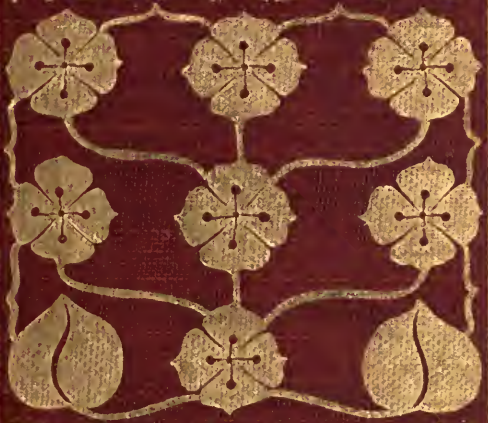
SEVEN ON THE HIGHWAY BY BLANCHE WILLIS HOWARD



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SEVEN ON THE HIGHWAY

BY

BLANCHE WILLIS HOWARD

AUTHOR OF "GUENN," "THE OPEN DOOR" "ONE SUMMER," ETC.

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You try to set yourself apart from the vulgar. It is in vain. In that instant vulgarity attaches itself to you.

CARPENTER'S Towards Democracy.

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SEVEN ON THE HIGHWAY

MARIGOLD–MICHEL

I

MARIGOLD–MICHEL strode down the mountain. It was five o'clock in the morning, and the world was fresh. From his broad-brimmed rush hat wreathed with marsh marigolds, streamed long stems of oak leaves dancing and nodding like a cavalier's plumes. His face was brown, gay, and clean-shaved except for a big mustache rather yellower than his faded hat, or even the straggling ends of fair hair curling loosely on his shoulders. On his arm he carried a large basket covered with plantain leaves; strapped upon his back, a canister; thrust through his belt, a peasant's knife sheathed and a solid

bunch of marigolds. Tall, powerfully built, in a weather-beaten brown jacket, his long legs encased in foresters' boots of stout russet leather reaching halfway up the thigh, he swung along as if his soul were singing a blithe tune. The woods were full of birds; he piped to them like a thrush-initiate. The trees were his own familiar friends. He smiled as in response to the vehement babble of the small brook that accompanied his swift feet down the slope.

Not far from the edge of the forest he crossed a few fields and approached a lonely hut. Deftly as he took from his basket and put upon the window-ledge some cresses, mint, mushrooms, Waldmeister, and a few flowers, the casement opened slightly, and a voice gruff as that of Red Riding Hood's pseudo-grandmother croaked, "Is that you, Michel?"

"Yes, granny. I hope you are feeling comfortable this morning."

"Comfortable? Pray what should make me comfortable, I 'd like to know? Old age and poverty and the rheumatism in every bone I 've got? Being shunned

like poison, and my great-grandson a jail-bird? Comfortable! That's your fool-talk, Marigold-Michel."

"All right, granny," the man returned cheerily. "Can I do anything for you in town?"

"Oh, it's town-day again, is it? Nothing better to do than to strut about with your weeds dangling, and the folk a-staring?"

"Not much," he said, with an amused laugh.

"Laughing's cheap!" she growled. "Wait till you are a rheumatic old woman neglected of every mortal soul, your own children quarreling with you tooth and nail whenever they cross your threshold, and Hans in jail."

"I know, I know," he answered soothingly, his voice indulgent and mellow. "There's a lot of bad luck in the world."

"You don't know, Marigold-Michel!" retorted the exasperated voice behind the casement. "Nobody knows anything about my rheumatism. Those that never had any better keep still. It stands to reason they know nothing about it.

Those that had it once, they 've forgotten, and what they say is trash and fibs; they 're only making themselves important. And those that have got it, they are thinking of their own pains every breath they draw, and that 's why I say nobody on earth knows anything about my rheumatism."

"Come, granny, what do you want to-day? A little snuff?"

"That last was pretty nasty," she grumbled.

"We 'll try to get some that 's good. And a wee drop of gin? That 's a bit comforting for our rheumatism, eh, granny?"

"Any child knows that without asking."

"Coffee?"

"Perhaps you think the last quarter-pound parcel you brought ought to last forever?" she rejoined acrimoniously.

"Fuel you have for a month, at least, and beer and potatoes; bread and milk and eggs the child Genoveva brings. As to Hans, poor little chap, I shall go to see him to-day, if they 'll let me in.

But he's all right. He had no more to do with the burglary than I had. If he refuses to explain why he was lurking in the neighborhood, it's a sure case of sweetheart."

"Minx!"

"But I think he will tell me about it. He's rather fond of me. He inherits it from his great-grandmother."

"Rubbish!"

"And he'll be up to see you before long."

"If he dare to show himself, I'll tell him he's disgraced the family, and I'll slam the door in his face."

"And drive away the only one of your children's children that still comes to brighten you up a bit? The youngest, — little Hans! Oh, you'll never do that. I know you better. You'll be very amiable and affable, and awfully nice, granny, and you'll give him a mug of beer, and bid him come again as soon as ever he can — and bring his sweetheart."

"H'm! Michel, I want a hank of yarn, — gray yarn: plain, not mottled;

dark, not light; and medium, neither coarse nor fine. Here 's a sample, which of course you 'll lose, and you 'll come back empty-handed and say you forgot. It 's a mean sort of world for a poor lone lame old woman. If you 're young and strong and go-as-you-please, with a hoity-toity and a whoop and hurrah and hulla-baloo, and " —

" Now I 'm off. I 'll fetch all your things, never fear. And I would n't be quite so solitary, day in, day out. Why do you not talk with Genoveva ? "

" You live alone yourself, Marigold-Michel ! "

" Quite true. — She 's a jolly little maid, and might amuse you. Can't you tell her a story or something ? "

" Her mother, the last time she ever came, said in my very face that I " —

" Oh, but the child is not to blame that all you people have spicy tongues. To-morrow I 'll come down and spend the afternoon with you if I may, being, as you say, so alone myself. I 'm weaving a new basket, and will bring my work along."

"Then see that you wipe your great dirty boots. I 'll not have my floor littered with rushes or tracked with black slime from the woods."

The tall man stood bending toward the tiny curtained casement which screened his amused smile.

"We 'll have a famous gossip."

"If you bring any news worth hearing. Your talk is mostly as dull as a son-in-law."

"Good-by, granny. Take care of yourself."

"If I don't, nobody else will, that 's pretty clear."

"Michel!" she called presently.

He stopped and turned. "Well, granny?"

"Those last mushrooms were vile."

He let loose a long-suppressed chuckle before calling back politely, "These, today, are better, I hope."

"You 'll poison me yet!"

He went on a few steps.

"Michel!"

"Yes."

"Plain gray."

"Not mottled," he returned jovially.

"Dark."

"Not light."

"Medium," she insisted.

"Neither coarse nor fine."

"Michel!"

"Yes, granny, but say it all, this time."

"Well, you need n't be so impatient. Men-folks never have the least control of their tempers." Her grim and wizened face, framed by a nightcap, peered out of the window. "Tell Hans he may come up when he gets out. You 'll get the lad out sure, won't you, Marigold-Michel? And tell him not to be such a dyed-in-the-wool idiot another time!"

Michel swung his hat, and shouted in a great sonorous voice, "I 'll tell him you know he is innocent, and long to see him!"

"Well, don't roar the roof off."

Her suspicious, thankless gaze mustered his offerings on the window-ledge.

"Michel!" she screamed, "these cresses!" and again, "Michel!" or some other sound of rasping protest jarred across the quiet fields.

But he, going on at a great pace, took care not to pause again or turn his head.

"Hullo there! Stop that, will you? Stop, I say!" he commanded, as he reached the main road, where, at the foot of a steep byway, a peasant stood pommeling his nag with the butt end of his whip, and had already lifted a hobnailed boot.

Presently he crawled from the gutter, and rubbed various portions of his person as he advanced red and scowling toward Michel, who remarked, "Directly, directly," in an amiable and slightly preoccupied tone.

Having propped the cartwheels, Michel was engaged in inspecting the animal, freeing his head, loosening straps, giving him a little water, and, with a wet sponge from the botanical canister, wiping the dust from his eyes and nostrils.

"What the devil are you doing to my horse?"

"Encouraging him."

"What do you mean by pitching me into the gutter?"

"It was necessary."

"I 'll teach you!" blustered the peasant, squaring.

"Do," said Michel pleasantly.

But eying the other's size and shape, the man came no nearer.

"I 'll complain of you. I 'll have you up for it. Who are you, anyhow, with your silly looks and woman's hair, and posies like a lovesick maid? Why, wait! I say! I 've heard of you. Your name 's Michel, — Wildflower-Michel."

"That is one of my names."

"Marigold-Michel."

"That is another."

"Fool-Michel."

"At your service."

"Well, I 'll not fight a fool."

"Nor I," returned Michel genially.

The man stared and slowly grinned, watched him awhile, and said at last: "Just leave me my own horse, will you, Fool-Michel? I must get on."

"You 've lost no time. He 'll go now without blows. I 've whispered in his ear."

"Oh yes, I 've heard of your tricks," muttered the peasant, reluctantly credu-

lous. "See here. It 's my horse, and none of your business, but even a fool can see there 's nothing the matter with him."

"He 's a good little beast, not ill fed, but overloaded and fagged. Galled here, too, see? I 've protected it. You 've come far, I presume?"

"I 've been on the road four days, and not hit him once until he was *jaloux* just now."

Michel repressed a smile at the odd foreign word, a relic of the French occupation, and used in all seriousness by peasants of that region exclusively for balky horses.

"Then why did you begin?"

"Because I 've got an ill boy. He 's all the boy I have. Perhaps it would get into your own nerves, Fool-Michel, to see the nag go jaloux so near home."

"What ails your boy?"

"As if I knew! He hangs his head and moans, my wife writes. There never was anything the matter with him before," the man exclaimed indignantly.

"How old is he?"

"Eight years old next September."

"Your name and village."

The peasant gave them.

"I 'll come to see him to-morrow morning. Send for the doctor at once. See, the horse pulls well. It 's only the start that 's steep. Take care of him. You 'll have to pay somewhere, somehow, for every blow you give him. A good wash-down and extra feed, eh? I 'm sorry about your boy. But cheer up. You may find him brighter than you expect."

Michel had walked a short distance with the cart. In his manner was a certain benevolent authority, an innocent lordliness, and he no longer spoke in dialect. With a friendly tap on the man's shoulder, he turned back.

"I say, you 're no fool, are you, now?" demanded the peasant, staring curiously.

But Michel merely smiled, and walked off swiftly. The other, looking after him, noted the waving oak plumage and all the yellow bravery, and grinned.

"Anybody 'd know he was a fool! Get along, old fellow. We 're almost home." Cheerfully cracking his whip,

he slapped with harmless palm the willing horse, now pulling stoutly up the hill.

Down the long road to the town went Michel, now and again branching off to the right or left to leave a rare botanical specimen with a world-forgotten old professor, a bunch of wood violets, anemones, or ferns at the doors of humble and mostly cross-grained invalids. Certain sylvan wares he sold at early market for fair prices, and jested in dialect and rough humor with old wives who hailed him jovially.

Everywhere he was greeted with nods, smiles, and chaff. A coarse fellow on a tram, winking at his mates, called out as Michel sat rearranging his basket, "What's that yellow M for in that bunch of wildflowers?"

Michel, silent, foolish and sly with half-closed lids, bent over his posies and moss.

"What does it cost, Michel?"

"Fifty pfennigs."

"But for my sweetheart, because her name is Marie, you'll sell it me cheaper?"

"Is his sweetheart's name Marie?" inquired Michel.

"It really is," several asserted, laughing.

"Give it me for twenty pfennigs because her name begins with M," urged the red-faced jester.

Michel extended the bouquet. "Give it her — for comfort," he added gravely, amid the laughter of the men. "And keep your twenty pfennigs. You look as if you'd need them when you go to housekeeping."

"When he is in a good vein he makes very fair shots. Such foolish fellows often can," a solemn gentleman explained as Michel stepped off the tram.

Passing rapidly by an hotel entrance, he nearly ran into an immaculate man of fashion emerging languidly in clothes of which the elbows and knees knew no derogatory wrinkles, and the shirt-collar was like unto a high and shining tower, so that when the wearer turned his head he had to turn his toes. The two exchanged brief glances. An involuntary smile of amazement crept into the stranger's eyes.

"Good Lord!" reflected the emancipated one, stretching himself in his lazy woolens, "to think I too used to thrust my body into broadcloth tubes and hang a glazed platter on my breast!"

In a sculptor's studio he posed long.

"Ah, give me another hour, Michel. I 'll make it worth your while."

"Not for your weight in gold."

"Ah, Michel, an idle, devil-may-care, happy vagabond like you!"

"Not to-day."

"But to-morrow?"

"Not to-morrow. Saturday all day, if you like."

"Is it a sweetheart that makes you so inflexible?"

"Sweethearts, — yes."

"I cannot make head or tail of the fellow," said the sculptor to his friend.

"At all events, you are making a glorious Siegfried of him."

The two studied the wet clay in silence for some time, pacing solemnly round it, hands behind them, chins in the air.

"It 's great."

"Well," the artist returned, drawing a

deep breath and smiling, "at least it's the best I've done yet. I'm superstitious about it," he added, covering it with a damp cloth. "I scarcely dare look at it when Michel's not here. I posed him several times. No good. 'How's this?' he asked suddenly. 'Don't budge for your life!' I cried, and worked like a madman. It's a superb body the queer fellow's got."

"But a bee in his bonnet."

"If he is half-witted, I wish I had the other half. That is why I tell you I don't know what to make of him. You meet him in the street, where he wears, for reasons of his own, a foolish countenance. What of that? Do not even the pillars of society the same, and never suspect it? Here, hour after hour, though he is silent and keeps a wonderfully straight face, the spirit of the man speaks. He simply cannot disguise intelligence and education. I'd swear he knows the meaning of everything here, of all our talk and traps. He likes it. He knows authors. The other day, I caught in the mirror there his quick smile as some of

us were quarreling over a quotation from Pindar, — Leo mangling it awfully, and old Arnim spouting Greek like a schoolboy. The man 's a gentleman, or I 'm daft. The first day he posed he did n't like it, you know, and he hated the money for it. I cannot explain why, but when he got up there stripped, and turned his eyes on me, I had a vision of a soldier marched out to be shot by his comrades."

"Oh, come, you are fanciful! Of course he gathers up the crumbs that fall from your table. He continually hears the art-chatter of you men here. But you are off the scent, I assure you. You are not yet acquainted with all our landmarks. Marigold-Michel is a public character, who has been roaming about here ten or fifteen years; twenty, for all I know to the contrary. Children adore him. He 's a sort of Pied Piper minus the pipe. Always looks the same. Nobody knows his age. But he 's a bit gray at the temples, I noticed to-day."

"On one side only. He may have been that at twenty."

"Well, my dear fellow, he may be less foolish than he acts, I grant you; although I incline to the current belief in his silliness, he does get himself up so like a male travesty of Ophelia, don't you know?"

"He's a better dressed man than you or I."

The other shrugged his shoulders. "If you mount that hobby, I yield at discretion. But anyhow he's a simple rustic: you cannot rout me on that point."

"It is possible you are right," returned the sculptor, lighting another cigarette; "but then, you see, I know better. However, since he elects to travel incognito, I shall be precious careful to respect his whim."

"Yes, for either there is nothing behind the mask, or something monstrously unsavory."

"Exactly. Whereas my model, Michel the marvelous, Michel the magnificent" —

"*Non olet!*" suggested the other, smiling. "Suppose we go to lunch."

Meanwhile, Michel was passed along with due ceremony by liveried servants through the courtyard, portals, stairways, and corridors of a palace. These men, although, being the lackeys of a duke, very great men indeed, were less haughty to Michel than to small tradespeople and such trash. The ducal retainers even smiled upon him, with a certain contemptuous tolerance of his vagaries. Men growing rotund upon the bread and beer of idleness, and displaying the splendors of scarlet and gold raiment and opulent calves, naturally found Michel's costume ludicrous, and his habit of tramping over hill and dale fatuity. Still, he too was a sort of vassal of the palace. At all events, he came often and was always admitted. Then he could do an obliging thing for one, as many of them knew from experience. So the languid great men were not more than phenomenally insolent, as Michel was announced along the line and advanced in proper form from pillar to post, until he stood on the threshold of a large and somewhat darkened room, — where from a

cot-bed a long, "Ah!" of intense relief greeted him, and a child's voice, sharp and imperious, cried, "Everybody go except Michel!"

A nurse, a maid, and a man obediently stole out.

"Where you left off!" commanded the small pale tyrant. "Begin exactly where you left off, Michel!"

II

"So the King and his fifty glittering knights rode ever on and on, day after day, month after month, in the Strange Country," began Michel, advancing slowly down the long room, his green leaves nodding, his marigolds and bright hair shining, as he crossed some fugitive sunbeam that stole in despite Venetian blinds and draperies. Smiling, moving very slowly, telling the tale as if born for the purpose, he came on, his eyes fixed upon the child, who, with the habitual frown of pain on his forehead and drawn lines of pain about his mouth, watched breathless, exultant — "in the Strange Country, which

became ever stranger. The trees and the grass were sapphire blue. The birds were snow white, marvelous in song, and not one was smaller than an eagle. Voices called, one knew not from whence, in words no man had ever heard. Jewels grew on stalks, and the knights, as you may believe, were not too proud to fill their pockets. But as all the streams ran molten silver, and the noble company, having ridden far without resting, were consumed with thirst, and ready, man and beast, to drop from weariness, even diamonds and rubies as big as your fist began to pall upon them, and they would have given all that they possessed for a cup of cold water. Encircling the vast plain loomed the blood-red smoking mountains of the Strange Country, and as yet was no sign of a town or any human habitation. So the knights were despondent, and the King no less, but no man uttered his thought.

"Presently they heard a delicious splashing. Hastening past a luxuriant mass of beautiful aluminum shrubbery, to their exceeding joy they discovered a

fountain of purest water playing into a tiny lake.

"As quick as a flash the king's cup-bearer whipped out his tray and golden cup.

"'Nay, lad,' quoth the King, 'rather thus!' Promptly kneeling upon his royal knees, he drank with his kingly lips from the refreshing stream, thereby proving what an exceptionally clever and enlightened monarch he was, while the fifty glittering knights stood in a row with courtly mien, each wishing for all he was worth that his Majesty would be quick about it.

"But when the King had drunk copiously, thoroughly quenched his thirst, and would fain withdraw his august head, he found that his great beard, five and a half feet long, was clutched and held immovable in the water by hands that seemed to weigh a ton, and a voice from the depths cried: —

"'You are in my power, O King, and the swords of your knights are naught against my spells. Speak not to them. If you call, they will immediately be-

come aluminum. There they will stand, and here you will remain, until you accede to the request I shall shortly make, as soon as I think you able to bear it.'

"Now only a king with a beard five and a half feet long, the pride of the kingdom, can appreciate the subtle awkwardness of this situation; not to mention the obvious indignity of having one's royal mane pulled at all, and the embarrassing consciousness that fifty good knights and true are thirstily drawn up on the shore, and etiquette forbids them to cool their parched throats and those of their red roan and piebald steeds, until the sacred person of royalty rises from its knees and gives them a chance.

"'Listen, O King,' said the awful gurgle in the depths. 'I will release you upon one sole, single, and solitary condition. You will pledge your sovereign word that on your return to your own realm, to your people, your palace, and your queen, you will'" —

Across Michel's mouth the child suddenly clapped his hand, exclaiming, "Time's up! Halt!"

The tale stopped short. The boy closed his eyes and sighed. "Oh, Michel, nobody's got any sense but you."

Michel inspected him closely and said nothing.

The child seized the rustic hat and patted the marigolds. "Nice!" he murmured. His gaze wandered with gloating delight over the details of the man's costume. "The others bore me so. They are all idiots, except mamma. I say, Michel, how long could you rattle on like that — miles?"

Michel laughed. "Like that? Well, yes, I rather think so."

"Some time I'll try you a whole day."

"All right. In the woods. But there we'll have better things to do than to spin that rubbish."

"It is rubbish if you hear a lot," the boy remarked dispassionately.

"I should say so."

"But a little of it is nice, and I stopped you at exactly the right place. For I shall be wondering until next time what old Gurgle was going to make King Longbeard promise. So I shall enjoy it three

times, don't you see? — now, and next time, and all the time between."

"Little sybarite!"

"I know what that means."

"You know a lot too much. Wait till I get you in the woods ten miles from your books."

"Ah, Michel, the woods! But in this stupid place a fellow has to read, you know."

"Such awfully old books for such a little man."

"Wait, Michel!" cried the boy eagerly. "How would you account for this? Solon said, *Call no man happy till he dies.* But Socrates said, *No harm can befall the truly wise man.* Now, I think Solon was a coward and afraid of life, and Socrates was brave: and that is how I account for it, Michel, don't you see!"

"Yes, I see," said Michel gravely.

The child's hands strayed like a baby's over his big friend's face, patting it, pulling and remodeling.

"I say, Michel, why don't you wax the ends of your mustache, like papa? Would n't you be a guy! No, don't.

Don't do a single thing different. Just stay so, Michel, exactly as you are, your hair, your clothes, and all of you, do you hear?"

"All right, my Lord Duke. I'll not budge an inch, I promise you, from the ways I find most comfortable."

"Michel," demanded the boy, with a sudden gleam of malice on his sensitive, mobile, and far too clever face, "how do you know anything about Socrates and Solon?"

"Oh, that amount of wisdom one can buy for a penny at the first bookstall."

"Why do you speak peasant dialect before the servants, and like a gentleman when you are alone with me?"

"Do I?" asked Michel placidly.

"Michel, you are a gentleman!" exclaimed the boy triumphantly.

"Oh, come, now, Azor! Do I like you because you are his Gracelessness the little Duke of Spitzfels-Höchstberg-Aussicht-über-Alles?"

"Oh, what a funny name! It does sound like ours, though," laughed Azor.

"Or because you happen to be a little

chap I like? And suppose I were the Emperor of Japan in disguise, would you like me better?"

"I could n't like you any better, Michel," Azor answered, with extreme simplicity and sweetness. "I like you best — except mamma."

"Besides" —

"Well?" the boy said sharply, divining Michel's thought.

Smiling, tender, ironical, boundlessly indulgent, the big man continued, — "There 's no possible doubt that Konstantin Albrecht Azor Karl Eugen is a gentleman, I presume?"

"No," returned the little duke haughtily.

"And you and I are friends, are we not?"

"Yes, Michel."

"Well, then."

The boy's eyelids drooped an instant. Presently he looked up into the face bending over him and said peevishly, "You are awfully unkind not to come here and live."

"I could not, dear boy. I have ex-

plained that before. I have other things to do and other people to see."

"Other boys with hips?" asked Azor jealously.

"No. Besides, if I were always here, you'd not like me as well. You'd get tired of me."

"Mamma is always here."

"Your mamma is a most lovely lady."

"And you are Marigold-Michel!"

"But you'd not get tired of me in the woods, little man. That I promise. When once they let you come, when once you are well enough."

"I've waited so long," wailed Azor. "I'm always waiting. I'm dead tired of everything — except mamma. I hate this nasty room; I hate to be carried about the garden in an old box in a footman's arms; I hate to drive in the stupid park. Oh, I do want to go and live in the woods with you! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" he moaned, all his precocious wisdom fled.

"You are very tired to-day, my poor little Azor. You slept badly, I suppose?"

"Yes, and I would n't let nurse know.

I hate her fussing and her horrid-tasting things. Oh, how they all bother! I hate the whole business. It is so slow, Michel! It is so nasty to live in a box!"

His slight hands fluttered restlessly. Michel took them in his quiet grasp and leaned close to the child.

"Look in my eyes, Azor, and listen," said the strong man's low, loving voice. "Look straight in my eyes. There is a place in the woods where some day you shall be. The way is steep and there is no path. It is a hidden place, only for you and me. But I will carry you softly in my arms and nothing shall harm you, and you shall lie in a hammock under a great beech-tree, and squirrels will come and throw bits of bark at you and scamper off and chatter. It is a cool, green place. Its name is Azor's Camp. The sunshine flickers down in patches on velvety warm moss where last year's nuts are beginning to grow tails and two little ears in front. All day long you can watch the birds. There are oaks centuries old, a big solemn fir now and then, and lovely white stems scattered about. Out be-

yond in the heather are hares sitting on their haunches, and looking as wise as the School Board. Sometimes a deer will point his nose at you and wonder what sort of queer new animal you are.

"Down below is a wet, shady place where my marigolds grow, among long grasses, reeds and rushes, and Solomon's seal stretches up ever so high. You shall weave a hat and a basket like mine. And I will fetch you lizards and flat-headed salamanders with very wriggly tails, and little toads speckled orange and blue, and wee bright green baby-frogs. There are splendid bright green beetles too, hundreds of them, and daddy-long-legs; and beautiful spiders with crosses on their backs will take impertinent walks on you and tickle your nose, and never so much as say, 'By your leave, Azor.' The air is warm and the breeze is cool, and it 's all fragrant and silent and full of murmurs — exactly as you love it best. A little rill comes tumbling over steep rocks, and lulls you with many voices when you wish to sleep. Under all the bending ferns, among the dead

oak leaves of last year, are innumerable little shy things rustling, and I will tell you stories about them from morning till night, — how they live and work and play. Whatever I know I 'll tell you. There 's not a thing in the woods, not a leaf, not an insect, that has not its story. And if you watch them and love them, they will tell you their stories themselves, and that is the best of all. The main thing is to love them. They do the rest."

The little hands were tranquil. On the wan face was restfulness. With a rapt smile the child gazed straight into the clear eyes that held him in thrall. Health, strength, serenity — the living breath of the woods — had subtly encompassed his frail being with brief but potent blessing. He basked in the generous sunshine of the man's presence. Michel's calm, controlling hands, his blue eyes smiling steadily, never varied, and the low voice ran on ceaselessly : —

" When they begin to tell you their stories, old Solon and Socrates can take a back seat. Azor's library will be full

to bursting without those gentlemen. I never could tell you the distinguished names of all your authors and their works : —

"The History of the Ant Republic; The Glorious Reign of her Majesty, Queen Bee; Butterfly's Intimations of Immortality ; The Ascent of the Acorn ; The Commonwealth of Frogs ; Carols by A Lark and Wood Thrush, M. A., and Principles of Harmony by Signor Blackbird ; The Rise and Fall of Dewdrops ; Nightingale on Love and Breeze on Liberty ; Brook's Voyages and Adventures ; The Tail of a Tadpole ; Anemone's Secret ; Wild Rose and her Wooers ; Owls' Night-Thoughts ; The Emancipation of Miss Moss ; Reincarnation, by Lizardius, F. R. S., and The Mystery of Wings, both published by the Soaraway Society ; Bullfrog's Commentaries ; Bunny's Pilgrim's Progress, and Fox's Martyrs ; Black Beetles' Digest ; Snakes' Lives ; Cuckoo's Essays on Domesticity ; Dr. Snail, D. D., on Races ; and Urwald's Architecture.

"The beauty of these books is they

have no horrid little black letters that spoil one's eyes, but voices that will speak sweetly to my little Azor, and tell him lovely stories in the cool greenness of the place in the woods that is only for Azor and me. Everything will tell its tale: the swarms of insects, the flickering patches of sunlight, the patter of millions of leaves, the ceaseless trickling of the brook, and all the sleepy, droning tones from far and near in the warm summer noon that is yet silent and cool and restful in the heart of the great woods. For the myriad murmuring leaves, and innumerable fluttering wings, and legions of humming buzzing things, and the sweet breath of earth — and ferns — and breeze — and — trees" —

Michel's voice became lower — slower — ceased. He waited awhile, rose noiselessly. Azor's dark lashes swept his sunken cheeks. The broad eyelids had begun to droop in happy languor long before, had opened, closed, and fluttered drowsily; the flexible mouth had smiled faintly but a moment gone. Now he was sleeping profoundly.

As Michel went out, the nurse at the door stole in. A valet informed him as usual that the duchess desired to speak with him. To-day, instead of his stereotyped answer that he "could n't stop," he intimated in shy, rustic fashion that he "did n't mind."

Shown into the presence of her Grace, he bowed gravely and stood by the door, hat in hand, his oak leaves trailing. Neither the old crone nor the peasant, neither the sculptor nor little Azor, had ever seen Marigold-Michel bear himself with this fine deference.

For some minutes after the door closed there was no sound or movement in the room.

III

"Guido," began the lady, hardly above her breath.

He merely looked at her.

She rose and came forward a few steps, a slight small woman with Azor's eyes. "Ah, Guido!" she faltered.

"The youth Guido is dead," he an-

swered gently. "I read his death in the papers years ago. They said he died in India."

"Is it worth while to speak so to me?" she said, trembling. "Do you imagine you deceived me for one moment? Did I not know you were innocent? Could I doubt you a second in spite of all you did to prove yourself guilty? So mad — so good — so glorious — so unheard of — so senseless — so like you, Guido!"

Over his face flashed the sudden light of great joy. "Madam," he returned quietly, "I could almost at this moment wish it were possible for me to have the honor to receive your commands in my castle, where are neither doors nor servants, — not for the sake of the youth Guido, since he is dead and nothing can harm him, but on account of all who were dear to him years ago."

"No one will hear. I have given orders we are not to be disturbed. Was it well to let me wait years to tell you I understood? Why, if it were not for my poor little Azor's whim, I might never

have been able to speak with you at all. And why only to-day? Why not months ago, Guido?"

"Your Grace will pardon me. I venture to present myself to-day to entreat a special favor."

"Ah," she said most sorrowfully, "not even now because you wanted to speak with *me?*" She sat down, looked at him drearily, covered her face with her hands, and dropped her head on a table.

Michel stood a few moments irresolute before he crossed the room and said, "Forgive me, Erika."

She wept on softly. At last she murmured: "Tears are rare with me. But it is all so utterly hopeless." Turning toward him abruptly, "The favor. Let us get it out of the way, for we two have long accounts to settle."

"Two favors, indeed. First the child Azor. May I interfere?"

"You? All you like."

"Ought he not to have more air? Is he not too cooped up?"

"Of course. He ought to live outdoors from morning till night. How can

I manage it in town, and with the sort of life I lead? I am going off with him. Konstantin has at last consented. The doctors say Azor must follow the sunshine round the world."

"Bravo! Then I need say no more. I had designs on the boy. When you return and he is stronger, if you could trust him to me for a while, I dare to believe you would never repent it."

"I would have trusted him to Guido."

"Trust Michel no less," he replied quietly. "The other favor is this. A word from the duke, if that were possible, would, I suppose, induce the proper authorities, whoever they may be, to permit me to see a young fellow in prison. Appearances are against him, and he is obstinately silent. I am sure he is innocent, and I think he would speak freely to me. It is a pity for him" —

"To sacrifice himself outright? I agree, Guido. Let us save him, by all means. Why should silly boys insist upon self-destruction? Give me his name and the necessary facts."

Having written a few words, she rang for a servant.

"Konstantin is in his study, I believe. He will be eager to do, not this, but a real service for you. He often speaks of your devotion to our boy, and your strange reluctance to meet us."

Replying to the sudden question in Michel's eyes, "No, Guido," she continued, "I have never intimated to my husband that you are other than you seem. I have respected your secret. How could I do otherwise when you guarded it so jealously, when you have shunned me all these years, and let me gaze at you with a great heartache as you walked the streets in your cap and bells? How often I have driven past you and longed to stop my carriage and say, 'Guido, cousin, playmate, dear old friend, best of men, come up where you belong, come to your own'! But you went flaunting by, the crowd grinning. It is incredible! It is heart-breaking! Don't stand there, Guido, like an errand-boy," she exclaimed, frowning. "It is distressing. It annoys me. Sit down."

"It is better so till the calves-in-waiting have returned, is it not?" he suggested tranquilly.

"I am glad," he said, as she presently handed him a cordially worded message from the duke. "I thank you. I had no other way. I know one man of influence here who would befriend me in need, but I cannot see him to-day."

"Does he know you?"

"He may suspect."

"But is discreet?"

"Perfectly."

"Ah," retorted the duchess with spirit, "he has no reason to intrude! He never was your comrade, your other self, your shadow, through all the young, happy years."

"No, little Erika, he was not."

"Sit here and talk to me, dear Guido, now that I have you at last."

"If I may talk in my own way," he said simply, and went on, pausing a little between his sentences: "It is not easy to bridge over the years. I knew it would be terribly painful, yet I could not refuse Azor. I knew too, of course,

coming to your house, that this meeting must sooner or later take place. I could not put it off forever."

"Well," she said impatiently, "you did very nearly, and here you are, temporizing."

"I cannot bear to pain you, Erika, but for the past there is no explanation, and I have lived this sort of life so long" — he glanced down good-humoredly at his clothes — "it really seems odd to me that it should need justification."

"Oh," she cried, surprised and indignant, "a mountebank! You!"

"Not quite that," he returned with gentleness.

"You, with your talents," she continued bitterly, "leading this utterly wasted life! Forgive me. You are so sweet to Azor. You have a marvelous influence over him. You help him when none else can. I know it. I feel it. But how forgotten, how ignoble is your existence! Ah, when I look back! Why, there was nothing beyond your grasp. What a general you might have become, what a statesman!"

He smiled. "I am not of much use, I admit, but upon the whole I do little harm. Perhaps the generals and the statesmen cannot always say as much."

"A man should serve his country."

"I am totally without patriotism," he replied, with a certain sweetness of voice and expression. "I hold it to be a gross error. I have reverence for few national or social rubrics. But I 'll not bore you with my theories. They wax strong in solitude."

"Guido, tell me this: when you are not displaying yourself in town for fools to gape at, how do you spend your days?"

"Oh, I don't know. Doing odd jobs."

"What sort of odd jobs?" she asked sharply.

"Well, I mended a man's roof the other day. Don't groan. I did it very well."

"They say," her face expressed repugnance and distress, "but this I refuse to believe, — that you pose for artists."

"I do sometimes. Why not?"

"Oh, Guido! oh, Guido!"

"I wish I could comfort you, Erika,"

he said very kindly. "You see, I think one can so easily do worse things. If I keep my body wholesome and strong, it seems to me I do my duty by it. I don't know that I owe it any special obsequiousness."

"A gentleman born" —

"I admit I had some scruples at first. It is odd how tenacious certain sentiments are. But all you have to do is to change your point of view and shake off a few husks. I assure you I don't mind it an atom now."

"They say you sleep on the ground in the woods or in a cave; at any rate, like a beast of the field. Is that true too?"

"Sigh no more, lady," he returned, with a laugh. "I 've got a capital little cabin, originally a forester's lodge, which suits me perfectly. It is not a large establishment. You could put it in that bay window. But it 's really got a bed in it, Erika; oh, dear, yes, a most respectable sort of bed, which I greatly esteem — in winter, sometimes, and in long storms. But I confess, at the risk of your displeasure, I have a graduated

set of bunks in the open, — nicely adjusted to my whims and the Lord's seasons, — and I 'd be more explicit, but you 'd never understand. You 're not educated up to it. You see I am terribly epicurean."

It was true, then, all true, — the impossible tales people told of Marigold-Michel; yet there he sat, brown, handsome, superb in strength, his blue eyes shining with mirth as in the old days. He had spoken in the old, boyish, jesting way. His voice had a mellow, contented ring. The tragedy of facts seemed persistently set aside by his comfortable unconcern. It was stupendous, but she felt herself yielding, against knowledge and conviction, to the potent cheerfulness of his interpretation of things. Not thus had she pictured this interview.

"Guido," she persisted, "tell me, how can you live so out of the movement, with no refinements, no advantages, no society of your kind, no talk of the day, no politics, no art, no books? Or have you books? I suppose you do not even read the papers?"

"Papers? Not habitually, thank Heaven!" he replied devoutly. "Books I have, — not many, but sufficient, — the masters. After all, the best of our reading most men get young, and then we keep mammaling it the rest of our lives, as an old sailor his old quid. Still, perhaps you 'd not be quite displeased with me in that one respect, Erika. It is not difficult in this electrical year of our Lord to keep somewhat in touch with vital things, even if one is uninformed by the gossip of drawing-rooms and clubs. You do not suspect what wisdom is in the air, on the road, on the lips, it may be, of the unknown workingman with whom one chances to walk as one goes home in the dusk. Besides, I do not live in a desert, but near a large town. I can get what I want. I am only a pinchbeck hermit, you see. But I am spared, — oh, such a lot of jibber-jabber that you have to put up with, my poor little duchess!"

"I believe you," she returned wearily, with a strange look. After a long silence she resumed: "There are many

detestable social functions, I admit; machinery so cumbersome, arduous, inexorable, soul-stifling, that I, even I could comprehend your glee in being able to snap your fingers at it, if — if only your mask were less ignoble."

"Ah, my marigolds!"

"Your whole position. The crucial step once taken, your great renunciation made, I grasp the sad necessity of self-effacement, but not of self-abasement, not the choice of your low, grotesque garb and clown-tricks."

"Is it so bad?" In his smile was a wealth of affection and serenity. "See, Erika, my cap and bells — as you call them — give me the right of way everywhere and disarm suspicion. Dear cousin, before I go let me comfort you if I can, let me try to reconcile you to my fate."

"You will reconcile me to nothing, Guido, — neither to your insensate magnificent self-immolation nor to this motley anti-climax."

"Erika," he pleaded, "there are things you say which it is impossible for me to

answer. I entreat you to let sleeping dogs lie. Let me talk to you a little about the evolution of the cap and bells. Let us suppose, merely by way of illustration, a young fellow" — he paused an instant — "commits some sort of crime and" —

"Never will I suppose that!" she broke in passionately. "Let us suppose instead that a quixotic boy assumes the onus of a felony committed by his older brother. Let us suppose things look most ominous for the older. Suddenly the younger disappears like a thief in the night. He too had access to the room where the deeds were. 'This is guilt!' cry the wiseacres. 'This is Guido,' says one girl, but only to herself. To what end speak? To whom? When did she ever reveal any prank of his? His monstrous flight throws inquiry off the scent. The scandal is gradually hushed up out of consideration for so old and influential a family. All people in general know is that there was some mystery about a scapegrace who disappeared. And the much respected older brother lives in

peace on the lands of his forefathers; and much good may it do him, for Philip was not worth so much love, Guido, — not worth heroism, exile, crucifixion like yours!"

"Don't, Erika!" exclaimed the listener sternly. "He was always a good brother to me." His face half averted and concealed by his hand, he had drunk in every word thirstily, though once or twice he had sought to restrain her by word or gesture. After a long pause, "In the hypothetical case under discussion," he continued imperturbably, "it is immaterial why the young fellow finds it imperative to leave home suddenly. The point is he goes off. Another young fellow is with him, ostensibly his servant, but always his best friend, — a gardener's son brought up with him. The boy follows without permission; gives no sign until it is too late to send him back."

"Michel always worshiped you," said the duchess softly.

"Three years later the poor lad dies in India, and is buried — it is all very

simple, you see — under the name of the other man, who is not much of a fellow, for after the death of his companion he grows so deadly homesick he is literally good for nothing, and droops like an anæmic girl. He has a tremendous admiration for strong men who can orientalize or occidentalize themselves at will, turn sheik or cowboy, and carve their way anywhere. But he 's not that sort. Lacks character or something. Finds no rest, pines for his home, cannot recover his strength. You see, he left behind — much that he cared for."

"Go on, dear Guido," murmured the duchess.

"Well, after looking about in pretty much all the hemispheres there are, he finally sneaks back to his own land, to a corner of it where he is unknown. Remember he is legally dead, and appears under the name and papers of the dead boy. He is bound, in the nature of the case, to lie more or less *perdu* forever. He has always loved the woods, and naturally enough drifts thither. He does a good turn now and then for an

old forester, and wins his confidence. Slowly, very slowly the wanderer learns to shape his life anew.

"But a serious man who lives alone in the woods is naturally to the general public a suspicious character, planning the assassination of monarchs or constructing dynamite bombs. Ergo, the cap and bells. I spare you obvious historical examples, but trust me, judicious fooling is the only complete disguise. For some occult reason, silliness — the 'childish-foolish' — is ingratiating; sense repels. What if the man looked wise, studious, or even respectable? He could not escape probing and embarrassment from all quarters. As it is, no mortal enjoys such unbounded freedom. Every policeman in town grins at him for a harmless fool, and at midnight as at high noon he is protected by the beneficence of his mask."

She looked at him thoughtfully. "Almost you persuade me you are happy."

"I am content. I have space."

"You might die all alone up there."

"Everybody dies alone."

"It is marvelous," she sighed.

"And you," he said gently, after a while, "are you happy, Erika?"

"Oh, Konstantin is very considerate and good," she replied, rather indifferently. "He is always much occupied, of course, with affairs of state. We see each other less than one expects before marriage. Azor's ill health is a great blow to his father's ambition." Replying to his slightly elevated eyebrows: "Oh, you know how men are, what they want. It is natural they should be ambitious, particularly a man in his position. It is an unfree, artificial world we live in. We all are forced to work and strive so hard. I sometimes ask myself for what. Court life is thankless business. My only real happiness, strangely enough, my little ill boy gives me."

Michel was silent, smiling faintly, his eyes regarding her thoughtfully. Presently he asked, "And your brothers? Jolly little beggars, how have they turned out?"

"It is certainly not their fault that

they are not beggars in earnest," she answered dryly. "Papa storms periodically, and calls upon the gods to witness he 'll not put up with this sort of thing a day longer, then pays their bills like a holy martyr. Oh, they are not bad fellows; only a little selfish and terribly gay, like all their set. When cavalry lieutenants dine, and play, and keep racers — Well, you know how it is."

"Yes, I know."

Michel paced the room once or twice before asking, rather low, "Are Philip and Aline happy?"

"In their own way. They jog along together pretty much like the rest of the world."

His look was still wistful.

"They have three fine boys and a charming little girl."

"Thank God," he broke out, "there 's life and laughter still on the old place!" And his jubilant heart sang: "For them — it was for those children — even then, and in all dark hours, though I knew it not — for them!"

"Philip has named his last boy Guido," she said suddenly, and wondered at Michel's face, touched, grateful, and strangely illumined.

Still transfigured, he approached with extended hand.

"You are not going?"

"I must."

"But you will come again? Surely, Guido!"

"When you consider," he said gently, "you will see it is inexpedient. From this time let me be only Marigold-Michel. I beg, dear Erika, I implore you."

She hesitated long, deeply agitated. "But if you should need me" —

"For myself or another, I will let you know. If you need me, you have but to command."

"Oh, Guido," she said as they stood hand in hand, "I see I may interfere with the strange course you have chosen no more than with the orbit of a planet. But it is sad to say farewell. Still, it is better than before you came. At least, I know now you have not avoided me from want of affection."

"Never that!"

"You dared not see me because you dared not deny your innocence," she declared with sudden vehemence. "You have not denied it. You cannot deny it. You can do all the rest, but you cannot look me in the eyes and lie. Thank God, your honor is spotless. Thank God, I always knew it."

He breathed deep; across his face flitted swift reflections of varying emotions, as if he fain would respond a thousand things to her sweet turbulence, yet he merely stooped and slowly kissed her hands, and said in his kind and simple way: —

"Little Erika was always a loyal little thing," and in answer to her troubled gaze, "It is not really good-by. I shall always come to Azor. We will make him a strong man yet. Some time you will trust him to me. And you and I are always at heart the old" —

"Rascals!" she suggested, smiling with wet eyes.

"And we shall see each other now and then, if only to pass with a good

thought and the memories that will always live. But Guido is dead. These marigolds grew on his grave. There is nothing at all gloomy about them. See how gay and sunny they look. Let us never mourn or resurrect him again. Now give Michel one good word before he goes."

"It is inconceivable, humiliating," she exclaimed, between a sob and a laugh, "but I am actually beginning to like Michel and his marsh-marigolds!"

"Always my generous little Erika, so straight and honest, so utterly her old self, so like Azor! Marigold-Michel thanks you from his heart that you could say that. It will help him in hours when he is not jingling his bells."

"Ah, such hours come!"

Again he bent over her hands. "Farewell, dear little duchess."

"Farewell — Michel," she faltered.

"Now smile, Serenissime; and ring and hand me over to the tender mercies of the calves."

"Show Marigold-Michel out," said her Grace languidly.

Turning away, she paid no further attention to the tall bright figure crossing the room, but bent over a bunch of yellow flowers lying on her writing-table.

NO CONTINUING CITY

WHEN Emma was born her mother was rather preoccupied. In some human, as in feline circles, a birth more or less is never a matter of moment. Besides, Frau Rupp had had eight infants already, was by nature scatter-brained, and contemplated moving to Zürich. Emma was wrapped in something and laid aside while the packing went on. She appeared in no respect agitated by her new environment. A large placidity in accepting the inevitable distinguished her from first to last, while the unphilosophical tendency toward *gourmandise*— her unique vice — evinced in the dawn of her history, marked also its brief high noon and flickering twilight. All the contrasts of a checkered career were powerless to render her other than consistent, equable, and just. She left despair to smaller minds.

Frau Rupp happened to marry about this time, thereby changing her name; but Rupp will be retained for the purposes of this narrative. She had had already two or three husbands, and was never particularly engrossed by anything of the sort, or "careful of the type." The new husband was about to establish himself in the beer and grog business in Zürich, whither he proceeded shortly after the ceremony, leaving Frau Rupp and all the little Rupplets to follow. The contracting parties had been delayed slightly by Emma's impending entrance into this stage of being; but, once an accomplished fact, she was but a minute obstacle in their path, and Frau Rupp's few and not very clean possessions were speedily ready for the emigration. Emma blinked and said nothing, except when her inherent *gourmandise* triumphed briefly over her habitual serenity of manner.

On the day of Frau Rupp's departure her cheeks looked glazed, her eyes unnaturally brilliant, and her utterance sounded husky, all of which may have

been due to fatigue or to emotion called forth by the painful necessity of bidding farewell to her neighbors in the Mansard: Lotte Mez, the washerwoman and house-cleaner; Leni and Mina the factory girls; the Widow Dugenhubel and her offspring; old Daddy Schanz, who was a little silly but could still read publishers' proofs; Granny Schanz, who could not; and the consumptive little chimney-sweep, jolly Nack Nickerson, called by his intimates Nick-Nack. Happily they could all be present, for the hour appointed for the exodus was early on a Sunday morning, so that Frau Rupp's cousin the teamster might, unimpeded by the exactions of employers, place himself and his cart at her disposal.

Sympathetic animation pervaded the Mansard. Each helped after his own fashion. Leni and Mina skipped up and down five flights to fling things into the cart and bold jokes at the inviting driver. The Widow Dugenhubel stood at her door and talked solid cubic feet. Old Daddy Schanz walked about, smiling feebly and rubbing his hands. Nick-

Nack, having emerged from his cloud of soot, shone upon the world with his handsome Sunday-face, sat upon a box, and laughed like a young god. Lotte Mez quietly did three quarters of the work, while Frau Rupp wept in a confused maudlin way and diligently dropped parcels; but this may have been due to overpowering regret. The available Rupp children — the older ones were in service, the later-born mostly dead — obeyed Lotte Mez's orders and bore, with careworn, anxious little faces, the burden of responsibility which for some reason or other, was slipping more and more from their mother's shoulders.

Everything was collected except a few straggling parcels. Frau Rupp took several at once under her arm. One of them was Emma. Making Widow Dugenhubel ceremonious, prolonged, exhaustive, emotional, and even teary adieux — which was not unnatural, they being very old neighbors who had never quarreled beyond human capacity — Frau Rupp dropped one of her encumbrances. It was not Emma. But Lotte Mez

thought it might have been, and for this and other reasons said abruptly : —

"Why not leave the baby here until you get settled ? "

The cart drove off without Emma. Lotte Mez, the washerwoman and housecleaner, took no airing that Sunday, but sat all day long in her room, old memories tugging at her heart, and with a strange mixture of pain and bliss, watched and tended a feeble mite, breathing indeed, evidently manifesting no prejudice against life, but making no distinct claims upon it. This impartial attitude the child never abandoned. It was an unchristened infant. Frau Rupp, who forgot most things, had forgotten to think of a name for this most irrelevant baby. Lotte, with hot tears and shuddering stifled sobs, — although she was alone in the Mansard, — knelt before it and murmured *Emma.* Five and twenty years previous had appeared, incidentally, in her own life just such a soft helpless thing. It had lived long enough to stammer sweet absurd words, and laugh, and be adorable, and fill its mother's life with

delight, although her former friends no longer spoke to her. When it died suddenly, Lotte left her home, a change in all respects commendable and worldly wise. She was now forty-five years old, the most able, conscientious, and respected of her profession, had her circle of regular patrons and was usually engaged six months deep — a rugged woman, strong as a man.

The exigencies of Lotte's profession necessitated days at home and days abroad. On the latter, Emma was handed over to Granny Schanz or the Widow Dugenhubel. Some babies object, and not unreasonably, to constant changes of temperature, milk, method, and handling. Emma's composure remained unruffled. The multifariousness of her diet would have destroyed the offspring of Titans. During the first weeks of her existence, she mouthed meat, lapped beer, sucked painted sugar-birds — Nick-Nack's tribute to her charms — partook, according to her degree, of saurkraut, bits of raw carrot, cold boiled potatoes and other urgent invitations to

colic, — and survived. Nay, more, she thrived in a certain sense, for although pallid and puny, her frail organism was less addicted to unseemly revolt and woeful spasms than is ordinarily the most robust and pampered heir to an ancient name.

Possessed thus of rare social tact, she was the pet of the entire population of the Mansard. Leni and Mina, when not at the factory or running about with sweethearts — in rotation — adored her and fondled her in spasmodic excess. Whether exposed to their loud assiduities, whether her pillow lay submerged by Daddy Schanz's proof-sheets, or on a chair in Widow Dugenhubel's room flooded by that dame's ceaseless oratory, whether whistled to, laughed at, pinched, and stealthily caressed by Nick-Nack, or whether the object of Lotte's devotion and sensible care, Emma accepted irregularities and homages alike, with a lofty indifference, a mild remoteness, which seemed a veritable triumph of mind over matter.

None of the gentlemen and ladies of

the Mansard had had opportunity and leisure to meditate upon occult lore, or they might have surmised the soul of Seneca or Marcus Aurelius had deigned to reincarnate in wee Emma Rupp. Lotte, unoccult but no fool, merely remarked : —

" She 's a wise one, Emma-le ! Looks as if she just *knew.*"

The baby-stoic's eyes were in truth knowing, — large, long, deep-set, of the blue that merges into gray, and so startlingly intelligent that the dwellers in the Mansard were of the unanimous opinion she privately reflected upon all that happened in her presence, and were inclined to lower their voices when discussing secrets and intimate family matters. At this period of her career, she seemed to be chiefly composed of a scrap of old shawl and eyes that took your measure. " She listens to every word I say," Widow Dugenhubel protested. If this was the case, it testifies to more intrepid politeness on Emma's part than could be alleged of any other human creature.

Baby Emma continued to manifest her

high stoicism, — except when she vibrated to lush Epicureanism as above indicated, — and at the age of two years was still tiny, frail, never ill, and the gracious recipient of the bounty of the Mansard, where changes now and then took place, — Leni and Mina being succeeded by Betti and Netti, and they by others like unto them. Hair, eyes, and names differed, but rarely the cruel drudgery of the day's work, or the fierce and frantic frivolousness of the reaction in free hours. Widow Dugenhubel had moved on, to exercise her tongue — let us for her sake hope, for talking was what she loved best on earth — in another and a better world. But all new-comers vied with old residents in paying court to the child.

When Nick-Nack, who had princely tastes, asked her what he should bring her from a fair or merry-making, she invariably responded, "Something good to eat," and usually specified prunes, dates, or sweets. Nick-Nack, like most of his colleagues, was a youth of brilliant expectations. Chimney-sweeping is a lucrative, as well as gallant profession, but

has an awkward effect upon the respiratory organs of the ambitious young gentlemen who follow it, and is apt to instigate a break-neck race between competence and consumption, the chances strongly in favor of the latter.

In Lotte's evenings at home she made smart frocks for Emma-le and was a happy woman. Her prospects looked peaceful and assured. She had for many years earned well, if at an enormous expenditure of her good strength, had a fair amount in the savings bank and would have had more, were she not helpful to relatives — even to such as had turned a cold but strictly moral shoulder upon her in the days when she was young and forsaken. Now she was zealously working for Emma-le, contentedly planning her future, and already ruminating with enjoyment upon the remote questions of schooling and a trade, — at any rate a better sort of school, a gentle sort of trade, Lotte determined.

She dreaded no interference on the part of Frau Rupp, of whose Swiss experiences few rumors had reached the

Mansard. One incoherent letter had come indeed, inquiring for certain missing objects, among which Emma was not included, but the mother added she should come for the child some day, when she was quite settled. Lotte was profoundly skeptical in regard to any finite completion of the settling process. Then a pedlar who had returned from Zürich — who met a man who knew the apple-woman on the corner who chatted with Frau Rupp's teamster-cousin who stopped to gossip with Nick-Nack, striding along with ladder and black face, who duly reported to Lotte — had hinted that the beer and grog business was rolling down hill, and its conductors likewise. The velocity and momentum of Frau Rupp's rolling were factors which Lotte had often reckoned in her straight, shrewd way.

"Nothing will stop her, short of the final thump," she reflected. "So much the worse for her. So much the better for us," — hugging Emma-le closer and weighing the comparative merits of millinery and art-embroidery.

"It is pretty work, ribbons and flowers, and paying — for such as has the knack in their fingers. 'Ma-le has. But that big embroidery is great. If you have a talent for drawing — 'Ma-le has — you can work in all you see; a bunch of horse-chestnuts, or even sunflowers. Anyhow, she shall never scour and scrub. Such wrists and ankles! A little tiny mite of a wee bit fine lady! She shall learn to sing if she likes, so there, now!" This with a defiant mien toward future warnings of worldly prudence, her own or another's.

She must make her will, too, and take legal steps to adopt 'Ma-le. Then she could be christened — Protestant of course. Here Lotte frowned, and decided there was no need of haste. For baptism involved some queer complications, and she had the invincible repugnance of the respectable working-woman toward lawyers. If you so much as spoke to one of them, you could find yourself in a disgraceful law-court before you knew it! No, there was time enough for all that. So Lotte, secure, dreamed

loving and ambitious dreams while the frail child slept in her arms.

On the morrow, a boy spied Lotte balancing herself at the top of a high ladder and dusting some carved woodwork in the ceiling of one of his father's palatial rooms. He thought it would be fun to shake her a bit. He was fond of what he called chaff, and merely meant to frighten her. He succeeded. She was taken unconscious to a hospital.

Not all the sweets that Nick-Nack brought could quite console 'Ma-le for Lotte's absence. The child ate them seriously, never declined any kindness, attention or adulation, yet for weeks glanced up, discreetly expectant and wistful, whenever a step approached the door. Petted by all, docile with all, she bestowed upon none, — not even Nick-Nack, — the more intimate caressing ways reserved for Lotte alone. Born old and wise, 'Ma-le waited.

It seemed probable that she would wait long. The nice little chaffing boy had played a very thorough-going prank.

Nick-Nack went on Sundays to the hospital, when he wore fine black clothes, polished boots and gaiters, a silk hat, and moved with a certain light elegance which may be acquired in chimneys. At first he took 'Ma-le with him. She behaved with her wonted weary gentleness, as if hospitals, doctors, and nurses were familiar trifles, but lavished upon Lotte faint baby touches of deep and still affection which subtly implied the sacredness of reminiscence and the strength of old association.

Nick-Nack went one Sunday alone. Then he went no more. The prank was consummated.

In the Mansard a council was held at which Nick-Nack, sitting on the table with 'Ma-le, presided. After floundering about for a while in helpless irrelevance, the assembly under Nick-Nack's guidance pulled itself sufficiently into shape to vote unanimously that 'Ma-le must on no account leave the garret. Those least concerned, Widow Dugenhubel's successor and Nanne and Fanni the new factory girls, voted loudest.

Now 'Ma-le from the garret-point of view had been looked upon as a *quasi* heiress. But as poor Lotte had merely contemplated those dreaded legal steps, all her savings fell with ironical promptitude to her kindred who had cast her out when she was in trouble. Some of these points Nick-Nack accentuated in his able speech, and little 'Ma-le at his side seemed like a dethroned queen — grave, reserved, and sucking barley-sugar.

Daddy Schanz with unwonted acuteness remarked that life was uncertain and such things did happen. Nanne and Fanni declared they would think themselves awfully lucky if they ever got as near as that to a fortune. Widow Dugenhubel's successor was good enough to regale the company with a convoluted narration of various episodes which, in her opinion, bore upon the subject under discussion. Granny Schanz murmured in her timid, deprecating voice she had not even considered the possibility of relinquishing her care of 'Ma-le. Nick-Nack laughed and said he would pay for her milk and toggery. The cheerful

little dressmaker, who had moved with a crippled husband and some young children into Lotte's room, stated that it would be no trouble at all for her to do any little job the child needed.

So the Mansard possessed 'Ma-le and 'Ma-le possessed the Mansard, and was regarded anew as a favorite of fortune, for was not Nick-Nack, her special patron, a man of independent means? Not even the morality of a garret can resist the prestige of reiterated prospective inheritances. Alone with him she would often ask when Lotte was coming back, and look at him with searching eyes that seemed to penetrate his paltry inventions. Meanwhile nothing was heard from Frau Rupp.

'Ma-le speedily assumed mental control of the worthy Schanz couple. It was the inevitable result of her intellectual superiority and quiet force of character. The children of garrets are necessarily far cleverer in practical ways than the children of luxury. But even for a garret child, 'Ma-le was singularly clear-headed, observant, and deft of hand. A dozen

times a day she would silently foresee and prevent the loss of Daddy Schanz's spectacles, the search for which had been hitherto a frequent and time-consuming rite. She knew where things were and where they ought to be, and instinctively harmonized these mostly conflicting conditions. Things indeed never embarrassed or intimidated her; she commanded them; whereas they had overawed and perplexed Granny Schanz all her life. Hence the child's easy supremacy. The Schanz *ménage* gained in perspicuity from the day 'Ma-le took it under her wing. She presided over Daddy Schanz's proof-sheets and invoked order among those distraught waves. It is probable that she also meditated making the queer little marks in the margin, for she was watching his work continually with her shrewd deliberate gaze. But about this time he became too silly even to read proof, and was conveyed to a place where he with other harmless and helpless old men enjoyed, it is to be hoped, protection even better than little 'Ma-le's.

For financial considerations Granny Schanz now moved into a smaller room in another garret. Its doors and passages bewildered her sadly, and 'Ma-le piloted her. Nick-Nack moved also. In the hours when he was not dangling between earth and sky, it mattered little to him where his tent was pitched, provided he was near 'Ma-le, who delighted in him and all his phases, black and white.

In the new garret lived a childless widow named Käthe who stitched clothing for men employed on the railway, and was therefore greatly respected by her neighbors. A government appointment has everywhere its own dignity. She often stopped on the stairs to see three-year-old 'Ma-le encouraging Granny Schanz and leading her home. Once the child looked up, shaking her head apprehensively, and said "She 's rather poorly to-day," and she and Käthe became friends on the spot.

Käthe had two neat rooms, a sewing-machine, a cat, plants, and a tiny veranda. 'Ma-le, introduced into this more esthetic sphere, grew in no respect forgetful of

less favored friends and older ties. She continued to protect Granny Schanz with gentle assiduity, frequently escorted her to their former garret-home, and never declined sweets from Widow Dugenhubel's successor, from Polle and Dolle the new factory-girls, or indeed from any other person.

Käthe was a quiet strong-featured woman, and thoughtful. 'Ma-le tacitly recognized her as a mental peer, and honored her with closer communion and more clinging affection than the waif had evinced since Lotte's death. Beside straightening the tangled mazes of Granny Schanz's daily occupations, 'Ma-le went to school, where, either by intuition, or as reminiscence of previous incarnations, she seemed to know everything without learning it. Her duties done, she associated with Käthe and Nick-Nack in refreshing companionship. Frau Rupp gave no sign, and Käthe, growing visibly younger, began to make plans not unlike those once cherished by Lotte.

'Ma-le's fleeting years could never overtake the maturity of her spirit, but they

were doing their best. She was now seven years old, a delicate, anæmic, old-fashioned, wise little creature with brooding eyes ; yet on a sudden, in the presence of her own familiar friends, unbending as it were, relaxing into moods of delicious merriment. Her brain was a power in the small community. Her hands by their sensitiveness, suppleness and deftness seemed to multiply themselves. Nick-Nack was coughing rather more than formerly, but laughed no less, and his elegance on Sundays was of the most distinguished character. On summer evenings the three sat on Käthe's veranda and looked down on the town, — as cool as nabobs. These were 'Ma-le's halcyon days.

Into them plunged ominously a message, nay, a mandate, from Frau Rupp. Whether her belated maternal instinct had now arrived upon the scene, or whether she merely happened, while in dangerous proximity to pen and ink, to remember 'Ma-le, is difficult for the historian to determine. Such evil conjunctions are attributed by some to the in-

fluence of Saturn, by others — *tout court* — to Satan. Either will serve the purposes of this tale, which is not argumentative. Whoever threw the bomb, it caused consternation and left a heartache and a void in its wake. Frau Rupp's language — if that noble word may be applied to her headless and tailless phrases — intimated, it would seem somewhat huskily, that it was high time 'Ma-le should begin to help her poor unfortunate mother, and the pedlar who knew her cousin the teamster would fetch her.

The pedlar fetched her. She wore the prettiest new frock and jacket the desperate Nick-Nack could buy, and all her pockets were stuffed with pralines and Kaiser-bonbons. She was deathly white, but did not weep, only clung speechless and motionless to Käthe. Going off to Switzerland, away from home and friends, with a strange man, to an unknown mother, was an event never yet dreamed of in her philosophy, and her great sad eyes looked, it may be, a bit frightened. All heroes have their moments of human weakness.

It is possible that nothing so lasting and solid as an opinion, a conviction, or even a distinct impression can be attributed to Frau Rupp at this stage of her existence, but some vague sense of disappointment she must have felt, when she folded 'Ma-le to the maternal bosom and perceived, crookedly, through fumes and vapors, that the child was too small, cold and undemonstrative, and had far too searching unchildlike eyes to succeed in the chosen profession. And this disappointment, fed indeed by subsequent events, must have recurred, dully persisted, and acquired a certain position in that muddled brain ; or surely Frau Rupp would not have administered blows, the force of which her chronic cerebral excitement prevented her from accurately measuring ; nor would she, as expression of general dissatisfaction with the paucity of 'Ma-le's emoluments as street-beggar, have flung her violently down the cellar-stairs. Those stairs and their supplement of awful darkness shook 'Ma-le's philosophy to its foundations.

It was not unnatural that Frau Rupp

should desire some assistance. She was all alone, as she lamented in major or minor key, according to what may be called the prevailing psychic manifestation. The beer and grog business was no more. Her fourth *Mann*, with admirable presence of mind, had fled to America. The daughters who had accompanied her to Zürich were gone also. The oldest had married and wisely disappeared. The second had gone into service from which she refused to budge. The little one had run away with some strolling players. 'Ma-le in time became aware that her mother's bloated and blurred sensibilities still retained an image of this errant child, who, it seemed, was bold and saucy, a field-marshal in planning campaigns, a most seductive beggar, — which 'Ma-le emphatically was not.

For weeks she came home empty-handed. Neither her fine personality nor her thrifty self-respecting traditions could efface themselves all at once. She roamed about in a dazed, sad way, and took her mother's reproaches, and worse,

rather than pennies from tourists. Meanwhile she grew thinner, and homesickness haunted her eyes. Her innermost famished thought was flight the first possible moment, but she was too far-sighted to run away ineffectually. The first things she begged were postage-stamps of the friendly corner grocer, who also gave her bits of red and white broken candy when she fetched her mother's grog. In her careful little letters the margin was very wide, the phrases ambitious, the capitals had curly tops, she hoped the cat and the plants were well, and never mentioned herself or her mother.

The letters, at first so frequent, grew rarer. "It 's trouble," said Käthe gloomily, and Nick-Nack nodded. Presently the child wrote business was bad and they were going to Lucerne. Silence followed — dead silence, — and she had been gone but six months. Käthe was growing older fast, Nick-Nack coughed more and laughed less. They both tried to steer Granny Schanz as well as they could, but without 'Ma-le she was in sorry

plight, and benevolent relatives finally gathered her up and put her away in the country.

In Lucerne, after long resistance, 'Ma-le began at last to do the hated work. Few stoics of nine years could have held out so long, and blows day after day are a forcible argument. Then, some gay children driving along the Axenstrasse stopped their carriage to ask her funny questions, which amused them greatly, and tossed her some chocolate. It was long since she had tasted sweets. So she hung about the hotels and the Lion, and chased carriages along the lake-shore, with animation only when she spied children.

When she began to beg, she ceased to write to her old friends. She never attained real proficiency in the art, — never loved it for its own sake, — but she could not fail utterly in anything she undertook. For the most part she merely stood, a squalid, listless little figure on the highroad, and took what fell to her lot. When she got sweets she sat down on the ground and promptly made sure

of them. Every penny she brought to her mother.

More than two years passed, and 'Ma-le was still on the road. She had become hardened to harshness, abuse, and to the dreary routine of begging. She saw ignominious phases of life, associated with vice and squalor, and comprehended them deplorably well. Her eyes were not always mournful now. Watching for pennies had made them stolid, — happy travelers sometimes called them brazen; the constant sight of her mother turned them haggard and hopeless. Fatigue, exposure to all weathers, poor and scanty food, and more especially her breathless and involuntary excursions into the cellar, were giving her a singularly yellow and witchy aspect and a whole gamut of pains. Something inside her felt queer and puffy when she ran. With the decrease of her business energy, her revenues diminished. Hence the cellar offered her rich opportunity for meditations upon *tempi passati*. She uttered no complaint, but kept unswerving her determination to return to her beloved garret.

Now Frau Rupp was unquestionably of a social temperament, nor should she be judged conclusively by her inordinate activity cellar-wards, which occurred without *rancune* and in but one species of her shifting, irresponsible, incoherent moods. She forgot the circumstance in a twinkling and would wonder where 'Ma-le was. But 'Ma-le forgot nothing, and inscribed her memories in hard set lines about her mouth. The vaunted voice of nature never spoke in her heart. She was remote, taciturn, and a "poor stick" financially, as Frau Rupp asserted not without reason. In a phenomenal access of lucidity, she entered into a sort of copartnership with and took under her roof an enterprising young vagabond, a girl of fourteen, but past-master in mendicancy, who knew all fat prospects in the canton and had even exploited the Engadine. Great, too, was her convivial receptivity.

The letter which Käthe received had no curly-headed capitals, no vestige of margin, was soiled, ambitionless, and said only this: —

DEAR KATHE,

If Nick-Nack comes quick he can get me. Your loving

'MA-LE.

Nick-Nack came quick.

'Ma-le's keenness had recognized and used the psychological moment, while the moment before or after might have proved fatal. Frau Rupp happened not to mind. Nick-Nack, hollow-eyed and emaciated, but gay, debonair, and attired with the old airy elegance, sat on a bench at the station and waited for the next train. Beside him crouched a dirty, unkempt child, all eyes, who clung to his hand and would not speak, had peremptorily refused to take time enough to buy a clean frock, breathed too short, shuddered, and cast furtive glances behind her.

When Käthe's close arms once released the trembling little form, 'Ma-le with one slow gloating look verified her reminiscences, satisfied herself that her long lost heaven was all there, — the plants, the cat, the cleanness, and the veranda under the sky, — smiled a beati-

fic smile of repossession, and went to bed for six weeks.

The unkempt hair grew soft again, the beatific smile, as she lay still and saw Käthe and Nick-Nack near, veiled the hard lines about the mouth, but the doctor could not mend her heart. It seemed incredible that, appertaining to 'Ma-le, it refused to listen to reason. It had, however, become large, startlingly large for its narrow accommodations, and obstinate. This was its way of expressing radical disapproval of certain episodes in her history. It disturbed 'Ma-le's serenity in no wise. Indeed, she sometimes told people how large it was, with mild pride as if it were a mammoth vegetable in a garden, and would add, affably, that the doctor said she could not possibly live very long.

Her ways of wise, still happiness returned. Her deep sense of the blessedness of comradeship had never, indeed, deserted her. Periods of bed alternated with intervals of semi-convalescence. Käthe never grasped the fact that a bedridden child, not of one's own blood,

could be an inconvenience, but was always extolling 'Ma-le's usefulness and narrating the wonders that child accomplished the instant she was on her feet, — her quick, silent, thorough ways, "more help than any two grown women." Yet Käthe gradually discovered that her genteel government appointment, which paid her as much as two shillings a day when she worked steadily, grew less lucrative if she was continually leaving her machine. This would have mattered less, had not Nick-Nack been persuaded by a sanguine and enterprising colleague to speculate a bit. Nick-Nack laughed, and said he could easily enough make more than he had lost, as soon as his cold got better.

With the advice of the doctor, and others who were showing some interest in the little group in the garret, — which was kind of them, for there was nothing at all extraordinary in 'Ma-le or Nick-Nack or Käthe, — such as they grow all round us as thick as blackberries, — Käthe consented to apply to the town for a certain provision for the little girl. For

the practical realization of this project, Frau Rupp's cognizance and signature were required. Whereupon she declared that if money were forthcoming from any source, her daughter's place was with her mother. This unexpected logic and decision would seem to imply the robust influence of the new girl, whose hand undeniably wrote the letters which caused 'Ma-le to shiver and cower in her bed and turn speechless to the wall. Then uprose Käthe and repudiated all alien aid. The city fathers, nothing loth, withdrew. Frau Rupp receded grumbling, and peace again descended upon 'Ma-le.

It may perhaps be claimed, without exaggeration, that this garret child unconsciously possessed some spiritual gifts for the mere shadow of which most of us have to struggle hard: the graces of wise reticence, dignity, patience, forbearance, steadfast affection, fortitude, and, rarest of all, pure gratitude. But the impartial observer will concede these may be pagan as well as Christian virtues, and 'Ma-le's religious notions, it must be

confessed, were *baroques* in the extreme. Her ecclesiastical refuges had proved as unpermanent as her local habitations. The mother who bore and forgot her was Catholic, but had reeled far from the fold. The child's first baby prayer was lisped at Lotte's knee in Lutheran form. Granny Schanz was a Methodist, inclined to Spiritualism. All that she could impart of these topics 'Ma-le had imbibed and assimilated. In Switzerland she had occasionally strayed into a Catholic church and regarded the lights and the incense approvingly. But her devotions, in the true sense of the word, took place without priest or bell, and, after the fashion of the early Christians, in a species of catacomb.

Käthe, ostensibly Catholic, was not over-occupied with the next world. But, being of a practical turn of mind, it seemed to her, in view of what in all probability would be 'Ma-le's next journey, no more than orderly to have her properly equipped. She was therefore christened and instructed, fixing her penetrating eyes on the priest's face and

seeming to read his soul and that of all the wise people who approached. They were many, for she had become popular, — an occasional but not usual penalty of greatness. Nothing could be more satisfactory, intelligent, and docile than her spiritual attitude, but she would have embraced with the same sweetness the faith of Timbuctoo had Käthe and Nick-Nack proposed it. Still, the wan little pilgrim had at last booked her seat for the kingdom of heaven, and her gentle spirit was what is termed "reconciled with its Creator," which was naturally gratifying to all parties concerned.

Her days out of bed grew fewer. In the spring came a brief revival of strength, but soon the unreasonable heart declined to let her take slow walks with Nick-Nack and climb stairs. Portions of his mechanism were playing him the same trick about this time. Although he did not suspect it, in the break-neck race he had undertaken, the rider on the pale horse had long ago won.

So Nick-Nack sat gayly by 'Ma-le's bed and laughed and gleamed with hope, and,

whenever he could get grip enough on his voice, told whimsical, brave tales of what they would do next year, and the next, and other years. And 'Ma-le had a graduated row of dolls standing on her bed and leaning against the wall, and she munched sweets and basked in the gentleness of the world. While Käthe stitched like mad, and for the rest took things as they came, having found they usually came quite soon enough. All three were cheerful and content, but then, you see, they were common persons, — and very matter-of-fact.

THALATTA!

"IT was glorious!" thought Henriette Vischer with exultation, as she mechanically smoothed her iron gray hair, put on her plain dress and prim collar, set her room — austere as an anchorite's cell — to rights, opened her casements and turned back her bed to air.

"It was so strong, so vivid. I never had a stronger. It was wonderful. It will last till I get there. *Ach, grosser Gott im Himmel*, to think I am going! What will Ottilie and Miezle say! How will they bear the surprise? It seems a crime to undertake it all alone. Twenty-two hours by rail. *Du meine Güte!* Two days there, to spend exactly as I like. Twenty-two hours back — remembering. How I ever got so far as to plan it and set the day I don't know, and I feel like the Prodigal Son. Yet, if you 've hun-

gered and thirsted for just one thing all your life, and are sixty-eight years old, and never saw the day you could do it, and now you can with a clear conscience, at least so far as the money is concerned — well, selfish or not, I 'm going to behold it once with waking eyes before I die ! "

With an expression of singular determination even for Henriette Vischer, she went briskly downstairs to see that Fritz, the little apprentice and errand boy, had opened the shop and properly begun his day's work.

Her mouth looked grim, but the deep wrinkles about her shrewd eyes were benevolent and humorous. The grimness had of necessity waxed strong, confronting the inordinate silliness of the two sisters she was trailing through life ; and, Heaven knows, daily intercourse with those dames required a liberal seasoning of benevolence and humor to make it in anywise palatable. She had an excellent head, both in its outward form and interior furnishings, a resolute profile, and a still erect and vigorous fig-

ure. In her little shop she sold lampshades, beribboned boxes and photograph frames, leather handkerchief and glove cases and other very clean and respectable objects of home manufacture, besides cards for birthdays, confirmations, Christmas, and the like. Hers were the patient old hands that might always be depended upon to complete embroidered tokens of affection for blushing girls to present to their lovers. In the background was a somnolent book-bindery, relic of her husband — dead these thirty years — and still conducted by his old foreman. Altogether, she enjoyed steady patronage, much respect, and had no fault to find with her modest humdrum business in a back street of a small inland town, except — in the most secret chamber of her heart — that the town was inland.

"Eberhard not yet down?" she asked, glancing into the workrooms.

"No," grumbled old Gottlieb, "and I never set eye on him yesterday and hardly on Monday either."

"He 's younger than you and I," she responded with so strong a note of good

cheer that the old man looked up from his work and smiled.

In the breakfast-room her sister Ottilie, a heavy woman with blurred features and a sententious manner, was talking thus, between large sips of coffee and liberal mouthfuls of bread:—

"It was a green silk frock, apple green with large white polka dots — good-morning, Henriette — made with five tucks and a frill. And I wore a pink sprigged jaconet bertha-cape and a broad Leghorn hat trimmed with straw-colored ribbons. They had been washed and ironed but they looked perfectly new. I remember Martha Pfitzer, she that was afterwards Frau Gemeinderath Stolz, said to me that morning what pretty ribbons they were. That was the twenty-seventh of April, 1840. Ribbons were better then. She had three boys. On the third of June, I wore the dress again to the Kränzchen and Lucie Kaltenbock spilled whipped cream all down the front breadth. She was fifteen, just confirmed and already engaged to her cousin Carl, and they moved to Ulm and set up a hardware

business. She that was afterwards Frau Revisor Berner whispered to me at the Musik Fest on the nineteenth of June, at half-past six in the evening, as we were going up the stairway to the left gallery third row back in an awful jam — I remember it was the nineteenth because it was the day after Cousin Helene Ritter's birthday, and the next Musik Fest three years later they began on the twenty-first in unusually hot weather for the season — that she could not for her life imagine what any man could see in that silly little Lucie Kaltenbock. The stains never came out."

Meanwhile Miezle, a spoiled child of fifty-six, was toying capriciously with her roll, feeding her canary with sugar, and chirping to him with shrill coquettish cries, and trills, a sort of airy clarionet-solo, insolently independent of the heavy bassoon accompaniment of Ottilie's voice.

"It was a pretty frock," Henriette remarked benevolently, her thoughts returning from a wide and breezy flight as Ottilie paused for breath and refreshments. In a moment her vast flood of

reminiscence was rolling on anew, while Miezle, impertinently unheeding, fitfully babbled to her bird.

With a distinct sense of guilt, Henriette regarded their unsuspecting faces. What she was contemplating savored of wild adventure. Then her motive — how explain it? How put her longing into words, she a staid old woman? Years before, she used to speak of the dream, but nobody cared about it. Not even her good husband had understood. After all, what was so utterly devoid of interest and significance as another's dream? Yet this dream, if the truth were known, was no small part of her existence.

From her earliest childhood it had haunted her. Sometimes it came night after night in an unbroken series; again, after varying intervals. If it was ever absent longer than eight or ten days, she missed it sorely and grew ill at ease. Always inherently the same, it presented itself under changing conditions. There might be ships, masts, crowds of hurrying men with vivid dark faces, — and steep narrow streets between houses

such as she had never seen, — but *It* lay beyond. Or ultra-foreign scenes — quaint, neat, like pictures on tea-cups — and *It* waiting in its might. *It* — shoreless, trackless, boundless, and no vestige of humanity except her itinerant dream-self. Oftenest, a vast expanse of rocky coast, *It* surging gloriously and a group of strong men hailing *It* with cries of joy.

She had waked, indeed, with that triumphant cry upon her lips, but never in all the years could she carry it quite over the mystic boundary of dreamland, though a sense of gladness and exhilaration would linger, and pervade her homely and monotonous duties. If she dreamed other dreams, she never remembered them. Why always this unique vision, — strenuous — dominant? Did other souls seek by night scenes diametrically opposed to the whole tenor of their lives, traditions, and occupations by day? Not Ottilie, not Miezle, at all events. She had heard them tell their dreams. They were precisely like their other experiences.

"Helma and Julia Kernick write they are coming to have coffee with me this afternoon," said Miezle, wiry and autocratic. "You must get me some cakes, Ottilie, and some whipped cream. But don't spill it on your front breadth," she added with a school-girl cackle and a gratified sense of aptness.

"On the day of old Otto Kernick's funeral," Ottilie began portentously, "the sixth of November, 1837, at three in the afternoon from the Hospital Church, Emilie Braun's first husband Herr Assessor Greiner was just coming round the corner of" —

"Don't spoil your front breadth," giggled Miezle, still enjoying her wit. "I hope it will not rain. I think it looks like rain. I said to Cousin Dorothea Siegle I thought we were probably going to have rain. And Cousin Dorothea said she did n't know, but it did certainly look like rain. I said I thought when it looked as it has looked lately it generally rained. I said to myself the first thing this morning that it looked cloudy and as if it might rain."

"The bearded man near me wore sandals," reflected Henriette. "I saw them distinctly on the shore. — Is there nothing else you would like, Miezle?"

Miezle considered, interpolating flippant, satisfied ejaculations in Ottilie's droning verbosity.

"They will resent it," mused Henriette with a pang of self-reproach. "They will think me crazy and wickedly extravagant and I suppose I am. I shall never hear the last of it, it is so altogether like riotous living. There they sit suspecting nothing. I shall not dare to tell them till half-past eleven to-morrow just as I 'm flying off to catch the noon train."

"Some jelly, Miezle? How would some Rheinwein jelly do? Oh, Ottilie, if you would like the real lace barb on your summer hat, I don't mind letting you wear it this season."

Whereupon Ottilie amid effusive thanks began to weave a convoluted tale of lace, her numbers as unassailable as an astronomer's.

"And if they should ever discover I had dared to speculate a wee bit in stocks

and had good luck and was going to use my gains for this journey, I believe they would simply faint." Conscience-stricken, with the soul of a conspirator, she surveyed their familiar features, her calm shrewd face betraying no trace of emotion. "But it was the first and last time and how else could I ever have gone? Nothing could induce me to touch my little capital; the business goes about so-so, well enough it is true; but living is dearer every year, and it would be a sin to let them suffer in the slightest degree through my wild notions. No, there was really no other way if it *was* gambling — and I fear it was — and I hope the Lord will forgive me, crazy old woman that I am!"

Ottilie's recital continued imperturbably. Miezle, interrupting *ad libitum*, was inspecting her hands — tiny, claw-like objects of which she was very proud. She was one of the ugliest and daintiest little women on earth. All three sisters were scrupulously neat, but Miezle was almost preternaturally exquisite. They had always been proud of her; no one in-

quired why or demanded her credentials. It was the family tradition even before her illness that she should be admired and humored in all things.

For many years she had been a chronic invalid, having early in life lost the use of her legs. Her complaint fortunately was painless, and by another beneficent dispensation her mental horizon, not spacious at the start, had assumed in her narrow environment dimensions more or less similar to her canary's, so that she seemed not to beat against her cage. It is true she now and then called attention to her imprisonment, but rather as a histrionic attempt to increase her importance than as actual lamentation.

For she passed her days pleasantly enough with minute attention to her toilette, pasting birds and flowers in her scrap-book, doing fancy work, reading the evening paper gloatingly, — that is to say its local news, continued tale and advertisements, never its leaders or telegrams — tyrannizing over Ottilie — who, whatever her limitations, was most conscientious and patient in servitude, —

and receiving visitors for gossip and coffee, at which feasts Miezle in her wheel-chair presided with sovereign ease and dignity.

Doubtless noble resignation goes far towards rendering such a life endurable, but still more potent, it would seem, is inordinate self-satisfaction. It is fair, perhaps, to add that the gentle fidelity of spirit which forbids people ever to let a little elderly, witchlike, unamiable woman — with a beaky face, an obvious moustache and no ideas — suffer from loneliness and neglect, and which keeps them, merely because they happened to know her forty or fifty years ago, trooping in still with their children and children's children, indefatigably offering flowers and modest gifts, is essentially "made in Germany."

Poor little Miezle, Henrietta reflected, had never taken the smallest journey. Even Ottilie had been only to and from the near village where her husband was Bürgermeister, until he died, the profane insisted, of over-exertion of the larynx — Ottilie's larynx. Henriette also had

never left her native town, yet contemplated them pityingly. It was almost as if she had gone, seen, and returned a conqueror.

She would bring them some remembrance from her wild mad roving (second-class return ticket to Hamburg) and Eberhard, too, although her conscience was at rest about him. He would inherit all she had, and the snug business. The time would come when he could travel at his pleasure. Her strange journey was no wrong to him at least. She could hardly accuse herself of niggardliness to the boy, nor did he, she was well aware. Well, she was so fond of him, and so glad to give him a pleasure, and he too loved her dearly. Not steady at his work of late, no — and somewhat moody and irritable — not his bright self. No doubt a little too wild. That would pass. He would sober down. He was a dear fellow at heart, always after the smallest fault so penitent and gentle as a child, and full of the best intentions. She must have a good talk with him immediately upon her return.

She knew her sisters had a way of calling her, behind her back, severe and even stingy, because she sometimes denied them a wish. They had good heads for reckoning their own money — a chancellor-of-the-exchequer, to say the least, was lost in Ottilie — but what Henriette expended upon them they deigned not to compute. Their little annuities they were wont to discuss rather grandly; that she for long years had provided them with their home and the necessities of life, they ignored for the most part. It seemed more genteel to be silent on this point. If they ever distantly alluded to it, they took care to remind each other that after all she could "afford it," — she had "the business." The qualities that went to make her modest commercial success they never appreciated — Miezle from sheer incapacity, Ottilie because too preoccupied by her chronological tables. Besides, Henriette never explained her methods. The sisters helped her to fill extra orders at Christmas-tide and Easter, and this was almost their only connection with the shop. She was

therefore the more content that Eberhard was quick, intelligent, in all practical things her confidant, more and more familiar with every detail of the business, particularly since he had become so clever a penman, and kept the books so handsomely ; that was a great relief, now that she was getting older.

Henriette had long since finished her breakfast, but lingered still, torn by curious compunctions. After all, these sisters were the powers with which she had to reckon. Perhaps she was too curt with Ottilie and Miezle at times, — in the hard years especially. Thank Heaven, she 'd paid off the mortgage. When she came back, they should each have some great pleasure — whatever they liked best. Ottilie should buy a new mantilla, taking her own time and going to all the shops to talk and compare. Then she should wear it somewhere and show it, say at a garden-concert. She had always been fond of music because it collects a crowd.

Once Miezle had stayed ten days at some small Baths in the suburbs, drunk

water at the springs in the mornings, and wheeled herself with *grandezza* along shady walks. The self-glorification which she had brought back from this campaign made her incredibly happy, and doubtless no conqueror ever alluded to the triumphs of a world-convulsing epoch with a tithe of the purely personal complacency which Miezle derived from her innocuous summer exploits. Ottilie had journeyed to her per tram every day and had the celestial pleasure of sitting on a bench and watching strangers and being thereby voluminously reminded of the old, exhaustless and never-to-be-forgotten. The two should do it again. If anything else could be devised to make them happy, they should have it upon her return. Poor Ottilie was looking rather waxen, and far from strong.

"Henriette," said Ottilie, "I forgot to mention that I heard the same mysterious noises night before last that I noticed last Thursday at two o'clock in the morning, and I really should think you 'd look into the matter. For you remember the great bank robbery that took place

on the second of March, 1863 — my sainted Sigmund was discussing it with the Herr Inspektor Botzen on the ninth of March between ten and eleven in the evening, while I was embroidering a blue poppy pattern in the corners of my plum-colored lady's-cloth table-cover with the pinked edge. That was the year I had my sciatica in the following November after wetting my feet coming home from church on Sunday evening the sixteenth. They were having four bottles of beer with black bread and Kräuterkäs — and my Sigmund said, and the Herr Inspektor said also, — and his father had been Bürgermeister, a solid man and father of a large family, — that if proper precautions had been taken beforehand, that burglary never would have occurred."

"How can I look into the matter, Ottilie, two days after it happened? Besides you never tell me what you hear — footsteps, doors or what. You talk in riddles. It is quite mystifying."

"How can I tell you when I do not know myself? You know as much as I know if it comes to that. I cannot pre-

tend to explain what I did not see and do not understand. I 'm worried, so I worry you. I 'm mystified, so I mystify you. I tell you what I heard and I surmise burglars. It is all very well to be scornful about noises in the night, but Frau Stadtpfarrer Nussbaum who was a Mayer from Waiblingen " —

" There, there, Ottilie, let us keep to the subject in hand."

"That is just what we cannot do. There is no subject in hand. The subject is in the dark. The subject goes wandering round your house at night and bodes no good, and you refuse to be warned while there is yet time, before we are all murdered in our beds like the entire Polt-Schmidt family on the seventeenth of August, 1856."

Miezle uttered a shrill little scream.

" It is very inconsiderate of you not to mind, Henriette. It is your own house and you ought to look after it. If there 's anything I do detest, it 's burglars prowling about by night."

" Child, what can I do?" returned Henriette indulgently. " Had I heard

anything, I should have gone out to see what it was. Ottilie prefers to stay on the safe side of a locked door. I miss nothing. The till was quite right. I locked up below as usual. It must have been Ottilie's nerves — or ghosts, perhaps."

"If you do not hear that stealthy creeping" —

"Oh, if they should get *me!*" cried Miezle, as if she were a species of Kohinoor.

"You must sleep like a log."

In Henriette's face was an indescribably happy light.

"I sleep — remarkably," she said. "But don't insist upon frightening poor Miezle, for probably your burglar is nobody but Eberhard."

"Eberhard! As if he would sneak about in the night and frighten his own mother! If my sainted Sigmund had lived to hear you say that, he would wonder, yes, wonder at you, Henriette! Eberhard, dear boy, having gone to his room night before last at twenty-three minutes past eleven, for I had just fin-

ished putting a new braid on my second best cashmere skirt, and the lamp beginning to flicker, I" —

"Did you see Eberhard yesterday?" asked Henriette abruptly. "Do you know where he was?"

"On Monday," replied the aggrieved mother, vaguely belligerent, slightly lachrymose, "he said he should go out of town on Tuesday to take Professor Hartwig's special orders for binding a lot of books."

"It is curious," thought Henriette, "that I 've heard nothing from Professor Hartwig. Somebody wants me, Fritz? I 'll come at once."

Miezle's bird was pecking her finger. She giggled girlishly and prattled baby-talk, unmindful of Ottilie, who, wiping her eyes, discoursed upon the feelings of a mother, which she declared Henriette never understood.

"No, I don't," Henriette admitted with blunt good-humor as she rose to go down-stairs. "Some feelings of mothers I never pretend to understand — others perhaps I may. But I meant no harm,

Ottilie. You know very well I think the world of Eberhard. If he's a bit late now and then, I cannot say he goes to roost with the chickens, can I? But Eberhard's got no better friend on earth than Henriette Vischer."

In the middle of the shop stood her banker.

"Can I see you alone?" he said, and as she closed the door of a private room, "I am so exceedingly distressed, I have come myself," he murmured. "Having always known you and your family — having so much esteem for you all — and — and" —

"Has anything happened to Eberhard?" she demanded. "An accident? Is he dead?"

"Control yourself, my dear Frau Vischer," he urged as people will, though she was regarding him with the strength of a rock in her rugged face. "It may be quite in order, of course — yet I fear — and if there's anything wrong we've not a moment to lose — allow me" —

Taking two cheques from his pocket-book he placed them in her hand.

As she stared at them, it seemed to him her strong and comely face visibly shrank into that of an old, old woman with gray and haggard features.

"The first was presented on Friday last, you observe. It was submitted to me as usual. I thought it rather large, but suspected nothing irregular. It was from your cheque-book and bore your signature. Your nephew Eberhard has frequently of late years presented your cheques, payable to yourself or bearer. Yesterday, unfortunately, I was out of town, and have indeed only just returned this morning. I certainly should have hesitated to cash it without consulting you, the sum is so astoundingly at variance with your business habits. In fact, the two cheques practically close your account with us.

"It was just before we closed yesterday that the second was presented. There was rather a run, and the cashier who received it was exceedingly busy. He

cashed it, but afterwards became uneasy, thought he perceived something queer in the signature. The quirl of the V is not yours, he maintains. He was waiting at my house this morning when I arrived —and here I am, deeply distressed, I need not assure you, to be the bearer of such tidings — but entirely at your service. It is most deplorable, but of course we must lose no time. With your permission I will without delay inform the police. I am of the opinion your unfortunate nephew is on his way to Hamburg. Sometimes," he spoke with a certain routine, "they try Zürich, but usually Hamburg, and the first ship sailing."

Suddenly into that narrow room, between her and the solicitous face upon which her physical eyes were gazing, broke space — strength — freedom; the slow plunge of breakers; the poise of wide-winged birds.

"He will behold it," cried her heart with a mighty pang.

She set her lips grimly.

"There is nothing the matter with the

quirl of the V," she said in a matter-of-fact tone.

"You condone," — gasped the banker — "you assume" —

Her grave gesture silenced him.

"The signature is mine."

PUSS-IN-BOOTS

I

THE two young men were weary and footsore, and the road was steep. The pale one dropped under a tree and closed his eyes.

"It's no use, Florio. You'd better give it up."

"Idiot!" returned the other, a big blond fellow with a soft voice, — sat down, hugged his knees, and scowled. Presently he exclaimed: —

"Chardo! You're not going to play me the shabby trick of fainting again?"

"Not if I can help it," Richard replied feebly.

"Well, mind what you're about! Wait."

Running down the bank, he wet his handkerchief in a bit of brook trickling

between vineyards and bathed his friend's face.

"It costs nothing, which is one for us; but, alas!" he muttered ruefully, "it is not filling. Don't faint, little one!"

"I 'm all right."

"You look it. Never mind. You 'll look better soon. Just you wait till your stomach 's full of roast capon and Burgundy."

Richard smiled in languid irony.

"See! The very thought is illuminating. If you 'd only grin a little oftener, and drop that bad habit of going about with your Sorrows-of-Werther, starved-greyhound expression, this copartnership would make a better impression on the public."

Richard propped himself on one elbow.

"My dear old boy, I want to speak to you. I 'm quite played out, you see, and" —

"Not a bit of it!"

"Worse still, I 'm ruining you."

"Don't drivel, little one."

"Alone, you 'd get along all right, even now that you 've wasted all you

had on me; and I've made up my mind once for all" —

"Oh, have you! You tell me about that later, will you? I can't stop just now. *Ricardo mio,* we stand upon the threshold of our enterprise!"

"Don't swagger. Listen, Florio."

"I'll be damned if I will. You are starving. Has a starving man sense? You have been eleven weeks in a hospital. Does that tend to cheerful and sane views of life? What were you at before, when I found you? Gluttonizing on black coffee, while you did nasty little jobs for that confounded illustrated paper and tried to scrape enough together to paint your picture, until you broke down flat, black coffee being proverbially not filling. Now don't lie there in a ditch and get maudlin. Just answer me this. Suppose you have bread and beer, and a room, and your canvas and traps, are you or are you not, man enough to paint your picture?"

The painter's soul leaped in his eyes.

"Well, you are going to paint it, my boy. So what's the use of whining?

But first we 've got to eat. I 've talked enough. Now, I 'm going to gird up my loins and storm the town."

"As we 've stormed the others," Richard said bitterly.

"Not at all. Quite otherwise. This town will be squeezed." He opened and closed his hand significantly. "We 've been, up to this present, too virtuous. Virtue is not filling. Nor does it make for respectability. Look at our clothes. I shall now take to the road. *Put money in thy purse.*"

"I 've no conception what you mean, Florio," the other returned wearily.

"Nor I. That is, I have created the gigantic outlines, but not yet the fine details. I advise you to pull your hat over your eyes and take a nap. It will cost us nothing. Anyhow, don't worry. Things are going to be all right. I 'll be back soon. Don't faint, little one! Mind, no nonsense."

"Florio, have you one single penny?"

"Not I. If I had a penny, pray where would be the genius in getting some bread?"

Richard sighed and covered his face. Too disheartened to hope, too hungry to sleep, he lay motionless and miserable by the roadside, while Florio tramped up hill with a spirited effect at the start, but soon with lagging feet and a perplexed countenance.

"Oh, Lord," he groaned, "whet my wits, or I cannot keep Chardo's soul and body together, and when you are driven into a corner it 's no use splitting hairs. I told them the truth," he reflected resentfully, "and nobody believed or cared. Old fools, that pretend to know everything beforehand, and are always sighting and scenting something rotten! Dolts that imagine themselves shrewd because they invite disappointment and fatten on suspicion! I tell them honestly who my father was, and what I know and can do and want, and what sort of fellow Richard is, and what a heroic fight he has made. The sleek ones with full bellies smile. It sounds rather improbable, they say. The art professors are very sorry. Of course, in their position, and so on and so forth,

they have a good many such applications. Besides — did n't I want to punch that smirk! — if a man has genuine talent he is sure to make his mark somehow, sooner or later. Then out stalks my lord Richard, as haughty as a hidalgo with a patch in his trousers. The commercial nabobs make still shorter work of me, and no newspaper needs a stevedore about my size.

"Improbable? Of course it is improbable. The truth mostly is, deuce take it! I don't know that I 'd believe it myself, if my stomach would sit down and be mannerly. All the same, two young fellows of fair education with no crimes on their conscience, no disgrace in their families, and through no fault of their own, are nearly famishing on the outskirts of this rich town this day.

"Well, town, if truth is too good for you, I 'll give you some ornamental lying. Richard 's got to have three square meals a day, which means color in his face, flesh on his bones, and the old spirit in his heart. For this I 'll dig, I 'll beg, I 'll — well, I do draw the line at stealing.

But I'll treat you to all the impudence and hocus-pocus you can swallow, and take without prejudice whatever the Lord sends in my way."

A carriage was slowly passing the cross-road on the brow of the hill where he stopped an instant. The chubby hand of a child seated by the coachman negligently dangled a large Bretzel. The vagabond at the horses' heads lifted his hands to his mouth and suddenly uttered a prolonged and terrific yell, which by straining a point might be considered a Jodel, but rather resembled the howl of a demon in anguish. The horses started, the child screamed, swayed and dropped the Bretzel, three women simultaneously comforted the victim, expostulated with the miscreant, and gave orders to the irate coachman who threatened with his long whip.

But these futile demonstrations receded with the brisk trot of the startled horses, and Florio in gleeful possession of the plunder retraced his steps down hill.

"An omen!" he exulted, for an instant regarding with a peculiar ex-

pression his crisp, brown booty, then thrusting it behind him, beyond sight and smell, and whistling ostentatiously.

"Where did you get it?" asked Richard, but not before biting the thickest part.

"I found it up there in the road."

"Oh, gammon!"

"Upon my word I did," Florio assured him with a candid air. "Children drop such things sometimes, don't they?"

Richard broke off half and proffered it.

"Oh, I ate mine coming down the hill," Florio said, picking up a twig and chewing it, while hugging his knees and keeping his eyes fixed like a dog's on his friend, until he had consumed the last morsel and leaned back against the tree with a little sigh.

"It is astonishing what a difference even a trifle like that makes in a man."

"Quite my opinion."

"But rather humiliating, is it not?"

"That we, hence our thoughts, are what we eat? Not a bit humiliating. But if you please, our genius is to be

no product of the humble Bretzel. Good juicy beef and mutton pictures you shall paint. You have proved that a diet of thin air does not foster art. And I claim that my great thoughts need succulent food, and a lot of it, washed down with foaming beer. A gnawing stomach writes bilious verse."

"Florio, I 'll come along with you now. It 's more cheerful, and I feel better."

"No, no. Wait a bit. You 're too tired. Let me go foraging alone once more. I have considerable business to transact before night. Judging by the cuckoo which has just struck sixteen, it must now be about two o'clock by my watch at the pawnbroker's in Cologne."

Again Florio climbed the hill.

"Upon my word, I could devour not only the Bretzel but the fat child on the box. Hermes, god of rogues, guide my yearning stomach. I don't know whether I can write a comedy, but I believe I can perform a large sized one, solo. I feel all sorts of latent iniquities bubbling up in me since I took to the road and the motto : "No prejudice." There 's

a house across the field. They can do no more than set the dogs on me. If I do not eat, I shall fall down like Chardo, and then where are we? Why should they not give me some bread if I 'm hungry? I would give it them. I refuse to consider it begging. Anyhow, I 'll just stroll down their lane and look over their hedge."

He buttoned his coat across his chest, set his teeth, and marched stiffly toward the little farm.

Out came a shrewish woman and accosted him with a harsh —

"What do you want?"

"No boon at your hands," thought he, "though I die."

"I am merely admiring your salad," he replied politely, lifted his hat and retreated whence he came.

He went some distance along the hot, dusty road, reached the top of the long hill, met no tempting morsels waiting to fall into his mouth, seated himself on a stile, wiped his moist face and racked his brains.

"Food and a bed for Chardo before

nightfall! They shall be forthcoming. But firstly, eat I must, eat I will. I'll march up to that cottage and spin them a yarn. I'll offer to tell their fortunes, regulate their clocks, mend their roofs, wash their poodles or cut their corns. No Gorgon and no pestilence shall deter me."

Bristling with determination, he knocked.

A benign and diminutive old woman opened the door and peered up curiously at him.

His romances all took flight. Before so much gentleness and simplicity he could invent nothing.

She bade him a friendly good day.

"My daughter is out, and the children. They are with my son in the vineyard. Did you want to see my son?"

"No," said Florio helplessly.

"My daughter, then?"

He shook his head.

She waited, wondering.

"I am tired," he stammered, deadly ashamed of his ulterior object. "Would you let me come in and rest awhile?"

"Certainly. I was cautioned not to let tramps and beggars in," she added smiling, "but I'm sure you are none of that sort."

He walked into the clean cool kitchen and sat down opposite a dresser, upon which was a large brown loaf and a pitcher of cider.

The little old woman, pleased to obtain a listener, resumed her knitting and prattled guilelessly of her son, her son's wife, her grandchildren's recent measles, the weather, the vines, the prognostications for the crops, last year's crops, the fowls, the potatoes, the hard times, and her native village fifty years gone.

"Why don't I get up and take it?" Florio asked himself desperately. "It is mere prejudice, — the miserable shackles of conventionality. Somehow I can't beg of this nice old woman. But it is evident I must, unless I construct the sort of woman of whom I can beg."

"Is there any sort of work I could do for you?" he mumbled, "any hoeing or digging or splitting or weeding or watering or chopping?"

She glanced shrewdly in his face, and at his clothes, which if shabby were not those of a laboring man, and answered placidly : —

"My Blasius does all that — and my daughter — with other help if needed, but such work is not for such as you."

"Being dead famished," he reflected, "and worn out and penniless, I cannot ask for that bread. If I did not need it, were well fed, and rich, I could smirk patronizingly : 'Oh, do let me try your good barley loaf!' And this we call being human. I 'd rather be a dog and bay the moon."

Staring straight before him at the dresser he waited, strangely unable to frame in words his first venture in mendicancy. If she had only not made that fatally apt allusion to beggars and tramps, he was certain he would not hesitate. Involuntarily his inward hollowness sought expression in a despairing groan.

She looked up startled.

"I have come far," he faltered, "and eaten no dinner to-day. Could I have a

slice of that bread?" His voice was shy and low, his heart beat fast, and a flush overspread his face.

"Bless me, why didn't you say so before?"

She trotted about briskly, set the loaf before him, and some cheese.

"What would you like to drink? Cider 's not good on an empty stomach. In a few minutes you shall have a cup of hot coffee. Bless me, bless me! How could I know, at this time of day? Of course, at Vesper-time, I should have offered it."

Florio had taken one heavenly mouthful of brown bread, when his heart sank with the awful suspicion he might be deceiving her unwittingly.

"I have no money," he bluntly announced.

"Sometimes that happens," returned the little old woman equably.

He said no more. He simply fell to. He could have wept or shouted for thankfulness. If this was begging he would make the most of it. His heart grew light as the loaf diminished. A sense of

security and peace pervaded his being. He stretched his legs lazily, and smiled at the little old woman as she bustled about and served his coffee and fetched some beer and took evident delight in the dauntlessness of his appetite.

"Well, you are hungry!" exclaimed his admiring hostess.

"Rather!" he agreed, continuing doughtily. The more he ate, the better tasted the hot coffee. The more coffee he drank, the greater his zest for thick slices of bread and cheese, and on this substratum he finally poured down a tall mug of beer.

At length he leaned back, wiping his smiling mouth, and suddenly remembered Chardo lying by the roadside.

With a muffled but robust imprecation, he sprang up: —

"See here, perhaps I am a tramp" —

"No, no, you have not a tramp's face, my pretty young gentleman. Nor do you speak like a tramp."

"If having no money, no work, no food to speak of in days and not a morsel since yesterday morning, is being a tramp,

I 'm a tramp fast enough, and I 'll not deny it. But I 'm an honest man, and I shan't be a tramp long, I promise you. Now, see here. While I 've been gorging myself, beast that I am, my chum 's down there in the road, ill and worn out and aching for food. And I want you to just give me a lot of things for him as fast as ever you can, — some of that coffee, and bread, and " —

" I 'll boil him some eggs," she proposed briskly.

" *Engelmütterchen !* Boil half a dozen. Make up a good parcel, will you ? anything you happen to have. Cake, if you 've got a bit. He likes cake. Or even cold pudding. I don't suppose you 've got a piece of meat ? Never mind. A lot of that cheese, please. It 's awfully good cheese. And what 's your name, and your son's, and the children's, and all your names ? Some day I 'll come back in a different fashion, and you 'll never be sorry as long as you live that I did my first begging in your house. What I 've eaten I 'll take as a gift from you to me," he went on, with a flashing

smile, and shaking both her hands — "as your bounty, Mütterchen, and I 'll bless you for it. But all this here I 'm borrowing, you understand. I 'm your *bonâ fide* debtor, and I 'll pay compound interest, you 'll see!"

"I see you are a merry young gentleman, and love your jest." Somewhat hypnotized by his eagerness and verve, his gentle benefactress now committed extensive depredations upon the family larder.

"We must all do one another good turns in this world," she said simply, handing him a well-filled basket. "If you don't mind my saying it, if I were you I would n't call myself tramp and beggar, because," with a smile of mellow sagacity, "some folks never know how foolish they are."

"Oh, angel-granny, I thank thee for that word," thought Florio, hastening down the hill. "It shall be the corner-stone of Chardo's fortunes."

"*Nunc plaudite.* There 's coffee in that beer-bottle."

Richard whistled.

"Begged or stolen?"

"An' it please you, borrowed! Borrowed of a friend of mine — after first dining like an alderman myself, of course. Look out for number one saves nine, is my motto," Florio returned with a swagger, his chest well out, his feet planted far apart, his face flushed and smiling.

Richard, after a long pull at the comforting bottle, gazed up with affectionate yet somewhat pathetic eyes, muttered: "You are such a donkey!" and turned his face quickly aside.

"It 's all right, little one. Amuse yourself now with that basket. Stay where you are and keep house. I 'm off for the third trip. They always go three times — my prototypes, you know — Noah's weary dove and the others."

Leaving the main road, he struck off at random, by narrow ways through vineyards, where men in blue blouses were stooping in the strong sunshine — hard at work loosing the rocky soil round the vine-roots.

"Most of them look as if they might casually suspect what fools they are.

'I must find one who, as Granny Aristotle said, never knows. This old bumpkin may do."

Negligently leaning on a stone wall, he gazed at nothing in particular, and began to whistle.

II

Beyond a surly glance now and then the vintner paid no heed to the idle fellow, but gradually, after the fashion of even unsocial animals, became vaguely accustomed or reconciled to his presence. When Florio judged sufficient time had elapsed, he cautiously let fall a series of isolated remarks of ultra-humdrum purport, the vintner responding, it is true, only by grunts, which, however, Florio ventured to hope were designed rather to sustain than to repress intercourse. Meanwhile he relentlessly noted that the blue figures against the brown warm earth along the whole broad hill were, for the most part, fairly young lithe men, advancing rapidly from hillock to hillock, where the new small vines were pushing, while this

man's movements were slow, reluctant, and impeded by an Athos of formidable dimensions.

"Tough, eh?" said the lazy youth, seating himself astride the wall.

A covert, oracular glance answered him.

"Especially for one man alone" —

No response except some rather vindictive hacking and picking.

"In our vineyards we turn out a score of men at a time even on a little place like this."

The vintner lifted his slow gaze.

"Although, to be sure, we have no such soil. Our earth is soft as butter. Our grapes are big as good-sized plums. Our vineyards — well, there's money in our vineyards. Only of course we don't sell."

The vintner paused, his foot on his spade.

"Whose vineyards?"

"My master's."

"Who is he?"

"Prince Chardo," replied the sunny youth on the wall and never blinked.

"Don't know him," said the man stolidly, and resumed his task.

Now Florio had had no notion in which direction his wayward genius would leap. He had but meant to win the peasant's confidence and earn a little money. "My master," was said in unpremeditated mischief, but it seemed to the rogue from this moment his course was clear. I ought not to have been ashamed to ask seraphic granny for bread and I was. I ought to be ashamed of myself now and I 'm not. On the contrary *en avant!* Hurrah for Prince Chardo! *Hoch!*"

Presently it was Prince Chardo here, Prince Chardo there, Prince Chardo round all corners. "Our estates," and the phenomenal size and sweetness of the melons, nectarines, peaches, strawberries, and figs grown in those delectable lands and forwarded in huge hampers when his highness deigned to travel in foreign parts; Prince Chardo's castles, villas, and hunting-lodges, his cattle, horses, dogs, and game, his mines, his forests, his immense retinue and oriental pomp.

The taciturn old vintner doggedly

hacked the stubborn earth, but he was ruminating, Florio plainly perceived.

"Where are his estates?"

"Hungry."

"Hungary? That 's far?"

"Hungry," rejoined the youth airily, "is near or far, according as you go."

The old man mused bitterly upon the inequalities of fortune and vineyards.

"Soft as butter?"

"As fresh butter."

"What 's his whole name?"

"*Sedet, Æternumque Sedebit Infelix Theseus,*" replied Florio glibly, without the quiver of an eyelash. "And that 's not all of it. He 's got a lot more. Gentlemen of quality always have, you know. Bless you, they don't mind how many names they have!"

By this time the vintner had heard Prince Chardo's name so frequently reiterated it had become an established fact, which naturally proved the authenticity of Florio's claims. The man belonged to that large category of individuals — not exclusively vintners — who, of an unimaginative and essentially suspicious

turn of mind, will yet believe the most monstrous tale if they but hear it often enough.

"He is here, — your prince?"

"He is on the way," Florio said sweetly. "You need n't say anything about it just yet. He prefers to travel quietly. That 's why I 'm not wearing my livery. I am only one of the under servants, you know. A lot of us were sent on in advance. It matters nothing to him how many come. He 's not one that counts noses." Florio stared at the sky and the earth, yawned, and swung his heels with lordly irresponsibility.

The peasant, whose back ached, betrayed some envy in the dense gutturals of his monosyllabic response.

Unexpectedly and unwarrantably the amiable trifler now grew didactic, began to suggest, to instruct, to relate how much better things were done in Prince Chardo's noble vineyards; in fact, to meddle and dictate.

The vintner responded wrathfully that he wanted none of that.

"If you really don't care about get-

ting on," — Florio shrugged his shoulders.

The old man deliberately seated himself on the ground, drew a small bottle of beer and some black bread from a basket behind a currant bush, and, eyeing his environment disapprovingly, silently partook of his *Vesper*. Somewhat mollified, he remarked succinctly : —

"Do three hundred vines and you sweat."

Between other appeasing draughts, he added : —

"Besides, it 's not my work. I 've other jobs. I 'm sixty-five years old and my back 's stiff. But my son Vincenz has broken his arm. It 's easy to sit on a wall and brag."

"Oh, I don't mind lending a hand just while you are at your beer," returned the prince's minion affably, jumped from the wall, flung off his coat, seized a pick, and being twenty-two years old, strong and supple, besides having most urgent reasons for desiring to please, set to work in a manner that vineyard had never before experienced.

When the old man resumed his toil, Florio still continued. He was rather tired, he said, lolling about and waiting for the prince. He not only worked steadily and swiftly until seven o'clock, but he told exactly the sort of safe and creaking joke which the vintner relished, and finally declared he was welcome to the three hours' assistance. It was not worth talking about when one had a good situation.

They parted on the best of terms, after Florio had consented to help again on the morrow — this time for the usual wages. He sauntered off, but returned to ask, as mere afterthought, if the man could recommend quiet lodgings not too far off. Happening to have a cousin who sometimes let rooms, he wrote her name and address at Florio's request, — "so she 'll know I 'm all right," the young man explained pleasantly. "I 've a mate with me," he added, "a nice fellow, but lazy. He 'd not touch your vineyard."

"But you 'll not fail me to-morrow?"

"Oh dear, no. Only one thing could

prevent, — sudden orders from Prince Chardo. It is fair to tell you that."

The peasant nodded approval. He hated strangers, but when you know who is who it is different.

That night as Richard lay in a good bed in a simple but clean room, Florio with a chuckle asked :—

"Is your Highness quite comfortable?"

"Surprisingly."

"Does Prince Chardo want any more to eat? There 's a lot still in the basket."

"Oh no, thanks. I 'm full to the brim. Why does the old schoolboy name amuse you on a sudden so immensely?"

Florio slapped his thigh and laughed uproariously.

After a while Richard said half sadly :

"You must not think me glum if I do not always see the joke nowadays. I used to, you know."

"And will again," Florio said heartily, laughing no more. "Besides, my jokes are gaseous."

"He is so awfully fastidious," he reflected, "has so many notions, it would

be confounded bad luck if he should happen to stroll through the vineyards to-morrow and get a shock to his nervous system."

"See here, Chardo. What if you should stay in bed to-morrow and have a good rest? You need it badly. I'll tell the woman to look after you."

Richard smiled drearily.

"I really should n't mind much. It 's a very good place. The best — except one — for dummies."

"You are weak, and it will do you good," Florio continued equably. "You must begin to recover your strength."

"It 's a mystery to me how you evolve food and beds out of your inner consciousness."

"That 's all right, little one. I'll tell you about it later. I 'm going to evolve a lot of things. I 've got some commercial transactions on hand. Now you go to sleep and don't bother."

Richard was too exhausted to remonstrate. Florio soon lay listening to his friend's soft breathing, and reviewed the day. Its victories, in spite of a certain

diabolical luck, seemed paltry and puerile enough, now that the excitement was over and night's merciless inner light shone on them. Still there they two wanderers lay housed and fed. "Improbable" — but a solid fact. The bed was short for Florio, but he rather enjoyed the insistence of the footboard, which proved possession.

Beyond the shadow of a doubt, had he, a vagrant, without diplomatic preliminaries simply demanded work of the vintner, that suspicious and crusty individual would have sent him about his business. Had he frankly intimated that he was a man of the better sort of associations, but, owing to a peculiar combination of adverse circumstances, homeless, impecunious, sorely in need of employment, and dead eager to do the hardest work for the meanest wages that would keep himself and his ill friend afloat, in all probability the case would have seemed so utterly disreputable it would have forthwith been handed over to the police.

"'Lord, Lord, how this world is given to lying!' Yea, verily, it doteth upon it,"

he mused, yet a certain lankness of spirit had succeeded to his hollowness of stomach. How could he pay for the lodging requisitioned in this high-handed manner? How buy food? How sustain Chardo's spirits without money to provide him with the one thing needful for his physical and moral health — the opportunity to paint in peace? How, in short, tide over until Chardo and he both should find their grooves?

Night thoughts are naked and strong. Florio surveyed his dubiously. The house was in the suburbs. Rustic sounds entered the open window, among them the insistent croaking of frogs, which he for a long time heard mechanically. They gradually awakened memories, and finally inspired him with a project, absurd yet reassuring, which set him heaving with silent laughter, and wishing Chardo were well enough to be waked up to listen. Still it was wiser, perhaps, to say nothing. Chardo was fastidious.

Two days later no night thoughts or misgivings clouded the landscape. The sun was up and so was Florio's fun.

"How great men spend the first money earned by the sweat of their brows — and heaven knows mine dripped like Niobe — is always gloated over by their biographers," whereupon he bought at a hatter's a nice little silvery tin bauble, a prince's coronet such as serving-men wear on their caps.

"What a blessed thing is a high state of civilization," reflected the philosopher, examining it contentedly before dropping it into his pocket. The toy had two little flexible pointed ends, and could be adjusted or removed in the twinkling of an eye. He also purchased and put on a towering shirt-collar. For this promenade he had taken the precaution to don Chardo's coat, it having no hole in the elbow.

"Destiny is more just than we sometimes acknowledge," he had, while dressing, informed his friend; "the seat of my trousers is intact."

Strolling on he fraternized with sundry newsboys and ne'er-do-wells. The sort of information he desired was the easiest in the world to obtain.

"What 's your line?" demanded the harassed director of a small variety theatre fiercely, for he was still writhing under a recent *bouleversement.*

"Oh, I can sit up and beg and hold a stick on my nose," drawled Florio, twirling his young mustache and cocking his eye over his new collar.

This was evidently a music-hall favorite.

The tired man's tone softened.

"Sung much?"

"Rather!"

"Name?"

"Varies."

"Oh, that 's all right," muttered the director, never shy of a celebrity lying *perdu.* "Fresh, plenty of nerve," he reflected. "Step this way, if you please. My Kapellmeister is here at the moment."

Indifferent, a trifle arrogant of mien, inwardly quaking, yet cheering himself on with adaptations of ancient wisdom such as "Modesty is the thief of time," "Cheek is its own reward," "Patient waiting gathers no moss," "Coming

events are soon parted," "It 's never too late to throw stones," Florio followed through dark, stuffy and tortuous passages, and finally found himself on a small, meagrely lighted stage before a dusky auditorium crowded with chairs and tables and redolent of tobacco and beer.

A little greasy, good-natured man sat at a piano.

"Just let me try my paces, will you?"

Florio put his hands on his hips, opened his audacious mouth, and roared an "ah" scale with a good light baritone fairly well trained.

"Now one of your specialties, if you please," the director, ever more expansive, requested. If the young fellow had a hit, it would really be a godsend, for that little vixen Ninette had torn up her contract in his face, refused point-blank to appear that evening, and threatened unless he doubled her salary to go over altogether to the Colosseum. The public were daft about her, and her celebrated No. 14 promised to be a blank. "You 've brought no music?"

"I 've been on a walking tour with a friend and not yet looked up my luggage. I don't mind singing with no accompaniment."

Florio nonchalantly sauntered toward the footlights and began "The Bullfrog's Roundelay," a mocking, nonsensical, wise, delicious thing, written by his dear dead father, and set to music by the equally happy and whimsical genius of a friend for a Christmas merrymaking not a decade ago. It seemed to Florio but yesterday that he was one of a chorus of rapturous urchins who, in complete frog garb, crouched on their hind legs during the solo, and croaked and gurgled the refrain, while hopping after the agile mode of the marshes. As he sang, remembering the kindly light of other days, the present grievous strait looked black enough, and in his throat were divers gulps foreign to the original composition, but he acquitted himself creditably for all that, and the director rubbed his fat hands.

"A good thing."

"A very good thing," echoed the

pleased Kapellmeister. "I'll get you up a fine accompaniment, sir. Strings?"

"Strings," decreed the lofty Florio, with a vile desire to weep.

"You sang in *F*." The Kapellmeister struck some chords and ran prettily through the melody.

"Just give me some sudden double-croaks in the refrain, will you? Horn, flageolet, bassoon, and that sort of thing, you know," suggested the singer, as one born in the music-hall purple.

"You shall have them, never fear."

"Capital!" exulted the director. "They are mooing at the Colosseum. All it wants is some local hits," — privately assured it would bring down the house. "Hinkenfuss must write you some gags."

"I always do my own gags," responded the star stiffly.

"So much the better. I'll merely give you a few hints, since you are a stranger. I'll note them for you. Politics, Court gossip, news about town, — all as risky as possible, you know, without being actually compromising."

"Quite my *genre*," said Florio gravely, accompanying the exceedingly urbane director back to his private room.

"As to terms," that gentleman remarked suavely, "I like your song and don't mind paying for it," suggesting a third of Ninette's salary.

Florio looked him in the eyes, put on his hat, and walked toward the door.

"Oh, come now, since it 's to oblige you." The director named two thirds of the capricious little dame's emoluments.

Florio paused on the threshold.

"Good-morning," he said amiably. "I 'll just look in at the Colosseum."

"Oh, I say, come back. You 're a spoiled one, I see plainly. I 'll not deny I want your song. It 's fresh."

"It 's not bad," Florio admitted negligently. "In fact, it 's one of my best. It is Prince Chardo's favorite."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Oh dear, yes. I 've sung it to him in private audience fifty times if I have once."

The singer, under the name of Willy Winkel, was shortly being engaged by

written contract on the gratifying terms paid hitherto, in that chaste temple of art, only to Ninette, the darling of the public.

"Minx, she 's led me a pretty dance! She 'll sing in a different key to-morrow morning. Six months?" he asked insidiously, glancing up from his desk to the youth sitting easily on the corner of a table, who shook his head oracularly.

"*Na, na!* I have larger things in view. I may and may not stay with you some months, but I can engage only by the week. What time am I on to-night?" he asked languidly.

"No. 14, between ten and eleven. Be here at ten, if you please. The Kapellmeister may want you a moment. Second entrance left. The bills are out, of course, but I 'll announce you with a rousing placard."

"I say! It 's awkward about my luggage. I had forgotten. I can't sing to-night."

"*Donnerwetter!* What do you mean?"

"Why, my frog costume, man! You don't suppose I can sing my song with-

out my own complete frog-mask? You 'll have to wait till next week."

"Wait till next week! Not to save your soul! Well, you artists are all alike as two peas. You all want your own capricious little way, don't you? No, sir. You don't know what you are talking about. You 'll find a first-class frog-costume in your dressing-room, sir. Trust me for that. And it 's an admirable idea, Herr Willy Winkel, and so opportune, for the Colosseum has a cow on — three nights already. Not sing for want of your own costume? You shall be satisfied, sir. Only look in early enough to try it."

Florio sat for a while on a bench in a park and played with his cap. His features wore the happy, artless smile we love to see upon the face of youth. Stepping into a shop, he begged to be allowed to glance at a directory, from which he copied a long list of picture dealers.

"Have you anything by Richard Burgdorf?" he inquired of each and all of them.

They regretted to say they had never even heard of him.

"Ah? Indeed!"

Polite but unmistakable surprise upon the open countenance of the young man, obviously the intelligent servant of a magnate. They noted the name of the artist.

Most of these shops were too sumptuous, too lavishly provided with supernumeraries, to suit the delicate poise of Florio's designs. Finally he found in a quiet street a place of modest yet apparently prosperous character, although its rosy young proprietor was not too busy to be standing at his door gazing benevolently at the passers-by.

Florio examined the pictures in the window.

"Have you anything by that very remarkable young painter Richard Burgdorf?"

"Never heard of him," replied the other, but not in the Olympian manner of his predecessors.

Florio raised his eyebrows.

"Well, you see," explained the young

man frankly, attracted by the other's face and, being himself of humble extraction, quite at ease with a person of that class, "I am a beginner. I've always been in frames. But I'm fond of pictures and am gradually working over. They say I'm not a bad judge. Of course I have a good deal to learn. Won't you come in and look about? I've got one or two nice things, and some fine engravings I'd be happy to show you."

"Oh, guilelessness," sighed Florio, "how beautiful thou art! To think I, too, was once like that, before I got hungry and hardened."

"You have painter's materials, I see," he said pleasantly. "Very tolerable stock."

"Oh, yes. Everything."

"He's a good fellow. It's a pity. It's almost like lying to the blessed granny of my dreams. Whereas the thrifty husbandman and the serpentine director got not a whit more than they deserved. Still" —

"We shall soon be wanting a lot of

things in that line, I suppose," he observed carelessly. "My master, Prince Chardo, paints."

"Should be honored by his Highness' patronage," 'returned the young man, erect, brisk, and respectful.

"Just hand me your business card, will you? I 'll try to remember to come again. I always attend to such things. Of course we are besieged by tradespeople, and being new here" — he muttered vaguely.

"What painter was it you asked for?"

"Oh, yes, — Burgdorf. Richard Burgdorf. My master is uncommonly interested in his work, thinks the world will hear great things of him yet. By the way, could you recommend me a studio, a quiet, simple place? The prince will be wanting something of the sort. He naturally prefers not to work among colonies of painters in great art buildings. His Highness works very steadily, you understand; needs a good studio, but secluded, where he can go about incognito."

"I know just the place," exclaimed the young man with animation. "An

artist left suddenly only this morning. But it 's always in demand. If you don't hurry you 'll not get it."

"I 'll hurry fast enough."

"I 'll write the address for you."

"Here, — just write it on your card."

"It 's not far. Up this street to the fountain. Then turn to the left, up the hill and the long stone steps to the gardens. They are quiet old people — a gardener and his wife. You 'll find nothing so good in town. A large atelier and sleeping-room adjoining, built up there in the garden by a painter who searched far and wide before he found the light and conditions that suited him, and then died before he could move in, poor chap!"

"Peace to his ashes! I 'm obliged to you. You 've done us a greater service than you are aware."

"It is in my own interest. I shall hope to see you often. Nothing at all today?"

"Well, I hardly know. I might call in on my way back for some canvas, a small one. Stretch it, please, about that

size. Just put up a few paints, too, and some brushes, the usual thing, please. I don't really know what is needed." He made an easy movement toward his pocket.

"Oh, never mind. Pay with the larger order."

"Bless you, honest Johannes Mezler, all the days of your pilgrimage!" said the schemer to himself, as he walked away. "You shall never lose one penny through me. After all, it is not as if Chardo were not a born genius. That he is, — I swear it."

Armed with the glittering fib on his cap, together with trusty Johannes Mezler's recommendation, Florio engaged the rooms without difficulty. Under the pledge of secrecy he confided Prince Chardo's name, even the long Latin one, to the gardener, and urged the necessity of leaving the highborn gentleman entirely to his own devices; for although of winning and amiable character he was singularly eccentric, and particularly, to preserve his incognito, would hesitate at nothing.

The gardener sagely replied that sovereigns and such had mostly nowadays a screw loose in the upper story. All he and his old woman cared about was steady pay and a quiet tenant on the premises, for a carousing painter such as they'd last had they could not abide.

Florio found Richard doubled up in an attitude of concentrated gloom.

"Here, little one! Now show the stuff you're made of."

Chardo sprang up, glorified.

"I don't ask where you got it. I don't much care if you stole it. Look! Just look at them!" thrusting under his friend's nose some maniacal black streaks which to the artist meant two bare-legged urchins bathed in spring sunshine and fishing in a brook. "Aren't they beauties!" He smiled ecstatically. "I'm fairly aching to get at them. If you could have seen the light this morning! They are coming to-morrow. I'll be there waiting on the opposite bank. And you've got me all these things? Oh, Florio, I was just ready to curse God and die. I cannot live unless I paint."

"Live and paint, Chardo! Paint some sketchy little things, and I swear I'll sell them for you, every one. Then you can paint the great one. Now you and I are going out to have a good hot Christian supper and some beer. Hear the chink-chink? I earned it."

"But how?"

"It's all right, I tell you. Just give me my head for a little while. Some day I'll tell you some things that will make your toes curl. You stick to your last. How long do you want to paint the beggars? Of course you can't tell how long they'll come. Will a week do? Well, we'll stay here a week. Then we will honorably pay our bill and move on to better things. Stepping heavenwards, you know. Don't look incredulous; you pain me, my son. It is almost as if you were aspersing my commercial integrity."

III

Willy Winkel was a "screaming success." The public said the best thing about him was he never was at a loss for

a new gag. In his speckled green mummery he warbled and croaked and flopped several months with unabated vigor, before he felt that he had amassed sufficient ill-gotten gains to permit him to retire from those gilded halls and tread the humble and less remunerative path of literature. But beyond question the Bullfrog gallantly filled the breach. He enabled Florio to meet decently and in order the manifold indebtedness he had assumed with such temerity; to nourish Prince Chardo with blood-producing viands and clothe him in suitable raiment; to lavish upon angel granny kerchiefs, sugar-loaves, snuff, and caps, against the time when he could more substantially respond to her gracious hospitality. One day, indeed, moved doubtless by pangs of conscience, he hunted up his surly vintner and presented him with a portly pipe and some tobacco, yet could not resist the temptation to wear, even upon this quasi-penitential pilgrimage, the coronet of princely servitude. It seemed but to cap the climax, he assured himself apologetically. One must al-

ways dot one's *i*'s. In short, the Frog paid their bills, gratified all their simple tastes, and fairly started them on the road to prosperity, but ah, how Florio loathed him!

Chardo looked anxiously at his friend when regularly about yawning time he began to mumble that he'd got to meet a man, absented himself for an hour or two, and reappeared, somewhat flushed, long after midnight.

"You are not playing, are you, old fellow?" Richard asked suddenly one night, as Florio came in. "You cannot be."

"Playing?" Florio turned very red. "How? Where? What in the deuce do you mean?"

"Why — cards, of course."

"Oh, cards. Well, that is an idea. Cards? Heaven forbid." With a great laugh: "I should say not. Don't bother, little one." After a while with beautiful candor: "It is merely some work I am doing for a man who cannot give it me any other time. He pays me well, so it's worth while."

Chardo, never inquisitive, still weak

and greatly preoccupied, troubled his head no more about his friend's nocturnal engagement, and somehow got the fixed impression it was of a literary nature, — writing at dictation, revision, or something of the sort.

"He seems to be a rabid smoker of vile tobacco," the invalid once murmured drowsily from his pillow, and Florio chuckled as he pulled off his shoes.

Again later, in the studio one day, the painter, glancing at a newspaper, exclaimed with a certain resentment : —

"Why, here 's a chap pretending to sing a frog-song. Willy Winkel is his sweet little tootums-name. Tremendous success, it says. I don't believe he can hold a candle to you. Let 's go and hear him."

Florio, his back turned, made a wry face as at some nauseous compound, and replied, with his head out the window : —

"We cannot afford luxuries just yet, can we, little one? Besides, the man is probably a blank idiot."

"No doubt," acquiesced his Serene Highness.

Sometimes all things work together for the naughty. Florio's frivolous music-hall experiences suggested to him a series of sketches which he called "Behind the Scenes." The first of these papers he submitted in person to the editor of a large journal the day after the frog's début. The great man happened to be suffering from a plague of anæmic contributions. He was of a robust and sanguine temperament, and it annoyed him to see his young colleagues floundering in pessimism.

As Florio entered the sanctum the amiable dictator was roundly asserting that Schopenhauer, von Hartmann, and even Nietsche were well enough in their way, but no fitting food for journalistic babes. Ibsen he profoundly admired, yet could shoot him in cold blood for the huge mental indigestion he had caused among feeble-minded disciples. As for Max Nordau, somebody ought to wring his little neck. "Vital, full-blooded things are what we want." At this moment in came Florio, whatever he lacked, preëminently vital, his article no less. The

autocrat raised his eyebrows, smiled, liked it and its author, gave him suggestions, counsel, and, still better, regular work. The relationship proved of value to both. Chardo, fully persuaded his friend was one of the most brilliant young men the world had ever seen, was yet astonished that his first journalistic work was so remunerative, for they wanted for nothing.

Nemesis ought obviously to have overtaken Florio, but in this instance was unpunctual. The classic dame sometimes misses our modern connections. It is true he imagined her dogging his footsteps, and he frequently had to realize that the way of the transgressor is hard. But just as his perjuries seemed on the point of being found out, some fresh burst of inspired impudence would rescue him. His progeny of fibs prospered amazingly well, never jostled one another rudely and put their progenitor to shame.

His most precarious task was to manage the prince, who, as his health improved and spirits rose, would persist in

slapping Florio on the back at inopportune moments, throwing an affectionate arm across his shoulders, as the friends strolled toward evening in the garden, even condescending to call him "old boy" or "Dumpling," — a nursery name resulting from certain quondam contours which the years had kindly obliterated, — when Florio would shoot a sneaking glance at the worthy old couple in their cottage porch, as much as to say, "It 's only his little eccentric way!" and they would nod astutely.

But Florio enjoyed exquisite moments of compensation. He liked to stand at an open window, the cigarette box in his hand, and inquire in the most solicitous and devoted manner conceivable: —

"Does your Highness deign to smoke?"

His Highness, working away as usual at a picture, would rarely turn his head, but merely say, in his pleasant, low voice: —

"What an incorrigible ass you are!" — "quite prince-like," the gardener told his wife.

Chardo not being an infant, a convict, or a maniac, could hardly be locked up for safe-keeping. Like other young men he had the inveterate habit of going where he pleased. Whenever Florio found the rooms deserted, he would pace them restlessly until he saw Richard striding in with still unclouded brow. He not unnaturally strayed into picture-exhibitions, chatted with painters, and now and again, to Florio's grim despair, went of an evening to drink a glass of beer in a cheerful place frequented by the fraternity. If a stray artist chanced to walk into the studio, he always found that other fellow unsocial, if not surly. Policemen and postmen, in the innocuous discharge of their duties, occasioned Florio many not insignificant frights.

In every reasonable and unreasonable way did he seek to avert the ever impending disastrous *carambolage* of Burgdorf and Prince Chardo, at least until the former young gentleman had built up a reputation upon legitimate foundations.

But the conspirator fared better than

his deserts and escaped with his fears and forebodings. Luckily for him, Richard for the most part desired nothing better than to shun mankind and paint. Reserved, sensitive, moody, inspired by large hopes and chafing at the prolonged delay in their fruition, proud of Florio's success, yet longing to bear his own share of their burdens, he worked unceasingly, bided his time, lived the life of a hermit, and cared for no society but that of his friend.

Yet if the painter so much as stopped to look at something in Johannes Mezler's window, Florio shivered with apprehension, and would resort to the meanest inventions and the longest way round to avoid that street.

"I saw Prince Chardo yesterday," Mezler announced one morning with some complacency. "I had a good stare at him."

"Oh, did you!"

"Handsome fellow, is n't he? No end aristocratic. So pale, and a bit haughty. Would n't do for you and me, eh? — but just suits him. He stood a long time at

my window. He almost came in. Then he changed his mind."

"Oh, did he!"

"I was just about to run and open the door for him when he went on."

Recovering from his alarm, Florio replied with singular vehemence: —

"It is lucky for you that you did not, Mezler. He does not like that sort of thing at all. Never open doors for him, never! The prince likes to open his own doors. Never take any notice of him at all. If he should come in here, be as indifferent as you can. Never on any account say your Highness. If you should make any such slip, he would never enter your place again or let me. I told you he was eccentric. He insists upon the strictest incognito. Do you ever see me in livery?"

"Oh, I understand all that. I was n't born yesterday. I 'll be very careful, you may be sure. I must say I like his appearance, and I believe you 've got an awfully good berth. He seems rather fond of you, do you know? I noticed his smiling and gracious manner as you

were walking by last week. After all, it is no wonder."

"Do you think so?" Florio returned modestly. "You see we are about the same age and grew up together, as it were. That is to say, I was permitted to play with his Highness when we were boys."

"Oh, anybody can see with half an eye that you have enjoyed unusual advantages," retorted Mezler encouragingly. "I noticed that the day we met."

Having taken the precaution to re-stretch the Boys Fishing — fearing Mezler might have some occult method of recognizing his own wares — Florio brought it down, and said amiably: —

"I thought perhaps you might like to see this. It is one of Richard Burgdorf's sketches. The prince happens to have several at his rooms just now."

"Oh, that is a good thing. I like that. I wish I could exhibit it in my window."

"Well, I don't know. I must ask the prince, of course. I suppose I can leave it an hour or so."

Mezler met him upon his return with

the somewhat embarrassed announcement that a rich customer had taken a fancy to the little painting, particularly when informed it was by a young painter of note, a protégé of his Highness Prince Chardo.

"I hardly knew what to say. I suggested a pretty big price, just as a damper, you know. She instantly declared she 'd pay it. She 's a person I don't like to disappoint. I explained it was not put into my hands to sell, and the decision rested entirely with Prince Chardo, but that only made her wild."

"Well," said Florio dispassionately, "I suppose all I can do is to go and ask him."

Off he went at a great pace two miles straight up a hill and two miles down again, and exercised heroic self-control not to break into a war dance in the public thoroughfares; for beyond all things he longed that Chardo, after his struggles, his long illness, his helplessness, enforced restraint and champing of the bit, should have the joy of selling a picture and feeling his own strength.

"His Highness has not the least ob-

jection," Florio in due time announced blandly. "He might perhaps have kept the sketch himself, but that is no matter. No price is intimated, and the artist is not at the moment accessible. Of course it 's a slight thing. Still — *it 's a Burgdorf.* The prince thinks under the circumstances you ought to set rather a fancy value on it, with a handsome commission for yourself, of course."

"Hurrah! Won't I? And if by hook or by crook you can get me another little Burgdorf, you 'll be doing me the greatest possible service, for I know a woman who will neither eat nor sleep until she has one a size larger than the Boys Fishing."

"Count upon me, Mezler."

The twain concocted a price which the lady proudly paid in solid coin of the realm. Two more charming little Burgdorfs the delighted Mezler sold at romantic rates. Discreet but strongly commendatory paragraphs about the young artist now began to appear simultaneously in many papers and were largely copied by exchanges. Mezler kindly showed

them to Florio, who said they surprised him not at all. But those journals never lay about the studio.

From the day the Boys Fishing was sold, Chardo seemed to take a new lease of life. His step became buoyant, his bearing erect, his eye calm, his laugh jolly, and his large picture grew apace.

Florio, covertly watching the transformation, felt warm and stout of heart, and repented naught of his sins. But as he was slaving much in those days — with his writing and his nauseating night occupation, beside piloting his fibs — and Chardo was now fortuitously launched, it happened that the star known as Willy Winkel disappeared suddenly from the music-hall firmament, to the chagrin of the public, still more of the director, who declared with *pectus* he would engage him again "at any time and on his own terms, for the Frog or any new creation."

Willy Winkel thanked him and bade him farewell amicably, as one who may look in on the morrow; for, Florio reflected, in the marvelous variety entertainment which we call life, it is always

well to have, as sailors say, something "to windward."

Soon he was heard in the studio jovially humming : —

Ug-gl-loo !
Ker-chunk, ker-chunk !
Ug-gl-loo !

for now he loved his frog again, and that is human nature.

"How jolly good that sounds!" exclaimed Chardo. "Do you know you've not sung it in an age?"

Hardly a score of months from the day the beggars were coming to town, they sat one evening on the deck of a Messagerie steamer bound for the Far East, their way and work clearly appointed under sufficiently liberal conditions. Chardo's first real picture had been snapped up by the Dresden Gallery, — one of the incredible events which occasionally confound the prudent, and prevent them from becoming altogether too bumptious.

It was dark and quiet. Florio opened his heart, and made clean confession. When he had finished, Chardo was silent.

"I thought it might amuse you. Somehow it does n't sound very funny. One's jokes so often fall upon the buttered side."

He was right. It did not sound funny. Still Chardo did not speak.

At length Florio said with curious shyness: —

"I hope you don't mind too much, Chardo. Of course it was awfully low down. But so were we. And oh, did n't the lies boom?"

But Chardo, viewing the long perspective, saw neither fun nor fibs. Something of which Florio was quite unconscious streamed warm and radiant upon the vista and revealed nothing petty or base.

The painter reached over and wrung his friend's hand abruptly, got up, walked off and stood awhile alone, returned still unrhetorical until finally he muttered: —

"It must have been a terribly hard pull, and I — a thankless lump!"

"Stuff!"

"But of course it 's like you, Dumpling."

"Ug-gl-loo! Kerchunk! Got another cigarette, little one?"

The two young men stood silent, vastly content with their lot and each other, and listened to the throb of the ship bearing them onward toward their brave hopes.

At length Florio, half laughing, yet not quite at ease, remarked: —

"Your Highness need not henceforth be anxious about me. It 's not a chronic complaint, you understand. I really don't think the disease has struck in deep. Apparently it has not yet seized my vitals. It was only an acute attack of" —

"Of the literary quality," suggested Chardo cheerfully.

THE YOUTH THAT NEVER SMILED

I

AFTER writing doggedly all day, toward evening she saw that her work was bad, and wished it and she had never been born. Near the house was a breezy height, whither she often fled to fight out her battles, gentle feminine sobbing in a corner being to her an unattainable grace.

Lost in thought, she went up the long flight of rough stone steps between the rich vineyards clothing the hillside. On a bench, as she passed, sat a slight solitary figure of which she was but vaguely aware. The wind swept strong across the broad-backed hill, and the October sun was low. Circling the park, she hardly heard the boisterous shouts of children from the crater-like playground, and responded but mechanically to the

working-men, who, tramping heavily homeward in little squads, pulled off their caps with a civil good-evening and a curious but not unfriendly stare at the black-robed woman they were wont to meet hurrying along the windy hilltop.

The holy men of old walked with God upon the mountain and came down sanctified. In her sorrowful, most restless heart, where revolt and submission rose and fell like great successive all-submerging waves, — where problems solved yesterday confronted her to-day with newborn vitality, and the same hot battles were raging incessantly, never lost and never won, holiness had indeed no abiding-place. Yet in her pagan passionate way, she too had erected her altar to the Unknown God and was seeking Him on the height.

She was what they called resigned. She could listen, with a somewhat wooden countenance, to the amiable platitudes of consolation, and answer in dry-eyed automatic fashion, when people solicitously inquired as to her health, her feelings, and cross-examined her — al-

though then, indeed, she wondered why there was no cave into which she could creep and die like any other wounded animal — even as to the details of her tragedy. Her way of meeting the veneered brutality of sentiment which obtains in polite society was however less due to virtuous striving after self-control than to the ironical imperturbability of her physical machinery. Hers was a good machine; there could be no doubt of that. It gazed at visitors. It opened its mouth on time and uttered correct commonplaces. It needed no repairs. Altogether, it ran as smoothly as if it belonged to some other soul — to a placid soul that had no history.

She ought to be very thankful for her wonderful health, they were always assuring her. Grief was quite a different thing when one was delicate. Whereupon the machine would duly emit a species of assent. But the inner spirit of the woman, inaccessible and remote, if it deigned to listen at all to their unctuous prattle, would wonder what they meant and how they knew.

For some women there were benevolent drugs, a merciful forgetfulness in fainting and languor, and pain that might be temporarily absolute monarch. Whereas strength — her strength — meant throbbing intensity of life; the power to feel and recall unremittingly; to thrill with anguish in every nerve and fibre; and to gaze wide-eyed upon desolation. Did they imagine health meant anything less? But what mattered their theories? Nor was it Lethe that she craved. Ah, no! In memory lay agony, but also — in those most rare moments when her stormy heart grew still enough to receive it — ineffable benediction.

What could she still desire? It was a year now that she had been battering, with puny yet importunate hands, at the portals of manifold religions and philosophies; groping in darkness, listening in the great silence, fancying in some uplifted moment that she caught a faint, far-off response, an echo from the Infinite, but hearing oftenest only the sound of her own despair.

What was she seeking now and ever,

without respite? Not a personal God on a white throne, for He had vanished with other visions. But whatever might be left — strength to endure, courage, relief from her own turbulence; and knowledge — yes, knowledge she unceasingly longed for. The knowledge of the mysteries of life and death and anguish, and love strongest of all. The knowledge unrevealed to the mightiest, denied to Plato and to Shakespeare, she, rash and feeble woman, craved unceasingly.

She stood motionless on the highest point. West, south, east, north, flamed the last glories of the sunset sky, and beneath that splendid golden dome lay the town in the valley — long, elusive, hazy, a city in a dream — with vanishing hills beyond, veiled in dense blue mist like the bloom on grapes and sleeping among long purple vistas that faded into an ocean of twilight.

"In the cloud and in the sea," she sighed. But why such beauty? Was it mockery, or a message — prophecy? A breath, so light, so light, upon her eyelids, — a caress fainter, finer than air

upon her cheek, and when she did not storm and rebel but stood quite still and patient in the dusk, almost — almost the vanished touch upon her hand.

"Ah, God — ah God!" she murmured helplessly, gazing into the darkening skies, while, unconsciously uttering the burden of that ancient chorus, chanting down the ages, her spirit cried: —

"'Zeus! Whoever thou art, if this be the name acceptable to thee, under this name I implore thee.'"

But from that overshadowing immensity no peace descended, no response, no sign.

"If it were not so pitiless. If but a hint, a message, a sign would come, to give one strength to go on! On this whole great earth is no soul so forsaken, so unutterably lonely."

Into her troubled thoughts floated an ancient Brahmin prayer uttered by sorrowing human hearts thousands of years before the Nazarene taught His disciples "Thy will be done:" —

"Thou seest. Thou knowest to the end. As thou wilt."

"I cannot say 'As Thou wilt,'" she groaned. "I will not. What in all eternity can atone!"

Once more she endeavored to formulate her soul-need. "O Thou — Thou," she stammered piteously, "Thou knowest I never want to be a coward."

Slowly she descended the dusky vineyards where at long intervals a weak, desultory light now burned. On the bench halfway down sat the same lonely figure. Without a glance or conscious thought of him she went on, when her feet, apparently wiser than her head, stopped short of their own accord, turned and retraced their steps until she found herself, she knew not how or why, standing by the bench. Its indistinct occupant was, she vaguely perceived, a man, and she felt rather than saw that his clothing was flapping emptily with a bizarre effect, — not as beseemed the tailor's art and good substantial feet.

Uncertain how to address him, she stood silent in the dusk, and the pause grew strangely long.

"Good-evening," began at length an

unmistakably young voice. "Good-evening," she returned relieved, instinctively adding — struck by the indefinable quality of his tone — "You are not well?"

"No," was the gentle answer.

"Are you in pain?"

"Yes," said the young voice in the dark, with its subtle suggestiveness, whether of resignation, meekness, or apathy she could not tell, yet recognized it was the voice of one who suffered and had foregone complaint.

He was evidently no beggar. He had no tale to tell, no ready whine and voluble appeal. He had not spoken as she passed him twice, and if she should leave him now, he would not call her back.

He would sit there still and uncomplaining, with mysterious shadowy features under his slouched hat, and with that miserable empty flapping down below, and the night would close round him, forlorn, ill, and young.

"You say you are in pain," she resumed, "and cold, surely?"

"Yes."

"And hungry, perhaps?"

He did not reply.

"Are you not hungry?" she persisted gently.

Silence.

"When to-day have you eaten anything?"

"Not to-day," said the patient voice, cutting her to the heart like the keenest reproach.

"This will never do," she exclaimed, assuming briskness. "Sitting here shivering and hungry! Won't you come down to our house? It is the third on the right, there where you see the lights. It is just dinner-time. Some good hot soup will do you good."

No reply.

"It will do me good, I know. I'm rather chilly myself."

Still no response.

She drew a step nearer to the inscrutable shape. She was trembling and a little sob caught her breath.

"Please come. It will hurt me very much if you do not."

"I 'll come, then," returned the boy.

She descended a few steps and waited. He had not stirred.

"You are coming?"

"Yes."

"But now — with me?"

"I'll follow you," he said tranquilly, as before.

Wondering, she went on, and at the foot of the stone stairway looked back and listened. The vineyards were one steep silent mass of gloom. No footstep followed hers.

Doubtful, yet inclined to believe he would appear, she gave certain orders for his reception and awaited her singular guest.

Presently she heard something hobbling up the few stairs of the servants' entrance, and an exhausted boy apparently on the verge of fainting, staggered across the threshold, and fell into a chair.

"Lean back," she said. "Swallow this. You'll be better soon," giving him teaspoonfuls of hot bouillon and offering wine which he feebly waved away. Gradually his face assumed a less ghastly hue

and he opened his eyes. Seeing the lady, he tried to rise.

"Sit still," she said.

When he turned fully toward her under the bright light, she motioned the others away and stood speechless before the youth as when he was but a vague shape in the twilight. She knew not what to say or how to reach him, for the sad severity of his young face appalled her. Pure in outline, with the limpid eyes of a child, and about the resolute lips a stern sweetness as of a seraph guarding heaven's gates, — it was an extraordinary face above a slight long body, squalid clothes and a stump instead of a right foot.

He finished drinking the cup of soup.

"Thank you. I think I 'd better go along now." Again he rose.

"Ah, not just yet. You 've eaten nothing."

"It is quite enough for me."

"I want to talk with you a little — that is, if you don't mind," — she added pleading, — smiling.

The austere young face did not return

her smile. Tacitly conceding the point, he leaned back and looked at her with dignity.

"I hope you do not often get as faint as you were just now," she said in a hesitating way, for she found him most difficult to *aborder*, yet some sort of catechism seemed imperative.

"Not very often; sometimes."

"You had been sitting there long alone. It was cold and late. Will nobody be anxious about you?" she ventured to ask.

He shook his head, with no change of expression, but always the inexorable sweetness which discountenanced her.

"Nobody."

"You have no father or mother?"

"No."

"No home?"

"My mother died when I was twelve years old. I never saw my father."

"Then you are quite alone in the world," she said softly.

"I have one brother, a soldier in Ulm," he announced with evident fraternal pride. "He does all he can for me.

He pays for my room. But I am alone. Oh, yes," he repeated gazing straight before him, and speaking with extreme composure, "I am alone in the world."

She wished he would smile just once. She wondered if he ever smiled. With compassionate eyes she observed the well-shaped blond head of which any mother might be proud; the bold profile — it would have been called patrician in another sort of lad; — the peculiarly delicate beauty of contour of the beardless cheek and throat, like those of an ill child; the transparent skin revealing smallest veins; the long silky lashes.

"You are so young," she sighed.

"I am not young," he rejoined with intense gravity. "I am nearly nineteen."

"You have not yet told me your name."

"My name is Gustav Maur."

"May I call you Gustav?"

He nodded his serious assent.

"Tell me," she said after a while, "why were you up among the vineyards. It must be hard for you to climb so high."

"To get away from the people. I can

think better up there. Besides, it is beautiful."

She wondered to hear her own motives from his lips.

Suddenly he for the first time volunteered a remark: —

"I have seen you on the hill often. I saw you months ago."

"I never saw you," she rejoined with regret.

"No, you never looked," the boy said simply.

"You are there every day?"

"Every day toward evening when the weather is not too bad and I am not prevented. In summer, all day long sometimes."

"Did nobody ever speak to you? Not one of all the people that go up and down those steps continually?"

"I never spoke to any of them either," he returned coldly.

Her heart was oppressed with strange remorse. How was it humanly possible to let all this sadness and loneliness crouch uncared for by the wayside? How was it possible that this boy could

starve and faint and die in his haughty reticence, while people, happy people, kindly enough people too, no doubt, must have brushed his flapping empty clothing as they climbed the narrow path to chat and laugh and admire the mellow light flooding the vineyards? Worse still was she — blind to his misery, because seeing only herself, her own sorrow; because lost in endless fruitless introspection. For what then were they and she waiting, before they should feed and aid him? For what is called an introduction? For somebody to mumble — *This is young starving Gustav Maur?* While in drawing-rooms one pretended to be consumed with delight merely to meet any well-vouched for, well-fed stranger — and this was civilization. But his beautiful solemn eyes still rebuked her. Not even yet did she know what ailed him.

"I shall look now," she said. "I shall always look for you, and I hope you will come here every evening. I shall be glad, and the others too. There will always be something warm for you, a warm corner — a warm welcome."

He gave her a searching look which she found wholly incomprehensible.

"Thank you," he returned gravely, whether in acceptance or mere acknowledgment, she could not determine, but hastened to say:

"You told me you were in pain tonight."

"I 'm always in pain," was the mild amendment.

"It is not your lungs?" she hazarded, for though exceedingly pallid and emaciated he had no cough, and his voice was sweet and clear.

He shook his head.

"If you would tell me about it," she pleaded very gently, "if you would try to forget I am only a stranger, I might be of some little use to you. Indeed, I am not inexperienced."

The boy's face softened. He seemed about to speak, wavered, eyed her keenly as if she, not he, vagrant and outcast, were before the tribunal, then in his passionless tones, he once more excluded her from his confidence: —

"Nobody can be of any use. Besides

you only think you want to know about me. But you don't. Nobody does."

"Ah, why should you not believe me!" she exclaimed distressed and amazed. "I care. I care really, whatever it is."

The pale boy watching her closely answered, whether in simplicity or irony she knew not: —

"It is not a pretty disease, madam."

"Ah," she said simply, at ease at last before her forbidding young guest — "then, Gustav, tell it *me*," and something in her face constrained him.

"Well," — he began deliberately, after a while, "it is in my blood and in my bones. It is eating me slowly — too slowly. I have dragged it about, off and on, since I was born. Still I've been to school. I've learned about as much as other fellows. I've read whatever I could get hold of, and I've learned my trade. I'm a goldsmith," he said with boyish pride. "Only if you faint and fall on the floor when you are at work, it is disturbing to your employer. Sometimes I'm better, sometimes worse. When I can earn my wages like an honest

man I ask nothing of nobody. But for the last six weeks it 's pretty bad. I cannot sleep without my drops, the pain never ceases. I cannot eat for sickness and if I do not eat I faint. I 'm every other day at the hospital for the knife business. See," pointing to his stump — "they did that at Tübingen when I was fourteen," — a sudden burst of resentment in his face and voice — "at Tübingen," he repeated with grim emphasis. After some moments he resumed in his unimpassioned, almost impersonal way, "the other leg is pretty far gone. There 's a girdle round my waist. And see," — slightly pulling up one sleeve.

She was breathing rapidly.

"I told you it was not pretty."

"Pretty!" she gasped, made a sorry attempt to smile, shook her head helplessly, murmured "Wait," and fled into her dark dressing-room where she who wept not for herself shuddered and sobbed in an overwhelming passion of grief for this poor lost life, lost before he had it — the dear lost childhood —

the joy of companionship, the conscious freshness of the strong sound body — all lost from the beginning, while the boy with his beautiful head, proud pure spirit and loathsome disease wandered on earth like a pariah. It was a sudden tempest of emotion and left her weak and spent, leaning against some low bookshelves, the first object that had met her flight.

She lighted her rooms, hesitated, unlocked a wardrobe. On shelves and in drawers lay man's underclothing of finest linen, wool and silk, fragrant with rose leaves and lavender. She looked long, passed her hands lingeringly over the smooth layers, buried her face in them and was still. "It is better so!" she sighed, quickly made a great parcel and rejoined Gustav, who was standing on his stump uncertain whether to hobble off.

"These things are soft," she said in a matter of fact way. "They may make you more comfortable. Now, Gustav, drink this milk at least if you cannot eat. I really cannot let you leave my house so

poorly cared for. And you 'll come to-morrow ? "

" Yes, I 'll come," he answered quite as he had spoken from his bench, but watching her intently.

" And where are you going now ? " she persisted, as if she had the right to know.

" To my room — to bed."

" That is good. Do you happen to have any money ? "

He hesitated.

" A little — enough," he replied with reserve.

" That is good too. Please put this in your pocket to eat with your milk to-morrow morning. And here is a book I should like to lend you. You said you liked to read. Books help — a little — sometimes."

He seized the volume abruptly, turned over the leaves, looked alternately at it, at her, a gleam of eagerness in his face, impulsively extended his hand as if to thank her and as suddenly withdrew it. She comprehended the pitiful pantomime.

She happened to be a person afflicted more or less with that vile complaint fastidiousness. She was ready to make sacrifices for her fellow-creatures provided she need not touch them. Deep-rooted in her nature was the instinct which in one way or another proclaims "The hand of Douglas is his own," and in spite of all her pyschic sympathy for the ideal qualities of this poor lad, she was now conscious of distinct physical repugnance, — of which baseness, however, she was deadly ashamed.

Smiling, she held out her hand.

He made no movement to take it, but stood quietly looking down on it and her.

"Do you think you quite understand about me?" he asked with a sort of manly solicitude for her. "I don't know myself whether I 'm contagious, but people rather avoid me. It is only natural."

"Nonsense!" she said, her hand outstretched, and his, slender, soft, unused, with the confiding clasp of a child closed over it suddenly and long.

II

Thus the strange boy found in the vineyards entered her life. Seeking, stumbling, groping still, fighting the old battles never lost and never won, she could yet forget them and herself in the profound pity that possessed her more and more, contemplating that slight still uncomplaining lonely shape waiting for her in the gloaming. For that he waited and watched for her, that he clung to her in his undemonstrative fashion was evident.

When as often happened, he was already on his bench as she went up, she could note by daylight — never without a pang — the pretty line of the back of his head, the blond hair that persisted in its curliness although cropped short, the touching mingling of childlike and adolescent beauty in his features, the grave repose of his bearing.

As she came down, in the beginning of their acquaintance, she would stand and talk with him awhile, but finally

she seated herself by him as a matter of course. She never could prevail upon him to accompany her home. He followed in his own good time, partook of his light repast, sat awhile in the brightness and warmth, grew familiar with no one, never without special entreaty prolonged his brief stay, got up with his quiet "Thank you — good-night," and hobbled away, — his pride and reserve intact.

It was a long sunny autumn, followed by a mild brief winter and an early spring. In six months of almost daily intercourse he never once volunteered any information about himself. Only very gradually by dint of questioning did she learn the general outlines of his mode of existence. He could, it appeared, obtain refuge, care, and the opportunity to work when able, in more than one benevolent institution; free lodging and food in various Homes provided for such as he. But his freedom — even his — he guarded jealously, and had not the remotest intention of submitting his one precious possession to the charitable dis-

cipline of an asylum. The dignity of the suffering boy who fought no battles, never stormed at life or arraigned fate, seemed little less than Christlike. His touching youthfulness gave her a great heartache and she longed to devise some way of letting a gleam of sunshine into his joyless existence, and of inducing that fine unsmiling mouth to relax in curves of gladness.

"Are you fond of music?" she asked him one evening.

He opened his eyes wide.

"Because if you 'd like to go to the opera to-night," — they 'll make him climb to the fourth gallery, she reflected; still he mounts the vineyard steps; he looks terribly ill and his hand is bandaged to-day; but if he should die listening to Fidelio it might be the best thing that ever happened to him, — "here is a ticket. There are a good many stairs, Gustav."

"I don't mind," he stammered. "I can get up all right. I never went anywhere in all my life." Snatching the ticket he dashed out of the room with

amazing rapidity, and went off at a reckless pace on his foot and stump with no crutch or cane, as if his fiery spirit disdained its mortal impedimenta altogether. She watched the pathetic breakneck scramble down the stairs and thought :

"Only a boy and does not know how to smile!"

"It was beautiful," he began at once, a strong ring of excitement in his tone, as she joined him the following evening. "I did n't know there was anything like that. I did n't hear quite all."

"You were too tired to stay?"

"Oh, no. But, you see, I fainted and fell on the floor. They had to carry me out, but they did n't mind much. The doorkeeper said he knew I could n't help it. I got more than half. Oh, it was great!"

Dismayed, she sat down beside him and watched him sadly.

"You can hear everything in that music," the boy went on excitedly; "winds and water and voices. It is the fiddles that have the voices. I like them even better than the singing."

"Gustav, why did you faint? Was the music too exciting?"

"I suppose," he admitted reluctantly, "it was because they chopped off two of my fingers at the hospital yesterday morning. My left hand;" he added quickly. "It won't prevent me working at my trade as soon as I'm well enough. Do you know how the sea sounds? Is that noise in the pines up there like it? I heard a fellow say so."

"It sounds singularly like it," she replied as soon as she could command her voice. "You can even hear the little rush of pebbles when the great wave recedes. There — at the end — after the swell — the long, low, grating sound, — do you hear?"

He listened. After a while he said: —

"Sometimes I dream of the sea. I climb masts and man the yards; that's what they call it, is n't it? There I am under the sky like a bird, and the ship goes sailing on."

She sat very still with tightly clasped hands and heard the wind moaning in the pines, and the patient voice of the

mangled boy. He said no more, but withdrew as usual within himself.

She, silent also, full of pity unspeakable, was sad with exceeding sadness because of her helplessness before him, because of her inability to penetrate his isolation, to be of any true comfort, to give him anything worth giving. For what was soup, she demanded scornfully, and what were clothes and a few creature comforts and smooth words from time to time? — and even the music which had briefly unsealed his thoughts? Him, his true self, she had never once reached. It evaded her benevolence, eluded her kind inquiries that, gently as they were put, doubtless savored to him of patronage.

At length she broke the long silence: —

"Gustav, your loneliness is immeasurable, your life most cruel; it breaks my heart to think of it; but if I could show you, if I could find words and courage, there are other sorrows, different from yours, — others who suffer, and appalling, ghastly griefs."

"I know," replied the boy compassionately, and turned toward her.

Simply, quietly, briefly, as if it were a remote tale, the woman sketched the outlines of her life, — its conflicts, loves, and losses, its agony, — its Calvary. Whatever was most heart-breaking, most holy, most beloved, — what she had guarded from the friendliest, — she now revealed.

A deep-drawn breath, a sigh, a half movement, a turning toward her from time to time was his only comment. But she knew without words that he comprehended, — as if nothing sorrowful in humanity were intrinsically strange to him, however remote from his stunted experience. Dusk and silence and mists closed round and made an island of their bench halfway up the height, and shut them off from the long valley below, and the busy town glimmering through vapors. The two were alone in the world like lovers.

"But you had it," said the slow, sweet voice. It was as if the night, or nature itself, or an angel from above, had uttered this eternal verity. Humbled, she bowed her head.

"Of course, what I want most is to die," and she knew subtly, instantly, even as he began, that his reserve was melted, that in giving him of herself she had at last given something worth the giving. "In that, nobody can help me unless I help myself. It would be easy enough, but somehow I don't want to hurry the Lord. It cannot be very long to wait, now that my heart is so weak. But there is one thing I 'm afraid of, one thing always hanging over me," — his voice was hard — "and I hate it worse than the devil! That 's Tübingen."

"Tübingen?"

"I was a little chap, you see, only fourteen. I had no mother and no money. So the town sent me to Tübingen and they cut off my foot. If I had had a little money, I need never have lost it. I know fellows like me who have kept both feet. Two years ago they sent me again. I was there six months, and *all those young doctors learned on me.*" He was hoarse with emotion. "*They learned on me!*"

"Poor Gustav! And that makes you bitter?"

"That makes me bitter," he repeated sternly.

"Yet they are wise there," she ventured to urge. "They could have made no mistake."

"I don't know whether they did or not. I only know I will never go there again and let those young doctors learn on me."

He was shivering.

"You are cold, Gustav."

"No, I am not cold. But whenever I think of those young doctors learning on me, I can't bear it. Suppose some day I should be worse and could n't get up in the morning. I've got a little room under the eaves. It belongs to the beer-shop on the ground-floor. Nobody troubles me, and I trouble nobody. But nobody wants an ill man as lodger, — least of all, my kind. They would notify the police quick enough and pack me off to Tübingen. My surgeon at the hospital here says every time he sees me, 'You 'd

better go back to Tübingen.' I 'm an interesting case, you know. That 's why they kept me so long for that crowd of young doctors to learn on. And sometimes I get a great fright that I shall be sent back there in spite of myself. I don't want to die there. I want to die — respectable."

"You shall never go back, my poor Gustav. Oh, why did you not tell me this before?"

"I never thought of telling you — until to-night."

"And is there nothing else that perhaps you might be able to tell me — to-night?" she asked humbly. "Have you no *wish*, Gustav? All boys have wishes."

With an eagerness that burst all barriers he, the silent one, broke out: —

"There 's a peasant in the Remsthal. He could help me. It is a mystery. He prays to God when he gathers his herbs. Nobody knows what herbs. He prays over you, and tells you to believe you will be cured and you are cured. You drink herb tea and take herb baths, two a day. He prays all the time. He asks nothing

for the treatment, you know. He gives his time and care, but you have to pay your board, because he is poor himself. His house is always full, and he has cured hundreds the doctors have given up and sent to Tübingen and such places. He is kind as a father to you. A fellow who was there told me so. He was almost as bad as I, and now he is sound and clean. If you will let me go to the peasant, I will pay you back every penny. For he will cure me, you see, and I am a good workman. I can earn three marks a day as soon as I can keep at it, and stop fainting and falling on the floor and disturbing the workshop. And if you will trust me, madam—ah, if you will only trust me!"

She was grateful to the darkness that concealed her consternation and startled prejudice. What was this outbreak of ignorance and crass superstition?

"He prays over you," Gustav repeated in a sort of ecstasy. "It is a mystery. It is quiet out there. You go out in the woods. You drink all the milk you want. And he is as kind as a father."

Tübingen was centuries old and centuries wise, she reflected; but for this doomed and dying boy why not the wonder-peasant with his prayers and herbs, rather than the prayerless young students with their knives? What mattered it whether Gustav were in point of science orthodox?

"I don't suppose you have any faith in it," said the boy shrewdly. "How could you? But when I am cured you will believe. When I am well enough to wear a wooden leg I can walk down with you," he added, a certain manliness in his tone. "I never will on my stump. It 's not decent for a lady like you."

"Oh, Gustav, Gustav, I believe now. That is, I believe it is good for you to go out there if you want to, and you certainly shall go at once — to-morrow — whenever you like." For he should have his one wish, she resolved; he should be glad with the gladness of hope once before he died.

In his delight he chattered freely like any boy, revealed how for years he had dreamed of the peasant as an unattain-

able salvation, told the exact distance and fare, described the route and every way-station. She, listening, marveled at nothing, least of all at the manifestation of the instinctive desire for life flaming up sudden and strong after long repression.

"I never thought I 'd get any chance down here," he exulted. "Of course I knew I must get one somewhere. That is why I never could decide to hurry the Lord. I always knew He and I had got accounts to be squared somewhere. I never hurt Him. He 's hurt me pretty bad. Now I want to see how He means to make up to me for it all. If I interfere and cut things short, it does n't seem fair to Him."

"How do you know you 'll have another chance, Gustav? I believe you will, but why do you say you know?"

"Why, because I 've never had any down here. I 've seen every kind of sin and sinner, things a lady like you knows nothing about. I 'm not a great sinner. It is no feather in my cap. I was never strong enough to be worth anything

either for good or bad. I told lies when I was little. I don't now. Sometimes I have evil thoughts. Not long ago I threw a stone at a fellow on a bicycle, — hit him, too. I had just fainted and lost my place, and my pains were bad, and he came spinning along, and I hated him. Only for a moment, you know, but it was awfully mean, for he 'd never done me any harm. And those young doctors that learned on me, — I hate them always. I 'd hurt them if I could — with knives. I 'd pay them back for all they 've learned on me, and for the way they look. But hurt them as much and as long as the Lord has hurt me, and never give them another chance? No, I would n't, I could n't, and, among all the bad fellows I 've seen, I don't know one bad enough for that. That would be devilish."

"You see," he resumed tranquilly, "if the Lord could serve me so, He must have His reasons. It 's not sense, is it, to suppose a great God big enough to make a world would hurt a poor chap like me for nothing? That is why I 've made up my mind to be as quiet as I can until

I see what next. I rather think it 's all right and He knows what He 's about. Being alone, I think about such things a good deal. Somehow, it does n't seem fair to find fault with what you are too small to understand. It 's best to bear things, is n't it ? "

" Did you ever know any one you thought worse off than you ? "

" Sometimes, waiting for death that would not come, — unwholesome, so that nobody wanted me near, always so lonely and so " — he hesitated — " unloved, I have thought I was the worst off on earth, the most God-forsaken. But it is not true. There are worse. I had my mother once. Then there 's my brother — and there 's you," he added shyly.

She questioned no more. She understood. For the first time, they were peers. He at last had deigned to grant her right of way in his proud spirit's territory.

" Let us go down, dear Gustav. It is cool, and we have sat here too long."

" I 'll follow," he replied, immovable in his punctiliousness.

It was not long before a light bore swiftly down upon him hobbling across a dim street. A bell rang vehemently, but the imperative warning was too late. A wheel struck him, flung him violently upon a heap of paving stones, and was itself with its rider overthrown. The cyclist helped to carry him into the nearest house. A woman bent over him tenderly. He lay unconscious.

"Gustav, my poor Gustav!"

He opened his eyes upon the little group, — the frightened face of the strange boy, her, and the others.

His lips moved. His gaze sought hers. She bent nearer.

"*Those — young — doctors!*" he gasped, smiling, as his spirit passed, a splendid flashing smile of boyish triumph. The afterglow of that strange farewell lingered upon the young features marvelously chiselled in death, and merged into a godlike smile of mystery and peace.

THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW

I

SAYING nothing of his purpose, — to whom, indeed, should he speak now that Christel was dead? — the little old man set forth. This, in substance, is the tale he told the lawyer whom he journeyed to town to consult: —

His name was Jakob Bleibtreu, — a peasant of Sonnenheim, seventy-three years old. He had lived a laborious and honest life. None of his race was ever charged with crime or misdemeanor. For more than two hundred years they had tilled the soil of Sonnenheim, toiled in their cornfields and vineyards, wronged no man, and been gathered, ripe in years of stainless reputation, to their fathers. Such had been the Sonnenheim Bleibtreus, not indeed among the richest, but a solid, thrifty, law-abiding race.

He had owned his cottage, his father's and grandfather's before him. In it, on his own land, he had lived forty-nine years with his wife Christel. During that long time they had met their share of good and ill luck with cattle, wine, and crops, had lost both sons — good lads, and sturdy as you'd seldom find — in the war; one daughter had married and moved away and one had died; there had been storm as well as fair weather: yet, all in all, he would not say they'd not been peaceful and prosperous enough, and he could complain of nothing, for he and his old Christel had got on rarely together from the first.

It was two years and one month now since he had begun to build his new-fangled house near the village. What induced him to do it he knew not. He had never been one of those that are troubled with ideas; never been tempted to start up and do things; was always content to plod along the safe way of his forefathers. But other men were building. They talked large at the village inn over their beer. Times were changing,

they said. Some even prophesied that before many years the shriek of the steam-engine would be heard in those quiet meadows. It was like a fever, — that talk at the Waldhorn. Solid men, they said, should come forward, when land was going up like pancakes, and show themselves enterprising and public-spirited, not stick in their shells like snails. Projects, advice, figures, and probabilities were paraded until his head swam.

He used to go home across the fields and try to explain what he had heard to Christel. He remembered better than yesterday the first time he broached the subject. He came into the kitchen and took off his boots, and she fetched him his carpet-slippers and skull-cap, — all still and friendly, as was her way. After they had had their usual supper of good boiled potatoes and thick sour milk, which they always ate in silence — for it was best to give your mind to your meals — and after she had handed him his long pipe and tobacco pouch and he had puffed awhile, he began to talk, and

not before ; for when he had anything to say he liked to sit down quietly and get ready and not feel hurried.

So he sat in his chair and smoked, and spoke between his whiffs, while Christel sat in hers and knitted and said nothing. But somehow, in the still cottage away from the men's encouragement, things sounded altogether different. At any rate, he could not rouse her to any sense of their importance, or make her understand. She listened quite unconcerned, and clicked on busily, asking no questions and making no comments. But when nine o'clock came, and she got up to lay aside her spectacles and knitting and look after fire and lights, she said in her quiet way — she was always a quiet woman, his wife Christel — she thought she and her good old Jokel would be apt to sleep well and long on it before they took up outlandish notions. And somehow it secretly irritated him that she felt so secure, and every day at the Waldhorn the men's talk pulled him the other way.

It was long before she seemed able to grasp the fact that he was in earnest, and

no wonder, for never before had they two divided opinions upon any course whatever. When she at length perceived his mind was made up, she opposed most bitterly. Why at their age, so near the grave, build houses? Why have notions? Why sink their hard-earned savings in building when they had their own good Haus und Hof? Why vex themselves with noise and change? Were they not well enough and content? Let strangers come to the village, — and the railway and loads of money-bags, if such things were to be; but all was not gold that glittered, and the Queen of Sheba and her gorgeousness had not yet arrived. Sonnenheim was pretty much as she remembered it going on sixty or seventy years, except for an unusual lot of foolish men-folk's talk. Surely she and her Jokel would not grow feather-brained, but go on, steady and sure, hand in hand, and keeping to old fashions.

The more she pleaded, the more stubborn he became, as if in his old age suddenly possessed of a devil. He might have remembered Christel was always

right. Never a woman of many words, but what she said rang true. An eye for a horse, for cattle, — well sharper than his own, or any man's he knew; a sound head at market and for farm work, and judgment in all things. But he in anger told her men's schemes were too deep for womenfolk. And so it came about they had their first hard words about that house, and Christel said she 'd die before she 'd so much as even look at it.

They quarreled, and had been man and wife nine and forty years and never before discontented with each other one whole day, — no, not really for an hour. It was known far and wide that they two pulled strong and smooth together, and, old as young, sat snugly side by side. At weddings, in the whole region round about, it was customary to wish the young pair wedlock as long and peaceful as old Jokel's and his Christel's. That is what they were until he built the new house.

Well, he built it. It cost more than he had reckoned. It swallowed all his savings, and even that was not enough.

Ill-luck pursued him from the day he laid the foundations. Somehow all his money transactions went wrong. He had to mortgage his cottage and his farm. Then came the great drought and distress on every side; — no crops, no fodder, and his cattle sold for a song. Finally his health gave way and Christel sickened and died. He buried her on the ninth of November seventeen months gone. She had drooped from the time he began building, she took it so to heart. That is what the new house cost him.

There it stood, empty and useless. No one would buy it. He hated it. The cottage of his fathers, where he and Christel had lived half a century in good and evil days and where their children were born, he was obliged to sell. The new-comers left him his old sleeping-room which he occupied. A lonely old man, he came and went silently, troubling nobody. The new faces and voices fretted him sorely. Day and night he missed his Christel and brooded over his misfortunes.

The new house was his curse. Had he not built it he would not have lost his health, his money, his home and farm, his peace of mind, and his good old wife. Over the very thought of it they two fell out for the first time in their lives. She kept her word; never looked at it building; never saw it done: it was hardly finished when she died. Had he listened to her, all would still be well. Thus he brooded continually, and a dull, impotent rage possessed him more and more, — a sense of personal enmity toward the house which neither he nor anybody else wanted, and which had robbed him of his Christel — the blessing of all his days.

One evening the previous November he was returning from a neighboring market town with some of the villagers. He had done little enough business, merely a few small matters which he had undertaken for the young couple in his cottage, and once he was one of the most important and respected men on the market. Such reflections galled him. It was hard in one's old age to lose the fruits of all the patient labor of one's life,

as well as the consciousness that one is of weight in the community.

So he was taciturn and came along with the others — mostly young men — merely from habit, and because they were all from Sonnenheim ; and sat with them in the Drei Mohren and the Schwalbe and the Traube, and the other inns where they stopped for beer or cider or new wine, yet drank nothing himself except one glass of the new, — young Thomas Bolz, who was a bit merry, insisting upon it, — and hardly heard their boasts and laughter, so lost was he in his own dreariness.

Finally, however, on the road homeward, their loud wit turned upon him. Bolz, chaffing him noisily about what people now called Bleibtreu's Folly, asked him if he was going to hang lace curtains in the windows and have a doorbell like city folk ; perhaps, — who knew ? — a piano, or even a smart young wife ; such things had happened before now to sly old men. Bolz joked on, not unkindly, but after the jovial fashion of young men who have partaken at brief

intervals of beer and cider and new wine. Yet as they parted at the stile — for Bleibtreu's way lay over the fields, the others' down the high-road to the village — young Bolz was not too merry to notice how wearily the old man walked, and to turn and accompany him a bit across the fields, holding his arm; and this was not much after ten o'clock, as all of them could and did testify.

Toward five o'clock on the following morning Bleibtreu, sleeping soundly, was waked by the young couple, who informed him his new house was burned to the ground. He made no comment, got up, went over and quietly surveyed the scene of the conflagration, returned and ate a better breakfast than usual.

The authorities, as a mere matter of form, examined and discharged him promptly. No shade of suspicion clung to him for a moment. The building was uninsured. What motive, then, could a man have to destroy his own property? Besides, the young men testified Bolz had assisted him some distance on the night of the fire, and it seemed scarcely reason-

able to suppose he had retraced his feeble steps and gone the long way twice, — late and alone. The young couple, too, had bade him good-night when he returned. They protested it would have been impossible for him to leave or enter the house without their knowledge. There he was, sound asleep, at five o'clock. Does a man commit a deed of that sort and sleep like an innocent child?

He went about silent as usual for a few weeks, after which his various bodily infirmities culminated in a long illness, and he was more or less bedridden all the winter, but seemed able to bear his lot placidly; in fact, the young couple thought him rather less melancholy than before.

Meanwhile, in the sober little village, where one robust sensation might afford entertainment for years, the motives of the mysterious incendiary were exhaustively discussed. The peasants confronted the gruesome possibility that their own good farmhouses and fat barns might blaze up at the touch of the same miscreant hand. Unimaginative pates

produced and proclaimed monstrous theories. A certain agitation and suspicion inflamed late oratory over beer-mugs at the Waldhorn. Young Bolz was the last person seen in the street by the watchman on the fatal night. Some good folk knew for a positive fact that nobody but he set Bleibtreu's new house afire. For what motive? Why, for devilry. Was that not motive enough for Thomas Bolz? Perhaps when people were grilled and roasted in their beds, they would begin to perceive what a dangerous and reprehensible young scamp he was. There was a distinct anti-Bolz faction. A poor lad who once in a pet — but this was years ago — had threatened to set fire to somebody's mill was anathematized by another group.

But rare and mild versions of such rumors reached the ill old man during the winter. People, curiously enough, were too intent upon the mystery of his burned house to concern themselves much about him. Late in March he ventured out for the first time, listened to stern as well as foolish talk at the

Waldhorn, and became suddenly cognizant of the strong feeling that had been accumulating steadily for a half year, and that public sentiment was like a swollen stream seeking an outlet.

So, saying nothing to anybody, — for to whom should he speak now that Christel was dead? — he got a lift to the market town, and came down by rail for the first time in his life to the capital, to tell to the learned gentleman whom, Bleibtreu said, men at the Waldhorn and the Drei Mohren had called the Friend of the Folk, all the evil that had befallen him; and to confess that he himself, the night that the young fellows, meaning no harm, jeered him, and his grief and rage were greater than he could bear, had recrossed the fields, hid himself from the watchman, waited until all was still, stolen into the new house, brought down and distributed everywhere straw which was stored in the garret, set fire to the accursed place at several points, locked the door, and crept away unseen and unheard as he came. From afar he watched it begin to blaze, and his heart then and

there threw off a great load of wrong toward his good old Christel, and he went to bed and slept soundly.

He had not one moment on his own account repented the deed. It was his own house and he destroyed it. In nearly fifty years the building of it was the first wrong he had done his wife Christel, and it had broken her heart. He wished he had but burned it before she died. Still it was gone now, burned to the ground, and that was well.

But what he could not bear was that innocent men should be accused in his stead. There was angry talk, and good men were named for a fault not their own, and harm might still come of it. But, even if not, he could not bear it, for his conscience gave him no rest day or night; and somehow the concealment in itself weighed heavy on him. Therefore he had journeyed to the great town to give himself up, for speech was less stumbling before strangers than to men who have stood with you at market two-score years and more, and seen you regular in your seat in church, and drunk

many a mug with you at the Waldhorn, and always bade you a neighborly *Grüss Gott*, and respected you all your days.

Infirm, sad-eyed, mild and slow, the old man told his tale. He seemed surprised to learn, if he denounced himself, he would be placed in custody. Somehow he had not thought of that, he said.

After some reflection he replied the Bleibtreus had been a law-abiding race, and he was an old man now; still, as his conscience gave him no choice and he had come to town to speak and take the consequences, he should not retract.

Moved with exceeding pity, his legal confessor urged him to consider well: no man was compelled to incriminate himself; he must remember the village authorities had pronounced him innocent; the affair was six months old; the excitement must soon abate and be forgotten; now that he had thoroughly freed his mind he would no doubt feel easier: he 'd better go quietly home, and if later, say in five or six months, he should want to reopen the subject, the legal gentleman was heartily at his service.

Bleibtreu gently shook his head.

Informed if he insisted upon formally confessing then and there, the police must be notified and would forthwith detain him, he seemed for a moment a shade more dreary and desolate, and replied humbly, as he had not understood it would be necessary to lock him up, he thought it would be best for him to go home and put everything in order; particularly because it being already April and good sowing-time, he should like to give some instructions to the young couple who were not yet acquainted with the ways of his land.

He departed, and the lawyer sincerely hoped he should never see the poor old fellow again. But in five days he reappeared, and was handed over to the august manipulations of the law.

II

The massive stone building, rich with carving, cost approximately eight million marks: ten million francs, two million dollars, four hundred thousand pounds

sterling, — a stately and sonorous sum, however reckoned; in this instance derived chiefly from the milliards extorted as war indemnity from a great conquered nation, and otherwise from the taxes under which the people groaned.

Rotund burghers, the rectitude of whose incomes led them not into temptation — that is to say, into certain forms of temptation — smirkingly pointed out the beauties of the huge and imposing edifice to strangers, but the poor and those of no repute looked askance at it. Such as they, once in, rarely emerged under pleasurable conditions.

It was lighted by electricity, warmed by steam, and employed a retinue of liveried servants, who stood about assiduously with somewhat haughty mien. Keen-faced men with portfolios under their arms hastened in every direction along its spacious corridors and up and down its marble stairways, smiling at one another — like the augurs — as they passed toward some lofty hall which would shortly resound with their eloquence, or withdrew to a still nook to

prepare repartees and impassioned bursts of oratory.

Guards splendid of presence and gleaming as to uniform decorated all chief portals. Busts of eminent lawgivers, classic and modern, awed even the ultra-flippant into a passing sense of nothingness, while the average serious-minded mortal was incited to considerable exaltation. Instinctively the human breast inflated, the spine straightened, the foot trod proudly, under these august influences. It was impossible to so much as walk through the building without paying this involuntary tribute to the majesty of the Law, and to one's own remote, abashed, yet as member of the universal human brotherhood, indisputable connection therewith.

To maintain this superb Palace of Justice, its oligarchy of incorruptible magistrates, its learned and zealous prosecutors for the Crown, its troop of recorders, clerks, and scribes of various sorts and degrees, its gendarmerie with the air of vikings, its troop of well-paid menials conscious of rectitude, its libraries, read-

ing and writing rooms, studies, and countless other amenities for the initiated, perhaps four hundred thousand marks were annually required: five hundred thousand francs, one hundred thousand dollars, twenty thousand pounds sterling — an appetizing morsel, however reckoned.

On a certain summer morning, in one of the larger court-rooms, the benches reserved for the public were crowded, and although it was haying-time a conspicuous and sturdy contingent of peasantry sat manfully along the front in their knee-breeches, scarlet waistcoats, and many rows of silver buttons.

It was long before court opened, much after the academic quarter; but who would venture to expect here the lowly virtue of punctuality? The public waited, for the most part, silent and docile. Chaste, temple-like, the noble proportions and discreet light of the high and oblong judgment-hall tended to restrain unseemly chatter. Even the careless and such as had strayed in from mere curiosity became gradually hushed, and astonished at their own elevated senti-

ments, as they vaguely meditated upon the transcendental wisdom permeating the atmosphere; gazed ingenuously upon those lofty precincts, drenched, as it were, in that virtue which we deem the most godlike attribute of man; and stared meekly at the empty but portentous judges' dais across the opposite end of the room, where, behind a fine railing of demarcation, were a long and vastly erudite table and five magisterial Gothic chairs — a sort of Sinai in carved oak.

High above the vulgar a row of small loges, skirting the hall and entered by glass doors from the gallery without, were occupied by privileged guests — those favored by great lights of the tribunal, or strangers of distinction. Peradventure those astute men in royal livery might also unlock the loge-doors for travelers who presented no credentials but a deft swift movement of the hand. It is not difficult to guess why the great statue of Justice in that gallery preferred to wear a bandage over her eyes.

The vast machinery began at length to revolve. Two gleaming sentinels swung

open the great doors on the right and stood on guard. A pause — long enough to whet the public's appetite for a felon of large dimensions. A stir. Should then a culprit let the righteous wait? Two stalwart blond warriors successfully conveyed the malefactor in and deposited him in a pew-like receptacle against the right wall — a mild-eyed, white-haired old peasant walking with extreme difficulty, who shrank small and motionless into the corner and stared at the floor.

His counsel, a rather young augur with pleasant eyes, entered in black gown and cap, seated himself on his bench below the prisoner, opened a portfolio, and studied acts with an admirably absorbed expression. Presently more stout guards unflinchingly did their duty, swung open other doors, and ushered in the Prosecutor for the Crown, who, also in *Talar* and *Barett*, took his place at the right of the dais and bent with impressive intentness over his papers. Strongly guarded, a herd of thirty unhappy looking jurors stamped in. The clerk, likewise capped and gowned and immensely

preoccupied, took the left chair on the dais.

Finally a phalanx of three caps and gowns together advanced with fine effect from what may be designated — purely for convenience — the stage-back, and the President of the Tribunal and two other species of learned judge filled with amplitude of person and sombre dignity the vacuum in the centre; so that five black-robed figures prepared to weigh human souls in the balance, now loomed from that judgment-seat and presented a ghastly likeness to Rhadamanthus, Minos, and Æacus flanked by two more sinister shapes like unto them. A flock of timorous witnesses — all villagers — under reassuringly strong escort, were marshalled to their seats back to the public and mercilessly facing these five gentlemen exhaling subterranean gloom.

Nothing, in point of fact, had as yet transpired. The participants had but assembled. Yet already the wondering layman was convinced of three things: that the Law has indeed other methods of procedure than our careless, unimpres-

sive, unhistrionic ways of coming into rooms and sitting down among our fellow creatures quite simply as if naught depended on the action; that the armed force in that building in time of peace could — unless its looks belied it — withstand an invasion of barbarians; and that if one were personally led innocent before that awful Five the ominous environment well might hypnotize one into confessing unattempted and undreamed of crimes. Still the world moves; the Council of Three and the *Vehmgericht* wore masks, — one patch of black prognostication more.

Meanwhile the thankless old man for whom all this pageant was unfolded sat small, humble, and unheeding in his corner and never raised his eyes, or had any proper appreciation of the complicated and imposing apparatus in movement at the moment solely for him; — never thought of the enormous expenses of that Temple of Justice, the Honorarium of each of the five Sublimities, and the salaries of the vassals, all accruing during the time required for his case, in a certain

sense exclusively on his account — that, in short, justice might be done him.

Eighteen things now happened in due course; all indispensable beyond a doubt as that which had preceded, or surely wisdom and learning, at the very thought of which the laical brain reels, would never have ordained and crystallized them in adamantine form, to shake which ever so lightly were sheer profanity.

But since it was publicly known the prisoner had confessed his deed and delivered himself up to the authorities, homely common sense was altogether in a bad plight and wellnigh discouraged before the legal bill of fare was half completed. The originally clear questions of right and wrong became hardly perceptible, so wadded were they in herewiths, hereins, to wits, aforesaids, heretofores, and such judicial mufflers. Things at other times of no import, the pushing about of pink-covered acts and inkstands by the five transcendental ravens, became after the triumphal impressiveness of their entrance fraught with strange significance. The Prosecutor for the Crown

regarding his well-shaped hands seemed no ordinary man inspecting ordinary human nails, but a supernal being drawing pure νοῦς from those polished sources. Only a little group of the augur fraternity, bending sharp, busy faces over documents, were quite unmoved by all the florid circumstance — they best knew why. And always in his corner sat the meek old man, detached, remote, with downcast brooding eyes.

1. The names of thirty worthy men were read out by the Clerk.

2. After much rejection on the part of Prosecution or Defense, twelve of the thirty were finally impaneled as jurors.

3. Johann Senfft, joiner, Karl Bauer, vintner, Adam Mollenkopf, plumber, etc., were sworn; a process which they, being a little heavy tongued, unaccustomed since their remote school days to public feats of verbal repetition, and doubtless like everybody else in deadly fear of the black Sublimities, found curiously embarrassing.

4. Blood-curdling admonition to rustic witnesses to tell the truth, and warning against perjury. Witnesses, already more dead than alive, reconducted under strong guard from court room to place outside, and held in a sort of limbo.

5. Interrogation as to name, age, parents, reli-

gion, and occupation of accused, and whether previously indicted.

6. Reading of the accusation — a rare privilege for the unjuridical. In most serious and abstruse language was alleged of a man who, voluntarily confessing he had burned down his house, had surrendered himself to the authorities, that he was under the impeachment of affording sufficient grounds for suspicion that he on a certain date did willfully, deliberately, consciously, intentionally, with malice prepense, etc., etc., by setting fire to his dwelling-house, perpetrate arson.

7. Jakob Bleibtreu was transported by the giants on guard to the very foot of Sinai.

Being an aged man, infirm and ill, he was permitted to sit. He still preserved his weary, sad, and unconscious demeanor. The public could see little but the top of his bowed white head. He never glanced at the jury.

At first under the presiding Magistrate's examination Bleibtreu's voice was almost inaudible, but as he continued and related in his own fashion what had happened, the court room became hushed and his slow and gentle accents were distinctly heard.

In him truth spoke and grief. The

pomp and circumstance which preceded and surrounded him vanished like mist. Bent, wizened, humble, unlearned, unmindful of effect, uneloquent, he alone for a brief period dominated that forum. When he ceased a great stillness prevailed. What that loving, remorseful, single-hearted, dazed, and baffled old man had done, what he had felt and endured, was clear as light. What ought now to occur — no less.

When a child confesses a fault because he will not see a mate blamed for it, what decrees the tender wisdom of mothers — by no means the least sound code on earth? What were those familiar words in the Book all Law Courts openly profess to venerate? *If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* That aged infirm man had already been in custody three months awaiting trial. Were it not rank heresy, one fain would choose for Bleibtreu and his like, instead of this vast enlightenment of judicature, some ruder *plein air* method of early shep-

herd folk. It might have better served the purpose.

Vague speculation, too, upon the essential meaning and uses of punishment followed. What dire convulsion would have rent the Commonwealth had it straightway forgiven the broken-hearted man of threescore and thirteen years? *There is no worse torture than the torture of laws*, wrote one named Francis Bacon, bidding judges "beware of hard constructions and strained inferences." Then — the solemn thought arose unbidden and lingered — were Christ there that day, how would He judge, how look upon this gentle old culprit? But these at best were mere laical visions, — idle, irrelevant, and distinctly lawless. Bleibtreu was reconducted to his corner and the business of the court went relentlessly on.

8. Witnesses one after another were called, questioned, and cross-questioned by the counsels for prosecution and defense to prove, it would seem, the probability that Bleibtreu did the deed he had confessed. Their testimony went apparently to establish the mooted points that Jakob Bleibtreu had had a house, a wooden house, a hereinbefore mentioned, now (presumably)

burned house — and its distance, thirty feet or more, from other buildings, was made manifest by a diagram at which Johann Senfft blinked long.

9. Examination of "experts" who declared Bleibtreu to be of sound mind, and who — one knew not the cause of this favoritism — had been permitted to remain in the hall instead of being promenaded painfully back and forth by gendarmes.

10. The President of the Tribunal (but in no such plebeian terms as follow) framed the questions to be determined by Senfft and Co.: —

a. Was the prisoner guilty of setting his dwelling-house afire, thereby committing the offense of arson?

b. If so, were there extenuating circumstances?

11. The Prosecutor for the Crown and the Counsel for the Self-Accused pleaded long, with *Replik* and *Duplik*. But what was here to prosecute, the ignorant and merely human person asked himself aghast.

The learned Counsel for the Crown intimated, indeed, that on account of the infrequent circumstance of self-denunciation he should in this instance overflow with magnanimity. He then proceeded to paint a picture of an inky black night, a peacefully sleeping village, a dangerous old man speeding across fields, the burst-

ing forth of lurid and hungry flames, — until Johann Senfft, Karl Bauer, and Adam Mollenkopf began to tremble for their roofs.

And what was in the prisoner's mind as he stole stealthily across those midnight fields? What, Gentlemen of the Jury, were his i-n-t-e-n-t-i-o-n-s? A dwelling-house was thirty yards northwest of Bleibtreu's. Forty yards in another direction stood a well-stocked unsuspecting barn. What loss of life and property might not have ensued had there been in that still and sheltered valley a tornado, a cyclone? What mercy had Bleibtreu on the slumbering and respectable fathers and mothers of large families, and their innocent and promising babes? Here Johann Senfft and the eleven gazed round-eyed at the speaker, and even the patient little old man in the box glanced up once, mild and wondering.

The wind, it appeared, was north, but, Gentlemen of the Jury, *what if the wind had been southeast!*

The augur, usually a young thunderer, for some reason was moved on this occa-

sion to speak with peculiar gentleness and briefly. Is it conceivable that even augurs may sometimes long for simplicity? No word of his, he said, could deepen the profound and memorable impression produced by his client; claimed that his manliness in submitting at his age to the humiliation of imprisonment should have great consideration in the verdict; accentuated the fact that no self-interest actuated the deed, no other property was harmed; dwelt upon his heavy sorrow and mental depression, his irreproachable life, his years and his infirmities: pleaded strongly for acquittal.

12. The Prisoner, being informed the last word was his privilege, shook his head wearily.

13. The President charged the jury as if instructing twelve hopeless idiots, so long, often, and strenuously did he repeat his utterances. Yet if their intellects felt as shattered as those of most unprofessional persons present, his method was perhaps not ill advised. What should chiefly govern their deliberations must be, it appeared, whether the prisoner in setting incendiary hands upon his own property had or had not — oh marvelous jurisprudence! — incendiary designs upon the property of others.

14. The Court withdrew, Bleibtreu was removed, and the crushed public wandered drearily about and stared at Moses, Solomon, Solon, and Lycurgus. Honest Johann Senfft, joiner, Karl Bauer, vintner, Adam Mollenkopf, plumber, etc., were convoyed by the still unexhausted guard to some stronghold and remained absent a full hour, — conscious the eyes of the nation were upon them, — while they officially made up their minds whether or no Jakob Bleibtreu had deliberately, willfully, intentionally, and with malice prepense, set fire to his dwelling-house, thereby committing the offense of arson, and, if so, what were his motives in doing it.

15. The Court — it were impious to suspect their Honors had stooped to beer in the long interval — sailed in again black and majestic. The prisoner was detained without. Johann Senfft, being called upon, announced in stentorian tones the verdict: —

"In answer to the first question — *Yes, with more than seven voices.*"

"In answer to the second question — *Yes, with more than seven voices.*"

16. Whereupon the two Samsons in charge of the prisoner brought him in and held him up that he might listen with fitting respect to what Senfft and the others had determined were the ultimate facts of the case.

"Prisoner at the bar, hear the verdict of the jury," was thundered down from Sinai.

The Clerk then proclaimed the oracu-

lar utterance: "In answer to first question — *Yes, with more than seven voices.*" But as he did not reread the question, and the prisoner had long since forgotten or indeed never grasped it, the truly legal beauty of this situation was that the person most concerned could not possibly comprehend whether he was acquitted or found guilty.

"In answer to second question — *Yes, with more than seven voices.*"

17. Considerable discussion and pleading as to degree of severity of Bleibtreu's penalty.

18. Rhadamanthus, Minos, and Æacus retired to concentrate their combined genius upon the sentence. After a prolonged absence they reappeared, their august, sable state quite unimpaired, and the prisoner was once more shoved and propped into deference to hear his doom: —

TWO YEARS' IMPRISONMENT, AND RECOMMENDATION TO THE MERCY OF THE KING.

As at this season the sovereign was busy entertaining foreign potentates, and as the formalities of the law must proceed with inexorable circumstance whoever pines and dies, it happened that some weeks elapsed before Jakob Bleib-

treu's humble griefs could be laid before the throne. In the meantime another monarch, all merciful, came unannounced by night and released the weary old man from prison and from pain.

ALL SAILS SPREAD FOR MONKEYLAND

A FROLIC cherub, sailing at random about the universe, spied from afar the bright windows of a palace on our earth, darted downwards, and floated in. He was an affable little being of an inquiring turn of mind, consisted at first sight of but a charming head, wings, *et preterea nihil* quite like St. Cecilia's artless and amiable congeries in the picture ; and he traveled very comfortably on his own little rosy cloud.

Only a poet perceived him.

Arriving suddenly from cool starry spaces, he was at first confused by the bad air, the din of human speech, and the braying of wide-mouthed instruments, whirled in giddy circles round and round like a helpless moth, and dashed against chandeliers and mirrors. But aware of the imperative duty of the well-bred tour-

ist, he bravely adapted himself to his environment, became mildly asphyxiated — the sole condition under which large gatherings in hot rooms can be enjoyed — steered for a statue in a corner, reefed his wisp of cumulus, and anchored on a departed monarch's marble brow.

The poet strolled near, to be on hand in case he were wanted. Poets are less unpractical than is popularly supposed.

From that corner floated a faint fragrance fresh as the breath of gorse upon a wind-swept headland, but some fine ladies sniffed, sneezed, frowned, and said they felt a draught.

The little stranger propped his rosy visage upon his chubby fist — in the attitude of the first cherub of the Sistine Madonna — and contemplated with silent bewilderment the human antics before him. (It is an unscientific and untenable theory that cherubs are limbless. The body of the cherub exists potentially in the cloud, as the oak in the acorn. He merely draws forth an arm, a leg, or whatever is required at the moment, and re-inclouds it when superfluous, thus

easily commanding, unlike the methods of luckless human adolescence, complete and agreeable absence of body.)

"How wretched they look, poor dears," he murmured compassionately. "What is this dreadful place, I wonder, and what have they done that they are compelled to be here?"

"This," replied the poet, "is a festival in the king's palace. To many present it is the proudest moment of their lives. Some have pushed, struggled, stooped to incredible meannesses, sold their souls, indeed, to be seen here this night. Others can ill afford the outlay, and they and their children will suffer months of privation for this one pageant. But they would all assure you they were happy. They are protesting one to another how supremely happy they are, and in truth this is the highest ideal of happiness many of them possess."

"Thank you so very much," the cherub returned, polite but puzzled. "Pardon me, but where am I? Is it possible I am on Terra? I have never happened to visit one of the wee rural

planets before, and as I rounded the tail of the Great Bear I was a little flighty and lost my reckoning. But from your kind remarks I judge this can only be the Earth. Some of my colleagues who used to come down occasionally to sit for their portraits told me it was the most topsy-turvy place imaginable. But I really beg your pardon. I should be so sorry to" —

"Oh, pray don't mind me. I never felt at home here."

The innocent wanderer again regarded the brilliant throng and turned his pretty profile in all directions — after the fashion of Sir Joshua Reynolds's group.

"They jerk their mouths," —

"Those are smiles," the poet hastened to explain.

"But their eyes are wary and unloving. Why is that?"

"I cannot tell you, dear Cherub. I only know it is the habitual expression of elderly human countenances confronting one another on festive occasions."

"Are there none present who have not scrambled or sold their souls?"

"Oh, certainly. Some are here as a matter of course, — by right of birth, — and a few have been distinguished for merit."

"Birth? On earth all are born, are they not?"

"Why, yes. But some are born with distinct advantages — highborn — don't you know, the hereditary nobility?"

The cherub shook his ambrosial locks dubiously, and became pensive as the little Carpaccio with the mandolin.

"Are they not all born babies? Not unlike us, except they cannot subsist on pure sunshine, and they pucker, grow red in the face, and wail? At least, that is what my colleagues have told me."

"That is true enough. But on our earth one baby is born to honor and privileges, another to hardship, neglect, and misery."

"Why?"

"Merely because the first baby's remote ancestor was strong or shrewd enough to own and keep his land — which often he stole; or he went to the wars, or changed his name, or pleased the fancy

or the pocket of a king, or got some other sort of better chance than his fellows."

"But that is most unholy! However," he added blithely upon second thought, "fortunately you are an ephemeral species down here on this minute object. You bloom only sixty or eighty of your own infinitesimal years, I believe. Afterwards you 'll find those pernicious ideas will soon be set to rights."

"Where?" demanded the poet eagerly.

"Beyond," responded the babe of heaven, "among the verities, the immensities, and the eternities," his hands clasped, his gaze uplifted in adoration, — like the rapturous cherubim of the Romani Altar-piece.

"Ah!" sighed the longing poet.

"Still," the cherub after a while remarked practically, "you are really among them now, even if it seems quite the other way round. Nothing and nobody can escape them. So it is the greatest mistake not to set things right as one goes along. And this most amazing matter of the hereditary babies" —

The poet smiled.

"Will be remedied, never fear, dear Cherub. It is a tottering institution. Strong hands are undermining its foundations. Strong hearts condemn it."

"It is well," said the cherub with emphasis, "for the most fantastic, unreasonable, and ominous notion I have met with in all my travels in this or any other solar system is your monstrous illusion of high and low birth. Now, if you please, sir, what is merit?"

"Merit?" repeated the poet modestly. "Well, there are various kinds. Merit in this special sense is ascribed chiefly to those who have excelled in the arts and sciences. For instance, there is a recently knighted man of the *haute finance*."

"Knighted? *Haute finance?* What art is that?"

The soft features were screwed up in helpless incomprehension.

"The noble art of getting rich. Still more, the science of playing astutely with fortunes, thereby controlling men, commerce, politics, love, and war. Cherub, I see it is too tough for you,

and I confess wealth never was my forte. Let 's drop it."

"Most gladly, for it is indeed a gruesome theme, and unethereal."

"Do you see that pale, thoughtful man ? "

"A gentle face with divination in the eyes, as one on a purer planet ? Pray, what is his merit ? "

"He is a great scientist and inventor. He has produced the worst explosive yet. No army, no town, can exist an instant before it."

"Oh, is it thus cruelly he employs his divine intellect, when on every side myriads of beneficent secrets are waiting to be discovered by such as he, for the comfort, progress, and happiness of mankind ? But you, friend, so patient with my ignorance, so courteous, — you, too, look mild, and in your deep eyes dwells thought. Why are you here ? Have you perchance struggled, pushed, and demeaned yourself to attain to this place of unrest ? Or were you born high ? Or did you study to exterminate your fellow-creatures ? "

The poet blushed.

"I wrote a Patriotic Ode," he faltered.

"I 'm sure you 'll never do it again," rejoined the cherub consolingly, secretly wondering what manner of thing it might be — terribly earthy and insular, he feared, — perceiving the other's dejection. "Would you kindly interpret the eccentric conduct of the assembly, so convulsive, you observe, and their — smiles, I believe you call them? — all aimed in one direction?"

"His Majesty stands at some distance talking with a foreign ambassador."

"Nobody down here can hear what they say?"

"Not a syllable. But when his Majesty deigns to jest, those standing near delight to look as if they were part and parcel of the royal wit. Those afar off, disliking to be left out in the cold, insist upon smiling also. Thus a great, obsequious, expectant grin ripples over the whole surface of the company."

"Does it matter much what one Terranean says to another?"

The poet stared, this inquiry striking him as too preposterously naïve for even the other-worldliness of cherubim.

"Still," continued the artless prattler, intent as the little Correggio sharpening the arrow, — who, strictly speaking, is an Amor, but that is only a cherub's first cousin once removed, — "I really need not be surprised, for I remember a friend of mine was relating to a lot of us, at the last Aurora Borealis, that you earth-born could one minute be fiercely hurling cocoanuts at one another's heads, and the next might grin and jabber and mimic prodigiously, quite as at present."

"Cherub," retorted the poet severely, for the first time rather hurt, "you 'd better read some good scientific books and improve your mind. The pitchers of cocoanuts are not human beings, and, if ever even remotely related to us, it was æon upon æon ago."

The little angel — now nestling in the classic pose of the second cherub of the Sistine Madonna — nodded sagaciously.

"Ah, yes, I had forgotten. Time has another meaning, *ici-bas*. From the

aërated point of view, your arbitrary distinctions are quite unimportant. It was, as you suggest, some few æons ago that my friend noted the vivacious manners of the cocoanut ladies and gentlemen. An arboreal race, was it not? You are not fond of these relatives? Let us talk of something else. Those men in bright clothes with little toys and trinkets on their breasts, — what are they, and why do they wear danglers?"

"They are eminent generals. They lead our armies to battle."

"Killers!" The cherub shuddered.

"The bits of metal, the crosses and stars in gold and silver and enamel, are orders, decorations, marks of distinction conferred by the sovereign in commemoration of gallantry and success in war."

"In killing! I have heard of these most painful customs. Men decorate themselves, as well, with chains of beads and shells and human teeth, and sometimes leap and howl round fires, and wear as trophies the skulls of their victims."

"Cherub, you 're off the track," remonstrated the poet.

"No doubt," returned the little one sweetly, — with a lovely, outstretched movement as of floating down the ray in Paul Veronese's Adoration of the Magi, — "one does get so very *desorienté* when one travels so much and so rapidly as we, and roams through millions of mansions. Besides, I am a particularly scatter-brained cherub. You see," he cooed confidingly, "few of us small fellows have any regular work on Earth. We may chance to drift hither in play hours and holidays on idle voyages of discovery. But the truth is, we are considered too light weight for this line of business. It takes our strongest, most able-bodied, large-sized seraphs to tackle things down here."

His innocent glance fell upon a small, bright object attached to the poet's coat.

"You, friend, wear a dangler? You are, then, a" —

"I am what is called a minor poet," replied the young man gloomily.

"Poets I know well," said the cherub softly, with a rapt look, — holy, wonderful, as the most beautiful Murillo. "God

loves them. In the Beyond, unspeakable is their bliss. Even on this Earth, their mystic hints reveal the high destiny of the soul. They are the prophets, — the sacred seers of secrets. Let kings come bow to them."

The listener snatched his decoration from his breast.

After a while the cherub remarked: "Two care-worn, venerable men are walking together down the room. They also wear many rows of childish gewgaws, yet are not killers surely, — still less poets."

"The Minister of War and the Minister of the Interior, both grown gray in the service of the state, — which practically means helping it to recuperate from one war and preparing it to meet the demands of the next."

"War, war!" murmured the grieved cherub. "Hatred, bloodshed, desolation, and tears, — internecine massacre! I was dimly aware of the existence of primitive and barbarous spheres where tribal conditions obtain, but have never before realized the gloom of such re-

tarded development. My colleagues were quite right. They warned me I should find it altogether too depressing in your tiny but fierce hamlet, and bade me wait a few cycles. Those are your young savage chiefs?"

"We call them officers."

"Whom will they go out to tomahawk and spear?"

"Their weapons, too, we designate otherwise. Still, after all, that may be a mere detail. It matters little against whom war is declared. Here, there, anywhere. All the nations are more or less alike. Each glorifies itself and vilifies its neighbor. This habit of mind we esteem a virtue and give it an imposing name. We are chiefly employed in snarling about geographical boundaries. A trifle precipitates the animosity. Then we march forth and destroy one another."

"Alas, a topsy-turvy globe indeed, or, rather, globule!" exclaimed the little one, fluttering a lively multiplicity of pinions with a fine Donatello or della Robbia effect. "Yet take heart, Poet. As we were tobogganing on the rainbow

the other day, one of our most luminous cherubs, — an authority, too, on World-Germs, — remarked: 'Terra is slow, but she will arrive.' Who are those amiable gentlemen in gay coats, stars, and ribbons?"

"That is the diplomatic corps. They represent the nations."

"In what respect, pray?"

"Ah! that nobody knows exactly. If one could possibly imagine what they did, it would no longer be diplomacy. Visibly, they dine a good deal, make ornate speeches, amuse themselves famously, cable tremendous dispatches, and compose wit and wisdom for their autobiographies."

"But at least they do not help to let loose wars?"

"They? Rather!"

"Yonder stands a white-haired, saintly old man in simple black. His occupation, kind Poet?"

"He is a distinguished Christian prelate. He preaches peace. He exhorts us to return good for evil, to love our enemies and bless our persecutors."

"At last!" cried the cherub joyously.

"But in time of war he implores the God of battles" —

"There is none!" solemnly ejaculated the cherub.

"To grant us victory, while the saintly divines of our enemies are as fervently beseeching Him to defeat our forces and let theirs triumph."

The cherub drooped his wings. "Tribal," he sighed, "essentially tribal," —and under his breath repeated words amazingly like: "Cannibals that each other eat, the Anthropophagi."

"Cannibals! Oh — I say — *Cherub!*"

"But is not this the dreary planet of blood-stained food? Stained with the blood of lowly kindred? Brothers and sisters in feathers and fur, and those possessed, it may be, of a few more legs and horns than you human animals have at the moment, yet all of the selfsame Mother Earth stock. Do you not mercilessly enslave and torture, kill and habitually devour the non-human animals? Or do I wrong you? Is it elsewhere that cruelty reigns supreme?"

"Alas!" sighed the poet, "it is here."

After a prolonged silence the cherub gravely resumed: "It is, I fear, a superfluous question, where all are either killers or abettors of carnage; but those tall men in scarlet and gold moving everywhere, and bearing shining disks?"

"Are harmless men of peace," responded the poet carelessly, "being only servants."

"Only?"

"Well," — hesitating, — "we look upon them as inferiors."

"Have they, then, committed crimes even worse than war?"

"By no means, little Cherub. They minister to our comfort, and do for us what we are too lazy or too ignorant to do for ourselves."

Perplexity clouded the baby-angel's brow and his lip quivered.

"Poet, your Earth is strangely sad. I think I 'll go home."

"Ah, do not leave me," entreated the poet. "Remain yet a little. You have chanced upon some of our ugliest traits. But Earth has also its loveliness. Come

with me and I will show you. You shall look upon wholesome home-life, — upon friendship, sympathy, unselfish devotion; upon the strong love of man and woman, which at its highest sees heaven open. We mortals know brief seasons of peace, holy instincts of protection and pity. At all times have been ardent souls ready to lay down their lives for the oppressed. Some of Earth's vistas are fair as dreams of Paradise. Earth's flowers, Earth's young children have faces pure as your own. Earth's music, all her longing, soaring art, is heaven-born. We are not wholly base. Surely a breath of the Beyond inspires even us."

"It vivifies the universe, and therefore even you. In spite of yourselves you cannot escape the eternal Law of Progress which rules all life. But while your butchery of war prevails, your system of international assassination, it remains a brutal and benighted place, — *ce bas monde.*"

"Look!" cried the young man eagerly. "Look through the great doorway where the crowd breaks, and see our

maidens dance! Surely that is no dreary sight."

"Is that dancing?" the cherub gently turned away after one glance. "The men's legs are so many and so obvious! You should see *us* dance, in space, at a dawn party." His iridescent pinions fluttered rhythmically, and his cloud swayed to and fro as he carolled under his breath a mystic measure of unearthly beauty which ever after haunted the poet's brain.

"Blessed Arch-cherub who may hear the morning stars sing together! Now watch our young girls drifting in, all whiteness and sweetness." For an instant the poet was light of heart and exclaimed proudly: "Behold Earth's best and dearest!"

The winsome being put his thumb in his mouth and cuddled down content.

"They look familiar as my own dear mates, and are doubtless wise and good as they are fair."

The poet stroked his moustache.

"Well, perhaps they might be a grain wiser. You see these are girls of the best society."

"The which? Again, I cannot understand your terrestrial *patois*."

"Upon my word, Society is a vastly difficult thing to explain to a cherub. You see it is a condition that surrounds them."

"And draws them toward the great light?"

"Quite the contrary. I 'm bound to confess it stunts their intellects, cools their hearts, and weakens their bodies."

"Bless my wings! A disease?"

"It may well be called a disease, deep-seated and infectious. It debars them from knowledge that would lend meaning and consecration to their lives, and excludes as rather worse than sin all healthful activity, self-reliance, and large aims."

"Poor, pretty dears! But at least they are able to fly with a message of tenderness and comfort to the sorrowful, the scorned, the outcast, the erring, the sorely tempted?"

"Not they! They may associate only with the very genteel."

"Genteel? An uncelestial word, and

wearisome. We cherubs know it not. How do they employ the hours God lends them ? "

" Alas ! they fritter them away and are self-satisfied. They sleep and know not their strength. Yet they are more sinned against than sinning, for they have been sacrificed for ages."

The cherub's bewilderment had waxed larger than himself, but now he replied, with a delightful air of reminiscence : —

" Such virgins, I have heard, are sacrificed by scores to Artemis."

" Cherub ! I really must protest ! Those were heathen misdeeds now quite out of date. Our maids marry. Each counts herself blessed to be chosen by a man whether she truly care for him or no, and to secure a soldier or great wealth is her chief ambition."

" Wealth ? Ah, I remember. We must not speak of it. That is where we draw the line. What are the young chiefs saying to the maids, that they smile and look down ? "

" Possibly that their eyes are large and their hands small."

"But that they must know already. Can such honeyed *marrons* please them?" — roguish as the Bordone Love crowning Daphnis and Chloe with a wreath.

"Presumably, since they listen greedily generation after generation."

"Do they in turn inform the men what sort of eyes and hands they have, and chins and ears?"

"That would be most indelicate."

"But why? What is the difference? I assure you, on the planet Mars, where they are far more" — With a startled expression he pressed both dimpled hands upon his mouth.

"Where they are far more what? Ah, tell me, — only speak! One word, one hint!"

"I am really the most inadvertent youngster upon the aerial plane! Talebearing from world to world is not allowed. One world at a time is the rule for you, at least until your spirits sprout. The fair maids strive, then, above all things, to please the killers? And are the sachems pleased?"

"Oh yes, for a season or so."

"And what then?"

"Well, they marry and settle down in the usual mundane way."

"Do they still tell them of their eyes and hands?"

"Not much."

"And afterwards?"

"In due time they grow like these matrons here." —

"What! With the unquiet eyes?"

"Even so. And assiduously rear daughters to be seen of marriageable men."

The cherub distractedly ran his fingers through his curls until he pushed his nimbus quite awry. "Oh Poet, why was it worse to die for Artemis? That was so much less lingering!"

Again the two regarded the fair girls, a radiant sight; despite all mortal imperfections, warming to the heart and fraught with nameless promise.

"When they awaken," — pronounced the cherub in prophecy.

"And know their strength," responded the other.

"They shall be the peacemakers" —

"The true mothers of the nations."

"Yet not amid this grievous tumult shall their high mission be revealed."

"But you see they must 'come out' and be presented to the King. Such are our inexorable rites."

"The King! Ah, yes. This is his palace. All are here because of him, eager for his glance, his lightest word. He doubtless is the solution of much that bewilders me. Why was he chosen guide and father of his people? For what virtues, what great and glorious achievements of love and luminousness?"

"He was born King."

"Born? A high, hereditary baby?"

"The highest."

"Then he rules not because he is illumined from within, and pitiful, but on account of something or other done by somebody long dead?"

"That 's about it, Cherubino."

"Oh mad Earth!" sighed the little one and fell into a pink study.

"But being King," he resumed more

hopefully, "he has made himself lofty, magnanimous, serene?"

"Oh, as to that, he 's not a bad sort."

"Beloved?"

"If we may believe the government newspapers."

"He labors for his folk and suffers with them?"

"His Majesty's existence is not precisely laborious."

"In time of calamity he strengthens and sustains by his presence?"

"A Cabinet Secretary's secretary writes a document or telegram."

"But the poor, the oppressed, the humble men and women with wrongs and petitions, may always by day or night claim audience and justice before his throne?"

"Cherub! Do we dwell in tents? Such tramps would not be allowed to pass the first sentry at the palace gates. You will presently see what his Majesty is like. By the backbone of the company, I infer he is approaching. Watch the dowagers dip."

The infantile features expressed distinct perturbation, and the caressing voice lisped hurriedly: "If you don't mind, Poet, I'll not wait to see them sink into the ground before a mere born man whom they neither love nor revere. That must be an awful spectacle even when you are used to it, and it is something no cherub can understand. Besides, my *tête-de-linotte* is as full as it will hold."

With a bright and dewy smile he added: —

"As my province is planets in full florescence, my opinion on a small, late bulb like Earth is, like myself, the merest winged nothing, — a trifle light as air, and I beg your indulgence for my chatter. Even your mumpsimus and myopy must some time disappear, and I doubt not the matter is already in the proper hands. *Nil Desperandum.*

"So farewell, Poet, dear, and a thousand thanks," he murmured with a suave, Botticelli manner. "Take care of your afflatus. I'll look in again shortly and see how you are getting on; say in a milliard

years, when Earth shall have become a little less arboreal."

"Ah! but you 'll not find me."

"As if that were a thing to weep about! Do you suppose in your next *étape* you are going to miss your cocoanuts? How doggedly you Terraneans cling to your dense Simian bodies and to your murky little islet! Do you never long to travel? Never desire to behold other and purer humanities? Never remember you are, after all, souls, hence allied with high cosmic races? Even before your spirits are released from their unwieldly shells, if you would only stop fighting long enough to learn the first principles of aerostation and interstellar communication, you might enlighten yourselves amazingly. Already Mars, and even Venus, not to speak of — But there I am at it again!"

Some one happened to open a casement.

"Here 's my cherubic chance. *Auf Wiedersehen* in the star where poets go to meet their dreams."

Enchantingly alert, mischievous yet

mysterious à la Albani's winsome Loves, the cherub loosed his moorings, and, drawn up to his full height on the quarter-deck, put off.

The poet wistfully watched him as he rose gallantly on the breeze, swept across the face of the moon, and steered E.S.E. for Sirius.

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