor a man for that decisive week-end. But Bo could have told him. Aunt Hilda had two reasons. First, a lord was a lord, and lords more lordly are not easily lured to such houses as Rackham. Next, Lord Hambourne had lineage—of a sort—and the other lords would be impressed.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

And who was Lord Mere de Beurivage? John Maple, in the ignorance and folly of youth, had jumped—as youth in its ignorance and folly does jump—to absurd conclusions. He had got his distorted picture from the conversations of others almost as young as himself. How different it was from the truth my reader shall soon learn. John had a vulgar foolish caricature in his mind of innumerable new peers shamelessly forcing themselves into their rank by bribery during the end of the war. There are none such. It is an illusion. John saw, in that imaginary host of vulgarians one vulgarian in no way distinguished from the rest called “Old Bruvvish.” He was wildly wrong. George, First Baron Mere de Beurivage (pronounced “Bruvvish”) was unique.

John had heard just enough gossip to have told you that remarkable man’s family name before his elevation to the peerage, or barony—if you will. It was, as we have heard, Huggins. No doubt John Maple, proud of his three or four generations of declining squire’s wealth (himself, remember, sprung from the cattle-dealer) would have sneered at the origins of George Adolphus Huggins, First Baron Mere de Beurivage—and that, I think, is a very good example of how little men know themselves and their antecedents. For George Adolphus Huggins, as my reader will learn in a moment, well merited the great position which he had taken step by step with a few

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

hundreds of others in the social leadership of Britain.

From first feeling of Rackham as an ideal Lady de Beurivage had come to dwell on it as it was in real bricks and timber. She heard rumours that Hilda might conceivably sell—but Hilda had seen that those rumours should be mixed with accounts of her passionate attachments to the place and her reluctance to leave it. And Hilda had heard rumours that Amatheia was in the market. She had not laboured in vain—but time pressed.

Anyhow, John was in for it. He was to go down to Rackham that week-end, and he was to meet with what I suppose I may call, for the purposes of my narrative, The Three Peers.

(They were all Barons, by the way. Since the American invasion even English gentlemen have begun to distinguish between Barons, Earls, Viscounts and Marquesses. They always did distinguish Dukes: but to return to my black sheep.)

The Three Peers . . . Lord Hellup was, after all, Bo's father, and what's more, he had snap. John both admired and got on with him—in spite of too much quotation from Motley's *Dutch Republic*, which that well-read man perpetually carried in his pocket in a cheap edition, now one volume, now another, feasting his mind upon the heroic conduct of commercial men in their resistance to mere soldiers.

Lord Hambourne he knew all about at second-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

hand. Lord Mere de Beurivage, as I have said, he misjudged. But after all, the boy was less to blame than those who had taught him this disrespectful way of regarding so great a man.

Well, he would play up to them all.

But it is time that I dissipated in my reader's mind John's misapprehension of Lord Mere de Beurivage, and, if she will excuse me, I will now proceed to give her a true estimate of that considerable English peer.

CHAPTER VI

GEORGE ADOLPHUS HUGGINS was born in a small street off the Old Kent Road early in the 60's of the last century. His first introduction to commercial life was made at the age of twelve as assistant to his father Jack, or, as one tradition has it, Jim Huggins, who sold fruit and vegetables from a barrow in that neighbourhood.

Upon the early demise of both his parents young Mr. Huggins took over the business, which remained undeveloped to close upon his fortieth year. Long before that he had married Matilda, or, as she was later called, Amatheia, the daughter of another gentleman and lady in the same branch of commerce: a strong, full-bodied, up-standing young woman of whom he was very proud, and whose advice in all matters not connected with barter and exchange he was ready to follow. They were contented enough with their lot, suffered no more than the average number of conflicts with their neighbours, and but rarely allowed these to develop into physical violence.

So late, therefore, as the beginning of King Edward's reign there was nothing to distinguish the genius of George Adolphus Huggins. He seemed to be but one costermonger among so

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

many in the great business life of London. But shortly after the end of the Boer War and King Edward's Coronation appeared those manifestations of the exceptional power which is latent in every great man, and is bound to express itself at last, however tardily.

Mr. Huggins, having been chosen for unpaid secretary of a Goose Club which enjoyed a large membership, found himself in the decline of the year 1902 possessed of a very considerable capital in trust. Indeed, it was far more than all his own stock-in-trade was worth, and it is a great tribute to his sterling qualities that he should have been entrusted thus by his neighbours with so responsible a task.

Rightly judging that it was imprudent to keep so much money loose, he took the advice of a friend somewhat superior in social position, a pawnbroker from Kipling Street (late Nelson Street), and through his introduction deposited the money in a bank until that expenditure or division among the members of the club—known in the Old Kent Road as “shareout”—should fall due at Christmas.

At this point took place an episode on which I have found it very difficult to get exact information, for there are contradictory versions.

There is no doubt that the account at the bank had been opened in the joint names of Mr. Huggins himself and his friend, Mr. Lawson, the pawnbroker of the neighbourhood. Mr. Lawson

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

for many years complained in his own circle that he had been defrauded, nor did the complaints cease until some arrangement was made by the lawyers of Sir George Huggins (as he had then become) long after the date of the transaction I am about to describe. We have Mr. Lawson's own vigorous and repeated statement that it was by his advice the speculation was made, as how could that poor fellow Huggins have known anything about it? While he, Lawson, had had the tip straight from his cousin, who was clerk in a broker's office and had obtained early inside information upon the approaching amalgamation of Paley's Brewery with Gatton's.

Lord Mere de Beurivage never spoke of the incident, to my knowledge, save, of course, in privacy to his solicitors; so I have no opportunity for testing Mr. Lawson's version of the affair; but his friends assure me *he* originated the investment, acting upon the very honourable motive of adding to the sum he held in trust, and not letting the money of his neighbours lie idle.

At any rate, the order to purchase Paley's Ordinary must have been given out in both names. What probably happened was that, in the absence of Mr. Lawson, Mr. Huggins' order to sell was taken by the bank; at any rate, the very considerable profit was, I am again assured by Lord Mere de Beurivage's friends, equitably divided; and probably Mr. Lawson's grievance lay in the fact

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

that further transactions, in which he had no share, were undertaken in Mr. Huggins' own name.

These further transactions were of a very simple sort. Indeed, high financial talent is often best seen in the simplicity of its operations. Mr. Huggins began by repaying in full to the account the original money due to the members of the Goose Club, which sum was therefore duly divided and accounted for at the Sacred Season of Peace and Goodwill to everybody's satisfaction.

Meanwhile the remaining profit of £150 Mr. Huggins drew out in cash, closing his account with the bank, which had indeed always troubled him a little, as being something mysterious, and at the same time putting himself a little too much into the power of the other man.

The surplus cash thus available he put upon a winner called Winsome Winnie. Not that he had received any information about the powers of the animal, but because that very phrase had been attached as a pet name to his only child, a little daughter who had died some years before. That the odds were 50 to 1 did not alarm this daring spirit. He divided the proceeds; keeping two-thirds of them, and losing the remaining third upon yet another horse, the name of which I have not been able to trace. Disgusted with the turf by this reverse of fortune, Mr. Huggins, after some hesitation, simply kept the sum of money now at his disposal. It was just under five thousand pounds, and he kept it in the large bank-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

notes of the bookie, under the lid of a rather battered little japanned box, carefully locked, though inspected with his own eyes from three to five times every day.

It was impossible that some rumour of his good fortune should not have spread. He was privately visited by more than one neighbour with pressing requests for a loan, even at considerable interest; and as he had every opportunity for judging the prospects of the barrows in his row, he could, and did, lend with judgment. The loans were at short term, usually of a week, at the most of a fortnight, and calculated at a penny in the shilling for each seven days; or, as a special accommodation for larger customers, a shilling in the pound.

He extended his operations. He became the Providence of Barrow-men in South-East London, and soon extended his activities to shop-keepers.

Mr. Huggins had the supreme gift of discretion. Each operator was left under the impression that the loan had been made to him as a special favour, though it was certainly remarked that the lender's circle of acquaintance was rapidly extending, and that he had many callers at his house after business hours, especially of a Saturday. He was wise enough to make no display, as his wealth increased, and it was greatly to the credit of his wife Matilda (or Amatheia, as she was soon to be) that she added little to her *parure*,

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

though she could not resist one particularly fine ostrich feather which she had seen in the shop of a neighbour, Mrs. Carey, who took in, mended, cleaned, turned, and otherwise served, the ladies of her neighbourhood. The transaction was the more tempting, as Mrs. Huggins had kindly helped Mrs. Carey upon more than one occasion and could, therefore, demand a special price.

The profession of private banking upon which George Huggins was now fairly launched is a lucrative one so long as it is confined to a certain scale. After that, it not only needs a particular *clientéle*, with offices in the West End and a considerable organisation, but involves grave risks and a special knowledge of the wealthy world—especially its younger members. It further requires a public licence, and is hardly ever conducted without occasional appearances in court. The financier was wise, therefore, to abandon those direct methods. He spent a few weeks in settling his affairs, concluding every transaction with great tenacity and vigour, still maintaining his own barrow as though nothing were to happen.

Feigning illness (a legitimate ruse), he put in a caretaker, and finally sold the humble barrow-stall which had been the foundation of his fortune and the good-will of a still sufficient trade in vegetables and fruit. Shortly afterwards his wife and he took a small villa in the northern suburbs, where he would be free from interruption by any former friends. There, dressed in the style re-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

quired by the new state of life to which it had pleased God to call them, George and Matilda Huggins acquired a solid circle of new acquaintances, including the Reverend Percy Hay, the local clergyman. For they were now members of the Established Church and regular in their attendance.

George Huggins took the train for the City every week-day morning, returning rather earlier in the evening than most of his colleagues. He had at first no office. Later, after many discreet inquiries, he joined his name to that of a Mr. Jeffreys, General Agent, on a second floor in Austin Friars: an address which was useful for the receipt and despatch of correspondence, for telephone orders, and for following the markets upon the spot.

It is no derogation of a man who so splendidly made good later on to admit that during the first two years the total of his capital slightly diminished. He was disappointed in the Paolo Mine venture, and deservedly annoyed when the friend who had told him they would rise came out with a new Rolls Royce, himself having sold the stock in question. He was also quite wrong upon the fate of the Electricity Bill, having as yet no acquaintance among politicians. Shortly after, however, he successfully staggged the Roumanian Loan. It was a matter of only a few thousands, but they were enough to put him well forward of what he had been when he first took to the

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

City. And then came the great stroke of his life, of which he is deservedly proud. As it may not be common knowledge, I will describe it.

It was the eve of the Great War. Mr. Jeffreys was out at lunch. The private telephone was rung up, and a Voice asked that, without delay, a very large bull account should be opened on margin in the stocks of three named armament firms, a bear ditto in two named foreign government loans and a solid investment in a controlling company which had hitherto been under a German directorship. The Voice went on to explain without reserve, and as to a full confidant, the nature of his information, introducing two important political names, and before ceasing confirmed the usual proportion of the proceeds to its correspondent. Only after all this had been said (and it took a good two minutes to say it, for the Voice was very eager and even excited), did the Voice, intrigued by Mr. Huggins' silence, ask anxiously whether it had the right number? Mr. Huggins saw no cause to inform It that It had not. He replaced the receiver on its hook without a word.

There has grown up a silly modern habit of decrying the genius of our great commercial men, especially when their fortunes have been rapidly acquired. Their success is set down to chance, and is besmirched with imputations of dishonesty.

I say this modern habit is a vile one, born not only of envy but of ignorance. For had the calumniators any real knowledge of the men they

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

run down they would be unable to deny them the same sort of genius as distinguishes the great Captains of History.

What George Huggins did on this memorable occasion is an example.

During the few moments when he was holding the receiver to his ear with his left hand George Huggins was rapidly noting down the name of the stocks, the prices, the margins, the dates, with a pencil in his right.

He immediately left the office. Within a week, all Europe being then at war, that dreadful calamity had within the mysterious designs of Providence launched the very moderate fortune of George Huggins into its advance towards becoming one of the largest of our time.

For once the great man was bewildered. The first huge sum had come so simply, so rapidly and so naturally, and in such overwhelming figures, that he hardly felt himself to be himself. And not a few wild projects cantered through his brain when, after the settlement, he was racing northward to Palmers Green in a first-class carriage—which projects, had he indulged in them, might, I admit, have led to disaster. It was the strong sense of his wife which saved him, and he was ever grateful to her. He found her eating tripe and onions, a favourite dish of hers when she could prepare it after her own fashion (for she had given the servant a night out), and drinking from

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

a tankard a very excellent brand of stout laced with gin.

He shared the meal, and when it was over and she had heard the full news, she made him his plan of campaign.

And see how wise she was! The whole thing was simply to be put into secure Government Stock. She trusted England. Indeed, she was confident that the war would be over in a few weeks, and of course in our favour.

Meanwhile until things had settled down, and when he had come to know (as he soon would with such a fortune) those who pull the strings of our affairs, he might cautiously distribute his investment, and if he so willed, increase his now great possessions. But the principal thing was safety. They were made, he and she. That was the point. But both remembered in silence that there was no heir.

The rest came easily enough. George Huggins was talked of. The simplicity of his manner and the kindness of his heart were remarked. No foolish hesitation was shown by families whose wealth happened to be of older growth in inviting him and his wife to their tables. His spontaneous generosity in the matter of the Belle Vue Hospital gave him, not a mere knighthood, as the Secretary had suggested, but a baronetcy. It was as Sir George and Lady Huggins that they entertained and did what lay in them for their country during the great life and death struggle of those four

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

years. Before the end of them, Sir George had occupied during a few fateful weeks one of the more important ministries, succeeding to a large wholesale grocer, and succeeded in turn by one of our shrewdest speculators in rising seaside resorts. He left office through no other cause than the strain which its cares put upon a man of his years, and, of course, accepted a peerage upon retiring from the more active duties of public life.

He was indifferent as to what his title should be. But having recently constructed (in spite of the building difficulties during the war) a charming little Jacobean thing at Mere Bruvvish, in Berkshire, the heralds pointed out to him that the spelling of the name in some early documents would seem to indicate an original French form, *Beaurivage*.

George, First Baron Mere de Beaurivage, therefore became the style and title of this very eminent, and (I think I may say) very typical British man of business.

It was remarked that his simplicity remained conspicuous in spite of his elevation. Thus he insisted on the plain pronunciation *Mere de Bruvvish*—or even *Bruvvish* alone—attaching to his new title, as it had to the village where he retired for the week-ends; and it was with difficulty that he could be persuaded to sign his name with a little “d” for the “de,” or to separate that particle from the main term of *Beaurivage*. He made no efforts to speak an English other than that to which he

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

had been trained in childhood, and no one acquainted with the pride of our gentry will doubt me when I say that it was ready to receive him in his plain and rugged honesty as it would have been had he spoken in the most exquisite accents of the stage.

In the now wide circle of their society the Mere de Beurivages had been glad to discover a really intimate friend in Hilda Maple. There was a warm and affectionate sincerity in her relation towards Lady Mere de Beurivage which Matilda—Amathea as she now was—sometimes missed in her grander acquaintances. She felt the atmosphere of Rackham Catchings to be homely. She admired the close admixture of every modern comfort with every ancient tradition in these honourable walls—the Ancestor had got there a little before her—and she often said to herself and to her husband that when they should build themselves a proper place they would keep that model in mind.

Moreover, she had an odd attachment to Sussex; perhaps because she had once been taken to the Downs behind Brighton for a Board School treat in her early youth, perhaps because an uncle of hers had been ostler in the then large stables of the Monarch at Byfield.

One way and another, Rackham Catchings was half a home in her mind already. She was glad to feel that Hilda and she were like sisters. Yet John Maple had never as yet met her during any

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

one of the four or five times on which she had passed a week-end in the place; and in the rich houses of London he had only seen the couple once (and even then it was from some way off) in a crush at Bakeham House. The poor old gentleman had seemed terribly hot and out of breath after squeezing up those stairs.

CHAPTER VII

So John Maple came down to Aunt Hilda's for that week-end. Once more did he put his foot down firmly on Spegel, refusing to do a turn after the Thursday night, but promising by way of compensation to go into the Provinces on Tuesday.

It was on the Friday as he had promised that he went down. He was offended, as he always was, by the motor-car and the French driver at the station; he wanted the old coachman (who was dead), and the old horse (who was worse than dead). He was offended, as he always was, by the new sham timber front of Rackham Catchings as he came up the drive. He was in a nasty mood.

But as for that determination in his heart, on the twenty thousand pounds, it had turned into cold iron. It was the hardest thing in him. But it was no longer in the air. Isabeau had done the trick. Upon my soul, as the too quick, too expensive car shot vulgarly through those dignified old trees up the new sweep of new drive to the new unfortunate great door in the devastated front of what had once been his home, he felt as though the twenty thousand pounds were there in a purse, to be thrown at his aunt when he should meet her.

But when he got in he did not meet her. The

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

atheist Gaul who had driven him smiled cheerfully enough, though in a fashion a little too manly for his servile position, and handed him his bag from the front of the car almost as though they were equals—a thing intolerable. It was at once a worry and a relief to hear that his aunt was out and would not be back for an hour or two. It was more like home, however, to be met by Corton and to talk to that old friend. Then he spent the time remaining wandering through the rooms, noting for the twentieth time what had been left the same as in his own days of childhood, and what had been changed.

Most had been changed, but not all. The schoolroom was just the same, except that they had put the boxes into it, as though it were derelict. What had once been the hall with its simple little eighteenth-century porch of wooden pillars and wooden Pediment had been degraded into a sort of back entrance, and where the old drive had gone on to it there was now moss and grass, though it was still hard with the old gravel.

What had been the main stairs of the house—how he loved the old carved banisters!—were now the back way to the bedrooms and passages above; the main staircase was a wicked new oaken thing, chemically stained to look old, leading up from the new hall.

That hall itself was a piece of stage scenery. He called up what had been torn down to make space for all that new big room. He smiled to

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

remember that it was nothing but the big empty, spare, plastered cavern where all manner of household wreckage piled up; where also the beer casks used to be kept in his father's time. He remembered how he had kept his bicycle there, and how proud he had been of it when he had been first allowed to ride it. He remembered having asked leave to keep his rabbits in there during the cold weather.

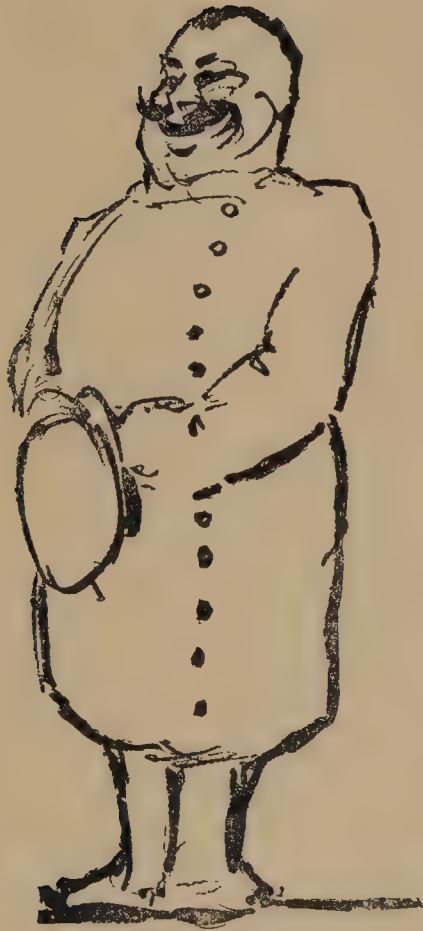
So all that was gone. And in its place was this sham old oak with the huge great beam—Baltic, not English, and the ridiculous sham date upon it—and in the dining-room, where he had been allowed on grand occasions of childhood, in the old dining-room now panelled, damasked and changed out of recognition, the abominable Ancestor grinning, and the abominable “refectory” table, long, with carved legs, darkened, and of the sort called antique.

He would change all that.

He was as certain that he would change all that as he was that he had (virtually) the twenty thousand pounds; and of such is the kingdom of twenty-three years old.

Aunt Hilda came in, not over-pleased with whatever she had been doing. She had been calling on the county people, and she always felt after doing that that she was not quite on their scale.

But before going out to call upon people (and



The atheist Gaul

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

she was so kind that she had done it in her little car, leaving the big one for John and his luggage), she had read two letters which had put her out not a little. The first was John's with its enclosure—and it made her hot with anger to think of it. The second was from the Esthonian. He would not wait. It was a shame, and it was silly. She had virtually sold the place. She was quite sure that either Lord Hellup or dear Amatheas's husband would buy. Why, it would probably be decided that very week-end. He could perfectly well wait. She was sure he was only fussing in order to make her renew. And *that* she was determined she would *not* do.

But this criticism of the Esthonian was uncharitable, and also unwise in Aunt Hilda. The Esthonian was really suffering, for Esthonians who have Europeans in their debt are yet often in debt themselves to bigger Esthonians; and such was the condition of this Esthonian. And for all I know, even the larger Esthonian up above was in debt to yet another enormous Esthonian, until you got to the centre of the great spider's web in New York, to which nowadays even Frankfort and London bow down.

But anyhow, in this piffing matter of these few thousand pounds the Esthonian was fussing abominably, and his letter was peremptory. The date for payment fell in the very next week. He respectfully but very urgently required her answer. Had she received anything on account?

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Had she anything to show him in writing which he could show to others (for the Esthonian was quite frank in this matter, as he sometimes was when he thought it profitable to be so). He said he really needed the money; and he really did—there was no reason why he should pretend not to; quite the contrary. But it is true that the Esthonian did not need the money so very much as he pretended.

Alas! poor Aunt Hilda had no writing yet to show! You cannot show in writing the growing devotion of an American business man to a fine figure of an Englishwoman not so old as himself. Nor the growing appetite for a quiet country place in the wife of a Coalition Peer.

She had not answered the letter. She had temporised. And that made her mood more irritable still.

It was in such a state of human tempers—Aunt Hilda exasperated and John, as he believed, quiet and firm, but really more exasperated still—that the meeting between them took place. She poured out tea for him. He spoke vaguely of London and, knowing well that he was applying an irritant, he told her with what anxiety to be under her roof he had put off his engagement upon the Halls. She in her turn had exploded at him and told him that she wanted to hear nothing about that horrible side of life, and he had said:

“Very well, very well. There’s nothing in it, to be sure.”

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

She wanted to make the best of her party for her guests. She felt that her nephew was popular with those whom he knew, and could make himself popular with those whom he did not. She switched off on to who was coming.

"I've told you who they are, John; there are only five; and only two women. I had to ask Lord Hambourne, because he was so kind to me over that unfortunate business of Oriel when *you* refused to go to Oxford. He was *most* considerate. He made every allowance for you. I've always been intending to have him down at the Catchings, and I've not had him here all that time."

John nodded.

"If only you had gone to Oxford, John, you would have had the advantage of one of the greatest minds in the world. Lord Hambourne . . ."

John interrupted.

"Yes, I know," he said. "They call him Hambone."

"That's silly and vulgar," said Aunt Hilda.

"It is," said John. "So is he."

"He's nothing of the sort. I met him often when I ran up there before you came back to England when I was making the arrangements. He's one of the nicest men I have ever met. You only run him down because he's poor."

"That may have something to do with it," said John deliberately.

Aunt Hilda was on the point of violence, when

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

she controlled herself and turned it off to the other two.

"Then there's Lord Hellup, and his daughter Isabeau." Aunt Hilda looked at her nephew for a moment, but he gave no response. "Have you met them?" she said.

"Yes," he answered rather surlily. "I've met them at the Pattles'."

"There are no Pattles," said Aunt Hilda majestically. "If you mean Lady Pattle . . ."

"Yes, I mean old Mother Pattle," said John, and Aunt Hilda sighed.

"Then there's a man, John, I really want you to meet, and to be careful about, if only for my sake."

John said that for her sake he would do anything.

"Very young men like you, John, may do things that not only ruin their own careers, but really hurt other people. I have asked Amatheia—Amatheia de Beurivage that is—and her husband."

John looked at her innocently.

"Why not? Who are they?"

"You know perfectly well, John," she said. "The man that was Sir George Huggins, who did all that splendid work during the war."

"Oh, Lord Mere de Boreevarge?" said John, charmingly and spontaneously. "Yes, I've read about him. A great financial brain. I read that only to-day, as I was coming down, in the paper—"

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

which paper, upon my soul, I forget. Or was it in *The Howl*?—which belongs to Cad Toronto.”

“For God’s sake, John,” said Aunt Hilda, exasperated, “behave yourself, at any rate when you meet him! And why do you call him De Bo-ree-varge?”

“Because it’s spelt that way. And I’ve always read it like that.”

“Well, I don’t know if you’re telling the truth. But please to understand that it’s Bruvvish.”

“I will,” said John solemnly. “I’ll call him Mere Bruvvish, and her, Lady Mere Bruvvish. Bruvvish all the time.”

Aunt Hilda got up from her chair and stood in front of the fire looking at her nephew. She had something to say. It might be the wrong time to say it, when they were half-quarrelling; but she wanted to get it over, and perhaps a certain softness of manner would come better after a passage like this than later on, when the trouble might begin again.

“John,” she said, “I want to put it to you quite frankly. I think it would be wrong to hide it from you, though I have a perfect right to do what I am doing. I want to tell you everything, so that nothing shall go wrong, because these next few days are so important to me; and to you too, my dear. And to Rackham Catchings.”

“Never mind me, Aunt Hilda,” said John quietly. “And for the matter of that, don’t take too much trouble about the Catchings.”

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Aunt Hilda controlled herself again.

"Both those men are prepared to make an offer. I shall ask £60,000 for £50,000. And I happen to know, privately, that both are thinking of it."

"I didn't know Hambone was worth it," said John quietly.

"Nonsense," snapped his aunt. "Hambourne indeed! Lord Hambourne! And please don't call him Hambone, like a schoolboy. No! Lord Hellup, and Amatheia and her husband may either, or both, make an offer. There. I've told you, and you ought to know. Remember, John," she went on hurriedly, "that you are the only one I have, and when I am gone" (after which illogical sentence she heaved a profound sigh from her considerable chest—which had, as might be, thirty more years of life in it), "it really concerns you as much as it does myself. I tell you quite frankly, and quite plainly, that I am not going to take less than £50,000."

For half a minute or so John gave no answer. She had said nothing about his letter. He looked in the fire, as though it were an old friend with whom he was consulting, and leaned his solid young head on his left hand. Then he rose slowly in his turn, and without facing Aunt Hilda, putting both hands upon the mantelpiece and still gazing into the fire, he said:

"Aunt Hilda, I can't offer you £50,000; but you've had my letter, there you have it in black

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

and white, after so much palaver. I can and do offer you £20,000. It's firm."

The effect of this remark upon Aunt Hilda may be compared to that produced by the slipping of a piece of ice down the neck of a neighbour at dinner during an ardent conversation; a practical joke which I hope is no longer fashionable. The victim is at first oddly shocked, as by a spasm—then stabbed into language. So Aunt Hilda. After a gasp she flamed up, turned round, found her nephew no longer staring at the fire in gentle distraction but facing her, square, firm, and defiant. She had received his challenge, she repeated the old insult.

"Twenty thousand pounds? Why, you haven't got twenty thousand pence!"

The insolence of his proposition! The insufficiency of it! The wild impossibility of his being able to fulfil it! His assurance! Why, he was her dependent——

John Maple was like a wrestler in his attitude and in his mood, standing ready for the spring. He tried hard not to quiver, but he was quivering all the same.

"I have said twenty thousand more than once, Aunt Hilda, and now I've written it and given you the paper to accept," he answered, "I *mean* twenty thousand."

Her reply was complete. She told him not to make a fool of himself. They both sat down to cool off.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"Well, John, it's no good quarrelling over nonsense, is it?"

"It isn't nonsense," said John. "There may be a day," he added darkly, "when you will think better of it."

Aunt Hilda groaned. She had not had much to do with young people, but she had heard they were all like that. She recovered her temper.

"There may be, John," she said, laughing uneasily, "but at any rate not yet, and not for Rackham Catchings."

"I didn't offer it for the Catchings. I know the Catchings would cost more. I offered it for Rackham."

And he went out to cool off further. They saw each other no more till dinner.

* * * * *

At dinner a truce was declared. They talked of anything: principally of the County. Hilda Maple was longing to do two things: first, to relieve her nerves by asking him to be particularly good when the guests came on the morrow, Saturday—but she had had the sense to hold her tongue—it would only have provoked a new quarrel, and after all, she could trust John Maple to behave himself if he felt inclined. She also knew that nothing would prevent his saying something to upset the *ci-devant* Huggins and his wife if he did not feel inclined. With Hellup she felt he



"Twenty thousand pounds? You haven't got twenty thousand pence!" said Aunt Hilda

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

was safe, and as he had no particular grudge against lords as such or dons as such, but rather a natural sympathy with poor men, she felt he would be safe with Lord Hambourne—though she could not get over the disrespectful allusion to Hambone; but she thought he might have picked it up from his Oxford acquaintances in London, and she let it lie.

The second thing she wanted to do was to examine him on this very point of Lord Hambourne. She herself hardly knew the man. She had observed that he would go to pretty well any house where he would meet rich people. She thought, quite rightly, that both the others would like to meet a brother peer with a few generations behind him.

She dipped her tongue in honey (if you will excuse the coarseness of the phrase), and said sweetly to her nephew at dessert:

“Tell me, John, I think you know Lord Hambourne, don’t you? Or about him, anyhow? You see, I know him *well*. Only I was told that he was interested in old furniture and understood it, and I wanted him to help me a little in that.” (It was true; but it was also true that she wanted him to help her in impressing his wealthier peers with the fact that the furniture was old and that the Beam was old and that the Ancestor was old, and that in general the Catchings were old and vouched for by that venerable glory the Hambourne peerage.)

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"Oh," said John, "I've met him. And I've got friends, as I said, who have known him at Oxford. And there's one man in his fourth year whom I know rather well and he did Psychology with him. Rather likes him. You know that he does journalism?"

"Who?" said Aunt Hilda.

"Hambourne."

"No, I didn't. What do you mean by journalism?"

"Why, this stuff they call Personal Journalism. He talks about people whom he's really met, and also about people whom he pretends to meet. But he won't sign. Perhaps it's a point in his favour, for they'd pay him double if he did. But the rag he's on is really so base that perhaps it pays him one way and another not to sign. You see, his column's called 'Behind the Scenes.' It's in *The Howl*."

"Oh!" said Aunt Hilda. Her heart had risen slightly at the idea that he might be useful to advertise her and hers. It sank a little at hearing under what headline she and hers would appear.

"He's not scurrilous, is he?" she said, after a pause.

"I'm told," said John Maple, critically and carefully separating his words, "that he would like to be, and can't. You see, though he was very poor he had a good mother and was an only son and (as he was very poor) he did not go to a

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Public School. It's very difficult for that kind to shake off all their early refinement."

Aunt Hilda again restrained herself.

"Is it true he is an atheist?"

"Oh, good Lord, *yes!*" protested John Maple. "Why, my dear Aunt Hilda, what did you expect? He's a don, Aunt Hilda—and more than that, he belongs to the old-fashioned lot. After all, he was elected to Burford nearly thirty years ago."

Aunt Hilda pursed her lips firmly. She had not got quite used to the moral revolution. As for the reaction that is now beginning, she had no idea of it.

"But he won't be blatant, Aunt Hilda," John went on. "Besides, I know Lord Hellup wouldn't mind."

"I think," said Aunt Hilda acidly, "I should know as well as anyone what Lord Hellup would or would not mind. . . ." Then she stopped abruptly, for she was getting on dangerous ground. She did not want to discuss her other two guests and raise a breeze.

John was less discreet.

"As for the other one, old Bruvvish," he began. . . . But Aunt Hilda cut him short.

"We won't discuss Lord Mere de Beurivage, if you please, John, though his wife *is* a friend of mine. A straightforward, plain, English gentleman—I think that's enough said. He never pre-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

tends to be what he is not, and that is one of the hundred reasons why everybody respects him.”

It is immensely to John Maple's credit that he did not here add the other reasons; but he remained silent. The wine he had drunk, the influence of the evening, which gave the darkening room a real antiquity (for Night is an aged thing), the fact that he had his back to the Ancestor and was facing the oak table—which after all *was* old—all this soothed John. In his mind he was already the owner of Rackham, planning innumerable things, and among these plans he reprieved some part of the Catchings. Yes, he would keep the oak table; he might even keep the panelling. But the Ancestor would have to go. Corrupted by too early an experience of competition, his mind wandered off (after his aunt had left him to his wine) to what he might make on the Ancestor. Should it go by auction or how? Then the thought of money brought him back to the raising of that £20,000. And *that* brought him back to Bo. And in contemplation of Bo's image he pleasantly remained.

He went to bed early, too sleepy to pursue the thoughts of banks, solicitors, options and the rest, which that excellent young daughter of commerce had put into his head. Opportunity would come with the morrow.

And it did; as it always does to the young.

CHAPTER VIII

THE three parcels of her week-end party were to be separately delivered to Mrs. Maple in three batches. She was just as well pleased. It was easier to mix them that way.

Of the three batches Lord Hambourne would be the first.

The title of Hambourne is an ancient one. The first Lord Hambourne, son of a rich King's Lynn merchant under Edward IV., married into the Cavells. His son died without issue.

The title was revived by Henry VIII. towards the end of his reign, for the ennobling of John Heysham, who had carried out a great part of the confiscations in the north, and kept a sufficient proportion for himself. He had no heir, but his only daughter married a younger son of the Parkers of Luttbury, for whom the title was revived by Elizabeth. He was a great deal at the Court attracting the attention of the Queen, after the early death of his wife—some say by poison, others by disease. He died at the early age of forty-three. He left no heir.

The title was revived by Charles II. as a reward for the loyalty of Sir William Malling, a Rutlandshire squire, who had devoted his fortune to

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Charles I.'s cause. His son, the second Lord Hambourne of the third creation, was true to the family tradition and accompanied James II. into exile. After years of struggling with poverty in the Rue de Fouare, in Paris, he died, it is to be feared of malnutrition, leaving no heir.

The title was revived in the early days of George III. by the managers for that monarch, who, having a pressing need for support in the House of Commons, thought it only their duty to close the long and honourable career of Henry Porter, a large shipmaster turned squire, five times member for King's Lynn—of whose burgesses he could always purchase a considerable majority. He had doggedly voted in the Court interest until he was thus raised to the peerage.

When the question of choosing his title arose, a local gentleman of antiquity and *vertu* pointed out to him the original connection between King's Lynn and the Hambourne name; on which account it is now generally—and erroneously—believed that the peer of Edward IV. was the ancestor of our Hambournes of to-day.

From that day to this, for four whole generations, the title has never failed. The family fortune was dissipated by the second Lord Hambourne (of the fifth creation) partly in entertaining the Regent, partly by losing money at cards to the Regent's more intelligent friends. The title passed, just before the accession of Queen Victoria, to a cousin, possessed of an annuity of

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

some £800 a year and a pleasant house with an orchard in Kent.

His eldest son, after a life of honest toil in the Civil Service, died childless—and of course impecunious. The title passed, just before the Boer War, to a then young man his nephew, who had just been elected to a classical Fellowship at Burford College. The lad was not without initiative; straitened circumstances had perhaps sharpened his wits; but anyhow, while he was making it his business to talk psychology, to buy books on psychology, to speak in debates on psychology, and even to attend the foreign congresses on psychology, certain of his friends were persuading The Turtle Eaters Company that Oxford was perishing for the lack of a Chair in Psychology; so when that Chair must be filled, what claim more obvious than Lord Hambourne's? The envious who pointed out how little he knew even of a subject on which there is so little to be known were silenced by the very true retort that the other candidates knew nothing.

With the Great War came his opportunity. It was admitted on all sides that he had procured for his country the great advantage of the only telepathic system among the Allies which could compare with the splendid organisation of the Germans. And while Ragensdorp in Leipsig was reading, with the success that has rendered him famous, the deep strategic thoughts of one British Minister after another during those four and a

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

half years, Lord Hambourne with far greater success was reading the strategic thoughts of Hindenburg, Ludendorf and Falkenhayn and communicating them daily to the Cabinet. On the Continent his powers were less appreciated, and it is to be feared that the prolongation of the struggle was largely due to the failure of the Italians and French to do credit to a science with which they were as yet unfamiliar.

The Coalition Government rewarded such great services to the country with a grant of £20,000. It was paid over at once, and the honoured recipient was on the point of retiring from his arduous academic duties, when the unexpected fall of the mark destroyed his prospects. For though Lord Hambourne had accurately read the thoughts of those who had determined to preserve the German currency, he had never thought of tapping one master mind in New York, whence alone he would have received more accurate information on the future of his securities.

At his very just estimate of the German character had led him to put the whole of a grateful nation's offering into the German domestic loans, he found himself, long before the date of Hilda Maple's party at Rackham, possessed of Bonds to Bearer Series 2 Nos. 555201—598237 of the first German internal 5 per cent. guaranteed reimbursable Peace Loan, worth anything between 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. and 6d. the lot.

But though thus denuded of material goods,

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

he had acquired all the special qualifications of his profession, and even a first-rate academic manner with a strong stammer, a habit of saying, "Quate! Quate!" at the ends of most of his sentences, a nickname among the undergraduates, and a sheaf of stories about him, the subtle humour of which missed fire outside the University.

* * * * *

Lord Hambourne, then, was coming to Rackham on the Saturday early; he was coming in time for lunch and (being poor) by train.

He was a very sensible man. He kept very careful accounts. He calculated that the free lunch at Rackham almost exactly paid for the return ticket from Oxford (a week-end third)—though, of course, it did not cover the ticket from London down to Sussex. He took a single for *that* journey, on the chance that one of the guests would motor him back to town on the Monday. In his letter he had told his hostess how eager he was to be in her county again, and what a pleasure it was to get off from Oxford and the associations of so much hard work. For Lord Hambourne had to lecture on psychology for one hour on two days a week by statute, and very often added a third lecture freely and of his own accord for a reasonable fee. And, like all dons, he only had six months' holiday in the year. To such men in our strenuous University life the free air and re-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

pose of a week-end make all the difference. He was to be excused, then, for taking that morning train. And as it trundled him up to Paddington, and he further trundled on from Victoria (there was an hour between the two, and that saved him the expense of a cab) he was thinking how many paragraphs Rackham would account for in his social column. He decided that a house of that calibre was not good for more than two, and just possibly they might even cut out one of those. The first he had already begun to scribble in the train:

"I ran down to Rackham Catchings this week-end, Mrs. Hilda Maple's charming place in Sussex. It is a fifteenth-century house, quite unspoiled, a rare thing nowadays. Mrs. Hilda Maple is, of course, the widow of Mr. William Maple, and she was famous some years ago in London during her distinguished husband's lifetime for her salons to which all the great lights of the day had the entrée. . . ."

and so on. There were about twenty lines of it. If anything happened he would work in a second paragraph. He hoped, with a doubtful hope, that something would happen, though it was difficult to see what could happen with a dull woman like Hilda Maple and a Yankee lord and a war profiteer (for he had been told who was coming).

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Still, he hoped—and his hope was rewarded. A good deal did happen.

Yet another thought was at the back of the noble Professor's mind as he travelled. He wanted to make quite sure that there really was nothing old—at least, nothing older than the eighteenth century—in Rackham Catchings. He suspected as much, but he wasn't certain. He liked to know those things. It gave him a hold over people. One never knew when it might turn up useful.

Lord Hambourne, like most of the academic tribe, had real knowledge in one matter outside his own subject. He did understand old wood, from adzed chamfered beams to Misericordes. As for psychology, he knew by this time as much about it as any other man, for it was now many years since that rich cousin of his, then in the Ministry, had terrified the Turtle Eaters Company into founding the Chair. It was quite a new subject in those days, the last years of Queen Victoria; but he had kept pace with it, and braced himself to read the duller and nastier books of our own time.

I have told how, during the war, he had enjoyed the one brief period of good pay he had ever known, had ended with a little fortune and had lost it.

Now the war was over and he was back again at the old grind, and though an intelligent man, had become so provincial through long residence

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

at the University as to imagine that no one guessed his little supplementary journalistic journal as "Behind the Scenes" in Lord Toronto's paper *The Howl*.

He was favourably impressed with the motor-car which met him. He was delighted to see, as Rackham burst upon his gaze (that all the antique part of the front was quite new, and that the old part was not very old. He sized it up at once for what it was. But he still had fears that there might lurk within it some mediæval stuff; for, after all, it was church loot. He had got that from a brother don whose Churchism was so high that he had gone deep blue. He even knew that the particular monks from whom it had been grabbed were *Pre-mon-stra-tentians*—a term which meant nothing to him, and which he always got wrong when he tried to spell it.

His hostess greeted him with an enthusiasm to which his poverty was unaccustomed, and which he rightly put down (for was he not a Professor of Psychology?) to her slight acquaintance with lords. She had within five minutes (by way of comparison with Rackham) deftly alluded to his own ancestral home. It was a subject he detested, because he had not been able to repair it, and the people who had taken it stoutly refused to spend a penny on it—let alone badgering him half a dozen times a year about gutters, pipes and drains. He lost by the ancestral home. And Lord Hambourne was a man in whose mind subjects

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

connected with the loss of even small sums of money are very painful. Then he suddenly thought that since she had looked up the name of his place in some book, and had shown some faint interest in it, he might use her later for selling it. He had never been able to find a purchaser yet.

The ancestral home having been put into its corner, Mrs. Maple all during lunch rubbed Rackham into the mind of her distinguished guest. And as lie after lie proceeded from her spate of local history and personal reminiscence, he deftly plucked out the truths like plums and pigeon-holed them in his mind.

Enormous as her information had been, she kept a wad or two back for those who were to come.

And the Hellups arrived first. They came ("of course," as Lord Hambourne would have said in his column), by car, and a very good car it was; not showy, but exactly suited to its purposes as a car: elastic, silent and shockless. Hellup was a man who thought comfort out, and thought it out rightly.

In one detail only had he not realised his thinking out. And that was through love of his daughter. For Lovey-Lad had come down with them, with horrid menace in his eye, all the way from London. He had had to waste his ferocity upon the landscape; but he looked up to any mischief as he came in bow-legged, growling, formidable,

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

but reduced to conventions by a nice smack on the nose from his adoring mistress, just to make him understand that he was among friends. It would never have done if he had dug his teeth into the well-displayed and most sufficient flesh-coloured calves of Aunt Hilda. It was the only thing that might have caused trouble between her father and herself.

Now with the appearance of this father and daughter the air changed, as it does change when, known only privately to pairs, but subtly influencing others, affection comes under a roof. It was an affection real upon the part of that crisp, humorous and successful, contented trans-Atlantic man, sincerely received by his hostess. In Bo I cannot tell you how freshly intense was affection, nor in John how profoundly sincere. Alas! that with four such currents of mutual attraction crossing in the Hall of Rackham, only Lord Hambourne should have failed to polarise. But, Professor of Psychology though he was, he tumbled to nothing. Nor, certainly, did Aunt Hilda tumble to John and Bo. And as for those two young people, they had an intellectual knowledge of the charming friendship between their elders, but of real appreciation thereon nothing whatever. They had something better to think of.

However, as I have said, affection mellowed things, and the air was kindly when in half an hour after the Hellups an enormous machine, the size of a cottage, driven by a gentleman whose

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

uniform vaguely recalled the General Officers of Central American States, and having by his side yet another uniformed gentleman of a more moderate type, purred, roared, halted and panted grandly before the door.

Therein, through large spaces of glass could be seen a huge bunch of hot-house flowers, set in a silver sconce. It faced in its gay opulence the owner of the splendid conveyance, Lord Mere de Beurivage himself. His considerable though not elongated form was protected from the inclemencies of the weather by a fur coat and, as to his legs at least, by the mounted skin of a very fine African lion, the head of which drooped, fierce, towards his feet, while the hinder quarters performed the same office of comfort for his wife, who sat upon his left.

And what a wife!

Her dress, though the afternoon was yet young, seemed compounded of a material wherein there entered no small proportion of gold. The hair upon her head, cut very short (and upon her ample neck even shaved) was more than sufficient in its amount, and excellently blended, crowning a large, determined face, in fine contrast with the somewhat more exhausted but equally expansive visage of her lord.

As she thus swept up, throned, the stern look of mastery which befits the mistress of such great possessions still dignified her glance, yet it dissolved into delighted smiles and half-closed elon-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

gated eyes of joy as she caught sight of dear Hilda unconventionally rushing out to meet her upon the very threshold.

John Maple (and his aunt was grateful to him) helped her down from the car.

“Darling Hilda!”

“Oh! Darling Amatheia!”

The two women were clasped in each other’s arms.

Lord Mere de Beurivage alighted with more circumspection, considerably aided by the second of his two dependants, the one in the lesser uniform, and set foot upon the sacred soil of England with a grunt, followed by a heavy breathing. For the exertion of such a man in leaving a vehicle is even more trying to him than his exertion in mounting one. The lion skin lay deserted upon the floor of the car. The lion’s master followed his wife hobbling into Rackham Catchings.

Aunt Hilda gave them time to recover from the enormous fatigues of the journey, solacing them with tea, impressing them with the dignified figure of Corton. Then only, when she had gathered them together (making at the same time certain signs to John with uplifted eyebrows and sharp glances), did she take them round in a herd, to put a climax to their rivalry for the house by filling it with history.

She was a determined woman. The thing had to be done some time, and the sooner the better, as a foundation for all that had to be wound up



*Fond embrace of Hilda, relict of the late William
Maple, Esquire, of Rackham Catchings in the
County of Sussex, and Amatheia, wife of
George, First Baron de Beurivage
(pronounced Bruvvish)*

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

by way of business in a brief week-end. The Esthonian in his character of Mr. Rupert de Vere of Jermyn Street was upon her: he would not wait.

And John followed the flock, looking up with sagacious vacuity at picture and carving and beam as each was mentioned, and down, as each was mentioned, at table and at chair and at *bric* and at *brac*: and feeling as he had felt on but one other occasion of his life, when Bo had insisted on his joining a horrible clot of tourists who were doing the Tower. It was a delightful thought that this trial would not last so long; for after all Rackham, though more beloved, was not as large as the Tower. He was glad of that.

He got what amusement he could out of information startlingly new to him. He learned more than he thought could be known about Rackham—let alone the Catchings. He learned that the Hall (where he so vividly remembered the rabbit hutches, the plaster and the bicycle) dated in part from the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign, but with later additions under James I. He learned that the great beam running across it from the staircase to the fire-place had upon it the date 1487, and was probably the oldest dated object in the house. He learned that a little chair which his father had bought for him when a tiny child because he had fallen in love with it himself during a visit to London had been a chair belonging to Queen Anne's nursery, and

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

given to one of his forbears by Sarah Duchess of Marlborough. He learned that the damned panelling was made from one of the ships of the Spanish Armada. These things he learned, and many more.

The Fury of Destruction rose in his heart and was struggling with the Comic Spirit, when, towards the close of the lecture, as they were waddling back to the drawing-room again, through the dining-room, and had just heard startling things about the oak table and Ben Jonson—as Lord Mere de Bruvvish was giving signs of distress—it was a good long walk for him—as Darling Amatheia's admiring exclamations were growing a trifle conventional, and as even Lord Hellup's thirst for facts, dates and measurements was getting satiated, there came something he might have expected, for he had heard it before: but now, since that suggestion Bo had made in London, it struck with unexpected force. That something was the Ghost.

It was as they were passing the Ancestor. The regular phrases had come out, how he was Sir Harry Murtenshaw, how he was by Holbein; how he combined all the qualities of the great Elizabethans, sea-faring, patriotism and, above all, prosperity. How (this was carefully insisted upon) he was not a *direct* male Ancestor. How the name alone was enough to show that. How it was his daughter who had brought the property into the family of Maple—all that, all the regu-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

lar stuff. Then, as Aunt Hilda led them back towards the drawing-room, she added:

“And it is that man, you know, who was the father of the Ghost.” Bo and her lover shot quick glances at each other. Things were going well.

Not till those few weeks ago had John heard of that Ghost: and quite certain was John that Aunt Hilda had not heard of it either. It had come in with the Ancestor. But I must confess that the Ghost bred in her nephew, now that it was taking shape, some admiration for Aunt Hilda. He did not know she had it in her! And he had to confess that so long as it remained but a story it did put up the value . . .

He was astonished at her power of fiction; for she held them all really interested in their various ways, with the story of the unfortunate boy who had been beheaded by the first James, and but for whose premature cutting off—in the fullest sense of that term—his sister would not have inherited and the Maples would never have possessed the broad mud-fields and the rather stunted oaks of Rackham.

It seems that the poor lad—he was hardly past his twentieth year—got mixed up in one of the plots in favour of Mary Stuart, and was therefore executed in 1613. And now, added Aunt Hilda, lowering her voice by four and a half notes and a bittock, and glancing at the jewellery upon her fingers, upon that day of the year people say that they see him, all in a dark cloak,

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

and in the great ruff of the day—*but without a head*. “It’s in one of the bedrooms,” she imprudently volunteered. Then to correct that error she hurriedly added, “But really it’s great nonsense. Servants’ talk, and the gossip of the more ignorant old people on the farms. They like that sort of thing,” she concluded with a short laugh—well knowing that other people liked the old country house ghost—as a legend—besides servants and old people on farms; and among those others were affectionate American business men and new war millionaires.

John Maple wondered whether he would be appealed to in corroboration. Had she so appealed to him, he would have been torn between his disgust at her so raising the value of the place to these competing purchasers, the instinct of treating his aunt with courtesy before her guests, and the absolute necessity of following Bo’s plan. Luckily she did not risk it. She was contented to answer the various questions which were put to her with real interest by Lord Hambourne, who took a professional interest in such flamboyant lying. He knew enough history to have spotted the Holbein already and to appreciate that boys do not have their heads cut off under James I. for plots connected with trying to save their mothers’ life before they were born.

Lord Hellup was more avid of details, including measurements; he wanted to know the exact height of the ghost—up to the neck—the exact

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

day of the year, the exact spot where he appeared, the exact hour of the night, and all that; but on these, alas! Aunt Hilda could be of no service.

Amathea, delighted to find an added glory to a possession which she already half felt to be hers, expressed her historic imagination without restraint, "Lordy!" she said, and "Help!" and "You make me come over all creepy like!" and further, "Well now, I don't know what an' all!" to the accompaniment of raised hands and of rounded eyes. Her husband looked as pleased as the fatigue of his recent perambulations would allow; and pleased he was, for after all, if one was to have an old family place, one might as well have an old family ghost with it. Only he was a little anxious about what it would add to the price.

But to John and Bo there came another and a very different thought. They must get to work.

And get to work they did.

CHAPTER IX

ON SUNDAY mornings Lord and Lady Mere de Beurivage went to church. They attended Divine Service. In town it was as often as not the afternoon (they were hardly of the generation for fasting communion), but in the country (and people of this exalted rank spend most Sundays in the country) they received the consolations of religion from eleven o'clock till close on lunch. They still felt a certain novelty about the Church of England, for what we begin after our fortieth year always has a certain novelty about it for the rest of our lives.

As luck would have it, her ladyship was delighted with the parson. He had a Cockney accent; he preached no mysterious doctrine; he insisted on the plain duties we owe to our fellow-men, especially the duty of charity, and more particularly the wickedness of class hatred.

But, as luck would have it, his lordship was not quite so sympathetic. For one thing, he didn't like the allusion to antagonism between the East End of London and the West; for he thought (quite justly) that that was all rubbish; and he guessed that the parson, in spite of his honest accent, must have lived somewhere in the middle.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

There he was wrong. The parson came from Ealing.

Aunt Hilda was with them, you may be sure. She could go in the best car and be driven in state, for a lazy morning parked outside God's Acre did not incommode the atheist Gaul. That was all to the good, since a pious driver might have wanted to go to chapel, and Aunt Hilda, after so many years in Sussex, had learnt how careful one must be of religious susceptibilities in the Servants' Hall.

As they purred back to Rackham Catchings from Rackham Church (by the long way, avoiding Rackham village, yet narrowly missing two Rackham children who were playing in the road), Hilda and Amatheia agreed upon the excellence of the parson, the former with enthusiasm (for was she not the seller?) but the latter (being purchaser) with more caution. For when you are buying and selling parsons, or anything else, it is indecent for the purchaser to praise too much: at any rate, in the higher ranks of society. With our peasantry, let me assure you, it is quite the other way (for I know all about it, having attended many markets). They have the nobler, immemorial human habit of the market, still customary (I am told) with the Chinese. The seller is most humble and deferential about his cow. The purchaser praises it to the skies. But, when it comes to cash, reality pierces through the mask and they are even more grasping than the rich.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

“He’s a wonderful man, Amatheia,” sighed Hilda dreamily. “He might have had a very great career if he had stopped in London.” (Well, reader, what are you grumbling about? —Ealing is a part of London, isn’t it?) “But he said he’d had a sort of a call to come down here. And when I heard that,” she added simply, “of course I thought it my duty to give him the living.” (Oh, wicked woman! He had been put in long before she had had anything to do with it!)

To whom Amatheia:

“*Dearest* Hilda! You always was that good about the church! Yer right, too! I haven’t often ’eard better preaching. True it was, and straight from the heart, in a manner of speaking.”

“I often think,” said Aunt Hilda, gazing wistfully at the top left corner of the roof of the motor, as though a vision might appear there, “that holiness is the most unmistakable thing on earth. Really that kind of man is the kind of man of whom I feel” (she sought for the word), “well, that is the kind of man who might in other days than ours have worked a miracle.”

“Mayhap he can lay the spook,” said his lordship with a gurgling laugh. But the suggestion was received in silence by both ladies; so he pursued it no further, and covered his laugh by choking a little.

* * * * *

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

While their elders were hearing and discussing the sermon, Bo and John began the conjuration. Lord Hambourne in his official quality of University Atheist had stayed at home, and so had Lord Hellup in his more natural quality of Commercial Sceptic. But the young people were safe enough, without disappearing. Lord Hellup was deep in Motley, far off, under the garden window of the hall. Lord Hambourne was prowling about peering at woodwork and glass and sizing up the Catchings without shame: standing on a chair to examine the date "1487" on the beam, and remarking that in Rackham alone out of all Europe dates were stamped on beams by the carpenters of the fifteenth century, and stamped in modern figures.

There wasn't too much time. It was already noon of Sunday, and by the Monday morning at latest the battle must be won.

"Bo, we're haunting this house," said John.

"We are," said Bo. "We haunt in couples."

And the delight of her eyes in his presence rejoiced him and lit a corresponding, less brilliant light in his.

"How are we to begin?" said her lover.

"Listen, Jacko," she answered. "The ghost has got to clinch his fell work before to-morrow morning; this evening, no less."

(I ought to tell you how she was dressed; but I have only the time to tell you that her skirt was of course a kilt, very short for a kilt, but a good

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

deal longer than that of Amatheia, First Baroness Mere de Beurivage.)

“Well, we’ve got to introduce the ghost early,” said John, “but it’s broad daylight for hours. What’s your plan?”

“Boy,” answered the maiden, “you want your thinking done for you.”

He nodded.

“You are approved,” Bo answered to that nod. “That’s how the Secretary writes from the Cabinet to our Ambassador—my Ambassador, but not Pop’s any longer, ’cause he’s naturalised—you are approved. First now, can’t you rattle folk by daylight?”

“More than they want,” he said, “much more than they can bear, Bo.”

“’Tisn’t ‘they,’” said Bo, “it’s him. The aged Bruvvish. Pop wouldn’t stand for it. He’s unknown to fear, is my Lord Hellup. He’s as brave as the lion-tamer’s wife. There are few ghosts on Manhattan Island, Jacko. It’s the other one you’re for, and that’ll spoil Aunt Hilda’s market. Badly. D’ye get me? I’ll fix Pop. He shan’t bid. He shall chorus the apparition.”

“You’re not going to tell him our plan?” said John in alarm.

“Nope; ’cause you’ve got to come a surprise on him as the Demon Buyer. You’ve got to make good. He’ll be just interested and that’ll help roll the ghost along.”



*Lord Hambourne is astonished at the modern habits
of the fifteenth century*

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"You don't want me to rattle a chain in the passages?"

"Better'n that," said Bo. "You begin right away. First chance you have. Voices, John. Get him to hear voices."

"Yes," said John thoughtfully, "that was the basis, wasn't it? I'm a ventriloquist—and a good one."

"Oh! Jacko! It'll hum! He's going to hear voices. They'll be subdued, you know, 'cause they're from the Other World. He's going to hear 'em this very day to get a move on him. Take him off and try him. Then he's going to hear them before he goes to bed this very night. And then . . ."

At the prospect thus opening illimitably before her this happy child, glorying in youth, to which all such jests are but too welcome, clasped her hands in ecstasy.

"Then, we'll dress you up for the part and _____"

But as she spoke the noise of the motor at the door interrupted her, the Church party came in, Lord Hellup arose from Motley, Lord Ham-bourne abandoned his examination of antiques, and the conspirators were halted.

"More at lunch," Bo whispered hurriedly. "Now you help Lord Mere off with that coat," she said loudly, and then added, for John's advantage, "and act the Judas."

When they had all swarmed into the dining-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

room for luncheon, though they were only seven they managed to make what Lord Hambourne called in his literary productions "a buzz of conversation," wherein appeared regularly, like the cry of a tame duck, his own "Quate! quate!" as he sat next to Amatheia. And now and then "Lor!" from her ladyship. He was explaining to her the three main theories of apparitions: "Illusions" and the two "Phantasms," *i.e.* "Phantasms of the dead," as distinguished from "Phantasms of the living," or P.D., and P.L. as (he assured her) they were called among the experts of psychology. He told her about Meyer's theory, Lombroso's experiments and Julia; also Lodge. He had the cunning of his kind, and knew that an academic reputation is built by repeating the very little one has read to the completely ignorant.

Lord Hellup had been masterfully captured to sit by the side of the handsome Hilda, and he was telling her how sure he did love an old English house, and how it just got him where he wanted it. The handsome Hilda was putting into her voice such inflections as she felt suitable to the occasion.

But John Maple—John Maple was occupied by greater things—one of which was Bo.

The further conference of those young people needed secrecy, but that was not so difficult to attain at a babbling table as one might think, for Bo and John were covered by the direct synco-pated speech of Lord Hellup and the loud, often

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

stammering, always quacking spate of the don, as also by the comments, not restrained in tone, big, hearty, of Amatheia, First Baroness Mere de Beau-rivage (you may blame me for calling her First Baroness Mere de Beaurivage if you like, but I pass the buck to her—it is her own expression).

However, they had to wait, for hardly had John got as far as the first few questions when Amatheia gave over Lord Hellup to her hostess and captured John.

It was not till she had ceased her description of the opening of Parliament, which had ended by her nudging John Maple jocosely in the ribs to reward him for a mild jest, and swung round again as on a large swivel to talk to Lord Hellup, that John was free to turn again to Isabeau and renew the interrupted crime.

“Am I talking too loud?” he said, though he might have concocted with her a plot to murder his sovereign for all that the eager conversation-alists on either flank would have known of it.

“No, Jacko,” she answered. “They’re bawling and deaf to the world.”

“I’ll wrap it up, all the same,” he said. “Follow close.”

And then continued pleasantly, not too emphatically, in this singular fashion:

“It’s astonishing how much later we are in Sussex than in town. Did you notice that? I mean, have you noticed the state of the woods compared with any square in London? Or the parks? Do

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

you think you could get hold of a large piece of black cloth after dinner and pleat it so as to make a sort of cloak? And it's all nonsense about hearing the nightingale before the cuckoo. Like that ass said the other day in 'Nature Notes.'"

His partner answered with simplicity:

"I never can get these English birds. I used to think the nightingale said 'nightingale,' just like the cuckoo says 'cuckoo.' Yes, I did. I've got exactly what you want. It's a cloak of my own. You've got black trousers, and you can keep black socks. Only no clocks, you know."

At this moment Lord Hellup interrupted to ask across the table:

"Jacko, what do you say about it?"

This was the third time the peer had called her nephew Jacko in her hearing and Aunt Hilda was impressed.

"About what?" said John cheerfully.

"Your aunt says that the only difference between making farming pay and losing on it is the amount of trouble you take."

He shook his head.

"We have neither of us farmed," he said.

Then he resumed, to Bo:

"It's true, though. You *can* make it pay, I believe. We've got a neighbour here who makes it pay by asking whether, if I got hold of some white paper, you could make it into a ruff for me? That's all that's wanted. Making farming pay. We'd stick it on the top of the cloak. That, and

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

looking carefully after things and not going too much up to London, and I'm sure anyone could make it pay. I could wear the whole damn contraption on top of my head, and you would sew the ruff on top of the neck. Then, as I am sure, thank God . . ."

"Thank God!" answered Bo gently.

"Bo," interrupted her father again, "here's Hilda Maple saying we make farming pay in America."

"Don't you believe it, Hilda," said the young woman, using the Christian name for elders, after the modern fashion. "From the tallest tower of my father's castle beyond the seas as far as the eye can reach over our broad lands there is not a hovel but what is derelict."

She resumed rapidly to John:

"What about him?" and nodded towards Cor-ton, who was solemnly pouring out the better wine for Lord Hambourne, whom he pitied for a gentleman, and poor.

"I can believe that," said John to her emphatically. "Any amount of derelict farms in New England too. I'm going to see him after lunch. And when I've seen him we three will arrange to meet, because you can't really make farming pay on old land. That's the reason."

For ten minutes the plot was interrupted by the next artificial turn between Amatheia and John, which was played upon this occasion to the tune of the beauty of the English climate and

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

ended with a second nudge to reward a second jest before the swivel turned to the left again after the stern law of the tables of the rich.

Then the two young people clinched the thing.

"Aunt Hilda has made a wonderful success of the place," he said. And he caught his aunt's eye as he said it. "And I must show you the new rock garden to-morrow. She put Alpine flowers in it, and a special sort that they thought could not grow in England, and it's doing wonderfully. I'll take him out there after lunch and haunt him. Then, when he's back, we could have a game of billiards, fifty up. Anything up. Then I'll bring Corton round to you there. But you can make almost anything grow in England, in the south at least, here in Sussex, if you take trouble. Then we will conspire, my dear, it won't take long."

"Take him out—soon—and haunt him," whispered Bo, as they got up. She was burning to begin.

So was John. But he had to restrain himself for an hour. His aged guest was in the habit of sleeping after the midday meal of a Sunday—he had done so in the days when Sunday was his one day of rest and he did so still. He chose a deep chair apart in the Library and there grunted and snored at peace till half-past three. His host watched and waited. As he came out, still heavy with sleep, and cramming into his pocket the large coloured handkerchief with which he had covered his head in slumber, John met him and took him

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

prisoner, told him they might walk out gently for a while, as the day was still and pleasant. He led the way to the hall, put on his victim's coat with tender care and opened the door into the garden.

With the kindest touch in the world he slid his hand and forearm into the elbow of Lord Mercede Beurivage, leading him out into the garden with all the affection of a relative. It is a vulgar, familiar gesture which he would have sickened to make had not stern duty prescribed it. He must obey Bo.

As for his captive, that elderly peer was actually flattered. True, John Maple was a commoner; but then he was a sort of squire, and as Amathea wanted the place so badly, and as John Maple was a kind of heir (the Baron did not know the exact position—perhaps there was an entail, or something: he didn't understand these things) it was as well to be friends.

John Maple led out through the damnable rhododendrons and across the accursed rock garden to where Aunt Hilda had arranged a little fountain with a leaden Cupid in the middle holding a duck which squirted a fountain of water from its bill.

"I'd as lief 'ave a rest, Mr. Miple," said the elder man, "quite a short walk puffs me."

There was a bench, and they sat down.

The splashing of the water was the only sound. It was still all about. John Maple remembered

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

how all this bit had looked in his childhood, not garden but wild undergrowth; how he had cut a fork for a catapult from a hazel here; and how once on the edge of that scrub, being all alone, he had looked wide-eyed at a fox lurching by with a sly smile showing its sharp teeth on its face.

He saw the old rough again clearly in his mind. It hardened him to his duty. He must sweep away all that horror of Alpine garden and rhododendrons and fountain, and replant the wild. But to do that he must achieve. And to achieve he must move Acheron and the Nether World.

"It's very quiet, Lord Mere," he began, "especially after London." He thought with justice that this gambit would suit the mind of his guest. And his guest replied that he couldn't a-bear London, except o' course for meeting one's friends; but there, country friends and country ways were the best.

"It's in the quiet of Rackham," said John, after a little calculated pause, "that I remember my childhood." He was violating sacred things, but he had his duty to do. "I was a nervous child," he went on. "They always had to leave a light in my room. And my dear old nurse would sit awake for hours with the door open of her room down the passage. She never allowed them to frighten me with the story, you know."

"What story?" said Lord Mere, in whose solid mind there were two very clear categories—non-sense in books and things as reely did 'appen.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

“Oh,” went on John hurriedly, and as though to get over something unpleasant as quickly as possible, “the story of the ghost, you know. . . . *She believed it*—dear old thing. She would have thought it impious not to believe in spirits. And on the top of that there was the feeling she had for the family. But she loved me more, and she would never let me hear of it. But I couldn’t help hearing of it. There was a foolish maid who spoke once . . . and terrified me. And I heard the groom complaining to my father about the terror of the horses on a certain night.”

“What’s that about the ’orses?” asked Lord Mere nervously, and with the beginning of an illness in his heart.

“Well, you know,” said John, “animals are supposed to see these things from the other world sometimes when we can’t. It’s no wonder I was terrified by the story as a child. I used to dream of it. And once, you know—well, of course, it’s all nonsense. But children are the prey of such things. . . . Once I *did* think I saw it—just at that season of the year . . . this season . . . standing quite clearly in the firelight. I hadn’t been well, and I think that’s the reason they had put me in the old room with the big bed, over the drawing-room. So that nurse could be next door. I had been asleep, and in the middle of a terrible nightmare. I can’t remember the nightmare, except some confused impression of violence and,”

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

he sank his head, "a child couldn't know the name for it . . . but it was the shadow of Death. . . . I remember that panic acutely still. I was only ten—I woke up, suddenly—broad awake. I sat up in the bed trembling—and, oh, Lord Mere" (and here John looked at the old man's face and saw it beginning to stare, the head drawn back a little), "it was an agony I shall never quite forget. . . . It was an illusion, I know. But . . ."

"Course it was, boy. Course it was, Mr. Miple, I mean." He wheezed into an uncomfortable laugh. "Yer know that as well as I does!"

"Yes, Lord Mere," said John thoughtfully, "I suppose I know it *now*. One grows out of these things. But it was abominably real then. . . . I don't know why, but this time of year it still comes back to me. . . . Association, I suppose."

"Not that you've seen nothing since, Mr. Miple?" pursued his lordship anxiously.

"No, no, no!" John assured him. "I am sure it was a matter of health, and I got my health back as I grew up. And you know, I went abroad. So it became only a memory."

The old man was restless. And when John began again, "Of course, they say that the influence of a violent and horrible death . . ." Lord Mere de Beurivage wanted to change the subject.

"Yus, yus, yus!" he said hastily, as John helped him to his feet. They went back slowly towards the house, Lord Mere already hobbling even after so short a stroll, and John tenderly supporting

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

him by the arm and treading most leisurely to ease the old man's way.

It was after some moments of silence, when they were in the thick of the rhododendrons on either side, that Lord Mere de Beurivage gave a startled twist in the midst of a step, a twist that hurt him and stopped him as he shot a glance at the thick growth to his left. He had heard—he thought he had heard—had he heard?—an evil whisper, sneering little words, not high above the ground, as from the mouth of something creeping, not human: surely the leaves had never stirred in that windless afternoon? And the words he had heard, or thought he had heard, were: "To the house," or "in the house"—something like that. It was a sibilant sound. He had heard the word "house" sneered at him. . . . Surely he had heard it. . . . It was a sound such as rustling leaves might have made. . . . But then no leaf had stirred.

He turned his head towards John. He was still halted, and still breathing heavily.

"What's the matter, Lord Mere?" said the young man, with great sympathy. "I'm afraid I've overtired you?" The old fellow shook his head.

"No, no. It's me heart, I think," he said. "I'm orl right. Let's be getting along and doing—along and doing. Get among the others, eh? Get among the others. More cheerful-like."

They were moving away from the rhododen-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

drons now, and into the open. So much to the good. And there was the house before them. He thought of that whispered word "house," and he shuddered.

Then he shook off the little trouble. It had only been a moment. And any small beast creeping in the shrubs might have brushed through with that sibilant sound.

During what remained of their brief companionship as they made back towards the porch John Maple cheered his guest in every way.

He made no allusion to the Abominable Thing. He even appeared to have forgotten it.

But Lord Mere de Beurivage, as he painfully put down his hat and stick on the oaken chest in the hall, and more painfully crawled out of his coat with his companion's aid, had something or other on his mind that would not away. He turned back suddenly on his way toward the library, put one arm on John's shoulder, and looked with a fixed but uncertain look in his poor old yellow eyes, straight into the frank glance of his hostess' nephew.

"Did yer say it 'ad no 'ed?" he whispered thickly.

"Oh, Lord Mere," answered John, "don't let's think of it!" He drew in his breath. "It was a long time ago, and I tell you, I was only a child. And—and—I'm sleeping here to-night also," he added, suddenly. "So the less I think of it the better."

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Then he watched the broad, squat figure re-treating slowly towards the library door. He saw the painful aged gesture of the gouty hand upon the knob, the shuffle into the room beyond. He thought he heard something like a groan, and in his heart he half repented.

But already that which commanded him was upon him: no less than Bo herself, swinging into the hall out of the drawing-room like a rather too tall ray of sunshine.

"Dog-Man," she said, "how's your end? Have you bitten 'em? Have you bitten 'em good and hard?"

There was no lack of healthy determination in *this* conspirator. Women know their minds. At least, some women do. And especially those of the kind who make happy marriages. John was learning every hour. But pray remember that the woman tempted him.

He was a little ashamed, and he did not meet her eye.

"I have suggested things, Bo. I did say a few words. Made an atmosphere."

"Was he scared?" persisted his implacable pre-mate.

"I'm afraid he was," said John.

"What did ye tell him, Jacko?" she asked softly, with such affection that he was relieved.

"Did you make it glare?"

"He couldn't glare without a head, Bo."

"No more could he," answered the young lady

thoughtfully. "Not in nature, that wouldn't be. But then, *he's* not in nature either, Jacko, is he? Did ye make Blackie Bogey talk?"

"No," said her lover. Then he corrected himself. "He did say a word in the rhododendrons."

"*What?*" answered Bo, delighted. "Oh, that's good! Push it along. He'll babble yet, Jacko. He'll babble like a brook. He'll moan and he'll groan. He'll put down old Uncle Hamlet like a one-spot taking a deuce. You are," she added, after searching for a compliment at the back of her mind, "the Bee's Knees. You are the Cat's Pyjamas."

Even as she spoke she was looking through the open drawing-room door and the tall French windows towards the big lawn in front of Rackham, and there she saw a sight which made her seize John Maple's wrist suddenly and strongly after a fashion more tolerable to-day from her sex and age than it would have been half a generation ago.

"Look, Dog-Man!" she whispered excitedly, and jutted her chin towards the sight that had thus fixed her eyes.

"What is it, Bo?" he asked. He saw nothing but his aunt and Lady Mere de Beurivage standing on the grass some little way off, and looking up towards the new-old woodwork of the house. Once more the comprehension of women came to aid the dullness of men.

"You haven't gotten it, haven't you?" she said

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

compassionately. "John Maple, heir of Rackham, mark the twain. The Baroness is deep in converse with the Lady of the Manor upon the green sward. Money's going to talk."

John Maple understood.

"You think it's begun already?" said he.

Isabeau Hellup nodded, with a fixed certitude.

"And my noble father will be the next to suffer," she added.

"It's a race, Bo," said John, "between them and us."

"And you've got to win by four little plaits of the mane on the steed's neck—or the whole neck, if you like. But you've got to win, damn you, Jacko!—you've got to win. Now see here. Have you gotten that spell with Corton yet?"

"No," said John. "I can't do everything at once."

"Well," answered Bo, looking at the impossible watch on her wrist, "step on the gas and shoot. There's no time to lose."

He agreed.

"I'm going to fix the coat and the ruff. And I'm going to sew through the slit in it that dandy little sword which I got from the shield stack on the stairs; six in a star. There's only five now. But I put them straight. No one'll notice. You run off to Corton." She paused and added, "And I'll add a word to Lord Mere. Just a word. Just a follow-up, Jacko. 'Nuff said."

CHAPTER X

AMATHEA, First Baroness de Beaurevage, stood in ecstasy upon the lawn, holding darling Hilda's arm solidly in the crook of hers—two solid arms well interlocked. In spite of the thickness and the shortness of her neck, she carried her head a little upon one side, partly from the intensity of her emotions, more through her conviction that such an attitude befitted the occasion.

“Oh, Ilda!” she said, “darling Ilda, wot a gem! What a reel Jule!” Then she sighed. “I wish the Prime Minister could see it, that I do,” she continued. “Yer can't think 'ow 'ot 'e is on old English 'ouses. Why, I tell you strite, Ilda, show that man an old English 'ouse, and he just fair goes off the deep end—as the saying is. He said to me once, he did, ‘Amathea,’ he says—'e calls me Amathea, 'cos Uggins don't like him to call me Mattie—yet we're pals, ye' know ——” and here she nudged her hostess strongly in the rib with a powerful elbow, and that lady, having before her one approach to fifty thousand pounds, stalwartly bore the blow.

“There'll never be another like 'im, Ilda,” went on the Baroness sentimentally, and in a rather lower tone. “Never no more! There'll be an-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

other in 'is place, no doubt—one passeth and another cometh—as the good book says. It's the rule of them great Parliament men, they pass away like the flowers o' the field. Yus, and it's the rule of the 'ole world too." She shook her head. "Mebbe they'll get some 'ighbrow in his room: but we'll never see the likes of 'im again—not in that plice. 'Owever, he's there now, and long may he stick. A treasure, Ilda." (Then she was off on the house again.) "To see all that quiet, and them old trees, and all so peaceful like, and timber on the front and all—oh, it fair sets me envious. Aren't you 'appy, Ilda, aren't you 'appy in a plice like this?"

Aunt Hilda sighed in her turn, profoundly.

"Dearest Amatheia," she said, with a Christian squeezing of the arm that had so lately dealt her such a cruel blow (you are too young, reader, to know what it will feel like to get a bang in the ribs from the elbow of a peeress and sister-friend in your fiftieth year), "I shall hate to leave it."

"Oo talks of yer leavin' it? Why, you're the queen o' the place," answered the noblewoman, not without guile, but in her business-like heart she was murmuring, "Artful, artful! That artful!"

"Sometimes," said Hilda Maple, disengaging her arm for one moment in the desire to breathe, and under the excuse of smoothing her kilt, "sometimes I think that I can't bear to leave it, and that some day I might hope . . . Then, you

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

know, there comes back to me all that I owe to the family and the name, and how Rackham ought always to be in Maple hands . . . And then I remember how the poor boy . . ." she shrugged her shoulders, "well, Mattie, you know what *he* is."

"I'm shore he's an 'andsome, well-set-up young feller," said Mattie.

"Yes, yes," sighed Hilda again. "He's all that. But you know what he is. He could never keep the place up. He will never really *earn*. His poor father was just like him . . . That's why I sometimes think . . . well, that I ought to realise and leave the poor lad, when I am gone . . ." (she sighed again, as though she were on the brink of the grave) "with a solid lump of money behind him anyhow." She glanced at her companion. "But well tied up, Mattie—you understand me. Well tied up. I wouldn't trust him to keep a penny of it, any more than his poor dear father." And Mattie nodded confidence. "Sometimes I think it's my duty," Hilda Maple went on, "to sell . . . And then sometimes I feel torn and distracted . . ." She clasped her hands, and cast upwards a gaze which took in the gables of Rackham and the lower part of the sky. "But to think of Rackham no longer in Maple hands!" The distinguished figure of Sir Harry Murtenshaw rose before her eyes, the romantic marriage—but no ghost. She had already forgotten about *Him*.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Mattie hadn't.

"Ow! It's all so romantic! An' the gowst an' all!" resumed that lady, capturing her hostess' arm once again and leading her towards the door of the hall. "I wish we ud ad a gowst at home when I was young, that I do," and she shook her head. "But there, you can't have everything!"

There was a pause upon the gravel, and the two ladies made their majestic progress towards the entry of those ancient walls. The one was ardently longing for an advance—I do not mean a prepayment (for the moment), but a suggestion of purchase. The other was considering the best form in which that suggestion might be made. Hilda Maple, having, if that were possible, the higher breeding, had the more rapid process of brain; and the initiative came from her.

"You know, Amatheia," she said gently, reverting to more formality, "that Lord . . . that your husband has spoken of buying the place?" Her tone was thoughtful, gentle, and a little pensive too.

"Why, Hilda Maple," answered the peeress, standing back as though in amaze, "oo'd 'ave thought it?"

"Yes," went on her hostess, still pensive, still subdued, and she sighed again yet more profoundly than before. "Oh, I wish there was someone to make up our minds for us, as there was when we were children! What am I to say? What am I to do? I can't bear to leave the place,

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

and yet . . . And yet . . . I think I know where my duty lies. When I had several offers for it," she added, lying gently, "I mean, just after the war, when there were so many people after it, I refused, as you know." (It was the first time Mattie had heard of it—and no wonder!) "But things were different then; my brother-in-law was alive, and the boy seemed such a child. And now, of course, when it's quite a different place in value, with all the changes I've made, and the improvements, they will come offering me more than they did, and I shall be tempted. I know I shall. But I do promise you this, Mattie. I won't even mention figures till I have given you and your husband first choice. There! I've said it now!"

"I knew you would!" answered Mattie impulsively, at the door, and suddenly kissing her friend. "Oh, you're strite and loyal, you are! Pity it is there ain't more like you. It's what I was saying to the Prime Minister only the other day, when he said that about Uggins. He said, 'Amathea,' he said (he calls me Amathea, 'cos I won't let him call me Mattie—I don't think it's right, nor he wouldn't neither), 'Amathea,' 'e says, 'that 'usband of yours is one of a thousand. And do you know why I ses it?' ses he. 'Because he's *strite*,' ses he. 'He runs *strite*,' ses 'e. 'I tell you, Amathea,' he ses, 'a man that runs strite is a jule.' And you run strite too, Ilda, you do. That's what 'e said. Them was the identical words!"

So the song ended—as the poet Longfellow

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

somewhere remarks—and the two ladies strolled into the hall. Amatheia, with an agility worthy of a better cause, rapidly performed the pounding gymnastics which she called “popping upstairs.” She had certain calculations to make, certain notes.

As for Hilda, she was turning towards her room, herself also intent on certain notes, certain calculations, when she heard a firm and regular step, which she knew. It was Lord Hellup. He had just caught up his expensive but reasonable grey hat, and his not demonstrative but costly gold-headed cane, and was about, as befitted the creases in his clothes and the exactitude of his coat, to adorn the gardens of Rackham. He had an hour before tea. He was suddenly aware that Hilda stood before him. I am sorry to say that he impulsively took her hand, as though he were meeting her for the first time in some days. But he smiled and she smiled, and he begged her to show him the rosery of which she had spoken.

So they went out together, he sixty or so, she fifty, and the spring around them both; and in the rosery they talked of roses.

On the way back Hilda Maple led the way round, still talking in the manner he found so engrossing, with such refinement, such subtlety, such charm, as none other but he had noticed in her conversation, until, turning out of the shrubbery, they found themselves upon the lawn where so lately Lady Mere de Beurivage had stood, where Lord Hellup now was—but with this dif-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

ference, that Lord Hellup had far too much respect for womankind to link his arm in Hilda's; contrariwise, his hung somewhat awkwardly along his flank.

Hilda Maple gazed at Rackham with a world of affection in her eyes. Lord Hellup stood by watching, admiring, nearly worshipping that gaze. It apprehended the gables of Rackham, and the lower part of the sky.

"I can't bear to think of leaving it," she said in a subdued voice, and there was a little catch in it, almost like a sob.

"Why, Mercy!" cried the candid gentleman from overseas, "you're sure not thinking of leaving it, Mrs. Maple! Why, we associate you with Rackham, and Rackham with you, like hand and glove. You're necessary to Rackham, Mrs. Maple," he added, with an emphatic enthusiasm, and he very nearly continued, "and Rackham's necessary to you," when his quick mind perceived that this would be a blunder. He said, with something almost like tenderness in his tone, and with a drop of two notes in his voice, "I could not bear to think of Rackham without you, Mrs. Maple."

She sighed—that same sigh.

"There was a time when I would not have dreamed of it, Lord Hellup," she answered. "You know, these things are very difficult to talk about ——" she delicately put the tips of her fingers upon his arm for a moment, and at once withdrew them. "But now I have begun perhaps

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

I ought to say it. When they were making all those offers for the place—just at the end of the war . . .”

“Were they *so*?” inquired Lord Hellup with interest, and a most intelligent look in his eyes.

“Yes, yes,” said Hilda Maple hurriedly. “Well, I wouldn’t hear of it then. It seemed to me abominable that Rackham should leave the Maple name. But then, you know, my brother-in-law was alive then, and John was only a boy. I refused them. Of course, it’s more valuable now: that was before I had done anything to the place, and I must say,” she went on prettily, and smiling at him as she said it, “I have made it what it used to be. I do think I may be proud of it.”

“Why, sure, you can,” answered the magnate emphatically. “It’s the niftiest little nest I’ve seen this side of the water. The more I see of it, the more I think so. And so does Bo,” he added hurriedly; to support his judgment lest by any chance his hostess should disagree with him. He repeated himself. “The niftiest little nest this side the water.”

The adjectives and noun were not those which Hilda Maple would herself have chosen. Rackham Catchings was not so little, after all; and there was something impertinent about “nifty,” seeing that the foundations were pre-monstrous, or whatever the word was. But she had that in her mind which made verbal niceties unimportant.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"My heart's been torn, Lord Hellup," she said, with a rising voice (and she clasped her hands). "But I think it's my duty to provide . . . You know what the boy is."

"He's some lad," replied Lord Hellup politely. It was not what Aunt Hilda wanted.

"Yes, yes," she said, almost impatiently—English people are sometimes a little like that with their trans-Atlantic cousins. "Oh, I know his talents, and he's a dear boy. But," shaking her head, "he could never keep up Rackham!" She sighed again. "It's the same old story. Like father, like son. He's like his father before him. I'm afraid it's my duty to see when I'm gone that there shall be solid money behind him—well tied up. When I am gone . . ." she added, putting a bell-like tone into her voice and receiving, what she had expected, an ardent protest from her companion.

"Yes, yes," she sighed, in reply to it, "it may be a long time yet—or it may not. But I have got to think of the boy."

Poor woman! She had got to think of the Esthonian as well! Of him who was to her Mr. Rupert de Vere.

"I don't know—I don't know," she went on, in a carefully distracted voice, and once more she put her hand on Lord Hellup's arm, this time less briefly. "We women need advice. No . . . I have made up my mind. It's my duty to sell . . . I even, sometimes, think I ought to take the price

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

that was offered me last month by that odious tea broker."

Lord Hellup had not heard of the tea broker, friend of his hostess though he was. And why should he—since the tea broker did not exist? Lord Hellup had passed his life in business. His judgment of prices, he would often tell himself, might be compared to the glance of an eagle. He could not help wondering what the odious tea broker man had suggested for Rackham Catchings. But Hilda was not "talking"—yet.

They were now off the lawn and upon that gravel path going back to the door, after another such silence as Amatheia also had known in that same place not very long before. Just as they reached the threshold, Hilda looked up frankly into her friend's eyes. There was a suspicion of tears in her own, which moved that friend profoundly.

"When once I'm *certain* it's my duty to sell, I shall do it," she said. She shook her head again sadly. "But I can't bear to think of myself without Rackham."

"And we," said Lord Hellup, in a low, deep voice, suitable to the occasion, and most sincerely moved, "we" (he used the impersonal term) "could not bear to think of Rackham without you." He took her hand again—I am sorry to say that it was his intention to have kissed the tips of her fingers, but found she had withdrawn them. The peer was annoyed with the fear that

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

he had perhaps broken some social canon or other. But Hilda Maple was not cruel, for as she went away, their last words exchanged, she smiled.

So much for sixty years and fifty years. Now let us come to calculations.

* * * * *

At the table in her room Lady Mere de Beau-rivage did, as she put it to herself, some figuring. She was an adept at the art, from the days when she had marked prices in chalk with lightning strokes upon the sides of the barrow in the Old Kent Road. She had improved in the later days, when she had cheapened furniture for the new villa of which she had been so proud in the suburbs, before the Great Change.

But since the Great Change I must admit that Amatheia, Baroness Mere de Beau-rivage had begun to let things slide. The money was there in such heaps that really it didn't seem to matter what one did. Her passion for Rackham had got hold of her. She knew enough of buying and selling to make certain that the place was within her reach if enough were offered. It was only a question of what enough was. She could usually manage her lord, but she knew that in one thing the management was not always easy; and that one thing was money. For like all those whose genius has led them to accumulate a considerable fortune rapidly, Lord Mere de Beau-rivage was in

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

some terror of losing it. She remembered what other friends had paid for houses and what other friends had sold at. Her desire for the place led her further to remember how often she had heard of the special value of these modest country houses of ancient memory; what a drug in the market were the great hulking stone places of the eighteenth century, and what a demand there was for these Tudor and timbered gems.

Before she had done dreaming of it, the good woman had got as her top price, at the back of her head—counting all—something like £60,000. After all, it was not her money. And what is £60,000 in two millions? Besides which, it was only £3,000 a year anyhow; and what's three thousand a year when you were born to an uncertain pound a week? The great thing is to get what you want. Three thousand a year—but that's not the way to look at it—£60,000. Why, there are toffs as ull give that for a trumpery picture!

And then, there was no one to inherit from them. And she asked herself sentimentally whether Huggins and she had not the right to enjoy what was left of their lives. And there could not be anything else like Rackham. There were not two places like Rackham—not in all England there weren't.

In Amatheia's room, therefore, the figure of Sixty Thousand Pounds had taken root and had sprung.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Through a wall not too thick (for it was in the new or Catchings wing, and the walls were damnably antique) at another desk, Hilda Maple was making *her* calculations also. She drew the figures wearily enough. £20,000 would clear her. What was desperate, what was immediate was de Vere of Jermyn Street.

It was to pay the first five hundred, and so get the Esthonian to renew, all those months ago, just after the Ancestor, that she had written, on the advice of an acquaintance familiar with antiques, to Blunt of Bristol; and really Blunt had been very nice about it. She had a full three months in which to meet it. But when Blunt had to be met for the renewal—he pressed her courteously by post, she had never seen him—he pleaded the smallness of his capital; he recommended that very honourable firm, or rather, private advancer, a Mr. de Vere of Jermyn Street. And Mr. de Vere had been quite charming. He had advanced enough to permit Blunt of Bristol to renew for another three months. And he himself had fixed a very easy date for his own repayment. But that easy date had fallen due a whole week ago—and how he had pestered her. He had made her dread the telephone.

She must have something to show him. Anything in writing. Even a private note. It was a little desperate; but she did think she could get it before the break-up on Monday.

It was not too late, Sunday though it was. She

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

knew from sad experience that de Vere could use the telephone from his end on a Sunday afternoon, and she doubted not that she could call him up from hers.

She took up the receiver; and sure enough that smooth voice answered in velvet from the other end. Her own voice as she continued was all as smooth.

"Is that Mr. de Vere? Mr. Rupert de Vere? Oh, Mr. Rupert," settling down, and still more sweetly, "I am so glad of the opportunity of telling you—yes, I know. I didn't want to make you talk business on a Sunday" (sudden change to an expression of anguish). "Oh, no, surely, dear Mr. Rupert. Not Monday! Why, that's to-morrow! Yes, yes" (pettishly), "I know that's the date on the paper—a week ago—yes—but there's common sense in these matters—no—yes—exactly. Do wait a minute. I've practically sold the place. No, no, Mr. Rupert, you haven't heard that so often before. I tell you it's *virtually* sold. There's Lord Hellup who has *virtually* accepted—practically. And then, you know, there's the other one here too—Lord Mere de Beaurivage—not heard of him? Oh, nonsense, you must have heard of him! Dear Mr. Rupert, he's positively dripping with it. No, no" (shouting) "BRUV-VISH—I'll spell it" (slowly) "B E A U R I (angrily). "It's damnable—you've cut me off . . . yes, yes, another three minutes. Yes. Oh, are you *there*, Mr. Rupert? Yes, I know they did,

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

the brutes. I'll spell it again. B for buffalo, E for Edward, A for affluent, U for ugly, R for rancid, I for innocent, V for vulgar—yes, that's it" (emphatically) "precisely. Sir George Huggins that was. Yes, only he pronounces it Bruvish—I thought you'd know. He's the man whom the Prime Minister—yes, exactly, dear Mr. Rupert. Oh, thank you *so* much. Tuesday, then? I may see you Tuesday? Oh, that makes *all* the difference" (peevishly). "Well, you don't suppose I can come with the agreement in my pocket! What? Something in writing? Oh, yes, certainly. Well, then, Tuesday. Thank you so much, dear Mr. Rupert! Tuesday morning—that'll be perfect . . . G-o-o-d b-y-e."

Aunt Hilda hung up the receiver, exhausted; faced the situation, and muttered bravely, "Hell!"

Meanwhile her nephew was making history with her butler, Isabeau Hellup concurring.

CHAPTER XI

JOHN MAPLE sought Corton. He found that excellent man seated in his private room beside the fire, reading *The Spectator* in cultured ease. For it was the hour when butlers take their ease. The dignified figure rose with majestic courtesy at the young man's knock and entry.

"You catch me *improviste*, Mr. John," he said.

"I interrupt you, Corton," answered John. "I'm sorry, but it's urgent, and it won't take me long. I'm glad you read *The Spectator*."

"That journal is my favourite reading, Mr. John," answered Corton, with fine simplicity. "Mrs. Maple is good enough to provide the *News of the World* for us. I glance at it, for a summary of what may be called domestic occurrences. But for judgment and a survey of public life I prefer *The Spectator*. It is my pabulum."

John told him he was quite right. But he added abruptly:

"Corton, have you ever heard about a ghost at Rackham?"

"A ghost, Mr. John? Lord, no!" said the old gentleman. "If there was a ghost," he added emphatically, "I should have heard of it, I hope! There *was* a ghost at Pilford, a little the other

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

side of Lewes, but," he added proudly, "they laid *him*."

"Oh, yes, I remember the ghost at Pilford. It was a white cow. Came into their upper garden at night, didn't it, in the dark of the moon?"

"That's right," answered Corton sagely. "It came twice. But some said it wasn't an earthly cow. On the third night that young clerical gentleman what wore a three-corner cap said he could exercise it and exercised it. It never came again. I heard the very details, Mr. John," he said, lowering his voice. "I heard that from Mr. Worthing, who you may remember was valet to Sir Charles."

John nodded.

"The young gentleman said some strange, solemn words: there they all was, after eleven, looking from the terrace, and the cow melted." He would have given more of the spectral beast. His voice was already in tune for the supernatural, when John interrupted him and said:

"Well, Corton, so there has never been a ghost at Rackham, anyhow. Now listen. There's got to be a ghost now, this very day."

And he unfolded his plan.

Corton listened gravely. But he was not yet an ally. He heard what John had to say, but he didn't know what Mrs. Maple would think of it. It was not for him to play practical jokes either. He would do anything to help Master John, but . . . What with one thing and another.



Mr. Corton reads "The Spectator"

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

It was then that John put down his cards.

"Corton," he said, "who's the rightful owner of Rackham?"

"Why, Master John," answered the old man, hesitating, "it's not my place to say. If I might be so bold as to be free to speak . . ."

"Yes, Corton," interrupted the young man, "if you were free to speak you would say that *I* was the rightful owner of Rackham. And you would say that I was swindled out of it, or at any rate crow-barred out of it; and that's an abomination. And you would say that if only I could pay Aunt Hilda the fair price (and the fair price would be a good deal less than the £20,000 my father was supposed to owe her husband—he never borrowed anything like it really) I'd have as good right to Rackham as my father himself had."

Corton made a gesture—too respectful for a nod, too affirmative for a bow.

"Well, Corton," said John sharply, "now don't you see?"

But the old man wanted to have the *i*'s dotted and the *t*'s crossed.

"Look here, Corton, do you want to see that fellow Bruvvish sitting here in Rackham, and you turned out, and Lord knows what horrors of his own brought in? Jazz bands and Wireless?"

"I had hoped," said the old man slowly, "to live and die here, Master John, I had hoped to live on here when I was past my service, if ever. Your father always said I should, and Mrs. Maple

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

never denied it one way or the other. This room's not my very own, sir, it's yours; but I don't think I could live long away from it. It would kill me, sir, if I may say so with respect. I never thought of strangers in this house. It wouldn't be in nature."

"Well, there you are, Corton. And the way to prevent that is to prevent this old brute Huggins from getting the place. Besides which, Corton, you know as well as I do that Rackham would be itself again if I was here, as I ought to be, and you as you were when my father was alive, running the whole place and bullying us to death. Well, there's only one way of doing it, and that's frightening off Lord Rubbish. I have laid the foundation, and we have only got to go ahead. Now listen to me, Corton. In about five minutes I shall be in the billiard-room with Miss Hellup. I have told her. I am going to marry that young lady, Corton."

"Indeed, sir," said Corton, bowing again, but this time far more ceremoniously. "I congratulate you, sir. I've always heard that these American young ladies . . ."

"You're quite right, Corton; you're perfectly right," said John hurriedly. "And very beautifully put. Thank you a thousand times. Now listen again. I tell you in about five minutes I've got to meet her in the billiard-room. When I ring *twice* will you come? We shall have to put

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

our three heads together. Do you understand? When I ring *twice*? And no one else is to come."

Corton understood.

As the young man made to go out of Corton's room that master of ceremonies heaved to his feet and was before him at the door. He bowed yet again as he showed John Maple out. Then, when all was clear, he sent for the boy.

"Boy," he said, "when you hear the bell *twice*, *twice*, mind you, you come and tell me. Twice, mind you! Don't disturb me for once."

"Very good, sir," answered the boy in a voice cracked but most servile.

His superior rewarded him with an august but very slight nod.

Some few minutes passed. Corton no longer read *The Spectator*, passionately absorbing though its pages be. He held it listlessly drooping in an aged hand; he looked into the fire and remembered his old master, Henry Maple, and the better days. Then there rose before his mind the picture of Lord Mere de Beurivage, and his mouth hardened.

The bell rang twice.

* * * * *

In the billiard-room Bo was pocketing the red all by herself with admirable precision. When Bo could not do things well she did not do them at all; which is one way of being efficient. She con-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

tinued her series as John catechised her on her short interlude, picking the red out for her every time and putting it back on spot with the tenderest care, and admiring her gymnastics at long and short range.

“Did you speak to him, Bo?”

“I did that. I asked him whether he had felt something odd about the corridor upstairs where his room is. He said no. I think he gulped.”

“What state did you think him in, Bo?”

“Shaken, Jacko; not badly, but shaken. He didn’t like my talking about it.”

“Oh! So I worked it?”

“Yep! Damn! You can’t do two things at once,” said she, putting down her cue as the red foolishly lolloped round hanging its head and came to a disgraceful rest, unsatisfied. John took up the cue and played a stroke.

“The others’ve got to hear the balls clicking, so as to know we’re at work and not to be interfered with,” he said.

“You’re right,” said Bo.

“He’s coming. He’s to come when I ring twice. So I’ll ring twice.”

He rang twice. And in due time with due dignity Corton entered. Bo put her finger to her lip and John obediently did the same. The elderly gentleman with some doubt that it might not be very dignified, but also that it might be his duty, put to his lips in turn a grave and rather podgy finger. Then John swung the balls together

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

viciously, to make a prolonged clattering, and they laid their swift plan.

"If I may say so without forgetting my place, Master John," said Corton, when they had begun the preliminaries, "we shall do well to begin with the household."

"The household?" said Bo.

"Yes, miss. I mean, the lower servants. And then, of course, my own colleagues, I trust I shall be able to indoctrinate them."

John nodded.

"That's wise," he said. "But remember the man we're shooting at."

"Oh, yes, Master John," said Corton respectfully. "That's what I mean. You will be working him, if I may use the word," and he coughed gently. "I'll be bringing a deputation some time later this evening, sir. They are a little shaken already, Master John, like what you said his lordship was. Only more so. Especially the cook. She was always psychic. And then there's the tweenie—she'll be useful, because she's worse, she has had religion this winter—badly. Only, Master John, I don't think I can do anything with that Frenchman. He's shown no signs. I fear he is impervious to the influences of the Other World."

"I know," said Bo simply. "Frenchmen are brass."

"They give no credit, miss, to the doctrine of eternal punishment."

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

“That’s what I meant,” said Bo.

“Now, Corton,” John went on, “listen to what Miss Hellup and I have arranged. I’m going to put on a long black coat she has got for me; and we’ve taken down one of the swords from the sham armour that Aunt Hilda bought the other day, and shall stick it through the slit in the coat. Then she’s made a big ruff. I shall put the whole thing over my head, and there I shall be. A short man with his head in his chest, or a tall man without a head—whichever you like. A ruff where his neck ought to be, but nothing above it.”

“It was Miss Hellup who thought of that!” said Corton with admiration.

“No, Corton,” said Bo. “We both thought of it. But it is I who made up the properties—and they’re dandy.”

“You’ll keep them carefully concealed, miss—and you, sir—until the right moment?” said Corton anxiously.

The two younger people nodded. John went on.

“That old gentleman’s going to hear voices, Corton, till they drive him to bed. And you know that Aunt Hilda has put him into the Armada room?”

“Yes, Master John,” answered Corton very seriously. “The room that’s panelled with oak which I hear is derived from the wrecks of the Spanish Armada, as is also that in the dining-room.”



John Maple explains his plan

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"That's right," said John cheerfully. "That's where the ghost's going to be. For I am the ghost, and I know. There's just room between the tapestry on the wall and the red damask hangings at the head of the four-post bed." Then he added oddly, "I wish I hadn't gone in for it. It feels mean. But I had to take his appetite away, Corton. I don't want those millions to eat up Rackham."

"You'll make me despise you, Jacko," said Bo, with the cruelty of her sex. "What you want is to make the old brute roaring crazy. If you don't, I shall."

"I'll go through with it, Bo," said Jacko simply. "But I do pity the old boy all the same. You see, I have had nerves myself—when I was a child."

"And you'll have them again to-night, if there's a mirror in the room and you squint through a button-hole," Bo answered. "Now, Corton, all this is bright and right?"

"Perfectly, miss, absolutely," said Corton.

"Well, then, I'll be getting back and helping some more with this lil' haunting; and I'll go coach Lovey-Lad. I know how to make him whine and shiver."

So did these conspirators part.

* * * * *

Still at her desk, the telephone relinquished,

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

the Esthonian for a moment silenced, Hilda Maple jotted away.

If she sold for £40,000 she could live modestly and freely for the rest of her life; she had gone into the prices of annuities at her age, and she knew what the £20,000 extra when all was paid off could buy.

If she could sell for £50,000, with a balance of £30,000 over for an annuity—well and good. Or rather, well and better.

But time pressed; even if she hooked one of her two fish, she must have something in writing by the morrow.

She was a determined woman, and a clear-headed woman; and also by nature as hopeful as she was decided. She said to herself, as she jotted figures slowly down on the paper before her, that if she played her cards at all properly she would have her competing offers before the evening was out. Then in the morning before her guests went away she would get a brief note from the firm bidder. She would say it was more regular, and whoever it was that had promised wouldn't be able to refuse that small formality. Then she could breathe again with something to take up to town on the Tuesday. She would play her cards first with Bruvvish—there was margin to play with in the devotion of Lord Hellup. She must take Bruvvish for a foundation.

Bruvvish therefore she boarded, taking him aside immediately after she had given him tea,

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

as the sacrificial victim is taken aside after a draught of honeyed wine. She got him into the library, alone, and fired a broadside under which he reeled, and from which he could not recover. She told him that she had divined his desire to purchase Rackham; she loyally swore that his wife had never breathed a word of it, but she admitted that Amatheia had not been able to conceal her very natural feeling about the place. They were old friends, were they not? and dear friends—or she would not be speaking so frankly.

Well, as he knew, until quite lately she would have thought that anyone who asked her to sell Rackham was mad. But then, with him and Amatheia it was different. And one thing she had always said: if it had to go—and if it really was her duty to the boy that she should sell—at least it should be in the hands of friends, and for the sake of friends, still more for the sake of feeling that the old place was still in the same kind of hands, she would take what she would certainly take from no one else.

All the great spirit of the Huggins blood rose at that moment, and before the fatal figures could be uttered, before the foot could be slipped into the open door, the initiative had passed from Hilda to the enemy. The mighty man of business spoke. These things have to be done as with an axe—once, and decisively. He had always read that of the millionaires in the papers. And since he had become a millionaire himself he had

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

been determined to live up to it. He settled his head well down, shortening still further his short neck; he put on the sullen expression which he associated with financial mastery, and he said these words:

“I ’ad thort o’ going to £30,000.”

Hilda Maple was worthy of herself, and of the occasion.

“Yes,” she said simply—and then, as though no one had spoken, “as you say. It is most strange to me how long it takes me to make up my mind. I will be straightforward with you, Lord Mere. When I was offered sixty thousand all those years ago . . .”

“Sixty thousand!” gasped Lord Mere de Beau-rivage.

Hilda Maple waved her hand impatiently.

“Sixty thousand, I said. Well, when I was offered it all those years ago I refused it. Not for the money, mind you—I thought it was a very fair price, especially as I had not added anything to speak of in those days. But I could not bear to think of selling the place. They might have offered me sixty million and it would have been the same. But now it’s another matter. You know, dear Lord Mere de Béaurivage” (he quailed beneath her eye), “. . . that I’m saying it to you because it *is* you—you and dearest Amatheia. One can’t have many close friends in this world. And you know too that I’m thinking of the boy. If I knew that I could get even fifty

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

thousand guineas now, and leave it in safe hands. . . . Why . . . Yes . . .” again she sighed. “I suppose I should yield.”

“Fifty thousand!” almost shouted Lord Mere de Beaurivage.

“Yes,” nodded his handsome friend. “Fifty thousand guineas. That’s it. It’s too little, I know. I know what you’re feeling for me—but can’t beat up a price. I can’t haggle. I never could bear the details of business. And if I must suffer, why, it’s like an operation . . . I want something quick, clean, and done with. . . . So I’d take even that.”

It was on the tip of his lordship’s tongue to utter the fatal words, “Yer would, would yer?”—and then her patience would have broken and there would have been a scene. But he stood in sufficient awe of superior culture to be restrained in time. All he said was:

“Well, ma’am—Ilda, I mean—honest and square like . . . come . . . I do think when you say fifty thousand pounds . . .”

“Guineas,” murmured Hilda Maple.

“Ho? Guineas?” he muttered savagely. “You’re fair coming it over me! That’s wot you are, strite—altogether coming it over me!”

“Oh!” moaned Hilda Maple wearily. “How I hate all this business talk! I don’t want to sell the place. I wish I’d never mentioned it. And if it’s going to interrupt our friendship, for God’s sake let’s say no more about it at all. It’ll be a

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

load off my mind, anyhow, to drop the whole thing. And there I shall be in Rackham, where I've always been. And it's my soul's home. And with John . . . here as I grow old . . . to inherit it all from me," she added, with beautiful sentiment.

"Don't misunderstand me, Ilda, don't misunderstand me," said the great man. "We need to be friendly in business, same as in everything else. Don't we? Now s'posin we talk it over quiet-like. Here have I been talkin' thirty thousand pounds. Well, I tell ye' strite, that was just bargaining. You wouldn't have me not bargain, would yer? Yer think less of me, wouldn't yer?"

"Oh, I'm tired . . . tired, tired!" exclaimed the lady, in tragic tones, higher than she had yet used, and alarming to the financier, who was always terrified of women's whims. "I can't go into it any more, George" (she did not often call him George—but she called him George now). "Really I can't. I tell you . . ." She got up and moved as though she would go.

"Stye a bit. Wite a bit, Ilda, do!" he cried, hoisting himself out of his chair. "I've got ter tell Mattie somethin, yer know. Now, let's be reasonable. We was saying fifty thousand pounds, that's what you and I was saying . . ."

"Guineas," I said. "No! no! I can't go on," burst forth Hilda Maple, making for the door in her agitation. Then she turned back suddenly and frankly took his hands. "We won't quarrel,

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

George, will we? Only don't let us talk business any more."

And then she was gone.

His lordship sank back into the big chair from which he had so painfully raised himself for that moment, and he grumbled to himself half aloud:

"All Mattie's doin'; she's that keen on the place! Fifty thousand! Well, it's a ramp. But now she's broke off! What am I to say to Mattie?"

* * * * *

Hilda Maple, singularly composed after her recital, not unlike King Lear or any other tragic figure when it gets off into the wings for its pot of beer, had two things clearly fixed in her mind: first, she had established her fifty thousand—guineas; there was no doubt of that at all. She had laid her foundation. Secondly, Lord Hellup would be spending the time between tea and dressing, as he always did, in the little Red Room, reading Motley's *Dutch Republic*—it was astonishing, she thought, how that great man could read and re-read Motley's *Dutch Republic*. But it argued a stable mind. Anyhow, he would be there, in the little Red Room. And therefore to the little Red Room did Hilda Maple steal.

* * * * *

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

For once in his life Lord Hellup did not mind being interrupted in his re-reading for the fiftieth time of the *Monstrous Alva*, the *Divine William of Orange*, the heroic *Dutch* and the villainous *Dagoes*. He put down his book with a snap; he was on his feet at once; he had put a winning look into his face, and was about to put a winning tone into his voice to greet her, when Hilda forestalled him.

“Lord Hellup,” she said, “I have come to ask your advice. No one would give it more freely or more generously than you, and I would trust your judgment beyond that of any living person.”

“Is that so?” replied the peer, with pleasure ringing through the quiet words.

“Lord Hellup, I have made up my mind to sell Rackham.”

“You don’t say?” repeated her guest, in the same courteous intonation. “That was what I felt scared about when you were talking just now in the garden. Well, well, so you want to sell Rackham?”

“Yes. But I come to you—I shall be quite frank, because you can help me as no one else can . . .”

“Help—how?” said his lordship courteously.

“Why, with your advice, Lord Hellup.”

His face admitted his relief.

“You can tell me more justly, and I would trust you more completely—as I have said—than

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

any living man. Tell me honestly, what ought I to ask?"

"If I were making the offer, Mrs. Maple," said her friend, word by word and carefully, "I say *if* I were, or if I were buying for a friend, say . . ." Then he broke off. "Or, see here, put it this way. If I were asked what it would fetch at an auction in a free market ——" He paused and took up another line, and began again almost affectionately, "Or, see here, if I were trying to get the best price for you . . ."

Hilda Maple became impatient.

"Lord Hellup, it would be much the same figure in any case, wouldn't it?"

"Why, no," he said thoughtfully. "You see, if I were buying that would be one thing, and if I were selling for you, that would be another thing. Then if I were bidding at an auction . . ."

Hilda Maple thought, not unwisely, that this might go on for ever. During all their growing intimacy she had more and more regarded Lord Hellup as a man of few terse phrases. It seemed there was another side to him—and this would never do.

"Lord Hellup," she said simply and swiftly to bring things to a crisis. "Tell me plainly. Do you think that if I ask fifty thousand guineas I am asking too much?"

"Why, no," replied the First Baron Hellup, composedly, and weighing his words. "Strictly

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

speaking, you cairn't ask too much. Same way, they cairn't offer too little."

"I've been offered more in the past," said the lady decisively.

"Well, if you didn't take it," he sympathetically answered, "that means it's worth more to *you* than fifty thousand pounds, doesn't it?"

"Yes," she said, "it is. To me, Rackham Catchings is worth untold gold."

"Why, then," said Lord Hellup—and she thought he might have said it earlier, "fifty thousand pounds doesn't sound too much, does it?"

"Guineas," said Hilda Maple.

"Yes, guineas," he replied, "it's all the same to me. If it's the way you say it is, then fifty thousand pounds—guineas, I mean—can't be too much, can it?"

Hilda Maple had come to her conclusion. He was cryptic; he was evasive; but she had heard that the great American masters of finance were always so in the first stages of a bargain. But there could be no doubt about it: fifty thousand guineas had seemed reasonable to this rich man.

In the silence that followed her mind worked rapidly. He had been shrewd, and she honoured him for being shrewd. He had been cautious; but she had no doubt now that he was a buyer, and that she had heard an authority who would at any rate back her up in her figure of fifty thousand guineas. He had talked of auctions and of acting for her; he had said that guineas and pounds were

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

the same to him; she was content. She felt perhaps a little vaguely that another arrow also had pierced his heart. Well, there was no harm in that.

But he hadn't come forward as buyer with any enthusiasm. The purchase money for Rackham must be sought from Lord Mere. But she could in a last resort quote Lord Hellup as having offered. It was stretching a point, but she could risk it. And when old Bruvvish had settled—as he would settle—the purchase money would be something of a dowry to bring even to a man as rich as Hellup was. And anyhow, the market was alive; she had both a bidder and a valuer now.

She thanked Lord Hellup warmly and sincerely and took his hand and shook it, to impress him with her sincerity. He said with warmth how pleased he had been to be of any service; but not ten minutes later, when Mrs. Maple had left the room and Bo had come in to see her father, he confided to that admirable daughter that Englishwomen were hard to understand.

“Do you understand them, Bo?” he said.

“More'n they do me,” said Bo, very truthfully.

“Now, that woman, Bo—well . . . I won't say all I was going to say; but she's an admirable woman, and she comes here and asks me what she ought to ask for Rackham.”

“Did you tell her, Pop?” said Bo anxiously.

“Why,” said her father, in his most genial voice; “I let her talk. I wouldn't disappoint her.”

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Whatever she wants to sell the place at she's welcome, for what I care. But she's an admirable woman, Bo. But these Englishwomen are subtle and difficult to understand."

"Now see here, Bo," said the English peer in carefully modulated slow accents, "you women understand what we men sometimes can't. Least, I can't. What's she getting at? What's it all about?" He paused, and then added in a tone of despair.

"These Englishwomen are incomprehensible."

Bo popped her cigarette out of her mouth between her fingers and spoke short words, "She's getting at you to buy, Pop!"

"To buy? What?" said the startled Baron.

"Why, Rackham Catchings. This." And with the words the lovely girl struck her right heel sharply against the floor. "All around . . ." she made a circle with her finger in the air. "Roof and all. Counting the little gadgets."

"I don't want it, Bo," her father said, sitting up and speaking very earnestly.

"She wants you to want it," answered his daughter.

"What should I do with it?" asked her father in his bewilderment.

"Don't you touch it, Pop," said his daughter decisively. "Leave it on the hook . . . Now if you want to know who *will* buy Rackham . . ."

But her father was musing, and interrupted her.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"I did some figuring," he said, "just to pass the time—as I do. And I make out this place and all the fixings, as it stands, counting the visitors' book, would stand me in for more 'n two hundred thousand and less than a quarter of a million dollars."

Bo agreed.

"I don't know about that," she said. "Yes, I do, though" (for a thought had struck her), "I've heard what the death duty was—when Henry Maple died, before she'd built on. They paid duty on £20,000. That's not a quarter of a million; that's only a hundred thousand."

"These Britisher Death Duties are appraised damn low," mused his lordship. "And there's been plenty of fixings in the place since then."

"You'll find that she won't take less than £50,000," said Bo decisively.

"Well, she won't get them from me," said the devout parent, business side uppermost for the moment.

Bo nodded her strong little chin at him.

"That's right, Pop. Don't you touch it."

"You said you knew who was buying," said her father. He was full of curiosity now that he was on the scent of a deal.

"Yep," answered Bo. "It'll make you jump. And buying gulfs under fifty too. Oh, some boy!"

Her father had an incredulous look.

"Which?" said he.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

She took time to deliver her shot, luxuriously inhaling the smoke of her cigarette; and then told him.

"Jacko!" she said.

"Whattt!" cried the millionaire, almost jumping out of his chair.

"That's so," answered Bo, delighted with the effect. "Jacko. Oh, that lad's all planed down, tongued and grooved." She shook her head. "No rough lumber."

Lord Hellup, as befitted a man who had just been shot, hesitated. He had too much pride to accept orders off hand, and too much snap as well. But he hesitated.

"See here, Bo," he began slowly, after a long pause, "I'm not saying a word against Jacko, mind you. That's your end. I never did believe in worrying young people, but if he can buy real estate like that, why . . ." There was a tone of admiration creeping into his voice which delighted his daughter's ear.

"He'll buy—settle, and clinch; leave that to him," she said. "He's a little Napoleon, is Jacko."

"Still, Bo, one doesn't gaff Rackham Catchings at £20,000."

"*He* will," nodded Bo emphatically. "You'll see. You call *that* making good?"

"Seems so," said her father, with his eyes on the ceiling. "But I can't join the slats. Where's it coming from?" He looked a little suspiciously at

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

his daughter. But her sincerity was not to be mistaken.

“You’re wrong there, Pop,” she said. “Won’t come from me or anywhere I know of. Only I say: watch Jocko. He’ll have this place, and he’ll have it for a hundred thousand dollars.”

“Some boy,” murmured Lord Hellup in his turn.

CHAPTER XII

THE evening was far advanced. It had long been time for the ladies to go and dress, especially in such a house as Hilda Maple's, where things were well organised, prompt and punctual. But to-day was an exceptional day.

It was time for Bo to dress—if dress it can still be called—anyhow, to wallow in warm water with Smell-Good Crystals added. But business came before pleasure with Bo.

She sought John, and led him to where she had ready, prepared and folded in a nice little parcel, her nice little cloak. She took it out again and put it over his head, and adjusted the ruff on the top, and patted the sword-hilt sewn into the slit at the side, and patted the sheath behind. Then she crowned the headless figure with the ruff.

"You look dandy, Jacko," she said. "I could kiss you if there was anything to kiss."

"I can't see anything," came a muffled voice from within.

"There's an eyelet hole just about opposite your eyes, I guess. Feel for it with your finger."

John obeyed, found it, and so widened it; an iris and pupil, grey and young, looked forth.

"Scares me, that does," said Bo, drawing back.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"But he'll never see it. You'll find your way about. Trouble's about your shoulders—all slopes down, Jacko—makes you look like an elephant."

"A small elephant," said he.

"Yes, but broad," answered the modest child, with a world of affection in her voice. Then she mused, "Couldn't we prop up them shoulders, Jacko?"

"Might stuff 'em," said he. "They usually have old copies of *The Times* stacked in the box room for packing. *The Times* makes good stuffing."

The young people went off for the paper, and Bo pinned the crushed rolls in. She put the cloak over his head again, and poised the ruff.

"That's more like," she said. "You're my tall, upstanding, spectral cavalier. You'd be a head taller with a head, Jacko."

They debated where to lay the properties, and decided for the lad's own room. It was the next but one to his victim's.

"And how'll you get there, Dog-Man?" she asked.

"I'll manage to slip in," he said. "I can squeeze the cloak over my head between the head of the bed and the wall. And I'll be waiting in the little room which opens out of his bedroom, and which they never use. They always keep the door locked. And they've only got trunks in there. But Corton gave me the key."

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

“Find your own time, Jacko,” she said; and then, snatching a glance at the impossible watch, she saw that she had barely time. But she guessed that the other women would be late that night. And she was right.

It had long been time for Aunt Hilda to dress; but with her also business came before pleasure; and after she had returned baffled from the great attack upon the Hellup trenches she knew that something desperate must be done, dinner or no dinner. Old Bruvvish would still be in the library—he always went up late. She must get back there at once, and nail him down, or confess herself defeated.

Ah! And it had been time longer since for Amatheia to dress. For Amatheia had many things to think of in the affair of dressing, including the choice of hair. But with Amatheia also business came before pleasure. She had seen from the end of the passage darling Hilda come out from the library, which she herself had been just about to enter, to convince her husband of the necessity of purchase. She had seen that hostess make straight for the room where she knew Lord Hellup was reading his Motley. She divined that the coast was clear; for the attack on Hellup (which she knew very well was about to take place) would not be over in ten minutes or in fifteen. Therefore it was that even at the moment Aunt Hilda’s entry had supplanted Motley’s *Republic* in the

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

interest of its reader Amatheia was charging for the library and for a decision.

Lord Mere de Beurivage saw his wife coming into the library. He told himself that it was time for her to dress. He divined some dreadful purpose in her delay. He saw that she was all smiles, and therefore dreaded the battle that was to come.

She had behaved well to him all her life—in the first hard days of accumulating that little fortune by the private banking in the Old Kent Road, she had proved as shrewd and as hard as he had, and a loyal partner; in the big affairs of his later life she had never interfered. When he had asked her advice, it had been sound. To-day the only cause of his dread was that he dared not tell her the real reason of his hesitation: he dared not advance the haunting. No man likes to look cowardly in the eyes of his wife—not even a new politicians' peer.

Corton also had spoken a word or two, very respectfully, explaining a dark stain on the oak floor, and telling him his own version of the legend.

What Corton had said still wreathed like a smoke in his mind, and in memory he again heard that Voice—had he heard it?—a little too clearly.

He braced himself for the discussion that was before him; but he already felt half beaten.

She sailed in and greeted him kindly; sat down at his side, and told him radiantly that her dream

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

had come true. Dear Hilda had as good as said it.

"But there weren't any figures, Uggins," she added, "and that's just as well. I like you men to do the figgerin' part. And you know your way about that well, you do, don't you, ducky? You remember ow the Prime Minister said . . ."

But George Huggins, first Baron de Beau-rivage was in a hurry.

"Yes, Mattie, yes, I remember. He was right, too. But, 'struth, Mattie, her figure's a corker."

"What d'yer mean?" answered the lady anxiously. "Yer not backing out now, George, are yer? Not breakin' my 'eart?"

"Don't you be so quick," said he testily. "Wot I said was that her figure's were corks, and so they were. That woman's greedy, Mattie," he added earnestly, and then he growled, with a sudden reversion to his youth, "bleeding greedy," and his wife reproved him.

"You haven't got no cause to use soldier language to me, Uncle Uggins," she said. "I've given you no provercation. And just you be minded of it!"

He begged her pardon very humbly.

"It got the better of me, Mattie, it did. It shan't again. But there! Fifty thousand pounds—guineas she put it. Just for this!" And he waved a short podgy arm vaguely and rheumatically at the book-lined walls.

Amathea Huggins put into her voice that rich

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

scorn which is rarely heard west of Temple Bar.

"Ow! So that's what sticks in yer gizzard, is it, George Uggins? Fifty dirty little thousand!"

"Guineas it was," growled the peer.

"Well, guineas," said Amatheia, suddenly rising, her arms akimbo. "Guineas. Why, George Uggins, you give more'n that for your baronetcy, you did. D'yer remember what you give for the peerage?"

"Don't!" said her husband faintly. "Don't!"

"Yes, but I will," said Amatheia. "Wot! Yer stick at a gent's price for a beautiful country 'ouse! And its oaks and all, and its park-like grounds. Like what I've read of all my life, and meant to 'ave. Do you know what I'd give for it, George Uggins? If I 'ad money of my own? But there, I 'aven't. I am only just a poor woman, I am. But 'oo 'elped you make your money, George Uggins? Oo stood by yer side, ever pitient, ever true? But there—I don't count, I don't."

And here there came out suddenly a little five guinea handkerchief with real lace all around it, and it was dabbed upon those poor porcine eyes, while she sank again into her chair and sobs shook her most substantial frame. "Oo am I? Just a victim, that's wot I am. Nothing for me. All the work for me. None of the joy, as you may say. And I had so set my eart on it. And so cheap at that," she said, suddenly removing the handkerchief, and switching across from emotion

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

to reason. "Cheap! Why, George Uggins, can't you see it's give away? It's like pine-apples at sixpence," she added, reverting to the days of the barrow. "There you are a-haggling and a-hesitating, carrying on like a hare-a-man. D'you know what I'd ave given? I'd ave given a *undred* thousand, I would. What's a hundred thousand to you, George Uggins? You'd give it to-morrow for another step-up, you would; and you know you would. And oo's it to go to any 'ow?" she added, short-circuiting. (It was her trump card always, poor woman! That only child who had died before their wealth had ascended upon them from Hell.)

And George Huggins, First Baronet, and First Baron Mere de Beurivage, in the county of Berks, struck his colours and handed over his sword.

"Ave it yer own way, old girl," he said. "Ave it yer own way."

She gave him a large Old Kent Road kiss of the kind that pleased him best even in his old age. And he was glad to have the battle over, even in defeat. But man as he was, he could not help muttering to himself (which was both inconsiderate of him, and futile):

"But oh, strike me, fifty thousand guineas!" Then, "What's fifty thousand shillings?" he asked sharply.

"Never you mind," said the lady archly. Now that she had got her way she was full of mature

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

sunshine. "'Taint as much as counts, and you wait till I'm settled ere, and all the county folk talking on the lawn, and you coming out and shaking hands and sayin'—wotever it is you ought to say," she concluded lamely. Then she added valiantly, "Oh, them'll be appy days!"

In her mind's eye she saw an endless procession of squires and their ladies: yes, and one or two of the big Houses too; her Rolls Royces parked in front of the new garage she was going to build—for they would have a proper number of cars. She heard the strains of the band . . .

It is not true that women have only two happy days of their lives—the day of their wedding and the day of their death. They have from seventeen to twenty others in between, and this was one of Amatheas. She left her husband thus rewarded.

Amatheas was fully employing her maid, she was dressing triumphantly. She had won.

Poor George lay limp and too large, and too short, enormous, in the chair. He was conquered. But finding himself alone, he muttered to himself with some relief:

"Any'ow, the wimmen's all gone up to dress now, and there's an hour's peace. I'll bide here awhile. No need for me to go for half an hour. Never did take much stock in all them frills. Such nonsense!"

But hardly had he completed that little mono-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

logue when (oh, horror!) the door was opened with decision, and the formidable Hilda strode in.

"Oh, Lord Mere," she said, even before she had sat down beside him, "I'm sorry, but I *must* see you a minute. You see, the truth is, I was rung up on the telephone, and I do honestly think it's my duty to tell you . . ."

"As wot?" said the unfortunate First Baron, trying to lift himself up by the arms of the too deep couch of repose, and sinking back again.

"You see, dear Lord Mere, everything's so hurried, isn't it? But you must hear of this offer, because honestly I think it'd be simply a *crime* to take it without letting you know first . . . You're generous, I know, but you're the best man of business of our time. You'd despise me if I didn't tell you the truth." Here her guest interrupted stentoriously.

"Not as ever I'd despise you, Mrs. Miple. But clear figures I do like."

"My dear Lord Mere," answered his hostess, leaning forward towards him earnestly, and boldly putting a hand upon his knee, "to be perfectly frank with you after your frankness with me, I have just heard; they've just offered £60,000."

"'Oo's *they*?" queried her guest, with the courtesy of an older world.

"And though they made me promise not to say a word," went on Aunt Hilda solidly, "I do think it right to tell you . . . I admit I don't like to lose . . . dear Lord Mere . . . but I must keep

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

my word. We had nothing fixed, but after all, I had already offered you the lesser price, hadn't I? And you know," she continued sweetly, and even pensively, "I think that straight dealing has a moral value of its own. It leaves the conscience quiet. And that's worth any number of thousands."

"Yus, yus," grunted the old man. He paid no attention to her nonsense. He was thinking of Mattie. She would come in and see him again while he was dressing—bound to do that. He couldn't a-bear being harried. "Once and for all!" was his motter. "It had made him what he was, it had."

"Look here, Mrs. Miple," he said, "I don't know what about your telephone and all. And I don't want to. That's strite, as between friends. But I've got to finish this 'ere business one way or t'other and I've made up my mind. You said fifty thousand, and I'll give fifty thousand."

"Guineas," murmured Hilda gently. "Guineas."

"Fifty thousand *pounds*," answered her guest, sitting up and speaking with a decision that made him look ten years younger, and tapping the padded arm of the low chair as he did so.

"Oh, really! Lord Mere . . ."

"Fifty thousand *pounds*, ma'am, and we'll count the dirty lawyers' frills for the guineas. Now then, are ye' agreed?"

Aunt Hilda had never met big business in its

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

more aggressive mood, and I weep to tell you that she was cowed.

“Very well, Lord Mere,” she said. “Very well.”

“That’s it, ma’am,” said he, riveting the bargain, and at the same time managing after two efforts to stand up on his poor old gouty legs. “Fifty thousand pounds.”

He had never learned the silly little social habits of a class which he both envied and despised; therefore he made for the door before his hostess, and she heard him muttering as he went out, leaving her there at once mightily relieved and mightily offended: “Fifty thousand pounds. And I wouldn’t have done it for any but Mattie. Fifty thousand pounds!”

CHAPTER XIII

DRESSING in his bedroom, poor Lord Mere de Beaurivage was not content.

He had only done it for Mattie—and he was not content.

Two quite separate parts of the man were disturbed; first, the old business part—fifty thousand was monstrously too much: he got feverish over it (and that delayed his dressing. He never would have a man to help him). It was monstrous. Good Lord! There was some he knew would have 'ad it for half. He'd have had it for half himself if he'd been developing the site. But there—Mattie wanted it.

Deeper down, and much worse, was the underlying wreathing mist of terror which came and went, half below his consciousness. It worried him extremely. Was he doomed to live under such influences the last poor years of his life? He still delayed his dressing . . . But there, they'd only come down from London at week-ends. There was no nonsense about the house in Mayfair. That was old, too, but respectable, at any rate. A man could sleep quiet there. Leastways at the back, away from the motors. And there! He'd done it for Mattie.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

If it be true that this world is governed by appetite, fear, avarice, hate, and affection, in this case affection had conquered—for the moment.

The poor old boy had nearly finished dressing. He was carefully brushing a scant white wisp of hair over a bold, broad head. As he did so he began nervously to start at a sound which he thought was like a whispering call. He tracked it down; it was only a curtain rustling slightly along the wall before the open window. Once or twice again he found himself looking oddly round as though something might be watching him; but he told himself that one must get rid of all that, or one could not carry on.

He was still struggling with the tying of his white tie (though he had taken innumerable lessons in the art) when Mattie came in, looking younger than she ought to have looked what with cosmetics and the rest, and shaded lights. She gave him a powdery kiss to thank him once again; and he was half-constoled when he came down late into the drawing-room and found them all awaiting him to go in to dine.

During dinner, by Bo's strict orders (for Bo knew a good deal more about psychology than Lord Hambourne), John said not a word of the ghost.

It was sound policy to give the old man rope, and a breathing space.

The greater would come the final shock of surprise; and surprise is the essence of victory. John's

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

marching orders were not to say a word of it till the women had gone. And even then to play delicately, and not to force the pace.

She couldn't prevent Lord Hambourne making a fool of himself and speaking of The Thing once or twice. It was his damned profession to make a fool of himself. Dons all do. She couldn't prevent her father asking a question or two about measurements—especially what size of ruffs they wore in those days, and how they got their food to their mouths over them, and whether they could see their feet.

But Hilda Maple had a growing instinct that the subject was dangerous, and though she had fifty thousand pounds as good as in her pocket, that same instinct bade her change this sort of conversation whenever it arose, and, so long as the women remained, it played little part.

But when they were gone John fulfilled his orders, and over the wine talked discreetly to his three guests.

He talked of apparitions, of Sussex tales, of the Fates of houses. He flattered the Turtle Professor of Psychology by listening eagerly to his appeals. He managed with great skill to distil some little poison into Lord Mere de Beurivage's not heroic veins—principally by dropping the subject once or twice rather obviously. He fought on two fronts, for he knew very well that Lord Hambourne believed in no spirit, creative or uncreative, finite or infinite, human or divine, and he had to

make Lord Mere de Beurivage more and more uncomfortably familiar with a spirit drawing more and more uncomfortably near.

The men were back in the drawing-room, and the first words they heard as they entered was Isabeau saying:

“Well, it may be all talk, as you say, but I didn’t dare look in the glass since I thought I saw *That* looking over my shoulder.”

And Hilda Maple was answering almost angrily:

“Oh, that’s enough about the whole business, surely! I can’t make out why anyone should take it seriously.”

Then, to stop that very nonsense, she bustled at making up four for bridge. Lord Hambourne was her partner (it would never do to quarrel with Lord Hellup); and as for Hellup, he was a good counter-weight for Amathea, whose bridge was not experienced, though at whist she had flattered herself all her life upon a pretty play, and boasted that at cribbage she was unequalled.

Lord Mere de Bruvvish sat apart in a darker recess where burned a second fire. He was fatigued by certain emotions. He needed repose. He was still disappointed. The figure, £50,000, still returned to his mind, and once, as the card-players, whom he would not interrupt by any remark, brought out their short monologues, “I pass,” “Double,” “She made it spades,” and the other brilliancies of the exercise, he had a horrible

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

brief recollection of a little Voice too near the ground, wickedly evil, in the thick of the rhododendrons.

Bo kindly determined to bear him company in his loneliness.

"It's an oddly quiet night, isn't it, Lord Bruvvish?" said Bo, seating herself beside him and talking dreamily. "It feels strange—this quietness of the country. I don't know . . ." But even as she spoke there came a very faint, very distant, and not pleasant laugh—where from no one could tell—except John Maple, who was watching the players with intelligent interest.

"What . . . what's that?" said Lord de Beauvriage, gripping the arm of the sofa and sitting up suddenly.

"What was what?" said Bo innocently.

"I thought . . . I thought I 'eard something—something like someone laughing, very faint like."

"Did you?" said Isabeau. "Well, perhaps someone did. I don't know . . ."

And once again, a little less remote, a little less evanescent, a little more defined, came the sneering chuckle of something evil.

Lord Mere de Beauvriage was fairly sitting up. He brought out a big silk handkerchief, wiped his forehead, and said:

"There, Miss Hellup! There! I could a-sworn . . ."

Then he pulled himself together. He was

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

afraid he was making himself ridiculous. But he badly needed human support.

Isabeau rose suddenly with a startled look.

"Where's my little dawg?" she said. And as she said it she looked round, and was able to exchange a sharp glance with her lover. "Oh! Something's happened, Lord Mere! Lovey-Lad never leaves me!"

She went off past John, murmuring to him as she did so, "Hooked!" And then she said aloud and awfully to the company at large:

"I feel a presentiment! Something's happening!"

John Maple left the bridge players, who only looked up for a moment from their game, and sat down in the seat that Bo had vacated, next to his guest.

"You mustn't mind Miss Hellup, Lord Mere," he said. "She's not like other girls—about spiritual things, I mean. I think sometimes she almost *feels* the other world."

"Oh, ah!" answered the old man, his yellow eyes filled with uneasiness.

"She told me once that the only time she was in a place of great evil—evil all round her—the first sign was given by her dog. Dogs see things."

"Do they? Well, I 'ave 'eard something like that," gasped Lord Mere de Beurivage.

Even as he said it there came more distinctly than before the low wail from the darkness, and the poor old gentleman was almost startled into



Growing nervousness of Lord de Beurivage

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

speaking; but still on John's face there was no sign of recognition. Lord Mere remembered how the doctor had talked to him about blood pressure and all sorts of other things a few months before, and warned him that if he heard voices or saw pictures just as he was falling asleep he was not to be alarmed. But far off at the bridge table he caught what was being said. It was Lady Mere de Beurivage asking Lord Hellup what had troubled Isabeau.

"She got anxious about her dog. She thinks he's got a terror. He does sometimes. She thinks he's seeing something."

The inevitable Hambourne broke in where he was least wanted.

"Animals often feel those influences first," he said, and then in a suddenly louder voice, "we inv-v-v-estig-g-gated a house w-w-w-once in the m-m-m-ost d-d-disg-g-gusting m-m-m-urder . . ."

"Lord Hambourne," said Mrs. Maple sharply, "you've made me forget. Was it a spade?" But Lord Hambourne went on in his stride:

"A *p-p-partic-c-c-ularly* d-d-isg-g-usting m-m-m-urder."

"Really, Lord Hambourne," said his hostess, too brusquely. "I can't play if you talk like this. I can't do two things at once."

Lady de Beurivage was dummy. She heard her husband calling in a whisper to her: "Mattie!"

"What's the matter," she said, going up to him.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

“Mattie, you didn’t hear nothing—not voices like?”

“Lor, Bruvvish, don’t be so sudden! You guv me a cold shock all down my back, you did!”

“Don’t say you seen nothing, Mattie? You’ve not *seen* nothing?”

“No. But I ’ad a sort of creeping-like looking in the glass just now.”

“Don’t, Mattie, don’t! I can’t a-bear it. Not now. I’ll slip away to bed soon. I can’t a-bear it.”

Then came Hilda Maple’s voice calling to her: “Amathea, dear, another deal,” and Amathea returned reluctantly to the cards.

John and the old gentleman sat together in silence looking into the fire. The elder man heard, or thought he had heard . . . well . . . what?

He was fighting against the influence. He tried silence, and then an attempt to speak of other things; when again he heard, or thought he heard, a Voice, so slight as to be disembodied—a nothingness upon the air—yet deep and full and of an intolerable sadness. Even as he thought he heard that voice he saw John start and look into the darker corner, where the firelight could not play, and where a bookshelf came up towards the drawn curtains of the window. Lord Mere gave a paralysed glance, put his hand graspingly on John Maple’s arm, squinted to the left into that same dark place, and whispered rather than said:

“Did yer ’ear anything, Mr. Miple?”

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

John did not answer at once; when he did he said:

"Perhaps, Lord Mere . . ." Then he looked down. "I really don't know. It's better not to let oneself think too much of such things . . ."

They talked just so long as gave the old man time to think himself recovered; when once again, but more certainly, though still distant and of a phantom sort, the sound came.

"Oh, Mr. Miple, I 'eard it pline! It said, 'The Night,' Mr. Miple! S'elp me, it did!"

There was terror in the eyes now, and he was gripping John Maple's arm convulsively. John Maple tossed his head slightly as though trying to be rid of some bad influence.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Yes. Shall we move?"

Then suddenly Isabeau's voice was heard from the landing as she ran downstairs, tragically loud:

"Oh, poor Lovey-Lad! Poor little pup!" she cried.

The unfortunate bridge players, interrupted again, looked up.

"You f-found him?" stammered Lord Ham-bourne.

"Oh, yes. He was whining and shaking so, I couldn't bear it. And all huddled up on the landing, and bristling. He's there yet. I couldn't fix him so's to get him to come. I tried to carry him, but he was just crazy. Snapped at me—for the first time in his life—poor li'l fellow!" Then she lowered her voice, and leaning against the banister

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

at the end of her descent, she said hysterically: "It's something in this room!"

Lord Mere de Bruvvish fell back in his chair again like a man stunned. He gasped; he clutched the padded arms on which his hands lay, leaned back, his breath coming and going as though he had just taken violent exercise. His head was thrown back, and his eyes were shut. Then he called quite loudly:

"Mattie!"

The bridge party looked round: that excellent wife broke off in the middle of a hand; she rushed—if such a form can be said to rush—across the room, and knelt by the chair.

"What's the matter, George?" she said. "What's the matter?"

"I'm orl right. I shall be orl right. I come over queer," he said. "I ought not to have called yer. Go back, dear; go back."

"'Ow was 'e took?" said the worthy woman to John Maple.

"It's nothing. I'm sure it's nothing, Lady Mere," said John, on his feet. "It was something . . . The night . . . and this talk of ghosts has made him nervous."

"Mattie," said the poor man in a low voice, "Mattie, I must go to bed. You'll excuse me, ma'am," he added, turning to his hostess, "but I'm that tired. I'm not as young as I was."

Mattie accompanied him affectionately to the

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

hall, gave him his candle, and looked at him anxiously.

"Ye're tired, dear," she said, "you're right when you sye you're tired."

"I'll be orl right, Mattie," he said. "Never mind me. You'll find me asleep. I'm orl right."

But she watched him anxiously, gazing up after him as his unwieldy, lumbering form went painfully up the stairs, candle in hand. He looked back at her and smiled. She was a good wife, and as she went back to the group in the drawing-room she wondered whether she ought not to go and see to him; she was beginning to share his fears.

Mrs. Maple was rattled, and she could not hide it.

"Well," she said, "so far as it's possible to count in the middle of all this, I make it 364."

Lord Hambourne thought he would make conversation—but he made it unfortunately.

"As I w-w-as s-s-aying j-j-j-ust now, I m-mean ab-b-about the m-m-murder . . ." he began.

His hostess interrupted him.

"Yes, it was very nasty," she said quickly. "But do help me with this. Do you make it 364?"

"Quate, quate!" said Lord Hambourne, a little puzzled at such a check. He added the figures. It was a pleasure to him, for he certainly could not have paid if he had lost; but he had not lost.

It was during the following silence, when Hilda

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Maple was in an agony lest some further thing should be said to disturb the purchaser of Rackham Catchings, that Corton came in with the glasses and decanters on a tray.

But it was not the Corton of earlier hours. For the first time in thirty years that great man was showing some lack of self-possession. He came in too quickly; he was trembling slightly, and as he advanced he so far forgot himself as to look over his shoulder; and in so doing he dropped a glass.

“Good heavens, Corton!” shouted his mistress angrily. “What are you up to? What’s the matter?”

“I’m sorry, madam.” His teeth were actually chattering. “I’m not quite myself to-night, madam.”

“So it seems,” answered the lady coldly, as he put down the tray.

Then she wondered whether she was awake or dreaming. For she saw that honourable servitor make, not for the door, but for the window towards the lawn, as though he would leave by that strange exit. With a hasty glance which satisfied her that her guests were occupied, she followed him and whispered quickly:

“What *are* you doing, Corton?”

“If you please, madam,” said the unfortunate man, glancing with horror at the door through which he had just come, “I’d rather not go back by the passage.”

"Not go back by the passage!" whispered Mrs. Maple angrily and looking him up and down. "Are you mad?"

"No, madam. No, not mad. Not mad." He passed his hand over his forehead—what great powers are revealed in man sometimes, quite late in life! Corton was now in the very spirit of the romances upon which he was modelling himself. "No, madam," he said again, most tragically, and with a tremor in his voice, "I am not mad."

"Corton," said Mrs. Maple, "you're a disgrace. You're drunk."

His only reply was to shake his head sadly.

"It's worse in the passage, madam. I couldn't bear it. I can't go back by the passage."

"Don't go on repeating that like a parrot!" said Hilda Maple passionately in the same low tones. Her guests might notice at any moment what was going on. She took the bull by the horns and opened the window herself, for she saw that if she did not act quickly there would be a scene. "Then go back across the lawn, you fool!" she barked at him aside; and then loudly and gaily, turning round, she added, to the company, "You don't mind my opening the window, do you? It's an astonishingly hot and still night for the time of year. Do you mind the fresh air?"

Her guests assured Hilda Maple that they did not mind the air. But Lord Hellup, who had watched the end of the little business, said the

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

wrong thing. He said it directly to his hostess, and what he said was:

“That guy’s rattled!”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” said Mrs. Maple. “You mustn’t mind him. He’s nearly always like that about eleven o’clock.”

Lord Hellup was highly interested.

“Do say? Mebbe that’s because he doesn’t drink enough. When that kind go dry between whiles their nerves just fray to old collars.”

It was getting worse and worse. The others were beginning to take notice, and Lord Ham-bourne did not fail to come up true to type. He butted in.

“In-inhib-b-b-ition,” he began, “with its ac-c-c-companying c-c-c-comp-compl ——” But Mrs. Maple cut him short savagely.

“Don’t, Lord Ham-bourne! Don’t say any more about it! It’s not that. It’s religion. He says long prayers after dinner.”

“That’s not natural—not in a butler,” was Lord Hellup’s comment.

But Lord Hellup had seen few.

“P-p-p-aying,” broke in the Professor in his best donnish manner, “is a w-w-well-known s-s-s-ymptom or re-e-e-ligious mania.”

“Maybe,” suggested Lord Hellup, “he struck that guy without a head.”

“There’s no such thing,” Aunt Hilda interrupted abruptly.

This was too much for Lady de Beurivage.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"Why, Ilda," she said, with real astonishment, "you told Bruvvage and all of us yourself, and it's part of the interest of the plice an' all!"

"Yes, yes, of course," said her hostess. "I told you the story—the legend. Many old houses have them—surely you know that. There's nothing really."

"In this particular c-c-c-ase," broke in the unfortunate Hambourne again, "what with the d-d-dog, it may be suggestion. It's a kind of h-h-hyp . . ." He swallowed after that syllable, tried it again and added, "nosis."

Lord Hellup remarked that if it was anything about the hip, he knew a bone setter in Park Lane . . . Mrs. Maple in despair tried to put an end to it all by saying, "No, no, no. Lord Hambourne means hypnotic, or something of that sort. Don't you, Lord Hambourne?"

And Lord Hambourne comforted her by quacking out: "Quate, quate."

It looked as though the trouble was over; but she had had a bad time. The telephone bell rang; John Maple took up the receiver and answered it. He turned to his aunt.

"It's from the stables, Aunt Hilda. They want you."

"Want me?" said Mrs. Maple incredulously. "What can they want from the stables at this hour of the night?" She took up the machine.

"Yes? . . . Oh, what nonsense! . . . Yes? Well, they often do get restless these hot nights

. . . What! Corton? Corton's got nothing to do with it. Don't listen to a *word* Corton says . . . What's that? The new mare's frantic? Well, go and pat her. What? . . . Don't be a coward. Go and pat her on the neck. Pat her on the crupper. Pat her anywhere . . . Are you there? Are you *there*? (She tapped her foot in her agony.) ARE YOU THERE? Hullo, why did you go away? . . . Good, she's quieter, is she? Well, don't bother me any more. Get hold of Alphonse. There's no nonsense about *him*," she added, looking up at her guests. "He's a Communist, you know, and knows all about machinery, so he won't believe in any of that rubbish. He'll be a good tonic to those idiots."

Again she hoped that she had stopped the rot. But Lord Hambourne failed not.

"It's all d-d-d-eePLY interesting," the academic ass began. "It's f-f-f-ascinating. Animals receive sub-sub-sub-liminal m-m-m-essages. And m-m-y c-c-colleague Pro-pro-fessor J-J-onah has sh-sh-own that while m-m-motors are im-p-p-ervious the equidæ . . ." But just at that moment the air was pierced by a very genuine shriek, and it came from Isabeau. She was pointing at the darkness.

"Oh! Oh, dear! Something went by the window!"

"Mercy!" cried the sympathetic Lady Mere de Beurivage. "I saw it too!"

Mrs. Maple's patience was nearly exhausted.



Lord Hellup accepting from Lord Hambourne the interesting scientific discovery that motor-cars are less susceptible to psychic influence than horses

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

“My dear Amatheia—Isabeau dear, go back. Anyone in the household might be passing.”

But, alas! her words were even truer than she knew; for a troop was upon them. Coming into the shaft of light which streamed from the window on to the lawn was Corton, and behind that Captain the whole force of the Offices, and as Corton appeared respectfully at the head of his regiment, full in the window behind him could be seen the ample form of the cook, Mrs. Fry, and Betsy Broom, and the housemaids and the groom, the boy, the footman and all. Only Alphonse was missing.

Corton, after a sepulchral but respectful cough, and begging leave to enter, brought them in.

“My colleague, madam, Mrs. Fry . . . and my other colleagues, and the under-servants, and the maid Broom, madam, insisted upon seeing you . . . and I thought it better to accompany them. They would not go by *that*”—and he waved his hand towards the passage.

“Go back at once . . .” Mrs. Maple had begun, “and I’ll come out to you . . .” when Mrs. Fry gave tongue in her turn.

“I can’t a-bear it no more, ma’am, no, that I can’t! No, not if it was the Queen herself, so there!”

“Really, Mrs. Fry!” commanded Mrs. Maple. But her command had no effect.

“No,” continued Mrs. Fry, in rising tones, “not

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

if it was 'er sacred Majesty Queen Victoria herself come back to life. I can't a-bear it."

"Oo—oo—ooo!" moaned the maid Broom—and Mrs. Fry made bold to comfort her.

"And this poor child, ma'am. She feels it like the others. I done my best to comfort 'em. I feel like a mother to 'em all, I do, but," and here she lowered her voice to a painful whisper and stepped forward, "wot's in this 'ouse to-night, ma'am, ain't flesh and blood."

"You're a pack of fools!" shouted Mrs. Maple, beside herself. But Corton went on gravely:

"The murder, madam, perpetrated under these ancient roof trees." And he pointed to the antique beam. "Under the reign of the Virgin Queen—it was perpetrated this very night, madam. I have observed the anniversary religiously for thirty years—since I was knife boy, madam. And now the Unquiet Spirit will not rest."

"Mr. Corton," said Mrs. Fry proudly, by way of chorus, "has the whole story like a book, ma'am."

"The blood, ma'am," continued Corton courageously, while the sobs of the women behind him increased, and poor Bo put her fingers into her ears, "the blood flowed down the stairs from under the door of the Blue Room . . . Lord Mere de Beurivage's room, madam."

But Mrs. Maple was resolved to put an end to it all.



Partial, but representative deputation of the domestic staff of Rackham Catchings protesting against the Headless Thing

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

“Look here, all of you, it’s sheer bunkum, and dangerous at that. If you want to sit up all night, I can’t prevent you. Go back across the lawn, the whole lot of you, and I’ll come with you. And you, Corton”—she turned to him—“I mean to have an explanation from you.” And with that she drove the herd before her, back through the night. It is just to add that her presence was a comfort to them—but not to Corton.

The guests looked at each other in silence: Lord Hambourne abominably interested, Lord Hellup discreetly amused, Isabeau shrinking as though worse were to come, and poor Lady de Beurivage shaken almost as her husband had been. Not one had yet spoken. Mrs. Maple’s voice could be heard far off beyond the lawn in a last word with Corton as she turned back to the house. She re-crossed the lawn, she entered the room.

Even as she did so there banged on the floor above a fearful crash as of a heavy body falling, and with it a loud and horrible cry. Then dead silence.

Amathea Lady de Beurivage dashed to the door with an inspired shriek:

“It’s my George!”

The others followed her, and in a rapid, thrusting group they all rushed through the hall and up the stairs.

CHAPTER XIV

UPSTAIRS in his bedroom that poor old lonely man—lonely save for his wife (and how grateful he was for her having treated him as she just had done, and for her last look at him as he painfully climbed the stairs)—sat waiting to recover from the ascent. Stairs tried him a great deal now . . . his health was breaking . . . he thought. Perhaps that's what accounted for what he had been feeling . . . what he thought he had been hearing; and he huddled his shoulders together. He wouldn't undress at once—he would rest awhile . . . rest awhile . . . rest awhile. He would get steadier then.

A knock somewhere? . . . It might have been downstairs, but in his condition he thought it was at his own door, and it made him jump.

“Come in!” he said.

There was no reply; and he went a little white. He steadied himself and leaned forward painfully to take up the poker and stir the fire. But he dropped it with a loud clatter that startled him again.

“Foolishness!” he muttered.

He heard the knock once again. This time he did not say “Come in!” He nerved himself to rise painfully from his chair, and threw the door

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

wide open. There was nothing but empty darkness outside. He shut the door again and fell rather than sank into the place he had just left.

“George,” he said to himself, half aloud, “George, pull yerself together. This’ll never do! You’re ’igh-strung, George, that’s what you are; remember what the doctor said about yer blood pressing. Wot was it ’e said? He said, ‘No whisky,’ ’e said. Well, I don’t know wot’s right about that, but I know it steadies me.” He stretched out his arm to the table by his side, and took up his flask from where it lay on the table—a large flask with a silver cup, and his coat of arms—supporters talbots, three mancuses quartered chevron and the devil and all on a field azure—engraved thereon. It shone under the electric shaded light on the table and the warmer glow of the fire. Other light in the room there was none.

He slowly poured out the strong drink into the silver.

“It’ll calm yer, George,” he said.

Below, he heard the noise of many voices. Too many, he thought, for the few guests. But it was company like. Then he heard people moving across the lawn. Perhaps some neighbours had come in, and gone again. Then the voices quieted down. He took his first sip of the whisky, pre-war.

“That’s better, George,” he said. “That’ll put yer right.”

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

His back, as he sat in the deep chair facing the fire, was to the side door which led to the little box-room. It opened so noiselessly that he heard no sound, tense though his nerves were.

He waited a moment, less unmanned, raising the silver cup again for a second sip—when there came, whether within his mind or from the air without he could not tell, a hint of rustling, a suspicion of a Presence in the room—near the bed. The start stopped the cup as he still held it in his hand, and he poised it in mid-air, staring—there came the pleading words from very far away:

“Not again, George! Oh, not again! It’s yer pison!”

“It’s me mother’s voice,” groaned the old man in a dreadful whisper.

He let the cup fall to the floor at his feet, careless of the liquor running out upon the rug. His hand shook, as did his whole body.

“’Er voice,” he said again, frozen with fear.

A hand came out from behind the head of the bed—a hand the wrist of which was draped in black. Lord Mere de Beurivage did not see it—he was staring into the air before him—it was Her Voice.

The hand found the switch, and all was suddenly dark, save for the glow of the fire. He had heard but the slightest of sounds—he looked round into that darkness—and there he saw, dreadfully distinct in the half light which the



*Unaffected emotion of George, First Baron de Beau-
rivage on the appearance of an historic figure*

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

glowing coals threw upon the dull red damask and the tapestry—what he had seen too often that day in his unhappy mind. There IT stood, for the half second in which he still retained his sanity. He was on his gouty feet groping towards it, his mouth open and giving small inarticulate sounds. IT was there by the side of the bed against the wall, agleam on the sword-hilt, tall, black, too vague, but the white ruff standing out glaring—and above that ruff nothing: only the wall. Even as he looked he saw a hand which appeared from beneath the cloak slowly moving. He gave a loud shriek and crashed to the ground.

In a flash the figure had passed the fallen man, and was through the door into the side room, and had turned the key. But quick as the motion was, even as he turned the key in the lock the great swirl of feet was running up the sounding wood of the staircase, the main door of the bedroom was thrown open, all the lights were turned on, and the hubbub of guests and servants flocked to what might be the living or the dead.

Amathea was the first of them, kneeling by her husband, trying to lift him up in her arms, calling him by his name, and sobbing loudly.

Three of the menservants hoisted the motionless form and got it on to the bed. He was breathing. His eyes opened for a moment, but he stared vacantly, seeing no one, and with yet another loud cry and a shudder his head fell back upon the pillow.

CHAPTER XV

ALL that night was a changed world for Rackham: messengers sent hither and thither; the telephone at work; a nurse from the Cottage Hospital; another nurse urgently sent for from Lewes; the local practitioner jumping into his trousers hurriedly after an insufficient sleep, and also jumping out of his skin for joy when he heard the great name of his patient; lanterns going back and forth through the spring night, as one and another was sent upon a further errand; motors purring, buzzing, hooting, and every human being stirred up to an unnatural vigil.

Meanwhile, upstairs Amatheia sat steadfast by her husband's bed, glad to hear his breathing, for it told her that he lived. She looked like a vulgar queen of the Renaissance, of the swollen commercial families, with big lips curved downwards, determined on what she should do. Anger was flaming in her heart.

She sent order after order, and Hilda Maple's servants humbly obeyed. She had them telephone for an ambulance to be at Rackham Catchings by nine the next morning—not a second later, or it would be the worse for them; and it had to be the best ambulance Maxton, who is open all

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

night, could supply. It was she who had sent for the nurses and the doctors, often doubling her hostess' orders.

She did more. She was determined that her George should return to recover—if recovery Gawd would grant him—in his own house in Mayfair. She knew the servants would have gone to bed, and she sent the message through an all-night office to knock the place up and compel them to have everything ready against the morning.

She thought of everything. Yet she did all this from where she sat, without moving from the bedside, despatching one after another to do her will.

It was half-past one o'clock in the small hours before she had received the final replies. She was still alone in the room, with the half-conscious, muttering man. She had given terrible commands that no one was to be admitted till she allowed it; and the nurses and the doctors were waiting, with the torturedly-anxious Hilda in the drawing-room below.

George Huggins stirred. Amatheia leaned over the bed and tried to catch what confused words were coming from those lips which she had known for a lifetime, and so much loved. The old fellow propped himself up on his elbow, a momentary gleam of sanity entered his eyes as they looked into hers.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"Mattie," he whispered hoarsely, "is that you?"

He smiled foolishly. Then his face changed dreadfully, and he went on in rising tones:

"It 'ad no 'ed, it 'ad no 'ed, Mattie! Oh! OH! OH!" and with a horrible groan he sank back, and went on muttering—but half sitting up at intervals and pointing, and catching her, and saying, "There 'tis! There 'tis! Keep it awye, Mattie! Keep it awye!"

She knew what had happened. He had seen IT. Her anger rose, enormous; but she contained it. She allowed the doctors and the nurses to come in. Hilda Maple, already stricken with fatigue, and showing her age under the strain, timidly followed them; but Amatheia, Lady Mere de Beurivage, on seeing her hostess, called out strongly, "Not that un! Keep 'er out, keep 'er out!" And poor Hilda had capitulated and retired.

The servants had gone to bed; Hilda herself lay down, all dressed as she was, half loosened and no more, to catch if she could an hour or two of sleep—but sleep came not to her.

John in his room, after helping to run innumerable messages and counter-messages, tried to sleep also, and did sleep a little, fitfully; but his conscience troubled him.

Lord Hellup thought it his duty to stay awake in the Little Red Room, and he did so too, with Motley and successive cigars.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Of all in that household only Isabeau slept placidly, when she had seen it all fixed up: so great conquerors on the night of victory. So William of Falaise in his tent after Hastings; so Mr. Gulp, at the Ritz after the Pugley deal, before he resigned in affluence his Secretaryship of State.

While the agony thus proceeded upstairs, Lord Hambourne showed initiative beyond his academic kind. But he was one whose wits had been sharpened by poverty. It was not the first time in his life that he had displayed those qualities which, with better luck, make millions. Had he not scooped the Chair of Psychology? Here was another little scoop, and he was going to pick it up. He had got the main event at once, overhearing two phrases in the frightened muttering of the servant. Leaving them to their agony upstairs, he himself went quietly into the deserted drawing-room, took up the telephone and got on to *The Howl*. It was not too late for a stop-press in that enterprising paper, at any rate for the London edition.

Carter was at the other end of the wire. No. It was not to be on the usual terms. He told Carter with great rapidity in a low, precise tone, conquering his stammer, what had happened, but he gave neither the place nor the name.

No. It was not to be in the contract. It would be a separate £100—posted that day. Would he

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

accept the verbal promise on the telephone? He would. Carter could not undertake the responsibility? Then he must do without the scoop. Oh, he could, could he? All right. He would trust him. The place was Rackham Catchings, and the old fellow was Bruvvish himself. . . . Yes, it *was* a scoop, wasn't it? Would Carter leave word for someone to be there when he rang up again, so that they could go on with it in the evening paper? It would be difficult for him to get to the telephone after they were down. He must have someone there to take it between six and seven o'clock in the morning. Yes, that was all.

He hung up the receiver, just in time, as the shuffling of someone descending came down the stairs, while above altercation and confused advice filled the air. He managed to get into the hall and to mix with them before they had noticed his absence.

* * * * *

In the grey light of morning Lord Hambourne had taken up the telephone again. He felt secure. They had all been lying down, dressed as they were, exhausted, and he himself in his evening clothes, looking crumpled and dishevelled in the new light, was the only one doing business.

He gave rapid advice to Lord Toronto's other serfs. The old boy was very bad indeed, he



*Distraction of Lord Hambourne on being offered
the usual terms*

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

thought he would be moved that morning. He advised someone from *The Howl* to be sent to photograph the house and if possible the scene when the ambulance left. It would make a good picture. But he warned them that Mrs. Maple had got a policeman in plain clothes on the place, and there were orders to allow no one to come near. She didn't want it in the papers—he laughed, gently, and there was another much louder laugh at the other end of the wire. No, he could not send a sketch of the ghost. They must do that. They could get that little drunken artist of theirs to make a line sketch—just a long black cloak and a sword and a big Elizabethan ruff, and no head, and an old curtained bed close by.

Even as he was talking he dropped the receiver at the sound of a piteous wail. It was Betsy Broom, casting her dustpan and brush to the winds and calling on her maker to deliver her from evil. Lord Hambourne himself was surprised to find how much his nerves were on edge. Betsy Broom might have been the ghost, he felt so startled. But he had the sense to quiet her.

“Hold your tongue,” he said. “What’s the matter with you?”

“Oh, sir,” said the unfortunate young woman, “I thought you was the ghost! That’s the third time I thought I seen it!”

Lord Hambourne made another of those rapid

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

decisions which I sincerely hope will sooner or later lead him to an independent income. He did not like parting with money, and he had very little to part with. But he decided it was worth his while; and after all, he had won at bridge. He took a crumpled ten-shilling note out of his waistcoat pocket, and put it into Betsy's hand.

"Betsy," he said, "if I were you I wouldn't talk too much about my telephoning. Their nerves are all on edge, you know."

"Yes, sir," said the simple girl, bobbing and grateful, "I quite understand." But she was still trembling. He patted her paternally upon the shoulder.

"There," he said. "It's all right. Even if there was anything, you wouldn't see it after sunrise, you know."

"So I've always heard, sir," answered Betsy, with due acknowledgment of his learning. "That and runnin' water lays 'em."

"Yes, you're right, Betsy," he said loftily; and then gently left the scene of his misdeeds, hoping that the office would not commit the unpardonable folly of ringing him up. But he ought to have warned them.

* * * * *

We still have relics of an age when the Press could be managed by people of influence, because



Effect of the other world on Miss Broom, housemaid

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

its owners, though millionaires, were commonly still climbing. Hilda Maple was of that age. She was quite secure in her own mind after she had telephoned to five or six London offices that she could keep the thing out of the papers. There would be no reporters, at any rate, and it was a relief, and she had seen to a detective coming to watch the place against photographers. She had ordered that loudly before she had lain down, and Lord Hambourne had heard her.

Therefore it was that, while yet the morning was very young, and while there was still a dew upon the gardens of Rackham—so quiet that the second under-gardener could hear the low moans proceeding from the patient's bedroom—a figure appeared by a very singular approach, to wit, pushing its way through the laurels to the west-south-west of the main approach. It would seem that the figure had avoided the publicity of the lodge, and preferred its own method of entry, which was by crawling under a barbed-wire fence, crashing through the brushwood and finding its way, a little torn and bleeding, to the edge of the lawn in front of the house. But with great gallantry the figure had borne with him throughout this adventure a huge contraption, a tripod covered with a black cloth, and reminiscent of the photography of thirty years ago. And the name of the figure was Columbus.

It was not his real name. It was the name

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

facetiously given him in his good-nature and condescension by his master, Lord Toronto, who, having asked upon one occasion which serf of his had managed to secure unexpected photographs, in double quick time, of other people's very private and intimate affairs, was respectfully given the efficient dependant's name. His lordship had thereupon christened the good serf Columbus, because he got there, and Columbus he continued to be called.

It was the method of Columbus, I say, whenever he had to surprise the vigilance of those whose lack of public spirit prompted them to elude the Press, to carry with him this huge superstructure upon a tripod, covered with a black cloth. He knew well enough the attention it would excite, the gathering of menials ordering him off the place, even the approach of the police. But its weight and size also meant that he could not be driven off at a moment's notice, and during the altercation nothing was easier than to bring out his little Zeiss camera on the sly and snap the whole concern, unbeknownst.

For this also had Columbus everything prepared upon that early morning. He put himself squarely facing the antique front of Rackham Catchings; he elaborately fixed the tripod; he covered his head with the cloth; he went through all the gestures of a performance dear to our fathers. Nor was he, as one might imagine, in-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

capacitated by this attitude from watching his foes; for the camera box beneath the cloth was a fake and in place of its glass a large round hole stared empty, through which all could be naturally observed. He swept the landscape. He patiently waited the arrival of the servants, perhaps with police. He had his expostulations ready in his mind; and, nicely tucked away, concealed in the hollow between his left arm and his left side, the little Zeiss that was to do the trick. He wanted "figures in the foreground." He got more than he bargained for.

No servant appeared. But what did at last saunter into the bright circle framed in black was something very different. By the boots, a policeman; by the clothes, and especially the sharply pressed trousers, an advertisement for that which the vulgar call ready-to-wear and the gentle ready-made; by the hat, a scandal to God and man; by the face, a fool. My reader has divined him with her customary skill. It was Mr. Pretherton, the Detective.

With a fine nonchalance Mr. Pretherton strolled across the green, as one taking the morning air. He came up to Columbus, still distracted, still, as it were, careless of mundane things. He lifted a corner of the black cloth and whispered in the ear of the stooping expert:

"It may interest you to know that I am a member of the Force in plain clothes."

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Columbus answered—to himself:

“Forty-three and one-tenth, diameter eight,” and proceeded to turn a little screw which was not there.

“And the sooner you make off, young man,” went on the redoubtable Pretherton, lifting the corner of the cloth again, but turning his face towards the house, as though he were taking part in the photography, “the better for you, I can tell you.”

To which Columbus very simply replied, but again to himself and not to his interlocutor:

“Double for morning light; cloudy sky, no deep shadows.”

Upon the scene of this blinded duel there appeared at some little way off, round a corner of the house, an unexpected ally, and an unexpected enemy, of the one and the other protagonist.

They were Bo with the hound Lovey-Lad.

Bo (Oh, the efficiency of the efficient!) had caught the whole situation in a moment. She had inherited, here again, that quality in the eminent peer her progenitor whereby the market may be seized at a glance. The Press was snapping the house. A bull point for the Bo-Jacko crowd. That fellow whom she had suspected was interfering; a bear point for same. To have the tragedy in the papers would complete the ruin of Aunt Hilda's market. To keep it out was the object of the interfering fellow in the policeman's boots.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

The greatest generals are capable in the heat of action of an ambiguous order. It must be admitted in defence of Lovey-Lad that he could hardly have distinguished between the friend and the enemy of his mistress. When, therefore, he heard from Bo's arched lips the glad words "Siccum, boy!" he leapt forward like a shell from a gun, not for the evil Pretherton, but alas! for the well-working Columbus. And after all, how should not your bow-legged, hideous, brass-banded bulldog befriend a common human who might be anybody's friend and rather go for a monster with three wooden legs, two trouser ends and no head?

Through the round empty aperture, where the object glass was not, Columbus saw his Fate hurtling at him. Without pausing to arbitrate on moral right, he fled incontinent. And Mr. Pretherton, very innocently and naturally thinking that someone from the household which he was serving had supported his effort, laughed heartily at the clumsy efforts of the devoted prey, who ran regardless, blinded by the black cloth, straight for the rhododendrons, the first cover he could find.

But dogs, since they are quite unintelligent, are admirably subject to discipline. Bo (who had learned the art in childhood and had happily retained it) put two fingers between her teeth and with a piercing whistle recalled the well-meaning

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

but mistaken hound. What it must have cost Lovey-Lad to pull up again upon the common earth, to lose his quarry, to turn back, slinking—only a dog can know. But the whistle had been imperative, and he had obeyed. He came back panting, not without an irresolute halt now and then and a glance back at the strange morsel he had missed, as Columbus, finding the chase had failed, recovered himself, folded his cloth upon his arm, and, grasping his tripod, came forward somewhat timidly to explain.

But Bo gave him no opportunity. She did not want explanations. She wanted a frank friendship and excellent publicity for the great Rackham Catchings tragedy—for the ghost—in the Press of the metropolis; and notably in that of Lord Toronto, as being to her certain knowledge the most vulgar of all the six vulgarians who control our great organs of opinion.

She could trust Lord Toronto to have it all over London that evening. Meanwhile she must be rid of Hilda's policeman.

The thing had not taken sixty seconds from the moment when Lovey-Lad had shot forward to the moment when he came back unsatisfied, and almost daring to growl, and sat on his haunches panting at his mistress' feet. Mr. Pretherton was still smiling the smile of triumph, Columbus was still in hesitating stance, wondering how he would be received, when Bo gave her second order, without hesitation, rapidly, and this time more directly,



*Solid satisfaction of Mr. Pretherton at the pressed
pace of Columbus*

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

pointing with an unashamed finger at her victim, and launched the Friend of Man at the Detective.

Then was it seen with what majesty the British policeman bolts! Note to what skill, what promptitude, what immediate appreciation of reality, the public civilian forces of our beloved country are trained!

The flight of Columbus from Lovey-Lad had been a turtle's waddle, hasty though it was, compared with the whizz of the detective. Lovey-Lad never reached him. He was through the brushwood, under the wire and over the stone coping in a flash; and, her purpose accomplished, his mistress called him back to heel.

What happens in the souls of dogs when they are used for retrievers, for pointers, for any object at all except their own (and they are so used all the time)? Is it triumph in their skill, and an obscure but loyal understanding that they have served their masters, mere disappointment, bewilderment, or what? I know not. But I fancy a mixture of all these things, from the description I have had of what lay upon Lovey-Lad's features as he came back the second time panting, still hungry, to his mistress' feet. He had torn nothing, he had bitten nothing; but he had gloriously chased him whom he had been sent to destroy—let that suffice.

Columbus came back extending a large hand towards Bo with the self-possession of his kind. Bo took it with the simplicity of hers. When he

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

thanked her, as one who had saved his life, and when they had both remarked upon the absurd picture presented by the detective in his flight, a very few words made clearer still what Bo had already discovered. With charming good nature the young woman sought out for the journalist the exact point of vantage whence best Rackham Catchings might be snapped. She was torn between her desire for a striking picture which no one could miss and a contradictory desire for early publication. She saw him register the scene; she accompanied him without shame to the lodge gate, and then in a moment of inspiration she made a suggestion consonant with her means, ill-fitted to her condition.

“D’you know what edition of your two-cent’ll carry the picture of Rackham Catchings? Have ye’ seen the story that’s to flare it?”

He had seen the story. It had gone up straight to London—from Lord Hambourne. As to the edition, it would be the lunch-time edition at the latest; he could swear to that—now that she had so kindly seen him through.

Bo decided at once, risking a rebuff, and, as you may expect, not in danger of receiving one. She did not pull out a single pound note, as a less efficient person would have done; she put the whole leather case—scented—quietly into his hand, whence it slipped into his pocket under his eyes.

“I know what’s in there, Bud,” she said. “And



*Genuine pleasure of Columbus on observing the haste
of Mr. Pretherton*

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

there'll be as much again for you when I see it in that edition. It sure must go in. D'you get me? But who'm I to send it to? What's your name?"

In an accent not unlike her own the mysterious stranger answered:

"My name? Nothing! Just you put 'Columbus' on the envelope, and the Baron'll see it won't miss me."

They nodded cheerfully to each other. And *that* was all settled.

Indeed, upon the morrow, after the story had ended and Bo could make sure that her bargain had been observed, she (a woman who knew exactly how much she had in that leather wallet at any one time) put into an envelope the exact equivalent, and, keeping her word, delivered it with her own hands, sealed up, at Lord Toronto's hideous building off Fleet Street, addressed only "Columbus," demanding no receipt and leaving no name.

Nor can I deny that Columbus well earned this treble stream of gold, the first from his vulgar master, the second and the third from Bo.

The picture of Rackham Catchings came out enormous on the front page of *The Howl*: they had the exclusive story; they had the exclusive snaps; and an admirable caption designed by the Editor himself, a Mr. Emston, who had been Emstein somewhere in America years ago. That caption ran:

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

ELIZABETHAN SPECTRE APPEARS IN
ANCIENT MANOR HOUSE.

SEEN BY ALL.

CONCLUSIVE PROOF BY OXFORD PROFESSOR OF
PSYCHOLOGY.

PROMINENT PEER PROSTRATED.

On the picture a large black cross deeply marked over poor Mrs. Maple's bathroom window, and having a gigantic arrow pointing at it, was labelled:

ANCIENT MONASTIC CHAPEL WHERE GHOST
APPEARED.

And underneath all this, in somewhat smaller letters:

Opinions of our Readers.

which last were a number of letters dated from all parts of London, signed by various names, and written somewhat hurriedly by the sub-editor's son, who was trying his hand as apprentice serf to Lord Toronto.

It would be all over London by one o'clock and the market for Rackham ruined.

CHAPTER XVI

Bo, RETURNING into the house, met Betsy Broom. Betsy had not yet recovered from her shock (remember that the morning was still very young), she had but that moment left the Professor's presence. She gave another little shriek, and was prepared to do another Cinquevalli trick with the dustpan and broom, when Bo dominated her.

"Doan be a li'l fool!" said Bo, pulling her up. "What's a-matter with ye? Scared?"

"Oh, ma'am! Oh, miss! I thought it was IM again. There! I'm that dazed. I thought 'is lordship was IM I did, when I found 'im telephoning. I'm not meself."

Bo pounced on the strategic point.

"Which lordship?" she said.

"Lord 'Ambourne, miss. 'E were telephoning all about it" (for thus did Betsy earn the heavy bribe she had received to remain silent).

"Oh, he was, was he?" said Bo grimly.

She remembered Lord Hambourne's notorious connection with *The Howl*, and how that other eminent peer and colleague, Lord Toronto, was his paymaster.

"Thank you, Betsy," she said. She had given away her wallet in a fine gesture—as the news-

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

papers have it; but she felt in the pocket of the little garden coat she was wearing, to shield her from the cold of that morning. She seemed to remember there was something there. And so there was. And she pulled out yet another crumpled ten-shilling note.

Betsy took it gratefully, and curtseyed.

“Oh, thank you, ma’am—miss, I mean!” she said. There entered into Betsy’s young life for the first and the last time an experience of that operation which politicians, share-shufflers, black-mailers, and other candidates for the House of Lords know in their own peculiar language as the “Double Cross.” She had had her palm greased by both sides. Alas! poor innocent child, she went away none the wiser! She made no use of it. With a little more opportunity she might have been in the Cabinet; for such accidents of special knowledge and special payment lead anywhere nowadays.

* * * * *

Remember, my sweet reader, that this book is written in 1927. What Bo did next never would have been done in 1917. And in 1907 it would have meant what they called in the horrible jargon of their day (still retained by Lord Ham-bourne) “social ostracism.” And in 1897 (but there I am back in my boyhood) it would have

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

been, in the still more horrible jargon of *their* day, "unthinkable."

She went straight up to the passage on the first floor. She waited a moment, listening keenly—and hearing nothing—outside the patient's room. She went on ten yards, and whispered through the keyhole of the room where John had just, after hours of struggle, begun to feel drowsy. She dared not knock.

"Dog-Man," was the undertone, "come out."

"What? What? What?" said John loudly, starting up.

"Hush!" she whispered again through the keyhole, "come out."

He staggered out, with his fatigue full upon him, and it crossed Bo's mind for a moment that he was, if possible, on such an occasion less of a god. A young beard had begun; his eyes were drooping; and the corners of his mouth showed strain. But she was loyal, and saw him as he was really, the divine Jacko, even through this disguise. She put her finger to her lip, as she had during the conspiracy of the day before, and led him tip-toe along the thick carpet to her own room in the other wing.

There she sat him down.

"Jacko," she said, "listen to me. An' get your piece word-perfect. I'm telling you. You see there's going to be a break-up?"

"Oh, yes," said John.

"We've won, haven't we?"

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"So far . . . I wish, Bo, that I hadn't . . ."

"Pack that away into your old kit-bag. As you say—so far. Now ye've got to hear the rest. Fat Matt's gotten an ambulance from London. It'll buzz up here at nine. Then there'll be the great retreat, an' the Thunder of the Captains, an' the Shouting . . . as it says in the Good Book. Then Aunt Hilda'll be all alone, and jest wanderin' around. That's the time to play the card."

"What card?" asked John.

"I'm telling you," answered Bo. "Hambone's 'phoned *The Howl*. The help told me all about it. She heard him. Told them over the wire. And they've had a picture-man down here snapping the place already. It'll be all over London, Jacko. And what's Aunt Hilda to do then?"

"Yes, but what am *I* to do?" said John.

"What you're to do, Bone-head, is to walk in and win. There's no selling the place for her now. And if she's still steely-hearted, work her with your Voice."

"I don't see how I could haunt Aunt Hilda in broad daylight."

"No matter. The Lord will find a way. Only follow up, Jacko; follow up. Have you got the carbons of those letters here?"

"Yes, in my pocket. She has the originals."

"Well, tell her *The Howl's* got the story. Rattle her more, someway. Then she'll sign."

"You think she will?" said John doubtfully.

Bo nodded with decision.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"Trust the Young Heiress," she said. "The child has never failed."

But even as she spoke there was commotion on the gravel beneath the window. It was the ambulance from London, and the whole house was astir.

The lovers slipped downstairs by the back staircase, reached the hall, and all the turmoil was upon them.

Down the main stairs, moving like funeral bearers under a coffin, staggered sundry males—the driver of the ambulance, his assistant, the footman, the atheist Gaul—even the local doctor lent a hand. While the Specialist from London waddled slowly sideways, downwards, next to the banisters, by way of inept superintendence: for he got the biggest fee.

On the stretcher under which they staggered lay the unfortunate First Baron Mere de Beauvillage, still muttering, still raving.

Bringing up the rear from the head of the stairs and commanding all things, his spouse, Presiding Goddess, herself storming, dominated the storm.

"Ow, tike 'im gently!" she cried. "Treat him tender! 'Andle 'im like a child!" But even as she spoke the sufferer rent the air with "A-r-r-r-h!"

"Don't jerk 'im, pore lamb!" the peeress went on—the procession had allowed her to gain three steps downwards. "Don't jerk 'im, whatever yer do! Don't give him a Hoick! Keep his 'ed up,

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

pore dear! Keep the blood from a-flowing to 'is 'ed!"

The foremost of the bearers had reached the bottom stair, Amatheia, presiding from above, was half-way down, the doors were fully open, Corton was flinging wide the entry to the ambulance, when poor Hilda Maple, a wreck from lack of sleep and all the attention which women of her age need before they can appear before human kind, made the error of attempting a pacification.

"Amatheia," she bleated, "*dearest* Amatheia! . . ."

But her adversary blazed out in terrible wrath.

"You shet yer 'ed!" she yelled, without reserve. "It's you did all the 'arm, it is!" Then to the procession. "Ow, 'andle him gentler, 'ear him groan—ow!" Then to her hostess, "Look on wot yer done!"

"I don't see what I've done," began Mrs. Maple, but Amatheia interrupted her again.

"Yer down't see?" she cried madly. "Yer down't see orl the 'arm yer've done with yer Demonds and yer Obgoblings and yer lying laow an' tryin' to pass off this 'ouse on us an' orl!"

"Amatheia . . ." began Mrs. Maple again.

"Don't you Amatheia me, Mrs. Miple!" shouted the peeress, with all the subtle charm of Aristocracy, as she crashed one hand on a table still sordid with last night's glasses, and stretched the other in wild denunciation. "Don't you Amatheia me! I wish yer'd never been born, nor I to

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

meet yer! With yer 'umbug and yer lies and yer Black Devil, and all! Yus, and 'id and concealed from our eyes! But I'll let yer know! I've priced yer! Yer profiteeress!"

Poor Hilda tried to stem the torrent, but the peeress's voice filled all heaven, and if its owner had had anything to throw she would have thrown it.

"Down't yer mike answer to me, Ilda Miple! I'm Mattie Huggins, I am, and I'd have yer to know that I could take on a dozen of yer! Any dy of the week!"

She put her right arm akimbo and snapped the fingers of her left hand finely in the air, "That for yer damn Rackham Catchings!" She put her left arm akimbo and snapped the fingers of her right hand with still nobler violence, "That for yer old Drury Lane stige barn!" She put both arms akimbo and leant forward over the end of the banisters shouting with titanic power, "Burn it down for the insurance, you bitch! Burn it an' keep quiet! For yer'll never get a penny out of hus! And so I tells yer strite!"

Her face was crimson, panting and sweating; her voice almost exhausted. But she had the strength to add, before she turned to the ambulance and to the last attentions due to her dear one: "Jest you wite till I tells the Prime Minister about you, Hilda Maple! You'll see what 'e'll do to yer! Yus, he will! Not arf!" And with that, amid the embarrassed, the horrified, the discreet

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

crowd about her, she sobered down to give still breathless but intelligible orders, sat herself down in the ambulance beside her husband, against all rules, and was gone.

* * * * *

Rackham Catchings was as quiet as the dusty scene of an explosion when the rumble is over: but it was as wrecked. And Hilda Maple sat down, a wreck herself, her elbow upon the table of the hall, her dizzy head supported in her left hand.

Lord Hambourne did not fail—he could not fail—upon such an occasion.

“I’ve c-c-come to say g-g-good-bye,” he grinned, as though it were the most ordinary morning that ever had dawned. Hilda Maple could hardly manage to be civil. She half rose, she asked him if he had a vehicle, she mechanically said she hoped he would come again.

Hardly had he gone when footsteps approached. It was the cook, heading her phalanx once again.

“Not as I’d disturb any Lady in your Circumstances, ma’am,” she declaimed, “but if you please, ma’am, I must be going this very day. Ow, never mind the month’s wages,” she added loftily, as Hilda attempted to speak. “And all these poor things,” waving at the herd, “they say the same as me.”



*Wifely protest of
the unwort*

*ea, Lady de Beaurivage, at
eatment of her lord*

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

“Not Alphonse?” asked poor Hilda of the crowd, feebly.

“Not that Toad!” said Mrs. Fry. “Not that I knows on. I won’t speak for him—I’ll have nothing to do with him. But this day we goes, ma’am, all of us. We’re all resolved. We won’t sleep under this roof again—for sleep we can’t.” And there were murmurs and groaning exclamations of assent from the rest.

“Not Corton?” said poor Hilda, in a still lower voice.

“Mr. Corton,” said Mrs. Fry with dignity, “has informed us that he prefers to speak to you privately. He will then say whatever he has to say.”

And with that she sailed out, and with her followed her attendant nymphs and gentlemen-in-waiting.

Hilda had hardly time for breathing space when John in his turn appeared.

“John,” said the unfortunate woman, “I feel faint.”

“Of course, Aunt Hilda,” he said sympathetically. “I must give you some brandy.”

“It’s a thing I never do,” said Aunt Hilda, as her nephew poured out a stiff dose from a derelict decanter of the night’s debauch, and squirted a sufficiency of soda into it.

“Drink that, Aunt Hilda,” he said.

“I suppose it’ll do me good,” she answered in a voice still faint. “I feel more dead than alive.”

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

She was breathing heavily. Then she said:

“Well, John . . .”

“I’m still here, Aunt Hilda,” said John dutifully. “Whatever you want me for, I’m still here. And . . . And, Aunt Hilda, I’ll still buy Rackham.”

“You’ll still what?” said Aunt Hilda, with the ghost of her former energy reviving.

“What I said,” doggedly repeated John, in an echo of so many insistencies. “I’ll buy Rackham. You’ve got the papers, Aunt Hilda, and I’ve got a copy of them here.”

There worked in Hilda Maple’s mind, violently surging one against the other like opposing strong tides in a strait, the two currents which have shaken men and women since first they dealt with buying and selling. She was ruined—no one would buy the place. Her reason told her in a flash that she was lucky to have such a chance even as this. It would clear her, at any rate.

And the other current was her pride—after having stood out for so long, and after having felt such contempt for the foolish boy. Above them the figure of the Ancestor grinned fatuously, and the young man of twenty-three and the woman of fifty sat silent under its gaze.

John put the papers down upon the table, and his fountain-pen by the side.

Then in that silence the Ancestor spoke from his frame. He spoke in a deep voice, and with a gravity that belied his features.



Hilda Maple admits that she is a sinful woman

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"Woman! Woman!" he boomed.

Aunt Hilda swerved round, stared a moment at the incredible Thing, gave a little squeak like a bird.

"Woman! Woman!" boomed on Sir Harry Murtenshaw, Knight, from the depths of his painted chest. "Is he not the Rightful Heir?"

"Oh, sir!" came abruptly and strongly in sharp agony from Hilda Maple's lips. She sank suddenly upon the floor to her knees and clasped her fingers convulsively, imploring the clemency of her dreadful visitant, "Oh, sir, I am a sinful woman!" She buried her face in her hands. Even as she did so she heard that solemn voice again for the third time, and in yet deeper tones:

"Is he not the Rightful Heir?"

She reeled a little. John Maple helped her up and seated her. She signed.

* * * * *

"John," sighed the unfortunate woman, as she laid down the pen, and when he had handed her his acknowledgment—the instrument of her release, the paper that would stop the Esthonian's bark—"leave me, dear boy. Leave me!"

"Can't I . . . ?" he began.

"No, my dear," she said feebly. She had never been a tithe so affectionate to him in all these years, as now when he had done her so ill a service; and it burnt him with remorse—but there

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

was the strong image of Bo in the background to keep him to the mark. "Leave me," she said. And he walked out with bent head.

Hilda Maple broke into a flood of tears, putting her head down upon her crossed arms, and sobbing freely. She gave full vent to her relief; and minutes passed before she raised her face again, stained, distraught—hideous, she was sure. And when she raised it, there stood respectfully at the door, hesitating whether he should come in, the tall figure of Lord Hellup. Alone of that household the night vigil had not ruffled him at all. He had simply changed from his evening dress to his morning clothes, with all the creases where they should be. He had shaved, he was as fresh as a daisy. No wonder they make money, and keep it. But then, they also have hearts of gold.

As she raised her face he knew at once that he was intruding, and turned to go. But she, the unfortunate, was on her feet.

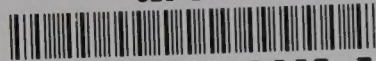
"Hannibal! . . . I mean, Hamilcar!" she cried, stretching forth her extended hands.

He returned. She tottered. And fifty fell into the arms of sixty years. But there! What difference does ten years make at that time of life?



"Hannibal! . . . I mean, Hamilcar!"

MARYGROVE COLLEGE LIBRARY
The haunted house,
828 B41h



3 1927 00041559 3

828

B41h

Belloc, Hilaire.

The haunted house.

DATE

ISSUED TO

1927 - '51

[Handwritten signature]

828

B41h

