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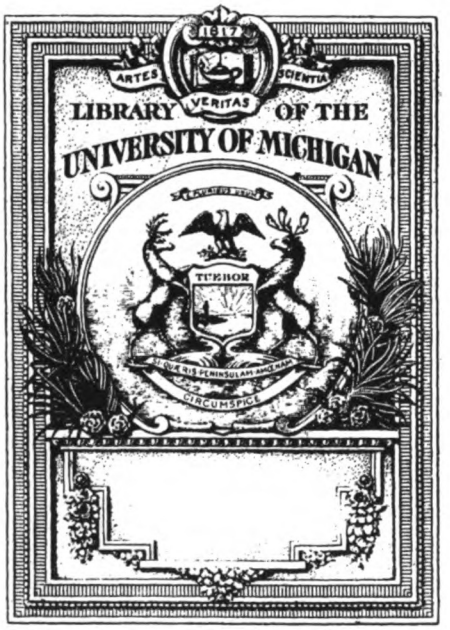

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VOLUME XXVIII

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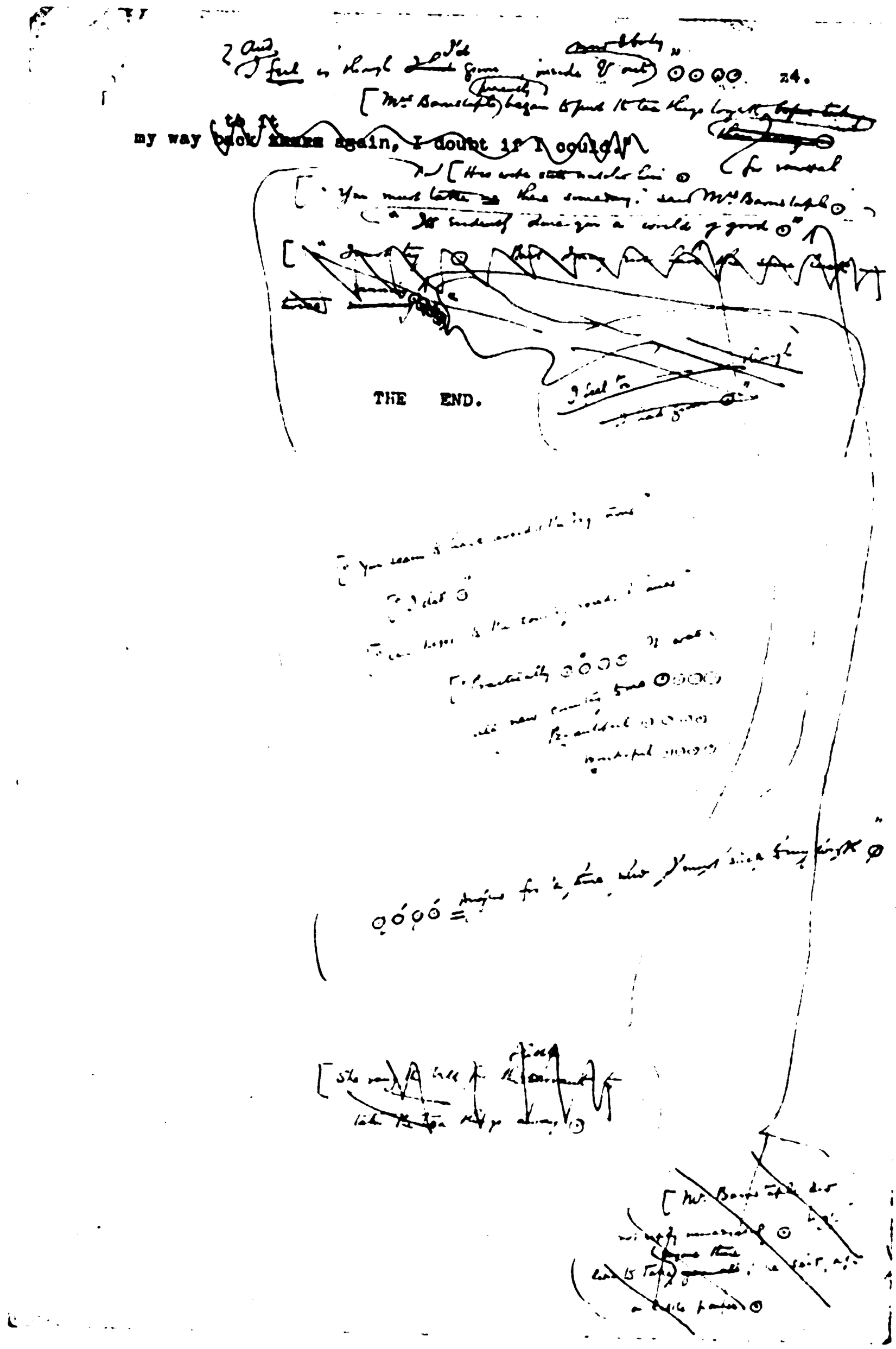

THE END.

FACSIMILE OF A PAGE FROM THE MANUSCRIPT OF "*MEN LIKE GODS*"

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MEN LIKE GODS
AND
THE DREAM

BY

H. G. WELLS

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN, LTD.
MCMXXVII

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PREFACE TO VOLUME XXVIII

In 1921 and 1922 the author returned to the Utopian method and tried to work out a picture of that world "like a garden," which his "Short History," his Washington Papers, and indeed all his later journalism had foreshadowed. It was an interesting piece of writing for him. Manifestly the world of "Men Like Gods" is maturer and further on than "A Modern Utopia." The Samurai as a separate ruling class, and all sorts of suggestions in that former book, have evaporated. In "Men Like Gods" all the people are Samurai. The writer's belief in a scientific reorganisation of society based on a broader conception of education has grown more confident with the years. He is no longer disposed to admit the necessary survival of inferior types. The story was first published in an illustrated magazine, and there was a certain embarrassment for the editor and his artist in the complete nudity of the Utopian characters. But that nudity had a symbolical value too great to be mitigated. It emphasised that uncompromising frankness, that stark reality, which is the very soul of the new world of the author's hope and desire. To escape from the passionately egotistical beast in our inheritance man has had to submit to taboos, confuse himself in a moral conflict, wear clothes and cheat his every instinct for hundreds of

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thousands of years. But his escape is almost made, and we can venture now to face the prospect of a future in which all these once necessary restraints and disguises will be laid aside again.

The telepathy in this story is obviously a story-teller's device to evade a tedious discussion of the probable evolution of languages. The author believes no more in telepathy as a practicable reality than he does in the manufacture of "Cavorite" (in "The First Men in the Moon") as a business proposition. It is just a convenient fiction for jumping a gap.

One of the most interesting things that was brought home to the writer by the construction and publication and reception of "Men Like Gods" was the "uncomfortableness" of a perfect world for such beings as ourselves. He tried to bring out the conflict in Mr. Barnstaple and his associates. Much of the literary criticism of "Men Like Gods" merely repeated what Father Amerton and Mr. Catskill and the two chauffeurs had said already about that uncongenial life into which they had blundered. And there were plenty of people to be found who thanked God they could not possibly live to see such an age. They could discover no interest in it except the lasciviousness that seemed to them a natural consequence of nakedness. They could not realise that the sensuous stir set up in them by the mere thought of the unclothed body is due entirely to the shock of its unusualness. Moreover, the tremendous excitement and delight of creative scientific work was a sealed book to them. In "The Dream," which is evidently the converse of "Men Like Gods,"

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they contrasted the intense, if painful, living of the earthly characters with the less feverish happiness of the Utopians. These latter had no quarrels and no hates, no tragic loyalties, and no distressed devotions; and that impressed these lovers of humanity as moral bleakness, a lack of richness. Of course the present life is richer in interest for such people; that is undeniable; just as a rat-infested drain is richer in interest for a dog than a library or a laboratory. Slum-bred children prefer their slums to the open country, and the first impulse of a rat released into sunlight is headlong flight.

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BOOK THE FIRST

THE IRRUPTION OF THE EARTHLINGS

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CHAPTER THE FIRST

MR. BARNSTAPLE TAKES A HOLIDAY

§ 1

R. BARNSTAPLE found himself in urgent need of a holiday, and he had no one to go with and nowhere to go. He was overworked. And he was tired of home.

He was a man of strong natural affections; he loved his family extremely so that he knew it by heart, and when he was in these jaded moods it bored him acutely. His three sons, who were all growing up, seemed to get leggier and larger every day; they sat down in the chairs he was just going to sit down in; they played him off his own pianola; they filled the house with hoarse, vast laughter at jokes that he couldn't demand to be told; they cut in on the elderly harmless flirtations that had hitherto been one of his chief consolations in this vale; they beat him at tennis; they fought playfully on the landings, and fell down-stairs by twos and threes with an enormous racket. Their hats were everywhere. They were late for breakfast. They went to bed every night in a storm of uproar: "Haw, Haw, Haw—*bump!*" and their mother seemed to like it. They all cost money, with a cheerful disregard of the fact that everything had gone up except Mr. Barnstaple's earning power. And when he said a few plain truths

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about Mr. Lloyd George at meal-times, or made the slightest attempt to raise the tone of the table-talk above the level of the silliest persiflage, their attention wandered ostentatiously. . . . At any rate it *seemed* ostentatiously.

He wanted badly to get away from his family to some place where he could think of its various members with quiet pride and affection, and otherwise not be disturbed by them. . . .

And also he wanted to get away for a time from Mr. Peeve. The very streets were becoming a torment to him, he wanted never to see a newspaper or a newspaper placard again. He was obsessed by apprehensions of some sort of financial and economic smash that would make the Great War seem a mere incidental catastrophe. This was because he was sub-editor and general factotum of *The Liberal*, that well-known organ of the more depressing aspects of advanced thought; and the unvarying pessimism of Mr. Peeve, his chief, was infecting him more and more. Formerly it had been possible to put up a sort of resistance to Mr. Peeve by joking furtively about his gloom with the other members of the staff, but now there were no other members of the staff: they had all been retrenched by Mr. Peeve in a mood of financial despondency. Practically, now, nobody wrote regularly for *The Liberal* except Mr. Barnstaple and Mr. Peeve. So Mr. Peeve had it all his own way with Mr. Barnstaple. He would sit hunched up in the editorial chair, with his hands deep in his trouser pockets, taking a gloomy view of everything, sometimes for two hours together. Mr.

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Barnstaple's natural tendency was towards a modest hopefulness and a belief in progress, but Mr. Peeve held very strongly that a belief in progress was at least six years out of date, and that the brightest hope that remained to Liberalism was for a good Day of Judgment soon. And having finished the copy of what the staff, when there was a staff, used to call his weekly indigest, Mr. Peeve would depart and leave Mr. Barnstaple to get the rest of the paper together for the next week.

Even in ordinary times Mr. Peeve would have been hard enough to live with; but the times were not ordinary, they were full of disagreeable occurrences that made his melancholy anticipations all too plausible. The great coal lockout had been going on for a month and seemed to foreshadow the commercial ruin of England; every morning brought intelligence of fresh outrages from Ireland, unforgivable and unforgettable outrages; a prolonged drought threatened the harvests of the world; the League of Nations, of which Mr. Barnstaple had hoped enormous things in the great days of President Wilson, was a melancholy and self-satisfied futility; everywhere there was conflict, everywhere unreason; seven-eighths of the world seemed to be sinking down towards chronic disorder and social dissolution. Even without Mr. Peeve it would have been difficult enough to have made headway against the facts.

Mr. Barnstaple was, indeed, ceasing to secrete hope, and for such types as he, hope is the essential solvent without which there is no digesting life. His

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hope had always been in liberalism and generous liberal effort, but he was beginning to think that liberalism would never do anything more for ever than sit hunched up with its hands in its pockets grumbling and peeving at the activities of baser but more energetic men. Whose scrambling activities would inevitably wreck the world.

Night and day now, Mr. Barnstaple was worrying about the world at large. By night even more than by day, for sleep was leaving him. And he was haunted by a dreadful craving to bring out a number of *The Liberal* of his very own—to alter it all after Mr. Peeve had gone away, to cut out all the dyspeptic stuff, the miserable empty girding at this wrong and that, the gloating on cruel and unhappy things, the exaggeration of the simple natural human misdeeds of Mr. Lloyd George, the appeals to Lord Grey, Lord Robert Cecil, Lord Lansdowne, the Pope, Queen Anne, or the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (it varied from week to week), to arise and give voice and form to the young aspirations of a world reborn, and, instead, to fill the number with —Utopia! to say to the amazed readers of *The Liberal:* Here are things that have to be done! Here are the things we are going to do! What a blow it would be for Mr. Peeve at his Sunday breakfast! For once, too astonished to secrete abnormally, he might even digest that meal!

But this was the most foolish of dreaming. There were the three young Barnstaples at home and their need for a decent start in life to consider. And beautiful as the thing was as a dream, Mr. Barn-

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staple had a very unpleasant conviction that he was not really clever enough to pull such a thing off. He would make a mess of it somehow. . . .

One might jump from the frying-pan into the fire. *The Liberal* was a dreary, discouraging, ungenerous paper, but anyhow it was not a base and wicked paper.

Still, if there was to be no such disastrous outbreak it was imperative that Mr. Barnstaple should rest from Mr. Peeve for a time. Once or twice already he had contradicted him. A row might occur anywhen. And the first step towards resting from Mr. Peeve was evidently to see a doctor. So Mr. Barnstaple went to a doctor.

"My nerves are getting out of control," said Mr. Barnstaple. "I feel horribly neurasthenic."

"You are suffering from neurasthenia," said the doctor.

"I dread my daily work."

"You want a holiday."

"You think I need a change?"

"As complete a change as you can manage."

"Can you recommend any place where I could go?"

"Where do you want to go?"

"Nowhere definite. I thought you could recommend——"

"Let some place attract you—and go there. Do nothing to force your inclinations at the present time."

Mr. Barnstaple paid the doctor the sum of one guinea, and armed with these instructions prepared to break the news of his illness and his necessary

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absence to Mr. Peeve whenever the occasion seemed ripe for doing so.

§ 2

For a time this prospective holiday was merely a fresh addition to Mr. Barnstaple's already excessive burthen of worries. To decide to get away was to find oneself face to face at once with three apparently insurmountable problems: How to get away? Whither? And since Mr. Barnstaple was one of those people who tire very quickly of their own company: With whom? A sharp gleam of furtive scheming crept into the candid misery that had recently become Mr. Barnstaple's habitual expression. But then, no one took much notice of Mr. Barnstaple's expressions.

One thing was very clear in his mind. Not a word of this holiday must be breathed at home. If once Mrs. Barnstaple got wind of it, he knew exactly what would happen. She would, with an air of competent devotion, take charge of the entire business. "You must have a *good* holiday," she would say. She would select some rather distant and expensive resort in Cornwall or Scotland or Brittany, she would buy a lot of outfit, she would have afterthoughts to swell the luggage with inconvenient parcels at the last moment, and she would bring the boys. Probably she would arrange for one or two groups of acquaintances to come to the same place to "liven things up." If they did they were certain to bring the worst sides of their natures with them and to develop into the most indefatigable of bores. There would be no

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conversation. There would be much unreal laughter. There would be endless games. . . . *No!*

But how is a man to go away for a holiday without his wife getting wind of it? Somehow a bag must be packed and smuggled out of the house. . . .

The most hopeful thing about Mr. Barnstaple's position from Mr. Barnstaple's point of view was that he owned a small automobile of his very own. It was natural that this car should play a large part in his secret plannings. It seemed to offer the easiest means of getting away; it converted the possible answer to Whither? from a fixed and definite place into what mathematicians call, I believe, a locus; and there was something so companionable about the little beast that it did to a slight but quite perceptible extent answer the question, With whom? It was a two-seater. It was known in the family as the Foot-bath, Colman's Mustard, and the Yellow Peril. As these names suggest, it was a low, open car of a clear yellow colour. Mr. Barnstaple used it to come up to the office from Sydenham because it did thirty-three miles to the gallon and was ever so much cheaper than a season ticket. It stood up in the court under the office window during the day. At Sydenham it lived in a shed of which Mr. Barnstaple carried the only key. So far he had managed to prevent the boys from either driving it or taking it to pieces. At times Mrs. Barnstaple made him drive her about Sydenham for her shopping, but she did not really like the little car because it exposed her to the elements too much and made her dusty and dishevelled. Both by reason of all that it made

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possible and by reason of all that it debarred, the little car was clearly indicated as the medium for the needed holiday. And Mr. Barnstaple really liked driving it. He drove very badly, but he drove very carefully; and though it sometimes stopped and refused to proceed, it did not do, or at any rate it had not so far done, as most other things did in Mr. Barnstaple's life, which was to go due east when he turned the steering-wheel west. So that it gave him an agreeable sense of mastery.

In the end Mr. Barnstaple made his decisions with great rapidity. Opportunity suddenly opened in front of him. Thursday was his day at the printer's, and he came home on Thursday evening feeling horribly jaded. The weather kept obstinately hot and dry. It made it none the less distressing that this drought presaged famine and misery for half the world. And London was in full season, smart and grinning: if anything it was a sillier year than 1913, the great tango year, which, in the light of subsequent events, Mr. Barnstaple had hitherto regarded as the silliest year in the world's history. *The Star* had the usual batch of bad news along the margin of the sporting and fashionable intelligence that got the displayed space. Fighting was going on between the Russians and Poles, and also in Ireland, Asia Minor, the India frontier, and Eastern Siberia. There had been three new horrible murders. The miners were still out, and a big engineering strike was threatened. There had been only standing-room in the down-train and it had started twenty minutes late.

He found a note from his wife explaining that her

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cousins at Wimbledon had telegraphed that there was an unexpected chance of seeing the tennis there with Mademoiselle Lenglen and all the rest of the champions, and that she had gone over with the boys and would not be back until late. It would do their game no end of good, she said, to see some really first-class tennis. Also it was the servants' social that night. Would he mind being left alone in the house for once? The servants would put him out some cold supper before they went.

Mr. Barnstaple read this note with resignation. While he ate his supper he ran his eye over a pamphlet a Chinese friend had sent him to show how the Japanese were deliberately breaking up what was left of the civilisation and education of China.

It was only as he was sitting and smoking a pipe in his little back garden after supper that he realised all that being left alone in the house meant for him.

Then suddenly he became very active. He rang up Mr. Peeve, told him of the doctor's verdict, explained that the affairs of *The Liberal* were just then in a particularly leavable state, and got his holiday. Then he went to his bedroom and packed up a hasty selection of things to take with him in an old Gladstone bag that was not likely to be immediately missed, and put this in the dickey of his car. After which he spent some time upon a letter which he addressed to his wife and put away very carefully in his breast pocket.

Then he locked up the car-shed and composed himself in a deck-chair in the garden with his pipe and a nice thoughtful book on the Bankruptcy of Europe,

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so as to look and feel as innocent as possible before his family came home.

When his wife returned he told her casually that he believed he was suffering from neurasthenia, and that he had arranged to run up to London on the morrow and consult a doctor in the matter.

Mrs. Barnstaple wanted to choose him a doctor, but he got out of that by saying that he had to consider Peeve in the matter and that Peeve was very strongly set on the man he had already in fact consulted. And when Mrs. Barnstaple said that she believed they *all* wanted a good holiday, he just grunted in a non-committal manner.

In this way Mr. Barnstaple was able to get right away from his house with all the necessary luggage for some weeks' absence, without arousing any insurmountable opposition. He started next morning Londonward. The traffic on the way was gay and plentiful, but by no means troublesome, and the Yellow Peril was running so sweetly that she might almost have been named the Golden Hope. In Camberwell he turned into the Camberwell New Road and made his way to the post-office at the top of Vauxhall Bridge Road. There he drew up. He was scared but elated by what he was doing. He went into the post-office and sent his wife a telegram. "Dr. Pagan," he wrote, "says solitude and rest urgently needed so am going off Lake District recuperate have got bag and things expecting this letter follows."

Then he came outside and fumbled in his pocket and produced and posted the letter he had written so carefully overnight. It was deliberately scrawled

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to suggest neurasthenia at an acute phase. Dr. Pagan, it explained, had ordered an immediate holiday and suggested that Mr. Barnstaple should "wander north." It would be better to cut off all letters for a few days, or even a week or so. He would not trouble to write unless something went wrong. No news would be good news. Rest assured all would be well. As soon as he had a certain address for letters he would wire it, but only very urgent things were to be sent on.

After this he resumed his seat in his car with such a sense of freedom as he had not felt since his first holidays from his first school. He made for the Great North Road, but at the traffic jam at Hyde Park Corner he allowed the policeman to turn him down towards Knightsbridge, and afterwards at the corner where the Bath Road forks away from the Oxford Road an obstructive van put him into the former. But it did not matter very much. Any way led to Elsewhere and he could work northward later.

§ 3

The day was one of those days of gay sunshine that were characteristic of the great drought of 1921. It was not in the least sultry. Indeed there was a freshness about it that blended with Mr. Barnstaple's mood to convince him that there were quite agreeable adventures before him. Hope had already returned to him. He knew he was on the way out of things, though as yet he had not the slightest suspicion how completely out of things the way was

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going to take him. It would be quite a little adventure presently to stop at an inn and get some lunch, and if he felt lonely as he went on he would give somebody a lift and talk. It would be quite easy to give people lifts because so long as his back was generally towards Sydenham and *The Liberal* office, it did not matter at all now in which direction he went.

A little way out of Slough he was passed by an enormous grey touring-car. It made him start and swerve. It came up alongside him without a sound, and though according to his only very slightly inaccurate speedometer, he was doing a good twenty-seven miles an hour, it had passed him in a moment. Its occupants, he noted, were three gentlemen and a lady. They were all sitting up and looking backward as though they were interested in something that was following them. They went by too quickly for him to note more than that the lady was radiantly lovely in an immediate and indisputable way, and that the gentleman nearest to him had a peculiarly elfin yet elderly face.

Before he could recover from the *éclat* of this passage a car with the voice of a prehistoric saurian warned him that he was again being overtaken. This was how Mr. Barnstaple liked being passed. By negotiation. He slowed down, abandoned any claim to the crown of the road and made encouraging gestures with his hand. A large smooth swift limousine availed itself of his permission to use the thirty-odd feet or so of road to the right of him. It was carrying a fair load of luggage, but except for a young gentleman with an eye-glass who was

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sitting beside the driver, he saw nothing of its passengers. It swept round a corner ahead in the wake of the touring-car.

Now even a mechanical foot-bath does not like being passed in this lordly fashion on a bright morning on the open road. Mr. Barnstaple's accelerator went down and he came round that corner a good ten miles per hour faster than his usual cautious practice. He found the road quite clear ahead of him.

Indeed he found the road much too clear ahead of him. It stretched straight in front of him for perhaps a third of a mile. On the left were a low, well-trimmed hedge, scattered trees, level fields, some small cottages lying back, remote poplars, and a distant view of Windsor Castle. On the right were level fields, a small inn, and a background of low, wooded hills. A conspicuous feature in this tranquil landscape was the board advertisement of a riverside hotel at Maidenhead. Before him was a sort of heat flicker in the air and two or three little dust whirls spinning along the road. And there was not a sign of the grey touring-car and not a sign of the limousine.

It took Mr. Barnstaple the better part of two seconds to realise the full astonishment of this fact. Neither to right nor left was there any possible side road down which either car could have vanished. And if they had already got round the further bend, then they must be travelling at the rate of two or three hundred miles per hour!

It was Mr. Barnstaple's excellent custom whenever

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he was in doubt to slow down. He slowed down now. He went on at a pace of perhaps fifteen miles an hour, staring open-mouthed about the empty landscape for some clew to this mysterious disappearance. Curiously enough he had no feeling that he himself was in any sort of danger.

Then his car seemed to strike something and skidded. It skidded round so violently that for a moment or so Mr. Barnstaple lost his head. He could not remember what ought to be done when a car skids. He recalled something vaguely about steering in the direction in which the car is skidding, but he could not make out in the excitement of the moment in what direction the car was skidding.

Afterwards he remembered that at this point he heard a sound. It was exactly the same sound, coming as the climax of an accumulating pressure, sharp like the snapping of a lute string, which one hears at the end—or beginning—of insensibility under anæsthetics.

He had seemed to twist round towards the hedge on the right, but now he found the road ahead of him again. He touched his accelerator and then slowed down and stopped. He stopped in the profoundest astonishment.

This was an entirely different road from the one he had been upon half a minute before. The hedges had changed, the trees had altered, Windsor Castle had vanished, and—a small compensation—the big limousine was in sight again. It was standing by the roadside about two hundred yards away.

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CHAPTER THE SECOND

THE WONDERFUL ROAD

§ 1

For a time Mr. Barnstaple's attention was very unequally divided between the limousine, whose passengers were now descending, and the scenery about him. This latter was indeed so strange and beautiful that it was only as people who must be sharing his admiration and amazement and who therefore might conceivably help to elucidate and relieve his growing and quite overwhelming perplexity, that the little group ahead presently arose to any importance in his consciousness.

The road itself, instead of being the packed together pebbles and dirt smeared with tar, with a surface of grit, dust, and animal excrement, of a normal English highroad, was apparently made of glass, clear in places as still water and in places milky or opalescent, shot with streaks of soft colour or glittering richly with clouds of embedded golden flakes. It was perhaps twelve or fifteen yards wide. On either side was a band of greensward, of a finer grass than Mr. Barnstaple had ever seen before—and he was an expert and observant mower of lawns—and beyond this a wide border of flowers. Where Mr. Barnstaple sat agape in his car and perhaps for thirty yards in either direction this border was a mass of some unfamiliar blossom of forget-me-not

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blue. Then the colour was broken by an increasing number of tall, pure white spikes that finally ousted the blue altogether from the bed. On the opposite side of the way these same spikes were mingled with masses of plants bearing seed-pods equally strange to Mr. Barnstaple, which varied through a series of blues and mauves and purples to an intense crimson. Beyond this gloriously coloured foam of flowers spread flat meadows on which creamy cattle were grazing. Three close at hand, a little startled perhaps by Mr. Barnstaple's sudden apparition, chewed the cud and regarded him with benevolently speculative eyes. They had long horns and dewlaps like the cattle of South Europe and India. From these benign creatures Mr. Barnstaple's eyes went to a long line of flame-shaped trees, to a colonnade of white and gold, and to a background of snow-clad mountains. A few tall white clouds were sailing across a sky of dazzling blue. The air impressed Mr. Barnstaple as being astonishingly clear and sweet.

Except for the cows and the little group of people standing by the limousine, Mr. Barnstaple could see no other living creature. The motorists were standing still and staring about them. A sound of querulous voices came to him.

A sharp crepitation at his back turned Mr. Barnstaple's attention round. By the side of the road in the direction from which conceivably he had come were the ruins of what appeared to be a very recently demolished stone house. Beside it were two large apple-trees freshly twisted and riven, as if by some explosion, and out of the centre of it came a

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column of smoke and this sound of things catching fire. And the contorted lines of these shattered apple-trees helped Mr. Barnstaple to realise that some of the flowers by the wayside near at hand were also bent down to one side as if by the passage of a recent violent gust of wind. Yet he had heard no explosion nor felt any wind.

He stared for a time and then turned as if for an explanation to the limousine. Three of these people were now coming along the road towards him, led by a tall, slender, grey-headed gentleman in a felt hat and a long motoring dust-coat. He had a small upturned face with a little nose that scarce sufficed for the springs of his gilt glasses. Mr. Barnstaple restarted his engine and drove slowly to meet them.

As soon as he judged himself within hearing distance he stopped and put his head over the side of the Yellow Peril with a question. At the same moment the tall, grey-headed gentleman asked practically the same question:

"Can you tell me at all, sir, where we *are?*"

§ 2

"Five minutes ago," said Mr. Barnstaple, "I should have said we were on the Maidenhead Road. Near Slough."

"Exactly!" said the tall gentleman in earnest, argumentative tones. "Exactly! And I maintain that there is not the slightest reason for supposing that we are not still on the Maidenhead Road."

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The challenge of the dialectician rang in his voice.

"It doesn't *look* like the Maidenhead Road," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"Agreed! But are we to judge by appearances or are we to judge by the direct continuity of our experience? The Maidenhead Road led to this, was in continuity with this, and therefore I hold that this is the Maidenhead Road."

"Those mountains?" considered Mr. Barnstaple.

"Windsor Castle ought to be there," said the tall gentleman brightly as if he gave a point in a gambit.

"*Was* there five minutes ago," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"Then obviously those mountains are some sort of camouflage," said the tall gentleman triumphantly, "and the whole of this business is, as they say nowadays, a put-up thing."

"It seems to be remarkably well put up," said Mr. Barnstaple.

Came a pause during which Mr. Barnstaple surveyed the tall gentleman's companions. The tall gentleman he knew perfectly well. He had seen him a score of times at public meetings and public dinners. He was Mr. Cecil Burleigh, the great conservative leader. He was not only distinguished as a politician; he was eminent as a private gentleman, a philosopher and a man of universal intelligence. Behind him stood a short, thick-set, middle-aged young man, unknown to Mr. Barnstaple, the natural hostility of whose appearance was greatly enhanced by an eye-glass. The third member of the little group was also a familiar form, but for a time Mr. Barn-

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staple could not place him. He had a clean-shaven round plump face and a well-nourished person, and his costume suggested either a high church clergyman or a prosperous Roman Catholic priest.

The young man with the eye-glass now spoke in a kind of impotent falsetto. "I came down to Taplow Court by road not a month ago and there was certainly nothing of this sort on the way then."

"I admit there are difficulties," said Mr. Burleigh with gusto. "I admit there are considerable difficulties. Still, I venture to think my main proposition holds."

"*You* don't think this is the Maidenhead Road?" said the gentleman with the eye-glass flatly to Mr. Barnstaple.

"It seems too perfect for a put-up thing," said Mr. Barnstaple with a mild obstinacy.

"But, my dear sir!" protested Mr. Burleigh, "this road is *notorious* for nursery seedsmen, and sometimes they arrange the most astonishing displays. As an advertisement."

"Then why don't we go straight on to Taplow Court now?" asked the gentleman with the eye-glass.

"Because," said Mr. Burleigh, with the touch of asperity natural when one has to insist on a fact already clearly known, and obstinately overlooked, "Rupert insists that we are in some other world. And won't go on. That is why. He has always had too much imagination. He thinks that things that don't exist *can* exist. And now he imagines himself in some sort of scientific romance and out of our

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world altogether. In another dimension. I sometimes think it would have been better for all of us if Rupert had taken to writing romances—instead of living them. If you, as his secretary, think that you will be able to get him on to Taplow in time for lunch with the Windsor people——"

Mr. Burleigh indicated by a gesture ideas for which he found words inadequate.

Mr. Barnstaple had already noted a slow-moving, intent, sandy-complexioned figure in a grey top hat with a black band that the caricaturists had made familiar, exploring the flowery tangle beside the limousine. This then must be no less well known a person than Rupert Catskill, the Secretary of State for War. For once, Mr. Barnstaple found himself in entire agreement with this all too adventurous politician. This *was* another world. Mr. Barnstaple got out of his car and addressed himself to Mr. Burleigh. "I think we may get a lot of light upon just where we are, sir, if we explore this building which is burning here close at hand. I thought just now that I saw a figure lying on the slope close behind it. If we could catch one of the hoaxers——"

He left his sentence unfinished because he did not believe for a moment that they were being hoaxed. Mr. Burleigh had fallen very much in his opinion in the last five minutes.

All four men turned their faces to the smoking ruin.

"It's a very extraordinary thing that there isn't a soul in sight," remarked the eye-glass gentleman, searching the horizon.

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"Well, I see no harm whatever in finding out what is burning," said Mr. Burleigh and led the way, upholding an intelligent anticipatory face, towards the wrecked house between the broken trees.

But before he had gone a dozen paces the attention of the little group was recalled to the limousine by a loud scream of terror from the lady who had remained seated therein.

§ 3

"Really this is too much!" cried Mr. Burleigh with a note of genuine exasperation. "There must surely be police regulations to prevent this kind of thing."

"It's out of some travelling menagerie," said the gentleman with the eye-glass. "What ought we to do?"

"It looks tame," said Mr. Barnstaple, but without any impulse to put his theory to the test.

"It might easily frighten people very seriously," said Mr. Burleigh. And lifting up a bland voice he shouted: "Don't be alarmed, Stella! It's probably quite tame and harmless. Don't *irritate* it with that sunshade. It might fly at you. Stel-*la!*"

"It" was a big and beautifully marked leopard which had come very softly out of the flowers and sat down like a great cat in the middle of the glass road at the side of the big car. It was blinking and moving its head from side to side rhythmically, with an expression of puzzled interest, as the lady, in accordance with the best traditions of such cases,

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opened and shut her parasol at it as rapidly as she could. The chauffeur had taken cover behind the car. Mr. Rupert Catskill stood staring, knee-deep in flowers, apparently only made aware of the creature's existence by the same scream that had attracted the attention of Mr. Burleigh and his companions.

Mr. Catskill was the first to act, and his act showed his mettle. It was at once discreet and bold. "Stop flopping that sunshade, Lady Stella," he said. "Let me—I will—catch its eye."

He made a detour round the car so as to come face to face with the animal. Then for a moment he stood, as it were displaying himself, a resolute little figure in a grey frock coat and a black-banded top hat. He held out a cautious hand, not too suddenly for fear of startling the creature. "*Poossy!*" he said.

The leopard, relieved by the cessation of Lady Stella's sunshade, regarded him with interest and curiosity. He drew closer. The leopard extended its muzzle and sniffed.

"If it will only let me stroke it," said Mr. Catskill, and came within arm's length.

The beast sniffed the extended hand with an expression of incredulity. Then with a suddenness that sent Mr. Catskill back several paces, it sneezed. It sneezed again much more violently, regarded Mr. Catskill reproachfully for a moment and then leaped lightly over the flower-bed and made off in the direction of the white and golden colonnade. The grazing cattle in the field, Mr. Barnstaple noted, watched its passage without the slightest sign of dismay.

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Mr. Catskill remained in a slightly expanded state in the middle of the road. "No animal," he remarked, "can stand up to the steadfast gaze of the human eye. Not one. It is a riddle for your materialist. . . . Shall we join Mr. Cecil, Lady Stella? He seems to have found something to look at down there. The man in the little yellow car may know where he is. H'm?"

He assisted the lady to get out of the car and the two came on after Mr. Barnstaple's party, which was now again approaching the burning house. The chauffeur, evidently not wishing to be left alone with the limousine in this world of incredible possibilities, followed as closely as respect permitted.

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CHAPTER THE THIRD

THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

§ 1

THE fire in the little house did not seem to be making headway. The smoke that came from it was much less now than when Mr. Barnstaple had first observed it. As they came close they found a quantity of twisted bits of bright metal and fragments of broken glass among the shattered masonry. The suggestion of exploded scientific apparatus was very strong. Then almost simultaneously the entire party became aware of a body lying on the grassy slope behind the ruins. It was the body of a man in the prime of life, naked except for a couple of bracelets and a necklace and girdle, and blood was oozing from his mouth and nostrils. With a kind of awe Mr. Barnstaple knelt down beside this prostrate figure and felt its still heart. He had never seen so beautiful a face and body before.

"*Dead,*" he whispered.

"Look!" cried the shrill voice of the man with the eye-glass. "Another!"

He was pointing to something that was hidden from Mr. Barnstaple by a piece of wall. Mr. Barnstaple had to get up and climb over a heap of rubble before he could see this second find. It was a slender girl, clothed as little as the man. She had

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evidently been flung with enormous violence against the wall and killed instantaneously. Her face was quite undistorted although her skull had been crushed in from behind; her perfect mouth and green-grey eyes were a little open and her expression was that of one who is still thinking out some difficult but interesting problem. She did not seem in the least dead but merely disregardful. One hand still grasped a copper implement with a handle of glass. The other lay limp and prone.

For some seconds nobody spoke. It was as if they all feared to interrupt the current of her thoughts.

Then Mr. Barnstaple heard the voice of the priestly gentleman speaking very softly behind him. "What a *perfect* form!" he said.

"I admit I was wrong," said Mr. Burleigh with deliberation. "I have been wrong. . . . These are no earthly people. Manifestly. And *ergo*, we are not on earth. I cannot imagine what has happened nor where we are. In the face of sufficient evidence I have never hesitated to retract an opinion. This world we are in is not our world. It is something——"

He paused. "It is something very wonderful indeed."

"And the Windsor party," said Mr. Catskill without any apparent regret, "must have its lunch without us."

"But then," said the clerical gentleman, "what world *are* we in, and how did we get here?"

"Ah! *there*," said Mr. Burleigh blandly, "you go altogether beyond my poor powers of guessing. We are here in some world that is singularly like our

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world and singularly unlike it. It must be in some way related to our world or we could not be here. But how it can be related, is, I confess, a hopeless mystery to me. Maybe we are in some other dimension of space than those we wot of. But my poor head whirls at the thought of these dimensions. I am— I am *mazed—mazed.*"

"Einstein," injected the gentleman with the eyeglass compactly and with evident self-satisfaction.

"Exactly!" said Mr. Burleigh. "Einstein might make it clear to us. Or dear old Haldane might undertake to explain it and fog us up with that adipose Hegelianism of his. But I am neither Haldane nor Einstein. Here we are in some world which is, for all practical purposes, including the purposes of our week-end engagements, Nowhere. Or if you prefer the Greek of it, we are in Utopia. And as I do not see that there is any manifest way out of it again, I suppose the thing we have to do as rational creatures is to make the best of it. And watch our opportunities. It is certainly a very lovely world. The loveliness is even greater than the wonder. And there are human beings here—with minds. I judge from all this material lying about, it is a world in which experimental chemistry is pursued—pursued indeed to the bitter end—under almost idyllic conditions. Chemistry—and nakedness. I feel bound to confess that whether we are to regard these two people who have apparently just blown themselves up here as Greek gods or as naked savages, seems to me to be altogether a question of individual taste. I admit a bias for the Greek god—and goddess."

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"Except that it is a little difficult to think of two dead immortals," squeaked the gentleman of the eye-glass in the tone of one who scores a point.

Mr. Burleigh was about to reply, and to judge from his ruffled expression his reply would have been of a disciplinary nature. But instead he exclaimed sharply and turned round to face two newcomers. The whole party had become aware of them at the same moment. Two stark Apollos stood over the ruin and were regarding our Earthlings with an astonishment at least as great as that they created.

One spoke, and Mr. Barnstaple was astonished beyond measure to find understandable words reverberating in his mind.

"Red Gods!" cried the Utopian. "What things are you? And how did you get into the world?"

(English! It would have been far less astounding if they had spoken Greek. But that they should speak any known language was a matter for incredulous amazement.)

§ 2

Mr. Cecil Burleigh was the least disconcerted of the party. "Now," he said, "we may hope to learn something definite—face to face with rational and articulate creatures."

He cleared his throat, grasped the lapels of his long dust-coat with two long nervous hands and assumed the duties of spokesman. "We are quite unable, gentlemen, to account for our presence here," he said. "We are as puzzled as you are. We have

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discovered ourselves suddenly in your world instead of our own."

"You come from another world?"

"Exactly. A quite different world. In which we have all our natural and proper places. We were travelling in that world of ours in—Ah!—certain vehicles, when suddenly we discovered ourselves here. Intruders, I admit, but, I can assure you, innocent and unpremeditated intruders."

"You do not know how it is that Arden and Greenlake have failed in their experiment and how it is that they are dead?"

"If Arden and Greenlake are the names of these two beautiful young people here, we know nothing about them except that we found them lying as you see them when we came from the road hither to find out or, in fact, to inquire——"

He cleared his throat and left his sentence with a floating end.

The Utopian, if we may for convenience call him that, who had first spoken, looked now at his companion and seemed to question him mutely. Then he turned to the Earthlings again. He spoke and again those clear tones rang, not—so it seemed to Mr. Barnstaple—in his ears but within his head.

"It will be well if you and your friends do not trample this wreckage. It will be well if you all return to the road. Come with me. My brother here will put an end to this burning and do what needs to be done to our brother and sister. And afterwards this place will be examined by those who understand the work that was going on here."

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"We must throw ourselves entirely upon your hospitality," said Mr. Burleigh. "We are entirely at your disposal. This encounter, let me repeat, was not of our seeking."

"Though we should certainly have sought it if we had known of its possibility," said Mr. Catskill, addressing the world at large and glancing at Mr. Barnstaple as if for confirmation. "We find this world of yours—*most* attractive."

"At the first encounter," the gentleman with the eye-glass indorsed, "a *most* attractive world."

As they returned through the thick-growing flowers to the road, in the wake of the Utopian and Mr. Burleigh, Mr. Barnstaple found Lady Stella rustling up beside him. Her words, in this setting of pure wonder, filled him with amazement at their serene and invincible ordinariness. "Haven't we met before somewhere—at lunch or something—Mr.—Mr.——?"

Was all this no more than a show? He stared at her blankly for a moment before supplying her with:

"Barnstaple."

"Mr. Barnstaple?"

His mind came into line with hers.

"I've never had that pleasure, Lady Stella. Though, of course, I know you—I know you very well from your photographs in the weekly illustrated papers."

"Did you hear what it was that Mr. Cecil was saying just now? About this being Utopia?"

"He said we might *call* it Utopia."

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"So like Mr. Cecil. But is it Utopia?—*really* Utopia?

"I've always longed so to be in Utopia," the lady went on without waiting for Mr. Barnstaple's reply to her question. "What splendid young men these two Utopians appear to be! They must, I am sure, belong to its aristocracy—in spite of their—informal—costume. Or even because of it." . . .

Mr. Barnstaple had a happy thought. "I have also recognised Mr. Burleigh and Mr. Rupert Catskill, Lady Stella, but I should be so glad if you would tell me who the young gentleman with the eye-glass is, and the clerical gentleman. They are close behind us."

Lady Stella imparted her information in a charmingly confidential undertone. "The eye-glass," she murmured, "is—I am going to spell it—F–R–E–D–D–Y M–U–S–H. Taste. Good taste. He is awfully clever at finding out young poets and all that sort of literary thing. And he's Rupert's secretary. If there is a literary Academy, they say, he's certain to be in it. He's dreadfully critical and sarcastic. We were going to Taplow for a perfectly intellectual week-end, quite like the old times. So soon as the Windsor people had gone again, that is. . . . Mr. Gosse was coming and Max Beerbohm—and every one like that. But nowadays something always happens. Always. . . . The unexpected—almost excessively. . . . The clerical collar"—she glanced back to judge whether she was within earshot of the gentleman under discussion—"is Father Amerton, who is so dreadfully outspoken about the sins of

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society and all *that* sort of thing. It's odd, but out of the pulpit he's inclined to be shy and quiet and a little awkward with the forks and spoons. Paradoxical, isn't it?"

"Of *course!*" cried Mr. Barnstaple. "I remember him now. I knew his face but I couldn't place it. Thank you so much, Lady Stella."

§ 3

There was something very reassuring to Mr. Barnstaple in the company of these famous and conspicuous people and particularly in the presence of Lady Stella. She was indeed heartening; she brought so much of the dear old world with her, and she was so manifestly prepared to subjugate this new world to its standards at the earliest possible opportunity. She fended off much of the wonder and beauty that had threatened to submerge Mr. Barnstaple altogether. Meeting her and her companions was in itself for a man in his position a minor but considerable adventure that helped to bridge the gulf of astonishment between the humdrum of his normal experiences and this all too bracing Utopian air. It solidified, it —if one may use the word in such a connection—it *degraded* the luminous splendour about him towards complete credibility that it should also be seen and commented on by her and by Mr. Burleigh, and viewed through the appraising monocle of Mr. Freddy Mush. It brought it within range of the things that get into the newspapers. Mr. Barnstaple alone in Utopia might have been so completely over-

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awed as to have been mentally overthrown. This easy-mannered, brown-skinned divinity who was now exchanging questions with Mr. Burleigh was made mentally accessible by that great man's intervention.

Yet it was with something very like a catching of the breath that Mr. Barnstaple's attention reverted from the limousine people to this noble-seeming world into which he and they had fallen. What sort of beings really were these men and women of a world where ill-bred weeds, it seemed, had ceased to thrust and fight amidst the flowers, and where leopards void of feline malice looked out with friendly eyes upon the passer-by?

It was astounding that the first two inhabitants they had found in this world of subjugated nature should be lying dead, victims, it would seem, of some hazardous experiment. It was still more astonishing that this other pair who called themselves the brothers of the dead man and woman should betray so little grief or dismay at the tragedy. There had been no emotional scene at all, Mr. Barnstaple realised, no consternation or weeping. They were evidently much more puzzled and interested than either horrified or distressed.

The Utopian who had remained in the ruin had carried out the body of the girl to lay it beside her companion's, and he had now, Mr. Barnstaple saw, returned to a close scrutiny of the wreckage of the experiment.

But now more of these people were coming upon the scene. They had aeroplanes in this world, for two small ones, noiseless and swift in their flight as

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swallows, had landed in the fields near by. A man had come up along the road on a machine like a small two-wheeled two-seater with its wheels in series, bicycle fashion; lighter and neater it was than any earthly automobile and mysteriously able to stand up on its two wheels while standing still. A burst of laughter from down the road called Mr. Barnstaple's attention to a group of these Utopians who had apparently found something exquisitely ridiculous in the engine of the limousine. Most of these people were as scantily clothed and as beautifully built as the two dead experimentalists, but one or two were wearing big hats of straw, and one who seemed to be an older woman of thirty or more wore a robe of white bordered by an intense red line. She was speaking now to Mr. Burleigh.

Although she was a score of yards away, her speech presented itself in Mr. Barnstaple's mind with great distinctness.

"We do not even know as yet what connection your coming into our world may have with the explosion that has just happened here or whether, indeed, it has any connection. We want to inquire into both these things. It will be reasonable, we think, to take you and all the possessions you have brought with you to a convenient place for a conference not very far from here. We are arranging for machines to take you thither. There perhaps you will eat. I do not know when you are accustomed to eat?"

"Refreshment," said Mr. Burleigh, rather catching at the idea. "Some refreshment would certainly be

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acceptable before very long. In fact, had we not fallen so sharply out of our own world into yours, by this time we should have been lunching—lunching in the best of company."

"Wonder and lunch," thought Mr. Barnstaple. Man is a creature who must eat by necessity whether he wonder or no. Mr. Barnstaple perceived indeed that he was already hungry and that the air he was breathing was a keen and appetising air.

The Utopian seemed struck by a novel idea. "Do you eat several times a day? What sort of things do you eat?"

"Oh! Surely! They're *not* vegetarians!" cried Mr. Mush sharply in a protesting parenthesis, dropping his eye-glass from its socket.

They were all hungry. It showed upon their faces.

"We are all accustomed to eat several times a day," said Mr. Burleigh. "Perhaps it would be well if I were to give you a brief résumé of our dietary. There may be differences. We begin, as a rule, with a simple cup of tea and the thinnest slice of bread-and-butter brought to the bedside. Then comes breakfast." . . . He proceeded to a masterly summary of his gastronomic day, giving clearly and attractively the particulars of an English breakfast, eggs to be boiled four and a half minutes, neither more nor less, lunch with any light wine, tea rather a social rally than a serious meal, dinner, in some detail, the occasional resort to supper. It was one of those clear statements which would have rejoiced the House of Commons, light, even gay, and yet with a trace of earnestness. The Utopian woman re-

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garded him with deepening interest as he proceeded. "Do you all eat in this fashion?" she asked.

Mr. Burleigh ran his eye over his party. "I cannot answer for Mr.—Mr.——?"

"Barnstaple. . . . Yes, I eat in much the same fashion."

For some reason the Utopian woman smiled at him. She had very pretty brown eyes, and though he liked her to smile he wished that she had not smiled in the way she did.

"And you sleep?" she asked.

"From six to ten hours, according to circumstances," said Mr. Burleigh.

"And you make love?"

The question perplexed and to a certain extent shocked our Earthlings. What exactly did she mean? For some moments no one framed a reply. Mr. Barnstaple's mind was filled with a hurrying rush of strange possibilities.

Then Mr. Burleigh, with his fine intelligence and the quick evasiveness of a modern leader of men, stepped into the breach. "Not habitually, I can assure you," he said. "Not habitually."

The woman with the red-bordered robe seemed to think this over for a swift moment. Then she smiled faintly.

"We must take you somewhere where we can talk of all these things," she said. "Manifestly you come from some strange other world. Our men of knowledge must get together with you and exchange ideas."

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§ 4

At half-past ten that morning Mr. Barnstaple had been motoring along the main road through Slough, and now at half-past one he was soaring through wonderland with his own world half forgotten. "Marvellous," he repeated. "Marvellous. I knew that I should have a good holiday. But *this, this——!*"

He was extraordinarily happy with the bright, unclouded happiness of a perfect dream. Never before had he enjoyed the delights of an explorer in new lands, never before had he hoped to experience these delights. Only a few weeks before he had written an article for *The Liberal* lamenting the "End of the Age of Exploration," an article so thoroughly and aimlessly depressing that it had pleased Mr. Peeve extremely. He recalled that exploit now with but the faintest twinge of remorse.

The Earthling party had been distributed among four small aeroplanes, and as Mr. Barnstaple and his companion, Father Amerton, rose in the air, he looked back to see the automobiles and luggage being lifted with astonishing ease into two lightly built lorries. Each lorry put out a pair of glittering arms and lifted up its automobile as a nurse might lift up a baby.

By contemporary earthly standards of safety Mr. Barnstaple's aviator flew very low. There were times when he passed between trees rather than over them, and this, even if at first it was a little alarming, permitted a fairly close inspection of the landscape.

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For the earlier part of the journey it was garden-pasture with grazing creamy cattle and patches of brilliantly coloured vegetation of a nature unknown to Mr. Barnstaple. Amidst this cultivation narrow tracks, which may have been foot or cycle tracks, threaded their way. Here and there ran a road bordered with flowers and shaded by fruit-trees.

There were few houses and no towns or villages at all. The houses varied very greatly in size, from little isolated buildings which Mr. Barnstaple thought might be elegant summer-houses or little temples, to clusters of roofs and turrets which reminded him of country châteaux or suggested extensive farming or dairying establishments. Here and there people were working in the fields or going to and fro on foot or on machines, but the effect of the whole was of an extremely underpopulated land.

It became evident that they were going to cross the range of snowy mountains that had so suddenly blotted the distant view of Windsor Castle from the landscape.

As they approached these mountains, broad stretches of golden corn-land replaced the green of the pastures and then the cultivation became more diversified. He noted unmistakable vineyards on sunny slopes, and the number of workers visible and the habitations multiplied. The little squadron of aeroplanes flew up a broad valley towards a pass so that Mr. Barnstaple was able to scrutinise the mountain scenery. Came chestnut woods and at last pines. There were Cyclopean turbines athwart the mountain torrents and long, low, many windowed buildings

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that might serve some industrial purpose. A skilfully graded road with exceedingly bold, light and beautiful viaducts mounted towards the pass. There were more people, he thought, in the highland country than in the levels below, though still far fewer than he would have seen upon any comparable countryside on earth.

Ten minutes of craggy desolation with the snowfields of a great glacier on one side intervened before he descended into the upland valley on the Conference Place where presently he alighted. This was a sort of lap in the mountain, terraced by masonry so boldly designed that it seemed a part of the geological substance of the mountain itself. It faced towards a wide artificial lake retained by a stupendous dam from the lower reaches of the valley. At intervals along this dam there were great stone pillars dimly suggestive of seated figures. He glimpsed a wide plain beyond, which reminded him of the valley of the Po, and then as he descended the straight line of the dam came up to hide this further vision.

Upon these terraces, and particularly upon the lower ones, were groups and clusters of flower-like buildings, and he distinguished paths and steps and pools of water as if the whole place were a garden.

The aeroplanes made an easy landing on a turfy expanse. Close at hand was a graceful châlet that ran out from the shores of the lake over the water, and afforded mooring to a flotilla of gaily coloured boats. . . .

It was Father Amerton who had drawn Mr. Barnstaple's attention to the absence of villages. He now

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remarked that there was no church in sight and that nowhere had they seen any spires or belfries. But Mr. Barnstaple thought that some of the smaller buildings might be temples or shrines. "Religion may take different forms here," he said.

"And how few babies or little children are visible!" Father Amerton remarked. "Nowhere have I seen a mother with her child."

"On the other side of the mountains there was a place like the playing-field of a big school. There were children there and one or two older people dressed in white."

"I saw that. But I was thinking of babes. Compare this with what one would see in Italy.

"The most beautiful and desirable young women," added the reverend gentleman; "*most* desirable—and not a sign of maternity!"

Their aviator, a sun-tanned blond with very blue eyes, helped them out of his machine, and they stood watching the descent of the other members of their party. Mr. Barnstaple was astonished to note how rapidly he was becoming familiarised with the colour and harmony of this new world; the strangest things in the whole spectacle now were the figures and clothing of his associates. Mr. Rupert Catskill in his celebrated grey top hat, Mr. Mush with his preposterous eye-glass, the peculiar long slenderness of Mr. Burleigh, and the square leather-clad lines of Mr. Burleigh's chauffeur, struck him as being far more incredible than the graceful Utopian forms about him.

The aviator's interest and amusement enhanced

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Mr. Barnstaple's perception of his companions' oddity. And then came a wave of profound doubt.

"I suppose this is *really* real," he said to Father Amerton.

"Really real! What else can it be?"

"I suppose we are not dreaming all this."

"Are your dreams and my dreams likely to coincide?"

"Yes; but there are quite impossible things—absolutely impossible things."

"As, for instance?"

"Well, how is it that these people are speaking to us in English—modern English?"

"I never thought of that. It is rather incredible. They don't talk in English to one another."

Mr. Barnstaple stared in round-eyed amazement at Father Amerton, struck for the first time by a still more incredible fact. "They don't talk in *anything* to one another," he said. "And we haven't noticed it until this moment!"

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CHAPTER THE FOURTH

THE SHADOW OF EINSTEIN FALLS ACROSS THE STORY BUT PASSES LIGHTLY BY

§ 1

EXCEPT for that one perplexing fact that all these Utopians had apparently a complete command of idiomatic English, Mr. Barnstaple found his vision of this new world developing with a congruity that no dream in his experience had ever possessed. It was so coherent, so orderly, that less and less was it like a strange world at all and more and more like an arrival in some foreign but very highly civilised country.

Under the direction of the brown-eyed woman in the scarlet-edged robe, the Earthlings were established in their quarters near the Conference Place in the most hospitable and comfortable fashion conceivable. Five or six youths and girls made it their business to initiate the strangers in the details of Utopian domesticity. The separate buildings in which they were lodged had each an agreeable little dressing-room, and the bed, which had sheets of the finest linen and a very light puffy coverlet, stood in an open loggia—too open Lady Stella thought, but then as she said, "One feels so safe here." The luggage appeared and the valises were identified as if they were in some hospitable earthly mansion.

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But Lady Stella had to turn two rather too friendly youths out of her apartment before she could open her dressing-bag and administer refreshment to her complexion.

A few minutes later some excitement was caused by an outbreak of wild laughter and the sounds of an amiable but hysterical struggle that came from Lady Stella's retreat. The girl who had remained with her had displayed a quite feminine interest in her equipment and had come upon a particularly charming and diaphanous sleeping-suit. For some obscure reason this secret daintiness amused the young Utopian extremely, and it was with some difficulty that Lady Stella restrained her from putting the garment on and dancing out in it for a public display. "Then *you* put it on," the girl insisted.

"But you don't understand," cried Lady Stella. "It's almost—*sacred!* It's for nobody to see—*ever.*"

"But *why?*" the Utopian asked, puzzled beyond measure.

Lady Stella found an answer impossible.

The light meal that followed was by terrestrial standards an entirely satisfactory one. The anxiety of Mr. Freddy Mush was completely allayed; there were cold chicken and ham and a very pleasant meat paté. There were also rather coarse-grained but most palatable bread, pure butter, an exquisite salad, fruit, cheese of the Gruyère type, and a light white wine which won from Mr. Burleigh the tribute that "Moselle never did anything better."

"You find our food very like your own?" asked the woman in the red-trimmed robe.

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"Eckquithit quality," said Mr. Mush with his mouth rather full.

"Food has changed very little in the last three thousand years. People had found out all the best things to eat long before the last Age of Confusion."

"It's too real to be real," Mr. Barnstaple repeated to himself. "Too real to be real."

He looked at his companions, elated, interested and eating with appreciation.

If it wasn't for the absurdity of these Utopians speaking English with a clearness that tapped like a hammer inside his head Mr. Barnstaple would have had no doubt whatever of its reality.

No servants waited at the clothless stone table; the woman in the white and scarlet robe and the two aviators shared the meal and the guests attended to each other's requirements. Mr. Burleigh's chauffeur was for modestly shrinking to another table until the great statesman reassured him with: "Sit down there, Penk. Next to Mr. Mush." Other Utopians with friendly but keenly observant eyes upon the Earthlings came into the great pillared veranda in which the meal had been set, and smiled and stood about or sat down. There were no introductions and few social formalities.

"All this is most reassuring," said Mr. Burleigh. "Most reassuring. I'm bound to say these beat the Chatsworth peaches. Is that cream, my dear Rupert, in the little brown jar in front of you? . . . I guessed as much. If you are sure you can spare it, Rupert. . . . Thank you."

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§ 2

Several of the Utopians made themselves known by name to the Earthlings. All their voices sounded singularly alike to Mr. Barnstaple and the words were as clear as print. The brown-eyed woman's name was Lychnis. A man with a beard who might perhaps, Mr. Barnstaple thought, have been as old as forty, was either Urthred or Adam or Edom, the name for all its sharpness of enunciation had been very difficult to catch. It was as if large print *hesitated.* Urthred conveyed that he was an ethnologist and historian and that he desired to learn all that he possibly could about the ways of our world. He impressed Mr. Barnstaple as having the easy carriage of some earthly financier or great newspaper proprietor rather than the diffidence natural in our own everyday world to a merely learned man. Another of their hosts, Serpentine, was also, Mr. Barnstaple learned with surprise—for his bearing too was almost masterful—a scientific man. He called himself something that Mr. Barnstaple could not catch. First it sounded like "atomic mechanician," and then oddly enough it sounded like "molecular chemist." And then Mr. Barnstaple heard Mr. Burleigh say to Mr. Mush, "He said 'physiochemist,' didn't he?"

"*I* thought he just called himself a materialist," said Mr. Mush.

"I thought he said he weighed things," said Lady Stella.

"Their intonation is peculiar," said Mr. Burleigh. "Sometimes they are almost too loud for comfort

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and then there is a kind of gap in the sounds." . . .

When the meal was at an end the whole party removed to another little building that was evidently planned for classes and discussions. It had a semicircular apse round which ran a series of white tablets which evidently functioned at times as a lecturer's blackboard, since there were black and coloured pencils and cloths for erasure lying on a marble ledge at a convenient height below the tablets. The lecturer could walk from point to point of this semicircle as he talked. Lychnis, Urthred, Serpentine and the Earthlings seated themselves on a semicircular bench below this lecturer's track, and there was accommodation for about eighty or a hundred people upon the seats before them. All these were occupied, and beyond stood a number of graceful groups against a background of rhododendron-like bushes, between which Mr. Barnstaple caught glimpses of grassy vistas leading down to the shining waters of the lake.

They were going to talk over this extraordinary irruption into their world. Could anything be more reasonable than to talk it over? Could anything be more fantastically impossible?

"Odd that there are no swallows," said Mr. Mush suddenly in Mr. Barnstaple's ear. "I wonder why there are no swallows."

Mr. Barnstaple's attention went to the empty sky. "No gnats nor flies perhaps," he suggested. It was odd that he had not missed the swallows before.

"Sssh!" said Lady Stella. "He's beginning."

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§ 3

This incredible conference began. It was opened by the man named Serpentine, and he stood before his audience and seemed to make a speech. His lips moved, his hands assisted his statements; his expression followed his utterance. And yet Mr. Barnstaple had the most subtle and indefensible doubt whether indeed Serpentine was speaking. There was something odd about the whole thing. Sometimes the thing said sounded with a peculiar resonance in his head; sometimes it was indistinct and elusive like an object seen through troubled waters; sometimes, though Serpentine still moved his fine hands and looked towards his hearers, there were gaps of absolute silence—as if for brief intervals Mr. Barnstaple had gone deaf. . . . Yet it was a discourse; it held together and it held Mr. Barnstaple's attention.

Serpentine had the manner of one who is taking great pains to be as simple as possible with a rather intricate question. He spoke, as it were, in propositions with a pause between each. "It had long been known," he began, "that the possible number of dimensions, like the possible number of anything else that could be enumerated, was unlimited!"

Yes, Mr. Barnstaple had got that, but it proved too much for Mr. Freddy Mush.

"Oh, Lord!" he said. "Dimensions!" and dropped his eye-glass and became despondently inattentive.

"For most practical purposes," Serpentine continued, "the particular universe, the particular system of events, in which we found ourselves and of

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which we formed part, could be regarded as occurring in a space of three rectilinear dimensions and as undergoing translation, which translation was in fact duration, through a fourth dimension, *time*. Such a system of events was necessarily a gravitational system."

"Er!" said Mr. Burleigh sharply. "Excuse me! I don't see that."

So he, at any rate, was following it too.

"Any universe that endures must necessarily gravitate," Serpentine repeated, as if he were asserting some self-evident fact.

"For the life of me I can't see that," said Mr. Burleigh after a moment's reflection.

Serpentine considered him for a moment. "It *is* so," he said, and went on with his discourse. Our minds, he continued, had been evolved in the form of this practical conception of things, they accepted it as true, and it was only by great efforts of sustained analysis that we were able to realise that this universe in which we lived not only extended but was, as it were, slightly bent and contorted, into a number of other long unsuspected spatial dimensions. It extended beyond its three chief spatial dimensions into these others just as a thin sheet of paper, which is practically two dimensional, extended not only by virtue of its thickness but also of its crinkles and curvature into a third dimension.

"Am I going deaf?" asked Lady Stella in a stage whisper. "I can't catch a word of all this."

"Nor I," said Father Amerton.

Mr. Burleigh made a pacifying gesture towards

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these unfortunates without taking his eyes off Serpentine's face. Mr. Barnstaple knitted his brows, clasped his knees, knotted his fingers, held on desperately.

He *must* be hearing—of course he was hearing!

Serpentine proceeded to explain that just as it would be possible for any number of practically two-dimensional universes to lie side by side, like sheets of paper, in a three-dimensional space, so in the many-dimensional space about which the ill-equipped human mind is still slowly and painfully acquiring knowledge, it is possible for an innumerable quantity of practically three-dimensional universes to lie, as it were, side by side and to undergo a roughly parallel movement through time. The speculative work of Lonestone and Cephalus had long since given the soundest basis for the belief that there actually were a very great number of such space-and-time universes, parallel to one another and resembling each other, nearly but not exactly, much as the leaves of a book might resemble one another. All of them would have duration, all of them would be gravitating systems——

(Mr. Burleigh shook his head to show that still he didn't see it.)

——And those lying closest together would most nearly resemble each other. How closely they now had an opportunity of learning. For the daring attempts of those two great geniuses, Arden and Greenlake, to use the—(*inaudible*)—thrust of the atom to rotate a portion of the Utopian material universe in that dimension, the F dimension, into which

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it had long been known to extend for perhaps the length of a man's arm, to rotate this fragment of Utopian matter, much as a gate is swung on its hinges, had manifestly been altogether successful. The gate had swung back again bringing with it a breath of close air, a storm of dust and, to the immense amazement of Utopia, three sets of visitors from an unknown world.

"*Three?*" whispered Mr. Barnstaple doubtfully. "Did he say *three?*"

[Serpentine disregarded him.]

"Our brother and sister have been killed by some unexpected release of force, but their experiment has opened a way that now need never be closed again, out of the present spatial limitations of Utopia into a whole vast folio of hitherto unimagined worlds. Close at hand to us, even as Lonestone guessed ages ago, nearer to us, as he put it, than the blood in our hearts——"

("Nearer to us than breathing and closer than hands and feet," Father Amerton misquoted, waking up suddenly. "But what is he talking about? I don't catch it.")

"——we discover another planet, much the same size as ours to judge by the scale of its inhabitants, circulating, we may certainly assume, round a sun like that in our skies, a planet bearing life and being slowly subjugated, even as our own is being subjugated, by intelligent life which has evidently evolved under almost exactly parallel conditions to those of our own evolution. This sister universe to ours is, so far as we may judge by appearances, a little retarded

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in time in relation to our own. Our visitors wear something very like the clothing and display physical characteristics resembling those of our ancestors during the last Age of Confusion. . . .

"We are not yet justified in supposing that their history has been strictly parallel to ours. No two particles of matter are alike; no two vibrations. In all the dimensions of being, in all the universes of God, there has never been and there can never be an exact repetition. That we have come to realise is the one impossible thing. Nevertheless, this world you call Earth is manifestly very near and like to this universe of ours. . . .

"We are eager to learn from you Earthlings, to check our history, which is still very imperfectly known, by your experiences, to show you what we know, to make out what may be possible and desirable in intercourse and help between the people of your planet and ours. We, here, are the merest beginners in knowledge; we have learned as yet scarcely anything more than the immensity of the things that we have yet to learn and do. In a million kindred things our two worlds may perhaps teach each other and help each other. . . .

"Possibly there are streaks of heredity in your planet that have failed to develop or that have died out in ours. Possibly there are elements or minerals in one world that are rare or wanting in the other. . . . The structure of your atoms (?) . . . our worlds may intermarry (?) . . . to their common invigoration. . . ."

He passed into the inaudible just when Mr. Barn-

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staple was most moved and most eager to follow what he was saying. Yet a deaf man would have judged he was still speaking.

Mr. Barnstaple met the eye of Mr. Rupert Catskill, as distressed and puzzled as his own. Father Amerton's face was buried in his hands. Lady Stella and Mr. Mush were whispering softly together; they had long since given up any pretence of listening.

"Such," said Serpentine, abruptly becoming audible again, "is our first rough interpretation of your apparition in our world and of the possibilities of our interaction. I have put our ideas before you as plainly as I can. I would suggest that now one of you tell us simply and plainly what *you* conceive to be the truth about your world in relation to ours."

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CHAPTER THE FIFTH

THE GOVERNANCE AND HISTORY OF UTOPIA

§ 1

CAME a pause. The Earthlings looked at one another and their gaze seemed to converge upon Mr. Cecil Burleigh. That statesman feigned to be unaware of the general expectation. "Rupert," he said. "Won't *you?*"

"I reserve my comments," said Mr. Catskill.

"Father Amerton, you are accustomed to treat of other worlds."

"Not in your presence, Mr. Cecil. No."

"But what am I to tell them?"

"What you think of it," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"Exactly," said Mr. Catskill. "Tell them what you think of it."

No one else appeared to be worthy of consideration. Mr. Burleigh rose slowly and walked thoughtfully to the centre of the semicircle. He grasped his coat lapels and remained for some moments with face downcast as if considering what he was about to say. "Mr. Serpentine," he began at last, raising a candid countenance and regarding the blue sky above the distant lake through his glasses. "Ladies and Gentlemen——"

He was going to make a speech!—as though he was at a Primrose League garden-party—or Geneva. It

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was preposterous and yet, what else was there to be done?

"I must confess, sir, that although I am by no means a novice at public speaking, I find myself on this occasion somewhat at a loss. Your admirable discourse, sir, simple, direct, lucid, compact, and rising at times to passages of unaffected eloquence, has set me a pattern that I would fain follow—and before which, in all modesty, I quail. You ask me to tell you as plainly and clearly as possible the outline facts as we conceive them about this kindred world out of which with so little premeditation we have come to you. So far as my poor powers of understanding or discussing such recondite matters go, I do not think I can better or indeed supplement in any way your marvellous exposition of the mathematical aspects of the case. What you have told us embodies the latest, finest thoughts of terrestrial science and goes, indeed, far beyond our current ideas. On certain matters, in, for example, the relationship of time and gravitation, I feel bound to admit that I do not go with you, but that is rather a failure to understand your position than any positive dissent. Upon the broader aspects of the case there need be no difficulties between us. We accept your main proposition unreservedly; namely, that we conceive ourselves to be living in a parallel universe to yours, on a planet the very brother of your own, indeed quite amazingly like yours, having regard to all the possible contrasts we might have found here. We are attracted by and strongly disposed to accept your view that our system is, in all probability, a little less seasoned and mel-

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lowed by the touch of time than yours, short perhaps by some hundreds or some thousands of years of your experiences. Assuming this, it is inevitable, sir, that a certain humility should mingle in our attitude towards you. As your juniors it becomes us not to instruct but to learn. It is for us to ask: What have you done? To what have you reached? rather than to display to you with an artless arrogance all that still remains for us to learn and do. . . ."

"No!" said Mr. Barnstaple to himself but half audibly. "This is a dream. . . . If it were any one else. . . ."

He rubbed his knuckles into his eyes and opened them again, and there he was still, sitting next to Mr. Mush in the midst of these Olympian divinities. And Mr. Burleigh, that polished sceptic, who never believed, who was never astonished, was leaning forward on his toes and speaking, speaking, with the assurance of a man who has made ten thousand speeches. He could not have been more sure of himself and his audience in the Guildhall in London. And they were understanding him! Which was absurd!

There was nothing to do but to fall in with this stupendous absurdity—and sit and listen. Sometimes Mr. Barnstaple's mind wandered altogether from what Mr. Burleigh was saying. Then it returned and hung desperately to his discourse. In his halting parliamentary way, his hands trifling with his glasses or clinging to the lapels of his coat, Mr. Burleigh was giving Utopia a brief account of the world of men, seeking to be elementary and lucid and

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reasonable, telling them of states and empires, of wars and the Great War, of economic organisation and disorganisation, of revolutions and Bolshevism, of the terrible Russian famine that was beginning, of the difficulties of finding honest statesmen and officials and of the unhelpfulness of newspapers, of all the dark and troubled spectacle of human life. Serpentine had used the term "the Last Age of Confusion," and Mr. Burleigh had seized upon the phrase and was making much of it. . . .

It was a great oratorical impromptu. It must have gone on for an hour, and the Utopians listened with keen, attentive faces, now and then nodding their acceptance and recognition of this statement or that. "Very like," would come tapping into Mr. Barnstaple's brain. "With us also—in the Age of Confusion."

At last Mr. Burleigh, with the steady deliberation of an old parliamentary hand, drew to his end. Compliments.

He bowed. He had done. Mr. Mush startled every one by a vigorous hand-clapping in which no one else joined.

The tension of Mr. Barnstaple's mind had become intolerable. He leaped to his feet.

§ 2

He stood making those weak propitiatory gestures that come so naturally to the inexperienced speaker. "Ladies and Gentlemen," he said. "Utopians, Mr.

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Burleigh! I crave your pardon for a moment. There is a little matter. Urgent."

For a brief interval he was speechless.

Then he found attention and encouragement in the eye of Urthred.

"Something I don't understand. Something incredible—I mean, incompatible. The little rift. Turns everything into a fantastic phantasmagoria."

The intelligence in Urthred's eye was very encouraging. Mr. Barnstaple abandoned any attempt to address the company as a whole, and spoke directly to Urthred.

"You live in Utopia, hundreds of thousands of years in advance of us. How is it that you are able to talk contemporary English—to use exactly the same language that we do? I ask you, how is that? It is incredible. It jars. It makes a dream of you. And yet you are not a dream? It makes me feel—almost—insane."

Urthred smiled pleasantly. "We *don't* speak English," he said.

Mr. Barnstaple felt the ground slipping from under his feet. "But I *hear* you speaking English," he said.

"Nevertheless we do not speak it," said Urthred.

He smiled still more broadly. "We don't—for ordinary purposes—speak anything."

Mr. Barnstaple, with his brain resigning its functions, maintained his pose of deferential attention.

"Ages ago," Urthred continued, "we certainly used to speak languages. We made sounds and we heard sounds. People used to think, and then chose

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and arranged words and uttered them. The hearer heard, noted, and retranslated the sounds into ideas. Then, in some manner which we still do not understand perfectly, people began to *get* the idea before it was clothed in words and uttered in sounds. They began to hear in their minds, as soon as the speaker had arranged his ideas and before he put them into word symbols even in his own mind. They knew what he was going to say before he said it. This direct transmission presently became common; it was found out that with a little effort most people could get over to each other in this fashion to some extent, and the new mode of communication was developed systematically.

"That is what we do now habitually in this world. We think directly *to* each other. We determine to convey the thought and it is conveyed at once—provided the distance is not too great. We use sounds in this world now only for poetry and pleasure and in moments of emotion or to shout at a distance, or with animals, not for the transmission of ideas from human mind to kindred human mind any more. When I think to you, the thought, *so far as it finds corresponding ideas and suitable words in your mind*, is reflected in your mind. My thought clothes itself in words in your mind, which words you seem to hear—and naturally enough in your own language and your own habitual phrases. Very probably the members of your party are hearing what I am saying to you, each with his own individual difference of vocabulary and phrasing."

Mr. Barnstaple had been punctuating this dis-

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course with sharp, intelligent nods, coming now and then to the verge of interruption. Now he broke out with: "And that is why occasionally—as for instance when Mr. Serpentine made his wonderful explanation just now—when you soar into ideas of which we haven't even a shadow in our minds, we just hear nothing at all."

"Are there such gaps?" asked Urthred.

"Many, I fear—for all of us," said Mr. Burleigh.

"It's like being deaf in spots," said Lady Stella. "Large spots."

Father Amerton nodded agreement.

"And that is why we cannot be clear whether you are called Urthred or Adam, and why I have found myself confusing Arden and Greentrees and Forest in my mind."

"I hope that now you are mentally more at your ease?" said Urthred.

"Oh, quite," said Mr. Barnstaple. "Quite. And all things considered, it is really very convenient for us that there should be this method of transmission. For otherwise I do not see how we could have avoided weeks of linguistic bother, first principles of our respective grammars, logic, significs, and so forth, boring stuff for the most part, before we could have got to anything like our present understanding."

"A very good point indeed," said Mr. Burleigh, turning round to Mr. Barnstaple in a very friendly way. "A very good point indeed. I should never have noted it if you had not called my attention to it. It is quite extraordinary; I had not noted anything of this—this difference. I was occupied, I am bound

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to confess, by my own thoughts. I supposed they were speaking English. Took it for granted."

§ 3

It seemed to Mr. Barnstaple that this wonderful experience was now so complete that there remained nothing more to wonder at except its absolute credibility. He sat in this beautiful little building looking out upon dreamland flowers and the sunlit lake amidst this strange mingling of week-end English costumes and this more then Olympian nudity that had already ceased to startle him, he listened and occasionally participated in the long informal conversation that now ensued. It was a discussion that brought to light the most amazing and fundamental differences of moral and social outlook. Yet everything had now assumed a reality that made it altogether natural to suppose that he would presently go home to write about it in *The Liberal* and tell his wife, as much as might seem advisable at the time, about the manners and costumes of this hitherto undiscovered world. He had not even a sense of intervening distances. Sydenham might have been just round the corner.

Presently two pretty young girls made tea at an equipage among the rhododendra and brought it round to people. Tea! It was what we should call China tea, very delicate, and served in little cups without handles, Chinese fashion, but it was real and very refreshing tea.

The earlier curiosities of the Earthlings turned

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upon methods of government. This was perhaps natural in the presence of two such statesmen as Mr. Burleigh and Mr. Catskill.

"What form of government do you have?" asked Mr. Burleigh. "Is it a monarchy or an autocracy or a pure democracy? Do you separate the executive and the legislative? And is there one central government for all your planet, or are there several governing centres?"

It was conveyed to Mr. Burleigh and his companions with some difficulty that there was no central government in Utopia at all.

"But surely," said Mr. Burleigh, "there is some one or something, some council or bureau or what not, somewhere, with which the final decision rests in cases of collective action for the common welfare. Some ultimate seat and organ of sovereignty, it seems to me, there *must* be." . . .

No, the Utopians declared, there was no such concentration of authority in their world. In the past there had been, but it had long since diffused back into the general body of the community. Decisions in regard to any particular matter were made by the people who knew most about that matter.

"But suppose it is a decision that has to be generally observed? A rule affecting the public health, for example? Who would enforce it?"

"It would not need to be enforced. Why should it?"

"But suppose some one refused to obey your regulation?"

"We should inquire why he or she did not conform. There might be some exceptional reason."

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"But failing that?"

"We should make an inquiry into his mental and moral health."

"The mind doctor takes the place of the policeman," said Mr. Burleigh.

"I should prefer the policeman," said Mr. Rupert Catskill.

"You *would*, Rupert," said Mr. Burleigh as who should say: "*Got* you that time.

"Then do you mean to say," he continued, addressing the Utopians with an expression of great intelligence, "that your affairs are all managed by special bodies or organisations—one scarcely knows what to call them—without any co-ordination of their activities?"

"The activities of our world," said Urthred, "are all co-ordinated to secure the general freedom. We have a number of intelligences directed to the general psychology of the race and to the interaction of one collective function upon another."

"Well, isn't that group of intelligences a governing class?" said Mr. Burleigh.

"Not in the sense that they exercise any arbitrary will," said Urthred. "They deal with general relations, that is all. But they rank no higher, they have no more precedence on that account than a philosopher has over a scientific specialist."

"This is a republic indeed!" said Mr. Burleigh. "But how it works and how it came about I cannot imagine. Your state is probably a highly socialistic one?"

"You still live in a world in which nearly every-

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thing except the air, the highroads, the high seas and the wilderness is privately owned?"

"We do," said Mr. Catskill. "Owned—and competed for."

"We have been through that stage. We found at last that private property in all but very personal things was an intolerable nuisance to mankind. We got rid of it. An artist or a scientific man has complete control of all the material he needs, we all own our tools and appliances and have rooms and places of our own, but there is no property for trade or speculation. All this militant property, this property of manœuvre, has been quite got rid of. But how we got rid of it is a long story. It was not done in a few years. The exaggeration of private property was an entirely natural and necessary stage in the development of human nature. It led at last to monstrous results, but it was only through these monstrous and catastrophic results that men learned the need and nature of the limitations of private property."

Mr. Burleigh had assumed an attitude which was obviously habitual to him. He sat very low in his chair with his long legs crossed in front of him and the thumb and fingers of one hand placed with meticulous exactness against those of the other.

"I must confess," he said, "that I am most interested in the peculiar form of Anarchism which seems to prevail here. Unless I misunderstand you completely every man attends to his own business as the servant of the state. I take it you have—you must correct me if I am wrong—a great number of people

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concerned in the production and distribution and preparation of food; they inquire, I assume, into the needs of the world, they satisfy them and they are a law unto themselves in their way of doing it. They conduct researches, they make experiments. Nobody compels, obliges, restrains or prevents them. ("People talk to them about it," said Urthred with a faint smile.) And again others produce and manufacture and study metals for all mankind and are also a law unto themselves. Others again see to the habitability of your world, plan and arrange these delightful habitations, say who shall use them and how they shall be used. Others pursue pure science. Others experiment with sensory and imaginative possibilities and are artists. Others again teach."

"They are very important," said Lychnis.

"And they all do it in harmony—and due proportion. Without either a central legislature or executive. I will admit that all this seems admirable—but impossible. Nothing of the sort has ever been even suggested yet in the world from which we come."

"Something of the sort was suggested long ago by the Guild Socialists," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Burleigh. "I know very little about the Guild Socialists. Who were they? Tell me."

Mr. Barnstaple tacitly declined that task. "The idea is quite familiar to our younger people," he said. "Laski calls it the pluralistic state, as distinguished from the monistic state in which sovereignty is concentrated. Even the Chinese have it. A Pekin professor, Mr. S. C. Chang, has written a pamphlet

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on what he calls 'Professionalism.' I read it only a few weeks ago. He sent it to the office of *The Liberal.* He points out how undesirable it is and how unnecessary for China to pass through a phase of democratic politics on the western model. He wants China to go right straight on to a collateral independence of functional classes, mandarins, industrials, agricultural workers and so forth, much as we seem to find it here. Though that of course involves an educational revolution. Decidedly the germ of what you call Anarchism here is also in the air we come from."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Burleigh, looking more intelligent and appreciative than ever. "And is that so? I had *no* idea——!"

§ 4

The conversation continued desultory in form and yet the exchange of ideas was rapid and effective. Quite soon, as it seemed to Mr. Barnstaple, an outline of the history of Utopia from the Last Age of Confusion onward shaped itself in his mind.

The more he learned of that Last Age of Confusion the more it seemed to resemble the present time on earth. In those days the Utopians had worn abundant clothing and lived in towns quite after the earthly fashion. A fortunate conspiracy of accidents rather than any set design had opened for them some centuries of opportunity and expansion. Climatic phases and political chances had smiled upon the race after a long period of recurrent shortage, pestilence and destructive warfare. For the first time the

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Utopians had been able to explore the whole planet on which they lived, and these explorations had brought great virgin areas under the axe, the spade and the plough. There had been an enormous increase in real wealth and in leisure and liberty. Many thousands of people were lifted out of the normal squalor of human life to positions in which they could, if they chose, think and act with unprecedented freedom. A few, a sufficient few, did. A vigorous development of scientific inquiry began and, trailing after it a multitude of ingenious inventions, produced a great enlargement of practical human power.

There had been previous outbreaks of the scientific intelligence in Utopia, but none before had ever occurred in such favourable circumstances or lasted long enough to come to abundant practical fruition. Now in a couple of brief centuries the Utopians, who had hitherto crawled about their planet like sluggish ants or travelled parasitically on larger and swifter animals, found themselves able to fly rapidly or speak instantaneously to any other point on the planet. They found themselves, too, in possession of mechanical power on a scale beyond all previous experience, and not simply of mechanical power; physiological and then psychological science followed in the wake of physics and chemistry, and extraordinary possibilities of control over his own body and over his social life dawned upon the Utopian. But these things came, when at last they did come, so rapidly and confusingly that it was only a small minority of people who realised the possibilities, as distin-

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guished from the concrete achievements, of this tremendous expansion of knowledge. The rest took the novel inventions as they came, haphazard, with as little adjustment as possible of their thoughts and ways of living to the new necessities these novelties implied.

The first response of the general population of Utopia to the prospect of power, leisure and freedom thus opened out to it was proliferation. It behaved just as senselessly and mechanically as any other animal or vegetable species would have done. It bred until it had completely swamped the ampler opportunity that had opened before it. It spent the great gifts of science as rapidly as it got them in a mere insensate multiplication of the common life. At one time in the Last Age of Confusion the population of Utopia had mounted to over two thousand million. . . .

"But what is it now?" asked Mr. Burleigh.

About two hundred and fifty million, the Utopians told him. That had been the maximum population that could live a fully developed life upon the surface of Utopia. But now with increasing resources the population was being increased.

A gasp of horror came from Father Amerton. He had been dreading this realisation for some time. It struck at his moral foundations. "And you dare to *regulate* increase! You control it! Your women consent to bear children as they are needed—or refrain!"

"Of course," said Urthred. "Why not?"

"I feared as much," said Father Amerton, and leaning forward he covered his face with his hands,

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murmuring, "I felt this in the atmosphere! The human stud farm! Refusing to create souls! The *wickedness* of it! Oh, my God!"

Mr. Burleigh regarded the emotion of the reverend gentleman through his glasses with a slightly shocked expression. He detested catchwords. But Father Amerton stood for very valuable conservative elements in the community. Mr. Burleigh turned to the Utopian again. "That is extremely interesting," he said. "Even at present our earth contrives to carry a population of at least five times that total."

"But twenty millions or so will starve this winter, you told us a little while ago—in a place called Russia. And only a very small proportion of the rest are leading what even you would call full and spacious lives?"

"Nevertheless the contrast is very striking," said Mr. Burleigh.

"It is terrible!" said Father Amerton.

The overcrowding of the planet in the Last Age of Confusion was, these Utopians insisted, the fundamental evil out of which all the others that afflicted the race arose. An overwhelming flood of newcomers poured into the world and swamped every effort the intelligent minority could make to educate a sufficient proportion of them to meet the demands of the new and still rapidly changing conditions of life. And the intelligent minority was not itself in any position to control the racial destiny. These great masses of population that had blundered into existence, swayed by damaged and decaying traditions and amenable to the crudest suggestions,

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were the natural prey and support of every adventurer with a mind blatant enough and a conception of success coarse enough to appeal to them. The economic system, clumsily and convulsively reconstructed to meet the new conditions of mechanical production and distribution, became more and more a cruel and impudent exploitation of the multitudinous congestion of the common man by the predatory and acquisitive few. That all too common common man was hustled through misery and subjection from his cradle to his grave; he was cajoled and lied to, he was bought, sold and dominated by an impudent minority, bolder and no doubt more energetic, but in all other respects no more intelligent than himself. It was difficult, Urthred said, for a Utopian nowadays to convey the monstrous stupidity, wastefulness and vulgarity to which these rich and powerful men of the Last Age of Confusion attained.

("We will not trouble you," said Mr. Burleigh. "Unhappily—we know. . . . We know. Only too well do we know.")

Upon this festering, excessive mass of population disasters descended at last like wasps upon a heap of rotting fruit. It was its natural, inevitable destiny. A war that affected nearly the whole planet dislocated its flimsy financial system and most of its economic machinery beyond any possibility of repair. Civil wars and clumsily conceived attempts at social revolution continued the disorganisation. A series of years of bad weather accentuated the general shortage. The exploiting adventurers, too stupid to realise what had happened, continued to cheat and hood-

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wink the commonalty and burke any rally of honest men, as wasps will continue to eat even after their bodies have been cut away. The effort to make passed out of Utopian life, triumphantly superseded by the effort to get. Production dwindled down towards the vanishing-point. Accumulated wealth vanished. An overwhelming system of debt, a swarm of creditors, morally incapable of helpful renunciation, crushed out all fresh initiative.

The long diastole in Utopian affairs that had begun with the great discoveries, passed into a phase of rapid systole. What plenty and pleasure was still possible in the world was filched all the more greedily by the adventurers of finance and speculative business. Organised science had long since been commercialised, and was "applied" now chiefly to a hunt for profitable patents and the forestalling of necessary supplies. The neglected lamp of pure science waned, flickered and seemed likely to go out again altogether, leaving Utopia in the beginning of a new series of Dark Ages like those before the age of discovery began. . . .

"It is really *very* like a gloomy diagnosis of our own outlook," said Mr. Burleigh. "Extraordinarily like. How Dean Inge would have enjoyed all this!"

"To an infidel of his stamp, no doubt, it would seem most enjoyable," said Father Amerton a little incoherently.

These comments annoyed Mr. Barnstaple, who was urgent to hear more.

"And then," he said to Urthred, "what happened?"

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§ 5

What happened, Mr. Barnstaple gathered, was a deliberate change in Utopian thought. A growing number of people were coming to understand that amidst the powerful and easily released forces that science and organisation had brought within reach of man, the old conception of social life in the state, as a limited and legalised struggle of men and women to get the better of one another, was becoming too dangerous to endure, just as the increased dreadfulness of modern weapons was making the separate sovereignty of nations too dangerous to endure. There had to be new ideas and new conventions of human association if history was not to end in disaster and collapse.

All societies were based on the limitation by laws and taboos and treaties of the primordial fierce combativeness of the ancestral man-ape; that ancient spirit of self-assertion had now to undergo new restrictions commensurate with the new powers and dangers of the race. The idea of competition to possess, as the ruling idea of intercourse, was, like some ill-controlled furnace, threatening to consume the machine it had formerly driven. The idea of creative service had to replace it. To that idea the human mind and will had to be turned if social life was to be saved. Propositions that had seemed, in former ages, to be inspired and exalted idealism began now to be recognised not simply as sober psychological truth but as practical and urgently necessary truth. In explaining this Urthred expressed

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himself in a manner that recalled to Mr. Barnstaple's mind certain very familiar phrases; he seemed to be saying that whosoever would save his life should lose it, and that whosoever would give his life should thereby gain the whole world.

Father Amerton's thoughts, it seemed, were also responding in the same manner. For he suddenly interrupted with: "But what you are saying is a quotation!"

Urthred admitted that he had a quotation in mind, a passage from the teachings of a man of great poetic power who had lived long ago in the days of spoken words.

He would have proceeded, but Father Amerton was too excited to let him do so. "But who was this teacher?" he asked. "Where did he live? How was he born? How did he die?"

A picture was flashed upon Mr. Barnstaple's consciousness of a solitary-looking, pale-faced figure, beaten and bleeding, surrounded by armoured guards, in the midst of a thrusting, jostling, sun-bit crowd which filled a narrow high-walled street. Behind, some huge ugly implement was borne along, dipping and swaying with the swaying of the multitude. . . .

"Did he die upon the Cross in *this* world also?" cried Father Amerton. "Did he die upon the Cross?"

This prophet in Utopia they learned had died very painfully, but not upon the Cross. He had been tortured in some way, but neither the Utopians nor these particular Earthlings had sufficient knowledge

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of the technicalities of torture to get any idea over about that, and then apparently he had been fastened upon a slowly turning wheel and exposed until he died. It was the abominable punishment of a cruel and conquering race, and it had been inflicted upon him because his doctrine of universal service had alarmed the rich and dominant who did not serve. Mr. Barnstaple had a momentary vision of a twisted figure upon that wheel of torture in the blazing sun. And, marvellous triumph over death! out of a world that could do such a deed had come this great peace and universal beauty about him!

But Father Amerton was pressing his questions. "But did you not realise who he was? Did not this world suspect?"

A great many people thought that this man was a God. But he had been accustomed to call himself merely a son of God or a son of Man.

Father Amerton stuck to his point. "But you worship him now?"

"We follow his teaching because it was wonderful and true," said Urthred.

"But worship?"

"No."

"But does nobody worship? There *were* those who worshipped him?"

There were those who worshipped him. There were those who quailed before the stern magnificence of his teaching and yet who had a tormenting sense that he was right in some profound way. So they played a trick upon their own uneasy consciences by treating him as a magical god instead of as a light

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to their souls. They interwove with his execution ancient traditions of sacrificial kings. Instead of receiving him frankly and clearly and making him a part of their understandings and wills they pretended to eat him mystically and make him a part of their bodies. They turned his wheel into a miraculous symbol, and they confused it with the equator and the sun and the ecliptic and indeed with anything else that was round. In cases of ill luck, ill health or bad weather it was believed to be very helpful for the believer to describe a circle in the air with the forefinger.

And since this teacher's memory was very dear to the ignorant multitude because of his gentleness and charity, it was seized upon by cunning and aggressive types who constituted themselves champions and exponents of the wheel, who grew rich and powerful in its name, led people into great wars for its sake and used it as a cover and justification for envy, hatred, tyranny and dark desires. Until at last men said that had that ancient prophet come again to Utopia, his own triumphant wheel would have crushed and destroyed him afresh. . . .

Father Amerton seemed inattentive to this communication. He was seeing it from another angle. "But surely," he said, "there is a remnant of believers still! Despised perhaps—but a remnant?"

There was no remnant. The whole world followed that Teacher of Teachers, but no one worshipped him. On some old treasured buildings the wheel was still to be seen carved, often with the most fantastic decorative elaborations. And in museums and col-

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lections there were multitudes of pictures, images, charms and the like.

"I don't understand this," said Father Amerton. "It is too terrible. I am at a loss. I do not understand."

§ 6

A fair and rather slender man with a delicately beautiful face whose name, Mr. Barnstaple was to learn later, was Lion, presently took over from Urthred the burden of explaining and answering the questions of the Earthlings.

He was one of the educational co-ordinators in Utopia. He made it clear that the change in Utopian affairs had been no sudden revolution. No new system of laws and customs, no new method of economic co-operation based on the idea of universal service to the common good, had sprung abruptly into being complete and finished. Throughout a long period, before and during the Last Age of Confusion, the foundations of the new state were laid by a growing multitude of inquirers and workers, having no set plan or preconceived method, but brought into unconscious co-operation by a common impulse to service and a common lucidity and veracity of mind. It was only towards the climax of the Last Age of Confusion in Utopia that psychological science began to develop with any vigour, comparable to the vigour of the development of geographical and physical science during the preceding centuries. And the social and economic disorder which was checking experimental science and crippling the

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organised work of the universities was stimulating inquiry into the processes of human association and making it desperate and fearless.

The impression given Mr. Barnstaple was not of one of those violent changes which our world has learned to call revolutions, but of an increase of light, a dawn of new ideas, in which the things of the old order went on for a time with diminishing vigour until people began as a matter of common sense to do the new things in the place of the old.

The beginnings of the new order were in discussions, books and psychological laboratories; the soil in which it grew was found in schools and colleges. The old order gave small rewards to the schoolmaster, but its dominant types were too busy with the struggle for wealth and power to take much heed of teaching: it was left to any man or woman who would give thought and labour without much hope of tangible rewards, to shape the world anew in the minds of the young. And they did so shape it. In a world ruled ostensibly by adventurer politicians, in a world where men came to power through floundering business enterprises and financial cunning, it was presently being taught and understood that extensive private property was socially a nuisance, and that the state could not do its work properly nor education produce its proper results, side by side with a class of irresponsible rich people. For, by their very nature, they assailed, they corrupted, they undermined every state undertaking; their flaunting existences distorted and disguised all the values of life. They had to go, for the good of the race.

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"Didn't they fight?" asked Mr. Catskill pugnaciously.

They had fought irregularly but fiercely. The fight to delay or arrest the coming of the universal scientific state, the educational state, in Utopia, had gone on as a conscious struggle for nearly five centuries. The fight against it was the fight of greedy, passionate, prejudiced and self-seeking men against the crystallisation into concrete realities of this new idea of association for service. It was fought wherever ideas were spread; it was fought with dismissals and threats and boycotts and storms of violence, with lies and false accusations, with prosecutions and imprisonments, with lynching-rope, tar and feathers, paraffin, bludgeon and rifle, bomb and gun.

But the service of the new idea that had been launched into the world never failed; it seized upon the men and women it needed with compelling power. Before the scientific state was established in Utopia more than a million martyrs had been killed for it, and those who had suffered lesser wrongs were beyond all reckoning. Point after point was won in education, in social laws, in economic method. No date could be fixed for the change. A time came when Utopia perceived that it was day and that a new order of things had replaced the old. . . .

"So it must be," said Mr. Barnstaple, as though Utopia were not already present about him. "So it must be."

A question was being answered. Every Utopian child is taught to the full measure of its possibilities and directed to the work that is indicated by its

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desires and capacity. It is born well. It is born of perfectly healthy parents; its mother has chosen to bear it after due thought and preparation. It grows up under perfectly healthy conditions; its natural impulses to play and learn are gratified by the subtlest educational methods; hands, eyes and limbs are given every opportunity of training and growth; it learns to draw, write, express itself, use a great variety of symbols to assist and extend its thought. Kindness and civility become ingrained habits, for all about it are kind and civil. And in particular the growth of its imagination is watched and encouraged. It learns the wonderful history of its world and its race, how man has struggled and still struggles out of his earlier animal narrowness and egotism towards an empire over being that is still but faintly apprehended through dense veils of ignorance. All its desires are made fine; it learns from poetry, from example and the love of those about it to lose its solicitude for itself in love; its sexual passions are turned against its selfishness, its curiosity flowers into scientific passion, its combativeness is set to fight disorder, its inherent pride and ambition are directed towards an honourable share in the common achievement. It goes to the work that attracts it and chooses what it will do.

If the individual is indolent there is no great loss, there is plenty for all in Utopia, but then it will find no lovers, nor will it ever bear children, because no one in Utopia loves those who have neither energy nor distinction. There is much pride of the mate in Utopian love. And there is no idle rich "society" in

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Utopia, nor games and shows for the mere looker-on. There is nothing for the mere looker-on. It is a pleasant world indeed for holidays, but not for those who would continuously do nothing.

For centuries now Utopian science has been able to discriminate among births, and nearly every Utopian alive would have ranked as an energetic creative spirit in former days. There are few dull and no really defective people in Utopia; the idle strains, the people of lethargic dispositions or weak imaginations, have mostly died out; the melancholic type has taken its dismissal and gone; spiteful and malignant characters are disappearing. The vast majority of Utopians are active, sanguine, inventive, receptive and good-tempered.

"And you have not even a parliament?" asked Mr. Burleigh, still incredulous.

Utopia has no parliament, no politics, no private wealth, no business competition, no police nor prisons, no lunatics, no defectives nor cripples, and it has none of these things because it has schools and teachers who are all that schools and teachers can be. Politics, trade and competition are the methods of adjustment of a crude society. Such methods of adjustment have been laid aside in Utopia for more than a thousand years. There is no rule nor government needed by adult Utopians because all the rule and government they need they have had in childhood and youth.

Said Lion: "*Our education is our government.*"

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CHAPTER THE SIXTH

SOME EARTHLY CRITICISMS

§ 1

At times during that memorable afternoon and evening it seemed to Mr. Barnstaple that he was involved in nothing more remarkable than an extraordinary dialogue about government and history, a dialogue that had in some inexplicable way become spectacular; it was as if all this was happening only in his mind; and then the absolute reality of his adventure would return to him with overwhelming power and his intellectual interest fade to inattention in the astounding strangeness of his position. In these latter phases he would find his gaze wandering from face to face of the Utopians who surrounded him, resting for a time on some exquisite detail of the architecture of the building and then coming back to these divinely graceful forms.

Then incredulously he would revert to his fellow Earthlings.

Not one of these Utopian faces but was as candid, earnest and beautiful as the angelic faces of an Italian painting. One woman was strangely like Michael Angelo's Delphic Sibyl. They sat in easy attitudes, men and women together, for the most part concentrated on the discussion, but every now and then Mr. Barnstaple would meet the direct scrutiny of a pair

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of friendly eyes or find some Utopian face intent upon the costume of Lady Stella or the eye-glass of Mr. Mush.

Mr. Barnstaple's first impression of the Utopians had been that they were all young people; now he perceived that many of these faces had a quality of vigorous maturity. None showed any of the distinctive marks of age as this world notes them, but both Urthred and Lion had lines of experience about eyes and lips and brow.

The effect of these people upon Mr. Barnstaple mingled stupefaction with familiarity in the strangest way. He had a feeling that he had always known that such a race could exist and that this knowledge had supplied the implicit standard of a thousand judgments upon human affairs, and at the same time he was astonished to the pitch of incredulity to find himself in the same world with them. They were at once normal and wonderful in comparison with himself and his companions who were, on their part, at the same time queer and perfectly matter of fact.

And together with a strong desire to become friendly and intimate with these fine and gracious persons, to give himself to them and to associate them with himself by service and reciprocal acts, there was an awe and fear of them that made him shrink from contact with them and quiver at their touch. He desired their personal recognition of himself as a fellow and companion so greatly that his sense of his own ungraciousness and unworthiness overwhelmed him. He wanted to bow down before them. Beneath all the light and loveliness of things

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about him lurked the intolerable premonition of his ultimate rejection from this new world.

So great was the impression made by the Utopians upon Mr. Barnstaple, so entirely did he yield himself up to his joyful acceptance of their grace and physical splendour, that for a time he had no attention left over to note how different from his own were the reactions of several of his Earthling companions. The aloofness of the Utopians from the queerness, grotesqueness and cruelty of normal earthly life made him ready for the most uncritical approval of their institutions and ways of life.

It was the behaviour of Father Amerton which first awakened him to the fact that it was possible to disapprove of these wonderful people very highly and to display a very considerable hostility to them. At first Father Amerton had kept a round-faced, round-eyed wonder above his round collar; he had shown a disposition to give the lead to any one who chose to take it, and he had said not a word until the naked beauty of dead Greenlake had surprised him into an expression of unclerical appreciation. But during the journey to the lakeside and the meal and the opening arrangements of the conference there was a reaction, and this first naïve and deferential astonishment gave place to an attitude of resistance and hostility. It was as if this new world which had begun by being a spectacle had taken on the quality of a proposition which he felt he had either to accept or confute. Perhaps it was that the habit of mind of a public censor was too strong for him and that he could not feel normal again until he began to con-

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demn. Perhaps he was really shocked and distressed by the virtual nudity of these lovely bodies about him. But he began presently to make queer grunts and coughs, to mutter to himself, and to betray an increasing incapacity to keep still.

He broke out first into an interruption when the question of population was raised. For a little while his intelligence prevailed over this emotional stir when the prophet of the wheel was discussed, but then his gathering preoccupations resumed their sway.

"I must speak out," Mr. Barnstaple heard him mutter. "I must speak out."

Now suddenly he began to ask questions. "There are some things I want to have clear," he said. "I want to know what moral state this so-called Utopia is in. Excuse me!"

He got up. He stood with wavering hands, unable for a moment to begin. Then he went to the end of the row of seats and placed himself so that his hands could rest on the back of a seat. He passed his fingers through his hair and he seemed to be inhaling deeply. An unwonted animation came into his face, which reddened and began to shine. A horrible suspicion crossed the mind of Mr. Barnstaple that so it was he must stand when he began those weekly sermons of his, those fearless denunciations of almost everything, in the church of St. Barnabas in the West. The suspicion deepened to a still more horrible certainty.

"Friends, Brothers of this new world—I have certain things to say to you that I cannot delay saying.

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I want to ask you some soul-searching questions. I want to deal plainly with you about some plain and simple but very fundamental matters. I want to put things to you frankly and as man to man, not being mealy-mouthed about urgent if delicate things. Let me come without parley to what I have to say. I want to ask you if, in this so-called state of Utopia you still have and respect and honour the most sacred thing in social life. Do you still respect the marriage bond?"

He paused, and in the pause the Utopian reply came through to Mr. Barnstaple: "In Utopia there are no bonds."

But Father Amerton was not asking questions with any desire for answers; he was asking questions pulpit-fashion.

"I want to know," he was booming out, "if that holy union revealed to our first parents in the Garden of Eden holds good here, if that sanctified lifelong association of one man and one woman, in good fortune and ill fortune, excluding every other sort of intimacy, is the rule of your lives. I want to know——"

"But he *doesn't* want to know," came a Utopian intervention.

"——if that shielded and guarded dual purity ——"

Mr. Burleigh raised a long white hand. "Father Amerton," he protested, "*please*."

The hand of Mr. Burleigh was a potent hand that might still wave towards preferment. Few things under heaven could stop Father Amerton when he

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was once launched upon one of his soul storms, but the hand of Mr. Burleigh was among such things.

"——has followed another still more precious gift and been cast aside here and utterly rejected of men? What is it, Mr. Burleigh?"

"I wish you would not press this matter further just at present, Father Amerton. Until we have learned a little more. Institutions are, manifestly, very different here. Even the institution of marriage may be different."

The preacher's face lowered. "Mr. Burleigh," he said, "I *must*. If my suspicions are right, I want to strip this world forthwith of its hectic pretence to a sort of health and virtue."

"Not much stripping required," said Mr. Burleigh's chauffeur, in a very audible aside.

A certain testiness became evident in Mr. Burleigh's voice.

"Then ask questions," he said. "Ask questions. Don't orate, please. They don't want us to orate."

"I've asked my question," said Father Amerton sulkily with a rhetorical glare at Urthred, and remained standing.

The answer came clear and explicit. In Utopia there was no compulsion for men and women to go about in inseparable pairs. For most Utopians that would be inconvenient. Very often men and women, whose work brought them closely together, were lovers and kept very much together, as Arden and Greenlake had done. But they were not obliged to do that.

There had not always been this freedom. In the

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old crowded days of conflict, and especially among the agricultural workers and employed people of Utopia, men and women who had been lovers were bound together under severe penalties for life. They lived together in a small home which the woman kept in order for the man, she was his servant and bore him as many children as possible, while he got food for them. The children were desired because they were soon helpful on the land or as wage-earners. But the necessities that had subjugated women to that sort of pairing had passed away.

People paired indeed with their chosen mates, but they did so by an inner necessity and not by any outward compulsion.

Father Amerton had listened with ill-concealed impatience. Now he jumped with: "Then I was right, and you have abolished the family?" His finger pointed at Urthred made it almost a personal accusation.

No. Utopia had not abolished the family. It had enlarged and glorified the family until it embraced the whole world. Long ago that prophet of the wheel, whom Father Amerton seemed to respect, had preached that very enlargement of the ancient narrowness of home. They had told him while he preached that his mother and his brethren stood without and claimed his attention. But he would not go to them. He had turned to the crowd that listened to his words: "Behold my mother and my brethren!"

Father Amerton slapped the seat-back in front of him loudly and startlingly. "A quibble," he

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cried, "a quibble! Satan too can quote the Scriptures."

It was clear to Mr. Barnstaple that Father Amerton was not in complete control of himself. He was frightened by what he was doing and yet impelled to do it. He was too excited to think clearly or control his voice properly, so that he shouted and boomed in the wildest way. He was "letting himself go" and trusting to the habits of the pulpit of St. Barnabas to bring him through.

"I perceive now how you stand. Only too well do I perceive how you stand. From the outset I guessed how things were with you. I waited—I waited to be perfectly sure, before I bore my testimony. But it speaks for itself—the shamelessness of your costume, the licentious freedom of your manners! Young men and women, smiling, joining hands, near to caressing, when averted eyes, averted eyes, are the least tribute you could pay to modesty! And this vile talk—of lovers loving—without bonds or blessings, without rules or restraint. What does it mean? Whither does it lead? Do not imagine because I am a priest, a man pure and virginal in spite of great temptations, do not imagine that I do not understand! Have I no vision of the secret places of the heart? Do not the wounded sinners, the broken potsherds, creep to me with their pitiful confessions? And I will tell you plainly whither you go and how you stand. This so-called freedom of yours is nothing but licence. Your so-called Utopia, I see plainly, is nothing but a hell of unbridled indulgence! Unbridled indulgence!"

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Mr. Burleigh held up a protesting hand, but Father Amerton's eloquence soared over the obstruction.

He beat upon the back of the seat before him. "I will bear my witness," he shouted. "I will bear my witness. I will make no bones about it. I refuse to mince matters, I tell you. You are all living—in promiscuity! That is the word for it. In animal promiscuity! In *bestial* promiscuity!"

Mr. Burleigh had sprung to his feet. He was holding up his two hands and motioning the London Boanerges to sit down. "No, no!" he cried. "You must *stop*, Father Amerton. Really, you must stop. You are being insulting. You do not understand. Sit *down*, please. I insist."

"*Sit down and hold your peace*," said a very clear voice. "Or you will be taken away."

Something made Father Amerton aware of a still figure at his elbow. He met the eyes of a lithe young man who was scrutinising his build as a portrait-painter might scrutinise a new sitter. There was no threat in his bearing, he stood quite still, and yet his appearance threw an extraordinary quality of evanescence about Father Amerton. The great preacher's voice died in his throat.

Mr. Burleigh's bland voice was lifted to avert a conflict. "Mr. Serpentine, sir, I appeal to you and apologise. He is not fully responsible. We others regret the interruption—the incident. I pray you, please do not take him away, whatever taking away may mean. I will answer personally for his good behaviour. . . . *Do* sit down, Father Amerton, *please;*

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now; or I shall wash my hands of the whole business."

Father Amerton hesitated.

"My time will come," he said and looked the young man in the eyes for a moment and then went back to his seat.

Urthred spoke quietly and clearly. "You Earthlings are difficult guests to entertain. This is not all. . . . Manifestly this man's mind is very unclean. His sexual imagination is evidently inflamed and diseased. He is angry and anxious to insult and wound. And his noises are terrific. To-morrow he must be examined and dealt with."

"How?" said Father Amerton, his round face suddenly grey. "How do you mean—*dealt* with?"

"*Please* do not talk," said Mr. Burleigh. "*Please* do not talk any more. You have done quite enough mischief. . . ."

For the time the incident seemed at an end, but it had left a queer little twinge of fear in Mr. Barnstaple's heart. These Utopians were very gentle-mannered and gracious people indeed, but just for a moment the hand of power had seemed to hover over the Earthling party. Sunlight and beauty were all about the visitors, nevertheless they were strangers and quite helpless strangers in an unknown world. The Utopian faces were kindly and their eyes curious and in a manner friendly, but much more observant than friendly. It was as if they looked across some impassable gulf of difference.

And then Mr. Barnstaple in the midst of his distress met the brown eyes of Lychnis, and they were kindlier than the eyes of the other Utopians. She

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at least understood the fear that had come to him, he felt, and she was willing to reassure him and be his friend. Mr. Barnstaple looked at her, feeling for the moment much as a stray dog might do who approaches a doubtfully amiable group and gets a friendly glance and a greeting.

§ 2

Another mind that was also in active resistance to Utopia was that of Mr. Freddy Mush. He had no quarrel indeed with the religion or morals or social organisation of Utopia. He had long since learned that no gentleman of serious æsthetic pretentions betrays any interest whatever in such matters. His perceptions were by hypothesis too fine for them. But presently he made it clear that there had been something very ancient and beautiful called the "Balance of Nature" which the scientific methods of Utopia had destroyed. What this Balance of Nature of his was, and how it worked on Earth, neither the Utopians nor Mr. Barnstaple were able to understand very clearly. Under cross-examination Mr. Mush grew pink and restive and his eye-glass flashed defensively. "I hold by the swallows," he repeated. "If you can't see my point about that I don't know what else I can say."

He began with the fact and reverted to the fact that there were no swallows to be seen in Utopia, and there were no swallows to be seen in Utopia because there were no gnats nor midges. There had been an enormous deliberate reduction of insect life in Utopia,

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and that had seriously affected every sort of creature that was directly or indirectly dependent upon insect life. So soon as the new state of affairs was securely established in Utopia and the educational state working, the attention of the Utopian community had been given to the long-cherished idea of a systematic extermination of tiresome and mischievous species. A careful inquiry was made into the harmfulness and the possibility of eliminating the house-fly for example, wasps and hornets, various species of mice and rats, rabbits, stinging nettles. Ten thousand species, from disease-germ to rhinoceros and hyena, were put upon their trial. Every species found was given an advocate. Of each it was asked: What good is it? What harm does it do? How can it be extirpated? What else may go with it if it goes? Is it worth while wiping it out of existence? Or can it be mitigated and retained? And even when the verdict was death final and complete, Utopia set about the business of extermination with great caution. A reserve would be kept and was in many cases still being kept, in some secure isolation, of every species condemned.

Most infectious and contagious fevers had been completely stamped out; some had gone very easily; some had only been driven out of human life by proclaiming a war and subjecting the whole population to discipline. Many internal and external parasites of man and animals had also been got rid of completely. And further, there had been a great cleansing of the world from noxious insects, from weeds and vermin and hostile beasts. The mosquito

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had gone, the house-fly, the blow-fly, and indeed a great multitude of flies had gone; they had been driven out of life by campaigns involving an immense effort and extending over many generations. It had been infinitely more easy to get rid of such big annoyances as the hyena and the wolf than to abolish these smaller pests. The attack upon the flies had involved the virtual rebuilding of a large proportion of Utopian houses and a minute cleansing of them all throughout the planet.

The question of what else would go if a certain species went was one of the most subtle that Utopia had to face. Certain insects, for example, were destructive and offensive grubs in the opening stage of their lives, were evil as caterpillar or pupa and then became either beautiful in themselves or necessary to the fertilisation of some useful or exquisite flowers. Others offensive in themselves were a necessary irreplaceable food to pleasant and desirable creatures. It was not true that swallows had gone from Utopia but they had become extremely rare; and rare too were a number of little insectivorous birds, the fly-catcher for example, that harlequin of the air. But they had not died out altogether; the extermination of insects had not gone to that length; sufficient species had remained to make some districts still habitable for these delightful birds.

Many otherwise obnoxious plants were a convenient source of chemically complex substances that were still costly or tedious to make synthetically, and so had kept a restricted place in life. Plants and flowers, always simpler and more plastic in the hands

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of the breeder and hybridiser than animals, had been enormously changed in Utopia. Our Earthlings were to find a hundred sorts of foliage and of graceful and scented blossoms that were altogether strange to them. Plants, Mr. Barnstaple learned, had been trained and bred to make new and unprecedented secretions, waxes, gums, essential oils and the like, of the most desirable quality.

There had been much befriending and taming of big animals; the larger carnivora, combed and cleaned, reduced to a milk dietary, emasculated in spirit and altogether be-catted, were pets and ornaments in Utopia. The almost extinct elephant had increased again and Utopia had saved her giraffes. The brown bear had always been disposed to sweets and vegetarianism and had greatly improved in intelligence. The dog had given up barking and was comparatively rare. Sporting dogs were not used nor small pet animals.

Horses Mr. Barnstaple did not see, but as he was a modern urban type he did not miss them very much and he did not ask any questions about them while he was actually in Utopia. He never found out whether they had or had not become extinct.

As he heard on his first afternoon in that world of this revision and editing, this weeding and cultivation of the kingdoms of nature by mankind, it seemed to him to be the most natural and necessary phase in human history. "After all," he said to himself, "it was a good invention to say that man was created a gardener."

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And now man was weeding and cultivating his own strain. . . .

The Utopians told of eugenic beginnings, of a new and surer decision in the choice of parents, of an increasing certainty in the science of heredity; and as Mr. Barnstaple contrasted the firm clear beauty of face and limb that every Utopian displayed with the carelessly assembled features and bodily disproportions of his earthly associates, he realised that already, but with three thousand years or so of advantage, these Utopians were passing beyond man towards a nobler humanity. They were becoming different in kind.

§ 3

They were different in kind.

As the questions and explanations and exchanges of that afternoon went on, it became more and more evident to Mr. Barnstaple that the difference of their bodies was as nothing to the differences of their minds. Innately better to begin with, the minds of these children of light had grown up uninjured by any such tremendous frictions, concealments, ambiguities and ignorances as cripple the growing mind of an Earthling. They were clear and frank and direct. They had never developed that defensive suspicion of the teacher, that resistance to instruction, which is the natural response to teaching that is half aggression. They were beautifully unwary in their communications. The ironies, concealments, insincerities, vanities and pretensions of earthly conver-

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sation seemed unknown to them. Mr. Barnstaple found this mental nakedness of theirs as sweet and refreshing as the mountain air he was breathing. It amazed him that they could be so patient and lucid with beings so underbred.

Underbred was the word he used in his mind. Himself, he felt the most underbred of all; he was afraid of these Utopians; snobbish and abject before them, he was like a mannerless earthy lout in a drawing-room, and he was bitterly ashamed of his own abjection. All the other Earthlings except Mr. Burleigh and Lady Stella betrayed the defensive spite of consciously inferior creatures struggling against that consciousness.

Like Father Amerton, Mr. Burleigh's chauffeur was evidently greatly shocked and disturbed by the unclothed condition of the Utopians; his feelings expressed themselves by gestures, grimaces and an occasional sarcastic comment such as "I *don't* think!" or "What O!" These he addressed for the most part to Mr. Barnstaple, for whom, as the owner of a very little old car, he evidently mingled feelings of profound contempt and social fellowship. He would also direct Mr. Barnstaple's attention to anything that he considered remarkable in bearing or gesture, by means of a peculiar stare and grimace combined with raised eyebrows. He had a way of pointing with his mouth and nose that Mr. Barnstaple under more normal circumstances might have found entertaining.

Lady Stella, who had impressed Mr. Barnstaple at first as a very great lady of the modern type, he

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was now beginning to feel was on her defence and becoming rather too ladylike. Mr. Burleigh however retained a certain aristocratic sublimity. He had been a great man on earth for all his life and it was evident that he saw no reason why he should not be accepted as a great man in Utopia. On earth he had done little and had been intelligently receptive with the happiest results. That alert, questioning mind of his, free of all persuasions, convictions or revolutionary desires, fell with the utmost ease into the pose of a distinguished person inspecting, in a sympathetic but entirely non-committal manner, the institutions of an alien state. "Tell me," that engaging phrase, laced his conversation.

The evening was drawing on; the clear Utopian sky was glowing with the gold of sunset and a towering mass of cloud above the lake was fading from pink to a dark purple, when Mr. Rupert Catskill imposed himself upon Mr. Barnstaple's attention. He was fretting in his place. "I have something to say," he said. "I have something to say."

Presently he jumped up and walked to the centre of the semicircle from which Mr. Burleigh had spoken earlier in the afternoon. "Mr. Serpentine," he said. "Mr. Burleigh. There are a few things I should be glad to say—if you can give me this opportunity of saying them."

§ 4

He took off his grey top hat, went back and placed it on his seat and returned to the centre of the apse.

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He put back his coat-tails, rested his hands on his hips, thrust his head forward, regarded his audience for a moment with an expression half cunning, half defiant, muttered something inaudible and began.

His opening was not prepossessing. There was some slight impediment in his speech, the little brother of a lisp, against which his voice beat gutturally. His first few sentences had an effect of being jerked out by unsteady efforts. Then it became evident to Mr. Barnstaple that Mr. Catskill was expressing a very definite point of view, he was offering a reasoned and intelligible view of Utopia. Mr. Barnstaple disagreed with that criticism, indeed he disagreed with it violently, but he had to recognise that it expressed an understandable attitude of mind.

Mr. Catskill began with a sweeping admission of the beauty and order of Utopia. He praised the "glowing health" he saw "on every cheek," the wealth, tranquillity and comfort of Utopian life. They had "tamed the forces of nature and subjugated them altogether to one sole end, to the material comfort of the race."

"But Arden and Greenlake?" murmured Mr. Barnstaple.

Mr. Catskill did not hear or heed the interruption. "The first effect, Mr. Speaker—Mr. Serpentine, I *should* say—the first effect upon an earthly mind is overwhelming. Is it any wonder"—he glanced at Mr. Burleigh and Mr. Barnstaple—"is it any wonder that admiration has carried some of us off our feet? Is it any wonder that for a time your almost magic beauty has charmed us into forgetting much that is

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in our own natures—into forgetting deep and mysterious impulses, cravings, necessities, so that we have been ready to say, 'Here at last is Lotus Land. Here let us abide, let us adapt ourselves to this planned and ordered splendour and live our lives out here and die.' I, too, Mr.—Mr. Serpentine, succumbed to that magic for a time. But only for a time. Already, sir, I find myself full of questionings." . . .

His bright, headlong mind had seized upon the fact that every phase in the weeding and cleansing of Utopia from pests and parasites and diseases had been accompanied by the possibility of collateral limitations and losses; or perhaps it would be juster to say that that fact had seized upon his mind. He ignored the deliberation and precautions that had accompanied every step in the process of making a world securely healthy and wholesome for human activity. He assumed there had been losses with every gain, he went on to exaggerate these losses and ran on glibly to the inevitable metaphor of throwing away the baby with its bath—inevitable, that is, for a British parliamentarian. The Utopians, he declared, were living lives of extraordinary ease, safety and "may I say so—indulgence" ("They work," said Mr. Barnstaple), but with a thousand annoyances and disagreeables gone had not something else greater and more precious gone also? Life on earth was, he admitted, insecure, full of pains and anxieties, full indeed of miseries and distresses and anguish, but also, and indeed by reason of these very things, it had moments of intensity, hopes, joyful surprises, escapes, attainments, such as the ordered life of

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Utopia could not possibly afford. "You have been getting away from conflicts and distresses. Have you not also been getting away from the living and quivering realities of life?"

He launched out upon a eulogy of earthly life. He extolled the vitality of life upon earth as though there were no signs of vitality in the high splendour about him. He spoke of the "thunder of our crowded cities," of the "urge of our teeming millions," of the "broad tides of commerce and industrial effort and warfare," that "swayed and came and went in the hives and harbours of our race."

He had the knack of the plausible phrase and that imaginative touch which makes for eloquence. Mr. Barnstaple forgot that slight impediment and the thickness of the voice that said these things. Mr. Catskill boldly admitted all the earthly evils and dangers that Mr. Burleigh had retailed. Everything that Mr. Burleigh had said was true. All that he had said fell indeed far short of the truth. Famine we knew, and pestilence. We suffered from a thousand diseases that Utopia had eliminated. We were afflicted by a thousand afflictions that were known to Utopia now only by ancient tradition. "The rats gnaw and the summer flies persecute and madden. At times life reeks and stinks. I admit it, sir, I admit it. We go down far below your extremest experiences into discomforts and miseries, anxieties and anguish of soul and body, into bitterness, terror and despair. Yea. But do we not also go higher? I challenge you with that. What can you know in this immense safety of the intensity, the frantic, terror-driven

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intensity, of many of our efforts? What can you know of reprieves and interludes and escapes? Think of our many happinesses beyond your ken! What do you know here of the sweet early days of convalescence? Of going for a holiday out of disagreeable surroundings? Of taking some great risk to body or fortune and bringing it off? Of winning a bet against enormous odds? Of coming out of prison? And, sir, it has been said that there are those in our world who have found a fascination even in pain itself. Because our life is dreadfuller, sir, it has, and it must have, moments that are infinitely brighter than yours. It is titanic, sir, where this is merely tidy. And we are inured to it and hardened by it. We are tempered to a finer edge. That is the point to which I am coming. Ask us to give up our earthly disorder, our miseries and distresses, our high death-rates and our hideous diseases, and at the first question every man and woman in the world would say, 'Yes! Willingly, Yes!' At the first question, sir!"

Mr. Catskill held his audience for a moment on his extended finger.

"And then we should begin to take thought. We should ask, as you say your naturalists asked about your flies and suchlike offensive small game, we should ask, 'What goes with it? What is the price?' And when we learned that the price was to surrender that intensity of life, that tormented energy, that pickled and experienced toughness, that ratlike, wolflike toughness our perpetual struggle engenders, we should hesitate. We should hesitate. In the end, sir, I believe, I hope and believe, indeed I pray

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and believe, we should say, 'No!' We should say, 'No!'"

Mr. Catskill was now in a state of great cerebral exaltation. He was making short thrusting gestures with his clenched fist. His voice rose and fell and boomed; he swayed and turned about, glanced for the approval of his fellow Earthlings, flung stray smiles at Mr. Burleigh.

This idea that our poor wrangling, nerveless, chance-driven world was really a fierce and close-knit system of powerful reactions in contrast with the evening serenities of a made and finished Utopia, had taken complete possession of his mind. "Never before, sir, have I realised, as I realise now, the high, the terrible and adventurous destinies of our earthly race. I look upon this Golden Lotus Land of yours, this divine perfected land from which all conflict has been banished——"

Mr. Barnstaple caught a faint smile on the face of the woman who had reminded him of the Delphic Sibyl.

"——and I admit and admire its order and beauty as some dusty and resolute pilgrim might pause, on his exalted and mysterious quest, and admit and admire the order and beauty of the pleasant gardens of some prosperous Sybarite. And like that pilgrim I may beg leave, sir, to question the wisdom of your way of living. For I take it, sir, that it is now a proven thing that life and all the energy and beauty of life are begotten by struggle and competition and conflict; we were moulded and wrought in hardship, and so, sir, were you. And yet you dream here that

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you have eliminated conflict for ever. Your economic state, I gather, is some form of socialism; you have abolished competition in all the businesses of peace. Your political state is one universal unity; you have altogether cut out the bracing and ennobling threat and the purging and terrifying experience of war. Everything is ordered and provided for. Everything is secure. Everything is secure, sir, except for one thing. . . .

"I grieve to trouble your tranquillity, sir, but I must breathe the name of that one forgotten thing —*degeneration!* What is there here to prevent degeneration? Are you preventing degeneration?

"What penalties are there any longer for indolence? What rewards for exceptional energy and effort? What is there to keep men industrious, what watchful, when there is no personal danger and no personal loss but only some remote danger or injury to the community? For a time by a sort of inertia you may keep going. You may seem to be making a success of things. I admit it, you *do* seem to be making a success of things. Autumnal glory! Sunset splendour! *While about you in universes parallel to yours, parallel races still toil, still suffer, still compete and eliminate and gather strength and energy!*"

Mr. Catskill flourished his hand at the Utopians in rhetorical triumph.

"I would not have you think, sir, that these criticisms of your world are offered in a hostile spirit. They are offered in the most amiable and helpful spirit. I am the skeleton, but the most friendly and apologetic skeleton, at your feast. I ask my searching

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and disagreeable question because I must. Is it indeed the wise way that you have chosen? You have sweetness and light—and leisure. Granted. But if there is all this multitude of Universes, of which you have told us, Mr. Serpentine, so clearly and illuminatingly, and if one may suddenly open into another as ours has done into yours, I would ask you most earnestly how safe is your sweetness, your light and your leisure? We talk here, separated by we know not how flimsy a partition from innumerable worlds. And at that thought, sir, it seems to me that as I stand here in the great golden calm of this place I can almost hear the trampling of hungry myriads as fierce and persistent as rats or wolves, the snarling voices of races inured to every pain and cruelty, the threat of terrible heroisms and pitiless aggressions. . . ."

He brought his discourse to an abrupt end. He smiled faintly; it seemed to Mr. Barnstaple that he triumphed over Utopia. He stood with hands on his hips and, as if he bent his body by that method, bowed stiffly. "Sir," he said with that ghost of a lisp of his, his eye on Mr. Burleigh, "I have said my say."

He turned about and regarded Mr. Barnstaple for a moment with his face screwed up almost to the appearance of a wink. He nodded his head, as if he tapped a nail with a hammer, jerked himself into activity, and returned to his proper place.

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§ 5

Urthred did not so much answer Mr. Catskill as sit, elbow on knee and chin on hand, thinking audibly about him.

"The gnawing vigour of the rat," he mused, "the craving pursuit of the wolf, the mechanical persistence of wasp and fly and disease germ, have gone out of our world. That is true. We have obliterated that much of life's devouring forces. And lost nothing worth having. Pain, filth, indignity for ourselves —or any creatures; they have gone or they go. But it is not true that competition has gone from our world. Why does he say it has? Every one here works to his or her utmost—for service and distinction. None may cheat himself out of toil or duty as men did in the age of confusion, when the mean and acquisitive lived and bred in luxury upon the heedlessness of more generous types. Why does he say we degenerate? He has been told better already. The indolent and inferior do not procreate here. And why should he threaten us with fancies of irruptions from other, fiercer, more barbaric worlds? It is we who can open the doors into such other universes or close them as we choose. Because we know. We can go to them—when we know enough we shall—but they cannot come to us. There is no way but knowledge out of the cages of life. . . . What is the matter with the mind of this man?

"These Earthlings are only in the beginnings of science. They are still for all practical ends in that phase of fear and taboos that came also in the

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development of Utopia before confidence and understanding. Out of which phase our own world struggled during the Last Age of Confusion. The minds of these Earthlings are full of fears and prohibitions, and though it has dawned upon them that they may possibly control their universe, the thought is too terrible yet for them to face. They avert their minds from it. They still want to go on thinking, as their fathers did before them, that the universe is being managed for them better than they can control it for themselves. Because if that is so, they are free to obey their own violent little individual motives. Leave things to God, they cry, or leave them to Competition."

"Evolution was our blessed word," said Mr. Barnstaple, deeply interested.

"It is all the same thing—God, or Evolution, or what you will—so long as you mean a Power beyond your own which excuses you from your duty. Utopia says, 'Do not leave things at all. Take hold.' But these Earthlings still lack the habit of looking at reality—undraped. This man with the white linen fetter round his neck is afraid even to look upon men and women as they are. He is disgustingly excited by the common human body. This man with the glass lens before his left eye struggles to believe that there is a wise old Mother Nature behind the appearances of things, keeping a Balance. It was fantastic to hear about his Balance of Nature. Cannot he with two eyes and a lens see better than that? This last man who spoke so impressively, thinks that this old Beldame Nature is a limitless source of will and

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energy if only we submit to her freaks and cruelties and imitate her most savage moods, if only we sufficiently thrust and kill and rob and ravish one another. . . . He too preaches the old fatalism and believes it is the teaching of science. . . .

"These Earthlings do not yet dare to see what our Mother Nature is. At the back of their minds is still the desire to abandon themselves to her. They do not see that except for our eyes and wills, she is purposeless and blind. She is not awful, she is horrible. She takes no heed to our standards, nor to any standards of excellence. She made us by accident; all her children are bastards—undesired; she will cherish or expose them, pet or starve or torment without rhyme or reason. She does not heed, she does not care. She will lift us up to power and intelligence, or debase us to the mean feebleness of the rabbit or the slimy white filthiness of a thousand of her parasitic inventions. There must be good in her because she made all that is good in us—but also there is endless evil. Do not you Earthlings see the dirt of her, the cruelty, the insane indignity of much of her work?"

"Phew! Worse than 'Nature red in tooth and claw,'" murmured Mr. Freddy Mush.

"These things are plain," mused Urthred. "If they dared to see.

"Half the species of life in our planet also, half and more than half of all the things alive, were ugly or obnoxious, inane, miserable, wretched, with elaborate diseases, helplessly ill adjusted to Nature's continually fluctuating conditions, when first we took this old Hag, our Mother, in hand. We have, after cen-

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turies of struggle, suppressed her nastier fancies, and washed her and combed her and taught her to respect and heed the last child of her wantonings—Man. With Man came Logos, the Word and the Will into our universe, to watch it and fear it, to learn it and cease to fear it, to know it and comprehend it and master it. So that we of Utopia are no longer the beaten and starved children of Nature, but her free and adolescent sons. We have taken over the Old Lady's Estate. Every day we learn a little better how to master this planet. Every day our thoughts go out more surely to our inheritance, the stars. And the deeps beyond and beneath the stars."

"You have reached the stars?" cried Mr. Barnstaple.

"Not yet. Not even the other planets. But very plainly the time draws near when those great distances will cease to restrain us. . . ."

He paused. "Many of us will have to go out into the deeps of space. . . . And never return . . . Giving their lives. . . .

"And into these new spaces—countless brave men. . . ."

Urthred turned towards Mr. Catskill. "We find your frankly expressed thoughts particularly interesting to-day. You help us to understand the past of our own world. You help us to deal with an urgent problem that we will presently explain to you. There are thoughts and ideas like yours in our ancient literature of two or three thousand years ago, the same preaching of selfish violence as though it was a virtue. Even then intelligent men knew better, and

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you yourself might know better if you were not wilfully set in wrong opinions. But it is plain to see from your manner and bearing that you are very wilful indeed in your opinions.

"You are not, you must realise, a very beautiful person, and probably you are not very beautiful in your pleasures and proceedings. But you have superabundant energy, and so it is natural for you to turn to the excitements of risk and escape, to think that the best thing in life is the sensation of conflict and winning. Also in the economic confusion of such a world as yours there is an intolerable amount of toil that must be done, toil so disagreeable that it makes every one of spirit anxious to thrust away as much of it as possible and to claim exemption from it on account of nobility, gallantry or good fortune. People in your world no doubt persuade themselves very easily that they are justifiably exempted, and you are under that persuasion. You live in a world of classes. Your badly trained mind has been under no necessity to invent its own excuses; the class into which you were born had all its excuses ready for you. So it is you take the best of everything without scruple and you adventure with life, chiefly at the expense of other people, with a mind trained by all its circumstances to resist the idea that there is any possible way of human living that can be steadfast and disciplined and at the same time vigorous and happy. You have argued against that persuasion all your life as though it were your personal enemy. It is your personal enemy; it condemns your way of life altogether, it damns you utterly for your adventures.

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"Confronted now with an ordered and achieved beauty of living you still resist; you resist to escape dismay; you argue that this world of ours is unromantic, wanting in intensity, decadent, feeble. Now—in the matter of physical strength, grip hands with that young man who sits beside you."

Mr. Catskill glanced at the extended hand and shook his head knowingly. "You go on talking," he said.

"Yet when I tell you that neither our wills nor our bodies are as feeble as yours, your mind resists obstinately. You will not believe it. If for a moment your mind admits it, afterwards it recoils to the system of persuasions that protect your self-esteem. Only one of you accepts our world at all, and he does so rather because he is weary of yours than willing for ours. So I suppose it has to be. Yours are Age of Confusion minds, trained to conflict, trained to insecurity and secret self-seeking. In that fashion Nature and your state have taught you to live and so you must needs live until you die. Such lessons are to be unlearned only in ten thousand generations, by the slow education of three thousand years.

"And we are puzzled by the question, what are we to do with you? We will try our utmost to deal fairly and friendly with you if you will respect our laws and ways.

"But it will be very difficult, we know, for you. You do not realise yet how difficult your habits and preconceptions will make it for you. Your party so far has behaved very reasonably and properly, in act if not in thought. But we have had another experi-

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ence of Earthling ways to-day of a much more tragic kind. Your talk of fiercer barbaric worlds breaking in upon us has had its grotesque parallel in reality to-day. It is true; there is something fierce and ratlike and dangerous about Earthly men. You are not the only Earthlings who came into Utopia through this gate that swung open for a moment to-day. There are others——"

"Of course!" said Mr. Barnstaple. "I should have guessed it! That third lot!"

"There is yet another of these queer locomotive machines of yours in Utopia."

"The grey car!" said Mr. Barnstaple to Mr. Burleigh. "It wasn't a hundred yards ahead of you."

"Raced us from Hounslow," said Mr. Burleigh's driver. "Real hot stuff."

Mr. Burleigh turned to Mr. Freddy Mush. "I think you said you recognised some one?"

"Lord Barralonga, sir, almost to a certainty, and I *think* Miss Greeta Grey."

"There were two other men," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"They will complicate things," said Mr. Burleigh.

"They do complicate things," said Urthred. "They have killed a man."

"A Utopian?"

"These other people—there are five of them—whose names you seem to know, came into Utopia just in front of your two vehicles. Instead of stopping as you did when they found themselves on a new strange road, they seem to have quickened their pace very considerably. They passed some men and women and they made extraordinary gestures to

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them and abominable noises produced by an instrument specially designed for that purpose. Further on they encountered a silver cheetah and charged at it and ran right over it, breaking its back. They do not seem to have paused to see what became of it. A young man named Gold came out into the road to ask them to stop. But their machine is made in the most fantastic way, very complex and very foolish. It is quite unable to stop short suddenly. It is not driven by a single engine that is completely controlled. It has a complicated internal conflict. It has a sort of engine that drives it forward by a complex cogged gear on the axle of the hind wheels and it has various clumsy stopping contrivances by means of friction at certain points. You can apparently drive the engine at the utmost speed and at the same time jam the wheels to prevent them going round. When this young man stepped forward in front of them, they were quite unable to stop. They may have tried to do so. They say they did. Their machine swerved dangerously and struck him with its side."

"And killed him?"

"And killed him instantly. His body was horribly injured. . . . But they did not stop even for that. They slowed down and had a hasty consultation, and then seeing that people were coming they set their machine in motion again and made off. They seem to have been seized with a panic-fear of restraint and punishment. Their motives are very difficult to understand. At any rate they went on. They rode on and on into our country for some hours. An aeroplane was presently set to follow them and another

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to clear the road in front of them. It was not easy to clear the road because neither our people nor our animals understand such vehicles as theirs—nor such behaviour. In the afternoon they got among mountains and evidently found our roads much too smooth and steep for their machine. It made extraordinary noises as though it was gritting its teeth, and emitted a blue vapour with an offensive smell. At one corner where it should have stopped short, it skated about and slid suddenly sideways and rolled over a cliff and fell for perhaps twice the height of a man into a torrent."

"And they were killed?" asked Mr. Burleigh, with, as it seemed to Mr. Barnstaple, a touch of eagerness in his voice.

"Not one of them."

"Oh!" said Mr. Burleigh, "then what happened?"

"One of them has a broken arm and another is badly cut about the face. The other two men and the woman are uninjured except for fright and shock. When our people came up to them the four men held their hands above their heads. Apparently they feared they would be killed at once and did this as an appeal for mercy."

"And what are you doing with them?"

"We are bringing them here. It is better, we think, to keep all you Earthlings together. At present we cannot imagine what must be done to you. We want to learn from you and we want to be friendly with you if it is possible. It has been suggested that you should be returned to your world. In the end that may be the best thing to do. But at present we

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do not know enough to do this certainly. Arden and Greenlake, when they made the attempt to rotate a part of our matter through the F dimension, believed that they would rotate it in empty space in that dimension. The fact that you were there and were caught into our universe, is the most unexpected thing that has happened in Utopia for a thousand years."

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CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

THE BRINGING IN OF LORD BARRALONGA'S PARTY

§ 1

THE conference broke up upon this announcement, but Lord Barralonga and his party were not brought to the Conference Gardens until long after dark. No effort was made to restrain or control the movements of the Earthlings. Mr. Burleigh walked down to the lake with Lady Stella and the psychologist whose name was Lion, asking and answering questions. Mr. Burleigh's chauffeur wandered rather disconsolately, keeping within hail of his employer. Mr. Rupert Catskill took Mr. Mush off by the arm as if to give him instructions.

Mr. Barnstaple wanted to walk about alone to recall and digest the astounding realisations of the afternoon and to accustom himself to the wonder of this beautiful world, so beautiful and now in the twilight so mysterious also, with its trees and flowers becoming dim and shapeless notes of pallor and blackness and with the clear forms and gracious proportions of its buildings melting into a twilight indistinctness.

The earthliness of his companions intervened between him and this world into which he felt he might otherwise have been accepted and absorbed. He was in it, but in it only as a strange and dis-

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cordant intruder. Yet he loved it already and desired it and was passionately anxious to become a part of it. He had a vague but very powerful feeling that if only he could get away from his companions, if only in some way he could cast off his earthly clothing and everything upon him that marked him as earthly and linked him to earth, he would by the very act of casting that off become himself native to Utopia, and then that this tormenting sense, this bleak, distressing strangeness would vanish out of his mind. He would suddenly find himself a Utopian in nature and reality, and it was Earth that would become the incredible dream, a dream that would fade at last completely out of his mind.

For a time, however, Father Amerton's need of a hearer prevented any such detachment from earthly thoughts and things. He stuck close to Mr. Barnstaple and maintained a stream of questions and comments that threw over this Utopian scene the quality of some Earl's Court exhibition that the two of them were visiting and criticising together. It was evidently so provisional, so disputable and unreal to him, that at any moment Mr. Barnstaple felt he would express no astonishment if a rift in the scenery suddenly let in the clatter of the Earl's Court railway-station or gave a glimpse of the conventional Gothic spire of St. Barnabas in the West.

At first Father Amerton's mind was busy chiefly with the fact that on the morrow he was to be "dealt with" on account of the scene in the conference. "How *can* they deal with me?" he said for the fourth time.

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"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Barnstaple. Every time Mr. Amerton began speaking Mr. Barnstaple said, "I beg your pardon," in order to convey to him that he was interrupting a train of thought. But every time Mr. Barnstaple said, "I beg your pardon," Mr. Amerton would merely remark, "You ought to consult some one about your hearing," and then go on with what he had to say.

"How can I be *dealt with?*" he asked of Mr. Barnstaple and the circumambient dusk. "How can I be dealt with?"

"Oh! psychoanalysis or something of that sort," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"It takes two to play at that game," said Father Amerton, but it seemed to Mr. Barnstaple with a slight flavour of relief in his tone. "Whatever they ask me, whatever they suggest to me, I will not fail—I will bear my witness."

"I have no doubt they will find it hard to suppress you," said Mr. Barnstaple bitterly. . . .

For a time they walked among the tall sweet-smelling, white-flowered shrubs in silence. Now and then Mr. Barnstaple would quicken or slacken his pace with the idea of increasing his distance from Father Amerton, but quite mechanically Father Amerton responded to these efforts. "Promiscuity," he began again presently. "What other word could you use?"

"I really beg your pardon," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"What other word could I have used *but* 'promiscuity'? What else could one expect, with people

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running about in this amazing want of costume, but the morals of the monkeys' cage? They admit that our institution of marriage is practically unknown to them!"

"It's a different world," said Mr. Barnstaple irritably. "A different world."

"The Laws of Morality hold good for every conceivable world."

"But in a world in which people propagated by fission and there was no sex?"

"Morality would be simpler but it would be the same morality." . . .

Presently Mr. Barnstaple was begging his pardon again.

"I was saying that this is a lost world."

"It doesn't *look* lost," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"It has rejected and forgotten Salvation."

Mr. Barnstaple put his hands in his pocket and began to whistle the barcarolle from "The Tales of Hoffman," very softly to himself. Would Father Amerton never leave him? Could nothing be done with Father Amerton? At the old shows at Earl's Court there used to be wire baskets for waste paper and cigarette ends and bores generally. If one could only tip Father Amerton suddenly into some such receptacle!

"Salvation has been offered them, and they have rejected it and well-nigh forgotten it. And that is why we have been sent to them. We have been sent to them to recall them to the One Thing that Matters, to the One Forgotten Thing. Once more we have to raise the healing symbol as Moses raised it in the

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Wilderness. Ours is no light mission. We have been sent into this Hell of sensuous materialism——"

"Oh, *Lord!*" said Mr. Barnstaple, and relapsed into the barcarolle. . . .

"I *beg* your pardon," he exclaimed again presently. "Where is the Pole Star? What has happened to the Wain?"

Mr. Barnstaple looked up.

He had not thought of the stars before, and he looked up prepared in this fresh Universe to see the strangest constellations. But just as the life and size of the planet they were on ran closely parallel to the earth's, so he beheld above him a starry vault of familiar forms. And just as the Utopian world failed to be altogether parallel to its sister universe, so did these constellations seem to be a little out in their drawing. Orion, he thought, straddled wider and with a great unfamiliar nebula at one corner, and it was true—the Wain was flattened out and the pointers pointed to a great void in the heavens.

"Their Pole Star gone! The Pointers, the Wain askew! It is symbolical," said Father Amerton.

It was only too obviously going to be symbolical. Mr. Barnstaple realised that a fresh storm of eloquence was imminent from Father Amerton. At any cost he felt this nuisance must be abated.

§ 2

On earth Mr. Barnstaple had been a passive victim to bores of all sorts, delicately and painfully considerate of the mental limitations that made their

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insensitive pressure possible. But the free air of Utopia had already mounted to his head and released initiatives that his excessively deferential recognition of others had hitherto restrained. He had had enough of Father Amerton; it was necessary to turn off Father Amerton, and he now proceeded to do so with a simple directness that surprised himself.

"Father Amerton," he said, "I have a confession to make to you."

"Ah!" cried Father Amerton. "Please—anything?"

"You have been walking about with me and shouting at my ears until I am strongly impelled to murder you."

"If what I have said has struck home——"

"It hasn't struck home. It has been a tiresome, silly, deafening jabbering in my ears. It wearies me indescribably. It prevents my attending to the marvellous things about us. I see exactly what you mean when you say that there is no Pole Star here and that that is symbolical. Before you begin I appreciate the symbol, and a very obvious, weak and ultimately inaccurate symbol it is. But you are one of those obstinate spirits who believes in spite of all evidence that the eternal hills are still eternal and the fixed stars fixed for ever. I want you to understand that I am entirely out of sympathy with all this stuff of yours. You seem to embody all that is wrong and ugly and impossible in Catholic teaching. I agree with these Utopians that there is something wrong with your mind about sex, in all probability a nasty twist given to it in early life, and that what you keep

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saying and hinting about sexual life here is horrible and outrageous. And I am equally hostile to you and exasperated and repelled by you when you speak of religion proper. You make religion disgusting just as you make sex disgusting. You are a dirty priest. What *you* call Christianity is a black and ugly superstition, a mere excuse for malignity and persecution. It is an outrage upon Christ. If you are a Christian, then most passionately I declare myself *not* a Christian. But there are other meanings for Christianity than those you put upon it, and in another sense this Utopia here is Christian beyond all dreaming. Utterly beyond your understanding. We have come into this glorious world, which, compared to our world, is like a bowl of crystal compared to an old tin can, and you have the insufferable impudence to say that we have been sent hither as missionaries to teach them—God knows what!"

"God *does* know what," said Father Amerton, a little taken aback, but coming up very pluckily.

"Oh!" cried Mr. Barnstaple, and was for a moment speechless.

"Listen to me, my Friend," said Father Amerton, catching at his sleeve.

"Not for my life!" cried Mr. Barnstaple, recoiling. "See! Down that vista, away there on the shore of the lake, those black figures are Mr. Burleigh, Mr. Mush and Lady Stella. They brought you here. They belong to your party and you belong to them. If they had not wanted your company you would not have been in their car. Go to them. I will not have you with me any longer. I refuse you and reject you.

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That is your way. This, by this little building, is mine. Don't follow me, or I will lay hands on you and bring in these Utopians to interfere between us. . . . Forgive my plainness, Father Amerton. But get away from me! Get away from me!"

Mr. Barnstaple turned, and seeing that Father Amerton stood hesitating at the parting of the ways, took to his heels and ran from him.

He fled along an alley behind tall hedges, turned sharply to the right and then to the left, passed over a high bridge that crossed in front of a cascade that flung a dash of spray in his face, blundered by two couples of lovers who whispered softly in the darkling, ran deviously across flower-studded turf, and at last threw himself down breathless upon the steps that led up to a terrace that looked towards lake and mountains, and was adorned, it seemed in the dim light, with squat stone figures of seated vigilant animals and men.

"Ye merciful stars!" cried Mr. Barnstaple. "At last I am alone."

He sat on these steps for a long time with his eyes upon the scene about him, drinking in the satisfying realisation that for a brief interval at any rate, with no earthly presence to intervene, he and Utopia were face to face.

§ 3

He could not call this world the world of his dreams because he had never dared to dream of any world so closely shaped to the desires and imaginations of his heart. But surely this world it was, or a

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world the very fellow of it, that had lain deep beneath the thoughts and dreams of thousands of sane and troubled men and women in the world of disorder from which he had come. It was no world of empty peace, no such golden decadence of indulgence as Mr. Catskill tried to imagine it; it was a world, Mr. Barnstaple perceived, intensely militant, conquering and to conquer, prevailing over the obduracy of force and matter, over the lifeless separations of empty space and all the antagonistic mysteries of being.

In Utopia in the past, obscured by the superficial exploits of statesmen like Burleigh and Catskill and the competition of traders and exploiters every whit as vile and vulgar as their earthly compeers, the work of quiet and patient thinkers and teachers had gone on and the foundations which sustained this serene intensity of activity had been laid. How few of these pioneers had ever felt more than a transitory gleam of the righteous loveliness of the world their lives made possible!

And yet even in the hate and turmoil and distresses of the Days of Confusion there must have been earnest enough of the exquisite and glorious possibilities of life. Over the foulest slums the sunset called to the imaginations of men, and from mountain ridges, across great valleys, from cliffs and hillsides and by the uncertain and terrible splendours of the sea, men must have had glimpses of the conceivable and attainable magnificence of being. Every flower petal, every sunlit leaf, the vitality of young things, the happy moments of the human mind

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transcending itself in art, all these things must have been material for hope, incentive to effort. And now at last—this world!

Mr. Barnstaple lifted up his hands like one who worships to the friendly multitude of the stars above him.

"I have seen," he whispered. "I have seen."

Little lights and soft glows of illumination were coming out here and there over this great park of flower-like buildings and garden spaces that sloped down towards the lake. A circling aeroplane, itself a star, hummed softly overhead.

A slender girl came past him down the steps and paused at the sight of him.

"Are you one of the Earthlings?" came the question, and a beam of soft light shone momentarily upon Mr. Barnstaple from the bracelet on her arm.

"I came to-day," said Mr. Barnstaple, peering up at her.

"You are the man who came alone in a little machine of tin, with rubber air-bags round the wheels, very rusty underneath, and painted yellow. I have been looking at it."

"It is not a bad little car," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"At first we thought the priest came in it with you."

"He is no friend of mine."

"There were priests like that in Utopia many years ago. They caused much mischief among the people."

"He was with the other lot," said Mr. Barnstaple.

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"For their week-end party I should think him—rather a mistake."

She sat down a step or so above him.

"It is wonderful that you should come here out of your world to us. Do you find this world of ours very wonderful? I suppose many things that seem quite commonplace to me because I have been born among them seem wonderful to you."

"You are not very old?"

"I am eleven. I am learning the history of the Ages of Confusion, and they say your world is still in an Age of Confusion. It is just as though you came to us out of the past—out of history. I was in the Conference and I was watching your face. You love this present world of ours—at least you love it much more than your other people do."

"I want to live all the rest of my life in it."

"I wonder if that is possible?"

"Why should it not be possible? It will be easier than sending me back. I should not be very much in the way. I should only be here for twenty or thirty years at the most, and I would learn everything I could and do everything I was told."

"But isn't there work that you have to do in your own world?"

Mr. Barnstaple made no answer to that. He did not seem to hear it. It was the girl who presently broke the silence.

"They say that when we Utopians are young, before our minds and characters are fully formed and matured, we are very like the men and women of the Age of Confusion. We are more egotistical then,

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they tell us; life about us is still so unknown, that we are adventurous and romantic. I suppose I am egotistical yet—and adventurous. And it does still seem to me that in spite of many terrible and dreadful things there was much that must have been wildly exciting and desirable in that past—which is still so like your present. What can it have been like to have been a general entering a conquered city? Or a prince being crowned? Or to be rich and able to astonish people by acts of power and benevolence? Or to be a martyr led out to die for some splendid misunderstood cause?"

"These things sound better in stories and histories than in reality," said Mr. Barnstaple after due consideration. "Did you hear Mr. Rupert Catskill, the last of the Earthlings to make a speech?"

"He thought romantically—but he did not look romantic."

"He has lived most romantically. He has fought bravely in wars. He has been a prisoner and escaped wonderfully from prison. His violent imaginations have caused the deaths of thousands of people. And presently we shall see another romantic adventurer in this Lord Barralonga they are bringing hither. He is enormously rich and he tries to astonish people with his wealth—just as you have dreamt of astonishing people."

"Are they not astonished?"

"Romance is not reality," said Mr. Barnstaple. "He is one of a number of floundering, corrupting rich men who are a weariness to themselves and an intolerable nuisance to the rest of our world. They

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want to do vulgar, showy things. This man Barralonga was an assistant to a photographer and something of an actor when a certain invention called moving pictures came into our world. He became a great prospector in the business of showing these pictures; partly by accident, partly by the unscrupulous cheating of various inventors. Then he launched out into speculations in shipping and in a trade we carry on in our world in frozen meat brought from great distances. He made food costly for many people and impossible for some, and so he grew rich. For in our world men grow wealthy by intercepting rather than by serving. And having become ignobly rich, certain of our politicians, for whom he did some timely services, ennobled him by giving him the title of Lord. Do you understand the things I am saying? Was your Age of Confusion so like ours? *You did not know it was so ugly.* Forgive me if I disillusion you about the Age of Confusion and its romantic possibilities. But I have just stepped out of the dust and disorder and noise of its indiscipline, out of limitation, cruelties and distresses, out of a weariness in which hope dies. . . . Perhaps if my world attracts you you may yet have an opportunity of adventuring out of all this into its disorders. . . . That will be an adventure indeed. . . . Who knows what may happen between our worlds? . . . But you will not like it, I am afraid. You cannot imagine how dirty our world is. . . . Dirt and disease, these are in the trailing skirts of all romance." . . .

A silence fell between them; he followed his own thoughts and the girl sat and wondered over him.

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At length he spoke again.

"Shall I tell you what I was thinking of when you spoke to me?"

"Yes."

"Your world is the consummation of a million ancient dreams. It is wonderful! It is wonder, high as heaven. But it is a great grief to me that two dear friends of mine cannot be here with me to see what I am seeing. It is queer how strong the thought of them is in my mind. One has passed now beyond all the universes, alas!—but the other is still in my world. You are a student, my dear; every one of your world, I suppose, is a student here, but in our world students are a class apart. We three were happy together because we were students and not yet caught into the mills of senseless toil, and we were none the less happy perhaps because we were miserably poor and often hungry together. We used to talk and dispute together and in our students' debating society, discussing the disorders of our world and how some day they might be bettered. Was there, in your Age of Confusion, that sort of eager, hopeful, poverty-struck student life?"

"Go on," said the girl with her eyes intent on his dim profile. "In old novels I have read of just that hungry, dreaming student world."

"We three agreed that the supreme need of our time was education. We agreed that was the highest service we could join. We all set about it in our various ways, I the least useful of the three. My friends and I drifted a little apart. They edited a great monthly periodical that helped to keep the world of

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science together, and my friend, serving a careful and grudging firm of publishers, edited schoolbooks for them, conducted an educational paper, and also inspected schools for our university. He was too heedless of pay and profit ever to become even passably well off though these publishers profited greatly by his work; his whole life was a continual service of toil for teaching; he did not take as much as a month's holiday in any year in his life. While he lived I thought little of the work he was doing, but since he died I have heard from teachers whose schools he inspected, and from book writers whom he advised, of the incessant high quality of his toil and the patience and sympathy of his work. On such lives as his this Utopia in which your sweet life is opening is founded; on such lives our world of earth will yet build its Utopia. But the life of this friend of mine ended abruptly in a way that tore my heart. He worked too hard and too long through a crisis in which it was inconvenient for him to take a holiday. His nervous system broke down with shocking suddenness, his mind gave way, he passed into a phase of acute melancholia and—died. For it is perfectly true, old Nature has neither righteousness nor pity. This happened a few weeks ago. That other old friend and I, with his wife, who had been his tireless helper, were chief among the mourners at his funeral. To-night the memory of that comes back to me with extraordinary vividness. I do not know how you dispose of your dead here, but on earth the dead are mostly buried in the earth."

"We are burned," said the girl.

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"Those who are liberal-minded in our world burn also. Our friend was burned, and we stood and took our part in a service according to the rites of our ancient religion in which we no longer believed, and presently we saw his coffin, covered with wreaths of flowers, slide from before us out of our sight through the gates that led to the furnaces of the crematorium; and as it went, taking with it so much of my youth, I saw that my other dear old friend was sobbing, and I too was wrung to the pitch of tears to think that so valiant and devoted and industrious a life should end, as it seemed, so miserably and thanklessly. The priest had been reading a long contentious discourse by a theological writer named Paul, full of bad arguments by analogy and weak assertions. I wished that instead of the ideas of this ingenious ancient we could have had some discourse upon the real nobility of our friend, on the pride and intensity of his work and on his scorn for mercenary things. All his life he had worked with unlimited devotion for such a world as this, and yet I doubt if he had ever had any realisation of the clearer, nobler life for man that his life of toil and the toil of such lives as his were making sure and certain in the days to come. He lived by faith. He lived too much by faith. There was not enough sunlight in his life. If I could have him here now—and that other dear friend who grieved for him so bitterly; if I could have them both here; if I could give up my place here to them so that they could see, as I see, the real greatness of their lives reflected in these great consequences of such lives as theirs—then, then I could rejoice in Utopia indeed. . . .

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But I feel now as if I had taken my old friend's savings and was spending them on myself." . . .

Mr. Barnstaple suddenly remembered the youth of his hearer. "Forgive me, my dear child, for running on in this fashion. But your voice was kind."

The girl's answer was to bend down and brush his extended hand with her soft lips.

Then suddenly she sprang to her feet. "Look at that light," she said, "among the stars!"

Mr. Barnstaple stood up beside her.

"That is the aeroplane bringing Lord Barralonga and his party; Lord Barralonga who killed a man today! Is he a very big, strong man—ungovernable and wonderful?"

Mr. Barnstaple, struck by a sudden doubt, looked sharply at the sweet upturned face beside him.

"I have never seen him. But I believe he is a youngish, baldish, undersized man, who suffers very gravely from a disordered liver and kidneys. This has prevented the dissipation of his energies upon youthful sports and pleasures and enabled him to concentrate upon the acquisition of property. And so he was able to buy the noble title that touches your imagination. Come with me and look at him."

The girl stood still and met his eyes. She was eleven years old and she was as tall as he was.

"But was there no romance in the past?"

"Only in the hearts of the young. And it died."

"But is there no romance?"

"Endless romance—and it has all to come. It comes for you."

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§ 4

The bringing in of Lord Barralonga and his party was something of an anticlimax to Mr. Barnstaple's wonderful day. He was tired and, quite unreasonably, he resented the invasion of Utopia by these people.

The two parties of Earthlings were brought together in a brightly lit hall near the lawn upon which the Barralonga aeroplane had come down. The newcomers came in in a group together, blinking, travel-worn and weary-looking. But it was evident they were greatly relieved to encounter other Earthlings in what was to them a still intensely puzzling experience. For they had had nothing to compare with the calm and lucid discussion of the Conference Place. Their lapse into this strange world was still an incomprehensible riddle for them.

Lord Barralonga was the owner of the gnome-like face that had looked out at Mr. Barnstaple when the large grey car had passed him on the Maidenhead Road. His skull was very low and broad above his brows so that he reminded Mr. Barnstaple of the flat stopper of a glass bottle. He looked hot and tired, he was considerably dishevelled as if from a struggle, and one arm was in a sling; his little brown eyes were as alert and wary as those of a wicked urchin in the hands of a policeman. Sticking close to him like a familiar spirit was a small, almost jockey-like chauffeur, whom he addressed as "Ridley." Ridley's face also was marked by the stern determination of a man in a difficult position not in

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any manner to give himself away. His left cheek and ear had been cut in the automobile smash and were liberally adorned with sticking-plaster. Miss Greeta Grey, the lady of the party, was a frankly blonde beauty in a white flannel tailor-made suit. She was extraordinarily unruffled by the circumstances in which she found herself; it was as if she had no sense whatever of their strangeness. She carried herself with the habitual hauteur of a beautiful girl almost professionally exposed to the risk of unworthy advances. Anywhere.

The other two people of the party were a grey-faced, grey-clad American, also very wary-eyed, who was, Mr. Barnstaple learned from Mr. Mush, Hunker, the Cinema King, and a thoroughly ruffled-looking Frenchman, a dark, smartly dressed man, with an imperfect command of English, who seemed rather to have fallen into Lord Barralonga's party than to have belonged to it properly. Mr. Barnstaple's mind leaped to the conclusion, and nothing occurred afterwards to change his opinion, that some interest in the cinematograph had brought this gentleman within range of Lord Barralonga's hospitality and that he had been caught, as a foreigner may so easily be caught, into the embrace of a thoroughly uncongenial week-end expedition.

As Lord Barralonga and Mr. Hunker came forward to greet Mr. Burleigh and Mr. Catskill, this Frenchman addressed himself to Mr. Barnstaple with the inquiry whether he spoke French.

"I cannot understand," he said. "We were to have gone to Viltshire—Wiltshire, and then one

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'orrible thing has happen after another. What is it we have come to and what sort of people are all these people who speak most excellent French? Is it a joke of Lord Barralonga, or a dream, or what has happen to us?"

Mr. Barnstaple attempted some explanation.

"Another dimension," said the Frenchman, "another worl'. That is all very well. But I have my business to attend to in London. I have no need to be brought back in this way to France, some sort of France, some other France in some other worl'. It is too much of a joke altogether."

Mr. Barnstaple attempted some further exposition. It was clear from his interlocutor's puzzled face that the phrases he used were too difficult. He turned helplessly to Lady Stella and found her ready to undertake the task. "This lady," he said, "will be able to make things plain to you. Lady Stella, this is Monsieur——"

"Emile Dupont," the Frenchman bowed. "I am what you call a journalist and publicist. I am interested in the cinematograph from the point of view of education and propaganda. It is why I am here with his Lordship Barralonga."

French conversation was Lady Stella's chief accomplishment. She sailed into it now very readily. She took over the elucidation of M. Dupont, and only interrupted it to tell Miss Greeta Grey how pleasant it was to have another woman with her in this strange world.

Relieved of M. Dupont, Mr. Barnstaple stood back and surveyed the little group of Earthlings in the

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centre of the hall and the circle of tall, watchful Utopians about them and rather aloof from them. Mr. Burleigh was being distantly cordial to Lord Barralonga, and Mr. Hunker was saying what a great pleasure it was to him to meet "Britain's foremost statesman." Mr. Catskill stood in the most friendly manner beside Barralonga; they knew each other well; and Father Amerton exchanged comments with Mr. Mush. Ridley and Penk, after some moments of austere regard, had gone apart to discuss the technicalities of the day's experience in undertones. Nobody paid any attention to Mr. Barnstaple.

It was like a meeting at a railway-station. It was like a reception. It was utterly incredible and altogether commonplace. He was saturated and exhausted by wonder.

"Oh, I am going to my bed!" he yawned suddenly. "I am going to my little bed."

He made his way through the friendly eyed Utopians out into the calm starlight. He nodded to the strange nebula at the corner of Orion as a weary parent might nod to importunate offspring. He would consider it again in the morning. He staggered drowsily through the gardens to his own particular retreat.

He disrobed and went to sleep as immediately as a tired child.

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CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

EARLY MORNING IN UTOPIA

§ 1

Mr. Barnstaple awakened slowly out of profound slumber.

He had a vague feeling that a very delightful and wonderful dream was slipping from him. He tried to keep on with the dream and not to open his eyes. It was about a great world of beautiful people who had freed themselves from a thousand earthly troubles. But it dissolved and faded from his mind. It was not often nowadays that dreams came to Mr. Barnstaple. He lay very still with his eyes closed, reluctantly coming awake to the affairs of every day.

The cares and worries of the last fortnight resumed their sway. Would he ever be able to get away for a holiday by himself? Then he remembered that he had already got his valise stowed in the Yellow Peril. But surely that was not last night; that was the night before last, and he had started—he remembered now starting and the little thrill of getting through the gate before Mrs. Barnstaple suspected anything. He opened his eyes and fixed them on a white ceiling, trying to recall that journey. He remembered turning into the Camberwell New Road and the bright exhilaration of the morning, Vauxhall Bridge and that nasty tangle of traffic at Hyde Park Corner. He maintained that the west of London was far more

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difficult for motoring than the east. Then—had he gone to Uxbridge? No. He recalled the road to Slough and then came a blank in his mind.

What a very good ceiling this was! Not a crack nor a stain!

But how had he spent the rest of the day? He must have got somewhere because here he was in a thoroughly comfortable bed—an excellent bed. With a thrush singing. He had always held that a good thrush could knock spots off a nightingale, but this thrush was a perfect Caruso. And another answering it! In July! Pangbourne and Caversham were wonderful places for nightingales. In June. But this was July—and thrushes. . . . Across these drowsy thought-phantoms came the figure of Mr. Rupert Catskill, hands on hips, face and head thrust forward speaking, saying astonishing things. To a naked seated figure with a grave intent face. And other figures. One with a face like the Delphic Sibyl. Mr. Barnstaple began to remember that in some way he had got himself mixed up with a week-end party at Taplow Court. Now had this speech been given at Taplow Court? At Taplow Court they wear clothes. But perhaps the aristocracy in retirement and privacy——?

Utopia? . . . But was it possible?

Mr. Barnstaple sat up in his bed in a state of extreme amazement. "Impossible!" he said. He was lying in a little loggia half open to the air. Between the slender pillars of fluted glass he saw a range of snow-topped mountains, and in the foreground a great cluster of tall spikes bearing deep red flowers.

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The bird was still singing—a glorified thrush, in a glorified world. Now he remembered everything. Now it was all clear. The sudden twisting of the car, the sound like the snapping of a fiddle string and—Utopia! Now he had it all, from the sight of sweet dead Greenlake to the bringing in of Lord Barralonga under the strange unfamiliar stars. It was no dream. He looked at his hand on the exquisitely fine coverlet. He felt his rough chin. It was a world real enough for shaving—and for a very definite readiness for breakfast. Very—for he had missed his supper. And as if in answer to his thought a smiling girl appeared ascending the steps to his sleeping-place and bearing a little tray. After all, there was much to be said for Mr. Burleigh. To his swift statesmanship it was that Mr. Barnstaple owed this morning cup of tea.

"Good morning," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"Why not?" said the young Utopian, and put down his tea and smiled at him in a motherly fashion and departed.

"Why not a good morning, I suppose," said Mr. Barnstaple and meditated for a moment, chin on knees, and then gave his attention to the bread-and-butter and tea.

§ 2

The little dressing-room in which he found his clothes lying just as he had dumped them overnight, was at once extraordinarily simple and extraordinarily full of interest for Mr. Barnstaple. He paddled about it humming as he examined it.

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The bath was much shallower than an ordinary earthly bath; apparently the Utopians did not believe in lying down and stewing. And the forms of everything were different, simpler and more graceful. On earth he reflected art was largely wit. The artist had a certain limited selection of obdurate materials and certain needs, and his work was a clever reconciliation of the obduracy and the necessity and of the idiosyncrasy of the substance to the æsthetic preconceptions of the human mind. How delightful, for example, was the earthly carpenter dealing cleverly with the grain and character of this wood or that. But here the artist had a limitless control of material, and that element of witty adaptation had gone out of his work. His data were the human mind and body. Everything in this little room was unobtrusively but perfectly convenient—and difficult to misuse. If you splashed too much a thoughtful outer rim tidied things up for you.

In a tray by the bath was a very big fine sponge. So either Utopians still dived for sponges or they grew them or trained them (who could tell?) to come up of their own accord.

As he set out his toilet things a tumbler was pushed off a glass shelf on to the floor and did not break. Mr. Barnstaple in an experimental mood dropped it again and still it did not break.

He could not find taps at first though there was a big washing-basin as well as a bath. Then he perceived a number of studs on the walls with black marks that might be Utopian writing. He experimented. He found very hot water and then very

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cold water filling his bath, a fountain of probably soapy warm water, and other fluids—one with an odour of pine and one with a subdued odour of chlorine. The Utopian characters on these studs set him musing for a time; they were the first writing he had seen; they appeared to be word characters, but whether they represented sounds or were greatly simplified hieroglyphics he could not imagine. Then his mind went off at a tangent in another direction because the only metal apparent in this dressing-room was gold. There was, he noted, an extraordinary lot of gold in the room. It was set and inlaid in gold. The soft yellow lines gleamed and glittered. Gold evidently was cheap in Utopia. Perhaps they knew how to make it.

He roused himself to the business of his toilet. There was no looking-glass in the room, but when he tried what he thought was the handle of a cupboard door, he found himself opening a triple full-length mirror. Afterwards he was to discover that there were no displayed mirrors in Utopia; Utopians, he was to learn, thought it indecent to be reminded of themselves in that way. The Utopian method was to scrutinise oneself, see that one was all right and then forget oneself for the rest of the day. He stood now surveying his pyjamaed and unshaven self with extreme disfavour. Why do respectable citizens favour such ugly pink-striped pyjamas? When he unpacked his nail-brush and tooth-brush, shaving-brush and washing-glove, they seemed to him to have the coarseness of a popular burlesque. His tooth-brush was a particularly ignoble instrument. He

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wished now he had bought a new one at the chemist's shop near Victoria Station.

And what nasty queer things his clothes were!

He had a fantastic idea of adopting Utopian ideas of costume, but a reflective moment before his mirror restrained him. Then he remembered that he had packed a silk tennis shirt and flannels. Suppose he wore those, without a collar-stud or tie—and went barefooted?

He surveyed his feet. As feet went on earth they were not unsightly feet. But on earth they had been just wasted.

§ 3

A particularly clean and radiant Mr. Barnstaple, white-clad, bare-necked and barefooted, presently emerged into the Utopian sunrise. He smiled, stretched his arms and took a deep breath of the sweet air. Then suddenly his face became hard and resolute.

From another sleeping-house not 200 yards away Father Amerton was emerging. Intuitively Mr. Barnstaple knew he meant either to forgive or be forgiven for the overnight quarrel. It would be a matter of chance whether he would select the rôle of offender or victim; what was certain was that he would smear a dreary mess of emotional personal relationship over the jewel-like clearness and brightness of the scene. A little to the right of Mr. Barnstaple and in front of him were wide steps leading down towards the lake. Three strides and he was going down these steps two at a time. It may have been his hectic fancy, but it

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seemed to him that he heard the voice of Father Amerton, "Mr. *Barn*—staple," in pursuit.

Mr. Barnstaple doubled and doubled again and crossed a bridge across an avalanche gully, a bridge with huge masonry in back and roof and with delicate pillars of prismatic glass towards the lake. The sunlight entangled in these pillars broke into splashes of red and blue and golden light. Then at a turfy corner gay with blue gentians, he narrowly escaped a collision with Mr. Rupert Catskill. Mr. Catskill was in the same costume that he had worn on the previous day except that he was without his grey top hat. He walked with his hands clasped behind him.

"Hullo!" he said. "What's the hurry? We seem to be the first people up."

"I saw Father Amerton——"

"That accounts for it. You were afraid of being caught up in a service, Matins or Prime or whatever he calls it. Wise man to run. He shall pray for the lot of us. Me too."

He did not wait for any indorsement from Mr. Barnstaple, but went on talking.

"You have slept well? What did you think of the old fellow's answer to my speech? Eh? Evasive clichés. When in doubt, abuse the plaintiff's attorney. We don't agree with him because we have bad hearts."

"What old fellow do you mean?"

"The worthy gentleman who spoke after me."

"Urthred! But he's not forty."

"He's seventy-three. He told us afterwards. They live long here, a lingering business. Our lives

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are a fitful hectic fever from their point of view. But as Tennyson said, 'Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay!' H'm? He evaded my points. This is Lotus Land, Sunset Land; we shan't be thanked for disturbing its slumbers."

"I doubt their slumbers."

"Perhaps the Socialist bug has bit you too. Yes —I see it has! Believe me this is the most complete demonstration of decadence it would be possible to imagine. Complete. And we *shall* disturb their slumbers, never fear. Nature, you will see, is on our side—in a way no one has thought of yet."

"But I don't see the decadence," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"None so blind as those who won't see. It's everywhere. Their large flushed pseudo-health. Like fatted cattle. And their treatment of Barralonga. They don't know how to treat him. They don't even arrest him. They've never arrested any one for a thousand years. He careers through their land, killing and slaying and frightening and disturbing and they're flabbergasted, sir, simply flabbergasted. It's like a dog running amuck in a world full of sheep. If he hadn't had a side-slip I believe he would be hooting and snorting and careering along now—killing people. They've lost the instinct of social defence."

"I wonder."

"A very good attitude of mind. If indulged in, in moderation. But when your wondering is over, you will begin to see that I am right. H'm? Ah! There on that terrace! Isn't that my Lord Barralonga and

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his French acquaintance? It is. Inhaling the morning air. I think with your permission I will go on and have a word with them. Which way did you say Father Amerton was? I don't want to disturb his devotions. This way? Then if I go to the right——"

He grimaced amiably over his shoulder.

§ 4

Mr. Barnstaple came upon two Utopians gardening.

They had two light silvery wheelbarrows, and they were cutting out old wood and overblown clusters from a line of thickets that sprawled over a rough-heaped ridge of rock and foamed with crimson and deep red roses. These gardeners had great leather gauntlets and aprons of tanned skin, and they carried hooks and knives.

Mr. Barnstaple had never before seen such roses as they were tending here; their fragrance filled the air. He did not know that double roses could be got in mountains; bright red single sorts he had seen high up in Switzerland, but not such huge loose-flowered monsters as these. They dwarfed their leaves. Their wood was in long, thorny, snaky-red streaked stems that writhed wide and climbed to the rocky lumps over which they grew. Their great petals fell like red snow and like drifting moths and like blood upon the soft soil that sheltered amidst the brown rocks.

"You are the first Utopians I have actually seen at work," he said.

"This isn't our work," smiled the nearer of the

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two, a fair-haired, freckled, blue-eyed youth. "But as we are for these roses we have to keep them in order."

"Are they your roses?"

"Many people think these double mountain roses too much trouble and a nuisance with their thorns and sprawling branches, and many people think only the single sorts of roses ought to be grown in these high places and that this lovely sort ought to be left to die out up here. Are you for our roses?"

"Such roses as these?" said Mr. Barnstaple. "Altogether."

"Good! Then just bring me up my barrow closer for all this litter. We're responsible for the good behaviour of all this thicket reaching right down there almost to the water."

"And you have to see to it yourselves?"

"Who else?"

"But couldn't you get some one—pay some one to see to it for you?"

"Oh, hoary relic from the ancient past!" the young man replied. "Oh, fossil ignoramus from a barbaric universe! Don't you realise that there is no working class in Utopia? It died out fifteen hundred years or so ago. Wages-slavery, pimping and so forth are done with. We read about them in books. Who loves the rose must serve the rose—himself."

"But you work."

"Not for wages. Not because any one else loves or desires something else and is too lazy to serve it or get it himself. We work, part of the brain, part of the will, of Utopia."

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"May I ask at what?"

"I explore the interior of our planet. I study high-pressure chemistry. And my friend——"

He interrogated his friend, whose dark face and brown eyes appeared suddenly over a foam of blossom. "I do Food."

"A cook?"

"Of sorts. Just now I am seeing to your Earthling dietary. It's most interesting and curious—but I should think rather destructive. I plan your meals. . . . I see you look anxious, but I saw to your breakfast last night." He glanced at a minute wrist-watch under the gauntlet of his gardening glove. "It will be ready in about an hour. How was the early tea?"

"Excellent," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"Good," said the dark young man. "I did my best. I hope the breakfast will be as satisfactory. I had to fly two hundred kilometres for a pig last night and kill it and cut it up myself, and find out how to cure it. Eating bacon has gone out of fashion in Utopia. I hope you will find my rashers satisfactory."

"It seems very rapid curing—for a rasher," said Mr. Barnstaple. "We could have done without it."

"Your spokesman made such a point of it."

The fair young man struggled out of the thicket and wheeled his barrow away. Mr. Barnstaple wished the dark young man "Good morning."

"Why shouldn't it be?" asked the dark young man.

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§ 5

He discovered Ridley and Penk approaching him. Ridley's face and ear were still adorned with sticking-plaster and his bearing was eager and anxious. Penk followed a little way behind him, holding one hand to the side of his face. Both were in their professional dress, white-topped caps, square-cut leather coats and black gaiters; they had made no concessions to Utopian laxity.

Ridley began to speak as soon as he judged Mr. Barnstaple was within earshot.

"You don't 'appen to know, Mister, where these 'ere decadents shoved our car?"

"I thought your car was all smashed up."

"Not a Rolls-Royce—not like that. Wind-screen, mud-guards, and the on-footboard perhaps. We went over sideways. I want to 'ave a look at it. And I didn't turn the petrol off. The carburetter was leaking a bit. My fault. I 'adn't been careful enough with the strainer. If she runs out of petrol, where's one to get more of it in this blasted Elysium? I ain't seen a sign anywhere. I know if I don't get that car into running form before Lord Barralonga wants it there's going to be trouble."

Mr. Barnstaple had no idea where the cars were.

"'Aven't you a car of your own?" asked Ridley reproachfully.

"I have. But I've never given it a thought since I got out of it."

"Owner-driver," said Ridley bitterly.

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"Anyhow, I can't help you find your cars. Have you asked any of the Utopians?"

"Not us. We don't like the style of 'em," said Ridley.

"They'll tell you."

"And watch us—whatever we do to our cars. They don't get a chance of looking into a Rolls-Royce every day in the year. Next thing we shall have them driving off in 'em. I don't like the place, and I don't like these people. They're queer. They ain't decent. His lordship says they're a lot of degenerates, and it seems to me his lordship is about right. I ain't a Puritan, but all this running about without clothes is a bit too thick for me. I wish I knew where they'd stowed those cars."

Mr. Barnstaple was considering Penk. "You haven't hurt your face?" he asked.

"Nothing to speak of," said Penk. "I suppose we ought to be getting on."

Ridley looked at Penk and then at Mr. Barnstaple. "He's had a bit of a contoosion," he remarked, a faint smile breaking through his sourness.

"We better be getting on if we're going to find those cars," said Penk.

A grin of intense enjoyment appeared upon Ridley's face. "'E's bumped against something."

"Oh—*shut it!*" said Penk.

But the thing was too good to keep back. "One of these girls 'it 'im."

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Barnstaple. "You haven't been taking liberties——?"

"I 'ave *not*," said Penk. "But as Mr. Ridley's

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been so obliging as to start the topic I suppose I got to tell wot 'appened. It jest illustrates the uncertainties of being among a lot of 'arf-savage, 'arf-crazy people, like we got among."

Ridley smiled and winked at Mr. Barnstaple. "Regular 'ard clout she gave 'im. Knocked him over. 'E put 'is 'and on 'er shoulder and *clop!* over 'e went. Never saw anything like it."

"Rather unfortunate," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"It all 'appened in a second like."

"It's a pity it happened."

"Don't you go making any mistake about it, Mister, and don't you go running off with any false ideas about it," said Penk. "I don't want the story to get about—it might do me a lot of 'arm with Mr. Burleigh. Pity Mr. Ridley couldn't 'old 'is tongue. What provoked her I do not know. She came into my room as I was getting up, and she wasn't what you might call wearing anything, and she looked a bit saucy, to my way of thinking, and—well, something come into my head to say to her, something—well, just the least little bit sporty, so to speak. One can't always control one's thoughts—can one? A man's a man. If a man's expected to be civil in his private thoughts to girls without a stitch, so to speak—*well!* I dunno. I really do not know. It's against nature. I never said it, whatever it was I thought of. Mr. Ridley 'ere will bear me out. I never said a word to her. I 'adn't opened my lips when she hit me. Knocked me over, she did—like a ninepin. Didn't even seem angry about it. A 'ook-'it—sideways. It was surprise as much as anything floored me."

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"But Ridley says you touched her."

"Laid me 'and on 'er shoulder perhaps, in a sort of fatherly way. As she was turning to go—not being sure whether I wasn't going to speak to her, I admit. And there you are! If I'm to get into trouble because I was wantonly 'it——"

Penk conveyed despair of the world by an eloquent gesture.

Mr. Barnstaple considered. "I shan't make trouble," he said. "But all the same I think we must all be very careful with these Utopians. Their ways are not our ways."

"Thank God!" said Ridley. "The sooner I get out of this world back to Old England, the better I shall like it."

He turned to go.

"You should 'ear 'is lordship," said Ridley over his shoulder. "'E says it's just a world of bally degenerates—rotten degenerates—in fact, if you'll excuse me—§ § * ! * ! * † * † ! degenerates. Eh? That about gets 'em."

"The young woman's arm doesn't seem to have been very degenerate," said Mr. Barnstaple, standing the shock bravely.

"Don't it?" said Ridley bitterly. "That's all *you* know. Why! if there's one sign more sure than another about degeneration it's when women take to knocking men about. It's against instink. In any respectable decent world such a thing couldn't possibly 'ave 'appened. No 'ow!"

"No—'ow," echoed Penk.

"In *our* world, such a girl would jolly soon 'ave 'er lesson. Jolly soon. See?"

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But Mr. Barnstaple's roving eye had suddenly discovered Father Amerton approaching very rapidly across a wide space of lawn and making arresting gestures. Mr. Barnstaple perceived he must act at once.

"Now here's some one who will certainly be able to help you find your cars, if he cares to do so. He's a most helpful man—Father Amerton. And the sort of views he has about women are the sort of views you have. You are bound to get on together. If you will stop him and put the whole case to him—plainly and clearly. . . ."

He set off at a brisk pace towards the lake shore.

He could not be far now from the little summer-house that ran out over the water against which the gaily coloured boats were moored.

If he were to get into one of these and pull out into the lake he would have Father Amerton at a very serious disadvantage. Even if that good man followed suit. One cannot have a really eloquent emotional scene when one is pulling hard in pursuit of another boat.

§ 6

As Mr. Barnstaple untied the bright white canoe with the big blue eye painted at its prow that he had chosen, Lady Stella appeared on the landing-stage. She came out of the pavilion that stood over the water, and something in her quick movement as she emerged suggested to Mr. Barnstaple's mind that she had been hiding there. She glanced about her and spoke very eagerly. "Are you going to row out upon the lake, Mr. Bastaple? May I come?"

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She was attired, he noted, in a compromise between the Earthly and the Utopian style. She was wearing what might have been either a very simple custard-coloured tea-robe or a very sophisticated bath-wrap; it left her slender, pretty arms bare and free except for a bracelet of amber and gold, and on her bare feet—and they were unusually shapely feet—were sandals. Her head was bare, and her dark hair very simply done with a little black and gold fillet round it that suited her intelligent face. Mr. Barnstaple was an ignoramus about feminine costume, but he appreciated the fact that she had been clever in catching the Utopian note.

He helped her into the canoe. "We will paddle right out—a good way," she said with another glance over her shoulder, and sat down.

For a time Mr. Barnstaple paddled straight out so that he had nothing before him but sunlit water and sky, the low hills that closed in the lake towards the great plain, the huge pillars of the distant dam, and Lady Stella. She affected to be overcome by the beauty of the Conference garden-slope with its houses and terraces behind him, but he could see that she was not really looking at the scene as a whole, but searching it restlessly for some particular object or person.

She made conversational efforts, on the loveliness of the morning and on the fact that birds were singing—"in July."

"But here it is not necessarily July," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"How stupid of me! Of course not."

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"We seem to be in a fine May."

"It is probably very early," she said. "I forgot to wind my watch."

"Oddly enough we seem to be at about the same hours in our two worlds," said Mr. Barnstaple. "My wrist-watch says seven."

"No," said Lady Stella, answering her own thoughts and with her eyes on the distant gardens. "That is a Utopian girl. Have you met any others —of our party—this morning?"

Mr. Barnstaple brought the canoe round so that he too could look at the shore. From here they could see how perfectly the huge terraces and avalanche walls and gullies mingled and interwove with the projecting ribs and cliffs of the mountain masses behind. The shrub tangles passed up into hanging pinewoods; the torrents and cascades from the snow-field above were caught and distributed amidst the emerald slopes and gardens of the Conference Park. The terraces that retained the soil and held the whole design spread out on either hand to a great distance and were continued up into the mountain substance; they were built of a material that ranged through a wide variety of colours from a deep red to a purple-veined white, and they were diversified by great arches over torrents and rock gullies, by huge round openings that spouted water and by cascades of steps. The buildings of the place were distributed over these terraces and over the grassy slopes they contained, singly or in groups and clusters, buildings of purple and blue and white as light and delicate as the Alpine flowers about them. For some moments

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Mr. Barnstaple was held silent by this scene, and then he attended to Lady Stella's question. "I met Mr. Rupert Catskill and the two chauffeurs," he said, "and I saw Father Amerton and Lord Barralonga and M. Dupont in the distance. I've seen nothing of Mr. Mush or Mr. Burleigh."

"Mr. Cecil won't be about for hours yet. He will lie in bed until ten or eleven. He always takes a good rest in the morning when there is any great mental exertion before him."

The lady hesitated and then asked: "I suppose you haven't seen Miss Greeta Grey?"

"No," said Mr. Barnstaple. "I wasn't looking for our people. I was just strolling about—and avoiding somebody."

"The censor of manners and costumes?"

"Yes. . . . That, in fact, is why I took to this canoe."

The lady reflected and decided on a confidence.

"I was running away from some one too."

"Not the preacher?"

"Miss Grey!"

Lady Stella apparently went off at a tangent. "This is going to be a very difficult world to stay in. These people have very delicate taste. We may easily offend them."

"They are intelligent enough to understand."

"Do people who understand necessarily forgive? I've always doubted that proverb."

Mr. Barnstaple did not wish the conversation to drift away into generalities, so he paddled and said nothing.

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"You see Miss Grey used to play Phryne in a Revue."

"I seem to remember something about it. There was a fuss in the newspapers."

"That perhaps gave her a bias."

Three long sweeps with the paddle.

"But this morning she came to me and told me that she was going to wear complete Utopian costume."

"Meaning?"

"A little rouge and face-powder. It doesn't suit her the least little bit, Mr. Bastaple. It's a *faux pas*. It's indecent. But she's running about the gardens—She might meet any one. It's lucky Mr. Cecil isn't up. If she meets Father Amerton—! But it's best not to think of that. You see, Mr. Bastaple, these Utopians and their sun-brown bodies—and everything, are in the picture. They don't embarrass me. But Miss Grey— An earthly civilised woman taken out of her clothes *looks* taken out of her clothes. Peeled. A sort of *bleached* white. That nice woman who seems to hover round us, Lychnis, when she advised me what to wear, never for one moment suggested anything of the sort. . . . But, of course, I don't know Miss Grey well enough to talk to her and besides, one never knows how a woman of that sort is going to take a thing. . . ."

Mr. Barnstaple stared shoreward. Nothing was to be seen of an excessively visible Miss Greeta Grey. Then he had a conviction. "Lychnis will take care of her," he said.

"I hope she will. Perhaps, if we stay out here for a time——"

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"She will be looked after," said Mr. Barnstaple. "But I think Miss Grey and Lord Barralonga's party generally are going to make trouble for us. I wish they hadn't come through with us."

"Mr. Cecil thinks that," said Lady Stella.

"Naturally we shall all be thrown very much together and judged in a lump."

"Naturally," Lady Stella echoed.

She said no more for a little while. But it was evident that she had more to say. Mr. Barnstaple paddled slowly.

"Mr. Bastaple," she began presently.

Mr. Barnstaple's paddle became still.

"Mr. Bastaple—are you *afraid?*"

Mr. Barnstaple judged himself. "I have been too full of wonder to be afraid."

Lady Stella decided to confess. "I *am* afraid," she said. "I wasn't at first. Everything seemed to go so easily and simply. But in the night I woke up—horribly afraid."

"No," considered Mr. Barnstaple. "No. It hasn't taken me like that—yet. . . . Perhaps it will."

Lady Stella leaned forward and spoke confidentially, watching the effect of her words on Mr. Barnstaple. "These Utopians—I thought at first they were just simple, healthy human beings, artistic and innocent. But they are not, Mr. Bastaple. There is something hard and complicated about them, something that goes beyond us and that we don't understand. And they don't care for us. They look at us with heartless eyes. Lychnis is kind, but hardly any of the others are the least bit kind. And I think they find us inconvenient."

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Mr. Barnstaple thought it over. "Perhaps they do. I have been so preoccupied with admiration—so much of this is fine beyond dreaming—that I have not thought very much how we affected them. But—yes—they seem to be busy about other things and not very attentive to us. Except the ones who have evidently been assigned to watch and study us. And Lord Barralonga's headlong rush through the country must certainly have been inconvenient."

"He killed a man."

"I know."

They remained thoughtfully silent for some moments.

"And there are other things," Lady Stella resumed. "They think quite differently from our way of thinking. I believe they despise us already. I noted something. . . . Last evening you were not with us by the lake when Mr. Cecil asked them about their philosophy. He told them things about Hegel and Bergson and Lord Haldane and his own wonderful scepticism. He opened out—unusually. It was very interesting—to me. But I was watching Urthred and Lion and in the midst of it I saw—I am convinced—they were talking to each other in that silent way they have, about something quite different. They were just *shamming* attention. And when Freddy Mush tried to interest them in Neo-Georgian poetry and the effect of the war upon literature, and how he hoped that they had something *half* as beautiful as the Iliad in Utopia, though he confessed he couldn't believe they had, they didn't even pretend to listen. They did not answer him at all. . . . Our minds don't matter a bit to them."

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"In these subjects. They are three thousand years further on. But we might be interesting as learners."

"Would it have been interesting to have taken a Hottentot about London explaining things to him—after one had got over the first fun of showing off his ignorance? Perhaps it would. But I don't think they want us here very much and I don't think they are going to like us very much, and I don't know what they are likely to do to us if we give too much trouble. And so I am afraid."

She broke out in a new place. "In the night I was reminded of my sister Mrs. Kelling's monkeys.

"It's a mania with her. They run about the gardens and come into the house and the poor things are always in trouble. They don't quite know what they may do and what they may not do; they all look frightfully worried and they get slapped and carried to the door and thrown out and all sorts of things like that. They spoil things and make her guests uneasy. You never seem to know what a monkey's going to do. And everybody hates to have them about except my sister. And she keeps on scolding them. 'Come *down*, Jacko! Put that *down*, Sadie'!"

Mr. Barnstaple laughed. "It isn't going to be quite so bad as that with us, Lady Stella. We are not monkeys."

She laughed too. "Perhaps it isn't. But all the same—in the night—I felt it might be. We are inferior creatures. One has to admit it. . . ."

She knitted her brows. Her pretty face expressed great intellectual effort. "Do you realise how we are

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cut off? . . . Perhaps you will think it silly of me, Mr. Bastaple, but last night before I went to bed I sat down to write my sister a letter and tell her all about things while they were fresh in my mind. And suddenly I realised I might as well write—to Julius Cæsar."

Mr. Barnstaple hadn't thought of that.

"That's a thing I can't get out of my head, Mr. Bastaple—no letters, no telegrams, no newspapers, no Bradshaw in Utopia. All the things we care for really— All the people we live for. Cut off! I don't know for how long. But completely cut off. . . . How long are they likely to keep us here?"

Mr. Barnstaple's face became speculative.

"Are you *sure* they can ever send us back?" the lady asked.

"There seems to be some doubt. But they are astonishingly clever people."

"It seemed so easy coming here—just as if one walked round a corner—but, of course, properly speaking we are out of space and time. . . . More out of it even than dead people. . . . The North Pole or Central Africa is a whole universe nearer home than we are. . . . It's hard to grasp that. In this sunlight it all seems so bright and familiar. . . . Yet last night there were moments when I wanted to scream. . . ."

She stopped short and scanned the shore. Then very deliberately she sniffed.

Mr. Barnstaple became aware of a peculiarly sharp and appetising smell drifting across the water to him.

"Yes," he said.

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"It's breakfast bacon!" cried Lady Stella with a squeak in her voice.

"Exactly as Mr. Burleigh told them," said Mr. Barnstaple, mechanically turning the canoe shoreward.

"Breakfast bacon! That's the most reassuring thing that has happened yet. . . . Perhaps after all it was silly to feel frightened. And there they are signalling to us!" She waved her arm.

"Greeta in a white robe—as you prophesied—and Mr. Mush in a sort of toga talking to her. . . . Where could he have got that toga?"

A faint sound of voices calling reached them.

"Com—*ing!*" cried Lady Stella.

"I hope I haven't been pessimistic," said Lady Stella. "But I felt *horrid* in the night."

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BOOK THE SECOND

QUARANTINE CRAG

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CHAPTER THE FIRST

THE EPIDEMIC

§ 1

THE shadow of the great epidemic in Utopia fell upon our little band of Earthlings in the second day after their irruption. For more than twenty centuries the Utopians had had the completest freedom from infectious and contagious disease of all sorts. Not only had the graver epidemic fevers and all sorts of skin diseases gone out of the lives of animals and men, but all the minor infections of colds, coughs, influenzas and the like had also been mastered and ended. By isolation, by the control of carriers, and so forth, the fatal germs had been cornered and obliged to die out.

And there had followed a corresponding change in the Utopian physiology. Secretions and reactions that had given the body resisting power to infection had diminished; the energy that produced them had been withdrawn to other more serviceable applications. The Utopian physiology, relieved of these merely defensive necessities, had simplified itself and become more direct and efficient. This cleaning up of infections was such ancient history in Utopia that only those who specialised in the history of pathology understood anything of the miseries mankind had suffered under from this source, and even these specialists do not seem to have had any idea of

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how far the race had lost its former resistance to infection. The first person to think of this lost resisting power seems to have been Mr. Rupert Catskill. Mr. Barnstaple recalled that when they had met early on the first morning of their stay in the Conference Gardens, he had been hinting that Nature was in some unexplained way on the side of the Earthlings.

If making them obnoxious was being on their side then certainly Nature was on their side. By the evening of the second day after their arrival nearly everybody who had been in contact with the Earthlings, with the exception of Lychnis, Serpentine and three or four others who had retained something of their ancestral antitoxins, was in a fever with cough, sore throat, aching bones, headache, and such physical depression and misery as Utopia had not known for twenty centuries. The first inhabitant of Utopia to die was that leopard which had sniffed at Mr. Rupert Catskill on his first arrival. It was found unaccountably dead on the second morning after that encounter. In the afternoon of the same day one of the girls who had helped Lady Stella to unpack her bags sickened suddenly and died. . . .

Utopia was even less prepared for the coming of these disease germs than for the coming of the Earthlings who brought them. The monstrous multitude of general and fever hospitals, doctors, drug-shops, and so forth that had existed in the last Age of Confusion had long since passed out of memory; there was a surgical service for accidents and a watch kept upon the health of the young, and there were places of rest at which those who were extremely old

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were assisted, but there remained scarcely anything of the hygienic organisation that had formerly struggled against disease. Abruptly the Utopian intelligence had to take up again a tangle of problems long since solved and set aside, to improvise forgotten apparatus and organisations for disinfection and treatment, and to return to all the disciplines of the war against diseases that had marked an epoch in its history twenty centuries before. In one respect indeed that war had left Utopia with certain permanent advantages. Nearly all the insect disease carriers had been exterminated, and rats and mice and the untidier sorts of small bird had passed out of the problem of sanitation. That set very definite limits to the spread of the new infections and to the nature of the infections that could be spread. It enabled the Earthlings only to communicate such ailments as could be breathed across an interval, or conveyed by a contaminating touch. Though not one of them was ailing at all, it became clear that some one among them had brought latent measles into the Utopian universe, and that three or four of them had liberated a long suppressed influenza. Themselves too tough to suffer, they remained at the focus of these two epidemics, while their victims coughed and sneezed and kissed and whispered them about the Utopian planet. It was not until the afternoon of the second day after the irruption that Utopia realised what had happened, and set itself to deal with this relapse into barbaric solicitudes.

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§ 2

Mr. Barnstaple was probably the last of the Earthlings to hear of the epidemic. He was away from the rest of the party upon an expedition of his own.

It was early clear to him that the Utopians did not intend to devote any considerable amount of time or energy to the edification of their Earthling visitors. After the *éclaircissement* of the afternoon of the irruption there were no further attempts to lecture to the visitors upon the constitution and methods of Utopia and only some very brief questioning upon the earthly state of affairs. The Earthlings were left together to talk things out among themselves. Several Utopians were evidently intrusted with their comfort and well-being, but they did not seem to think that their functions extended to edification. Mr. Barnstaple found much to irritate him in the ideas and comments of several of his associates, and so he obeyed his natural inclination to explore Utopia for himself. There was something that stirred his imagination in the vast plain below the lake that he had glimpsed before his aeroplane descended into the valley of the Conference, and on his second morning he had taken a little boat and rowed out across the lake to examine the dam that retained its waters and to get a view of the great plain from the parapet of the dam.

The lake was much wider than he had thought it and the dam much larger. The water was crystalline clear and very cold, and there were but few fish in it. He had come out immediately after his breakfast, but it was near midday before he had got to the parapet

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of the great dam and could look down the lower valley to the great plain.

The dam was built of huge blocks of red and gold-veined rock, but steps at intervals gave access to the roadway along its crest. The great seated figures which brooded over the distant plain had been put there, it would seem, in a mood of artistic light-heartedness. They sat as if they watched or thought, vast rude shapes, half mountainous, half human. Mr. Barnstaple guessed them to be perhaps two hundred feet high; by pacing the distance between two of them and afterwards counting the number of them, he came to the conclusion that the dam was between seven and ten miles long. On the far side it dropped sheerly for perhaps five hundred feet, and it was sustained by a series of enormous buttresses that passed almost insensibly into native rock. In the bays between these buttresses hummed great batteries of water-turbines, and then, its first task done, the water dropped foaming and dishevelled and gathered in another broad lake retained by a second great dam two miles or so away and perhaps a thousand feet lower. Far away was a third lake and a third dam and then the plain. Only three or four minute-looking Utopians were visible amidst all this Titanic engineering.

Mr. Barnstaple stood, the smallest of objects, in the shadow of a brooding Colossus, and peered over these nearer things at the hazy levels of the plain beyond.

What sort of life was going on there? The relationship of plain to mountain reminded him very strongly of the Alps and the great plain of Northern

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Italy, down into which he had walked as the climax of many a summer holiday in his youth. In Italy he knew that those distant levels would be covered with clustering towns and villages and carefully irrigated and closely cultivated fields. A dense population would be toiling with an ant-like industry in the production of food; for ever increasing its numbers until those inevitable consequences of overcrowding, disease and pestilence, established a sort of balance between the area of the land and the number of families scraping at it for nourishment. As a toiling man can grow more food than he can actually eat, and as virtuous women can bear more children than the land can possibly employ, a surplus of landless population would be gathered in wen-like towns and cities, engaged there in legal and financial operations against the agriculturalist or in the manufacture of just plausible articles for sale.

Ninety-nine out of every hundred of this population would be concentrated from childhood to old age upon the difficult task which is known as "getting a living." Amidst it, sustained by a pretence of magical propitiations, would rise shrines and temples, supporting a parasitic host of priests and monks and nuns. Eating and breeding, the simple routines of the common life since human societies began, complications of food-getting, elaborations of acquisitiveness and a tribute paid to fear; such would be the spectacle that any warm and fertile stretch of earth would still display. There would be gleams of laughter and humour there, brief interludes of holiday, flashes of youth before its extinction in adult toil;

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but a driven labour, the spite and hates of overcrowding, the eternal uncertainty of destitution, would dominate the scene. Decrepitude would come by sixty; women would be old and worn out by forty. But this Utopian plain below, sunlit and fertile though it was, was under another law. Here that common life of mankind, its ancient traditions, its hoary jests and tales repeated generation after generation, its seasonal festivals, its pious fears and spasmodic indulgences, its limited yet incessant and pitifully childish hoping, and its abounding misery and tragic futility, had come to an end. It had passed for ever out of this older world. That high tide of common living had receded and vanished while the soil was still productive and the sun still shone.

It was with something like awe that Mr. Barnstaple realised how clean a sweep had been made of the common life in a mere score of centuries, how boldly and dreadfully the mind of man had taken hold, soul and body and destiny, of the life and destiny of the race. He knew himself now for the creature of transition he was, so deep in the habits of the old, so sympathetic with the idea of the new that has still but scarcely dawned on earth. For long he had known how intensely he loathed and despised that reeking peasant life which is our past; he realised now for the first time how profoundly he feared the high austere Utopian life which lies before us. This world he looked out upon seemed very clean and dreadful to him. What were they doing upon those distant plains? What daily life did they lead there?

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He knew enough of Utopia now to know that the whole land would be like a garden, with every natural tendency to beauty seized upon and developed and every innate ugliness corrected and overcome. These people could work and struggle for loveliness, he knew; for his two rose-growers had taught him as much. And to and fro went the food-folk and the housing people and those who ordered the general life, keeping the economic machine running so smoothly that one heard nothing of the jangling and jarring and internal breakages that constitute the dominant melody in our Earth's affairs. The ages of economic disputes and experiments had come to an end; the right way to do things had been found. And the population of this Utopia, which had shrunken at one time to only two hundred million, was now increasing again to keep pace with the constant increase in human resources. Having freed itself from a thousand evils that would otherwise have grown with its growth, the race could grow indeed.

And down there under the blue haze of the great plain almost all those who were not engaged in the affairs of food and architecture, health, education, and the correlation of activities, were busied upon creative work; they were continually exploring the world without or the world within, through scientific research and artistic creation. They were continually adding to their collective power over life or to the realised worth of life.

Mr. Barnstaple was accustomed to think of our own world as a wild rush of inventions and knowledge, but all the progress of earth for a hundred

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years could not compare, he knew, with the forward swing of these millions of associated intelligences in one single year. Knowledge swept forward here and darkness passed as the shadow of a cloud passes on a windy day. Down there they were assaying the minerals that lie in the heart of their planet, and weaving a web to capture the sun and the stars. Life marched here; it was terrifying to think with what strides. Terrifying—because at the back of Mr. Barnstaple's mind, as at the back of so many intelligent minds in our world still, had been the persuasion that presently everything would be known and the scientific process come to an end. And then we should be happy for ever after.

He was not really acclimatised to progress. He had always thought of Utopia as a tranquillity with everything settled for good. Even to-day it seemed tranquil under that level haze, but he knew that this calm was the steadiness of a mill-race, which seems almost motionless in its quiet onrush until a bubble or a fleck of foam or some stick or leaf shoots along it and reveals its velocity.

And how did it feel to be living in Utopia? The lives of the people must be like the lives of very successful artists or scientific workers in this world, a continual refreshing discovery of new things, a constant adventure into the unknown and untried. For recreation they went about their planet, and there was much love and laughter and friendship in Utopia and an abundant easy informal social life. Games that did not involve bodily exercise, those substitutes of the half-witted for research and mental effort, had

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gone entirely out of life, but many active games were played for the sake of fun and bodily vigour. . . . It must be a good life for those who had been educated to live it, indeed a most enviable life.

And pervading it all must be the happy sense that it mattered; it went on to endless consequences. And they loved no doubt—subtly and deliciously—but perhaps a little hardly. Perhaps in those distant plains there was not much pity nor tenderness. Bright and lovely beings they were—in no way pitiful. There would be no need for those qualities. . . .

Yet the woman Lychnis looked kind. . . .

Did they keep faith or need to keep faith as earthly lovers do? What was love like in Utopia? Lovers still whispered in the dusk. . . . What was the essence of love? A preference, a sweet pride, a delightful gift won, the most exquisite reassurance of body and mind. . . .

What could it be like to love and be loved by one of these Utopian women?—to have her glowing face close to one's own—to be quickened into life by her kiss? . . .

Mr. Barnstaple sat in his flannels, barefooted, in the shadow of a stone Colossus. He felt like some minute stray insect perched upon the big dam. It seemed to him that it was impossible that this triumphant Utopian race could ever fall back again from its magnificent attack upon the dominion of all things. High and tremendously this world had clambered and was still clambering. Surely it was safe now in its attainment. Yet all this stupendous se-

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curity and mastery of nature had come about in the little space of three thousand years. . . .

The race could not have altered fundamentally in that brief interval. Essentially it was still a Stone Age race, it was not twenty thousand years away from the days when it knew nothing of metals and could not read nor write. Deep in its nature, arrested and undeveloped, there still lay the seeds of anger and fear and dissension. There must still be many uneasy and insubordinate spirits in this Utopia. Eugenics had scarcely begun here. He remembered the keen sweet face of the young girl who had spoken to him in the starlight on the night of his arrival, and the note of romantic eagerness in her voice when she had asked if Lord Barralonga was not a very vigorous and cruel man.

Did the romantic spirit still trouble imaginations here? Possibly only adolescent imaginations.

Might not some great shock or some phase of confusion still be possible to this immense order? Might not its system of education become wearied by its task of discipline and fall a prey to the experimental spirit? Might not the unforeseen be still lying in wait for this race? Suppose there should prove to be an infection in Father Amerton's religious fervour or Rupert Catskill's incurable craving for fantastic enterprises!

No! It was inconceivable. The achievement of this world was too calmly great and assured.

Mr. Barnstaple stood up and made his way down the steps of the great dam to where, far below, his

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little skiff floated like a minute flower-petal upon the clear water.

§ 3

He became aware of a considerable commotion in the Conference places.

There were more than thirty aeroplanes circling in the air and descending and ascending from the park, and a great number of big white vehicles were coming and going by the pass road. Also people seemed to be moving briskly among the houses, but it was too far off to distinguish what they were doing. He stared for a time and then got into his little boat.

He could not watch what was going on as he returned across the lake because his back was towards the slopes, but once an aeroplane came down very close to him, and he saw its occupant looking at him as he rowed. And once when he rested from rowing and sat round to look he saw what he thought was a litter carried by two men.

As he drew near the shore a boat put off to meet him. He was astonished to see that its occupants were wearing what looked like helmets of glass with white pointed visors. He was enormously astonished and puzzled.

As they approached their message resonated into his mind. "Quarantine. You have to go into quarantine. You Earthlings have started an epidemic and it is necessary to put you into quarantine."

Then these glass helmets must be a sort of gas-mask!

When they came alongside him he saw that this

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was so. They were made of highly flexible and perfectly translucent material. . . .

§ 4

Mr. Barnstaple was taken past some sleeping loggias where Utopians were lying in beds, while others who wore gas-masks waited upon them. He found that all the Earthlings and all their possessions, except their cars, were assembled in the hall of the first day's Conference. He was told that the whole party were to be removed to a new place where they could be isolated and treated.

The only Utopians with the party were two who wore gas-masks and lounged in the open portico in attitudes disagreeably suggestive of sentries or custodians.

The Earthlings sat about in little groups among the seats, except for Mr. Rupert Catskill, who was walking up and down in the apse talking. He was hatless, flushed and excited, with his hair in some disorder.

"It's what I foresaw would happen all along," he repeated. "Didn't I tell you Nature was on our side? Didn't I say it?"

Mr. Burleigh was shocked and argumentative. "For the life of me I can't see the logic of it," he declared. "Here are we—absolutely the only perfectly immune people here—and we—*we* are to be isolated."

"They say they catch things from us," said Lady Stella.

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"Very well," said Mr. Burleigh, making his point with his long white hand. "Very well, then let *them* be isolated! This is—Chinese; this is topsyturvy. I'm disappointed in them."

"I suppose it's their world," said Mr. Hunker, "and we've got to do things their way."

Mr. Catskill concentrated upon Lord Barralonga and the two chauffeurs. "I welcome this treatment. I welcome it."

"What's your idea, Rupert?" said his lordship. "We lose our freedom of action."

"Not at all," said Mr. Catskill. "Not at all. We gain it. We are to be isolated. We are to be put by ourselves on some island or mountain. Well and good. Well and good. This is only the beginning of our adventures. We shall see what we shall see."

"But how?"

"Wait a little. Until we can speak more freely. . . . These are panic measures. This pestilence is only in its opening stage. Everything is just beginning. Trust me."

Mr. Barnstaple sat sulkily by his valise, avoiding the challenge of Mr. Catskill's eye.

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CHAPTER THE SECOND

THE CASTLE ON THE CRAG

§ 1

The quarantine place to which the Earthlings were taken must have been at a very considerable distance from the place of the Conference, because they were nearly six hours upon their journey, and all the time they were flying high and very swiftly. They were all together in one flying-ship; it was roomy and comfortable and could have held perhaps four times as many passengers. They were accompanied by about thirty Utopians in gas-masks, among whom were two women. The aviators wore dresses of a white fleecy substance that aroused the interest and envy of both Miss Grey and Lady Stella. The flying-ship passed down the valley and over the great plain and across a narrow sea and another land with a rocky coast and dense forests, and across a great space of empty sea. There was scarcely any shipping to be seen upon this sea at all; it seemed to Mr. Barnstaple that no earthly ocean would be so untravelled; only once or twice did he see very big drifting vessels quite unlike any earthly ships, huge rafts or platforms they seemed to be rather than ships, and once or twice he saw what was evidently a cargo boat—one with rigged masts and sails. And the air was hardly more frequented. After he was out of sight of land he saw only three aeroplanes until the final landfall.

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They crossed a rather thickly inhabited, very delightful-looking coastal belt and came over what was evidently a rainless desert country, given over to mining and to vast engineering operations. Far away were very high snowy mountains, but the aeroplane descended before it came to these. For a time the Earthlings were flying over enormous heaps of slaggy accumulations, great mountains of them, that seemed to be derived from a huge well-like excavation that went down into the earth to an unknown depth. A tremendous thunder of machinery came out of this pit and much smoke. Here there were crowds of workers and they seemed to be living in camps among the débris. Evidently the workers came to this place merely for spells of work; there were no signs of homes. The aeroplane of the Earthlings skirted this region and flew on over a rocky and almost treeless desert deeply cut by steep gorges of the cañon type. Few people were to be seen, but there were abundant signs of engineering activity. Every torrent, every cataract was working a turbine, and great cables followed the cliffs of the gorges and were carried across the desert spaces. In the wider places of the gorges there were pine woods and a fairly abundant vegetation.

The high crag which was their destination stood out, an almost completely isolated headland, in the fork between two convergent cañons. It towered up to a height of perhaps two thousand feet above the foaming clash of the torrents below, a great mass of pale greenish and purple rocks, jagged and buttressed and cleft deeply by joint planes and white

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crystalline veins. The gorge on one side of it was much steeper than that on the other, it was so overhung indeed as to be darkened like a tunnel, and here within a hundred feet or so of the brow a slender metallic bridge had been flung across the gulf. Some yards above it were projections that might have been the remains of an earlier bridge of stone. Behind, the crag fell steeply for some hundreds of feet to a long slope covered with a sparse vegetation which rose again to the main masses of the mountain, a wall of cliffs with a level top.

It was on this slope that the aeroplane came down alongside of three or four smaller machines. The crag was surmounted by the tall ruins of an ancient castle, within the circle of whose walls clustered a number of buildings which had recently harboured a group of chemical students. Their researches, which had been upon some question of atomic structure quite incomprehensible to Mr. Barnstaple, were finished now and the place had become vacant. Their laboratory was still stocked with apparatus and material; and water and power were supplied to it from higher up the gorge by means of pipes and cables. There was also an abundant store of provisions. A number of Utopians were busily adapting the place to its new purpose of isolation and disinfection when the Earthlings arrived.

Serpentine appeared in the company of a man in a gas-mask whose name was Cedar. This Cedar was a cytologist, and he was in charge of the arrangements for this improvised sanatorium.

Serpentine explained that he himself had flown to

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the crag in advance, because he understood the equipment of the place and the research that had been going on there, and because his knowledge of the Earthlings and his comparative immunity to their infections made him able to act as an intermediary between them and the medical men who would now take charge of their case. He made these explanations to Mr. Burleigh, Mr. Barnstaple, Lord Barralonga, and Mr. Hunker. The other Earthlings stood about in small groups beside the aeroplane from which they had alighted, regarding the castellated summit of the crag, the scrubby bushes of the bleak upland about them and the towering cliffs of the adjacent cañons with no very favourable expressions.

Mr. Catskill had gone apart nearly to the edge of the great cañon, and was standing with his hands behind his back in an attitude almost Napoleonic, lost in thought, gazing down into those sunless depths. The roar of the unseen waters below, now loud, now nearly inaudible, quivered in the air.

Miss Greeta Grey had suddenly produced a Kodak camera; she had been reminded of its existence when packing for this last journey, and she was taking a snap-shot of the entire party.

Cedar said that he would explain the method of treatment he proposed to follow, and Lord Barralonga called "Rupert!" to bring Mr. Catskill into the group of Cedar's hearers.

Cedar was as explicit and concise as Urthred had been. It was evident, he said, that the Earthlings were the hosts of a variety of infectious organisms which were kept in check in their bodies by immun-

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ising counter-substances, but against which the Utopians had no defences ready and could hope to secure immunity only after a painful and disastrous epidemic. The only way to prevent this epidemic devastating their whole planet, indeed, was firstly to gather together and cure all the cases affected, which was being done by converting the Conference Park into a big hospital, and next to take the Earthlings in hand and isolate them absolutely from the Utopians until they could be cleaned of their infections. It was, he confessed, an inhospitable thing to do to the Earthlings, but it seemed the only possible thing to do, to bring them into this peculiarly high and dry desert air and there to devise methods for their complete physical cleansing. If that was possible it would be done, and then the Earthlings would again be free to go and come as they pleased in Utopia.

"But suppose it is not possible?" said Mr. Catskill abruptly.

"I think it will be."

"But if you fail?"

Cedar smiled at Serpentine. "Physical research is taking up the work in which Arden and Greenlake were foremost, and it will not be long before we are able to repeat their experiment. And then to reverse it."

"With us as your raw material?"

"Not until we are fairly sure of a safe landing for you."

"You mean," said Mr. Mush, who had joined the circle about Cedar and Serpentine, "that you are going to send us back?"

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"If we cannot keep you," said Cedar, smiling.

"Delightful prospect!" said Mr. Mush unpleasantly. "To be shot across space in a gun. Experimentally."

"And may I ask," came the voice of Father Amerton, "may I ask the nature of this *treatment* of yours, these experiments of which we are to be the—guinea-pigs, so to speak? Is it to be anything in the nature of vaccination?"

"Injections," explained Mr. Barnstaple.

"I have hardly decided yet," said Cedar. "The problem raises questions this world has forgotten for ages."

"I may say at once that I am a confirmed anti-vaccinationist," said Father Amerton. "Absolutely. Vaccination is an outrage on nature. If I had any doubts before I came into this world of—of *vitiation*, I have no doubts now. Not a doubt! If God had meant us to have these serums and ferments in our bodies he would have provided more natural and dignified means of getting them there than a squirt."

Cedar did not discuss the point. He went on to further apologies. For a time he must ask the Earthlings to keep within certain limits, to confine themselves to the crag and the slopes below it as far as the mountain cliffs. And further, it was impossible to set young people to attend to them as had hitherto been done. They must cook for themselves and see to themselves generally. The appliances were all to be found above upon the crest of the crag, and he and Serpentine would make any explanations that were

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needful. They would find there was ample provision for them.

"Then are we to be left alone here?" asked Mr. Catskill.

"For a time. When we have our problem clearer we will come again and tell you what we mean to do."

"Good," said Mr. Catskill. "Good."

"I wish I hadn't sent my maid by train," said Lady Stella.

"I have come to my last clean collar," said M. Dupont with a little humorous grimace. "It is no joke this week-end with Lord Barralonga."

Lord Barralonga turned suddenly to his particular minion. "I believe that Ridley has the makings of a very good cook."

"I don't mind trying my hand," said Ridley. "I've done most things—and once I used to look after a steam-car."

"A man who can keep one of those—those things in order can do anything," said Mr. Penk with unusual emotion. "I've no objection to being a temporary general utility along of Mr. Ridley. I began my career in the pantry and I ain't ashamed to own it."

"If this gentleman will show us the gadgets," said Mr. Ridley, indicating Serpentine.

"Exactly," said Mr. Penk.

"And if all of us give as little trouble as possible," said Miss Greeta bravely.

"I think we shall be able to manage," said Mr. Burleigh to Cedar. "If at first you can spare us a little advice and help."

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§ 2

Cedar and Serpentine remained with the Earthlings upon Quarantine Crag until late in the afternoon. They helped to prepare a supper and set it out in the courtyard of the castle. They departed with a promise to return on the morrow, and the Earthlings watched them and their accompanying aeroplanes soar up into the sky.

Mr. Barnstaple was surprised to find himself distressed at their going. He had a feeling that mischief was brewing amongst his companions and that the withdrawal of these Utopians removed a check upon this mischief. He had helped Lady Stella in the preparation of an omelette; he had to carry back a dish and a frying-pan to the kitchen after it was served, so that he was the last to seat himself at the supper-table. He found the mischief he dreaded well afoot.

Mr. Catskill had finished his supper already and was standing with his foot upon a bench orating to the rest of the company.

"I ask you, Ladies and Gentlemen," Mr. Catskill was saying; "I ask you: Is not Destiny writ large upon this day's adventure? Not for nothing was this place a fortress in ancient times. Here it is ready to be a fortress again. M'm—a fortress. . . . In such an adventure as will make the stories of Cortez and Pizarro pale their ineffectual fires!"

"My dear Rupert!" cried Mr. Burleigh. "What have you got in that head of yours now?"

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Mr. Catskill waved two fingers dramatically. "The conquest of a world!"

"Good God!" cried Mr. Barnstaple. "Are you mad?"

"As Clive," said Mr. Catskill, "or Sultan Baber when he marched to Panipat."

"It's a tall proposition," said Mr. Hunker, who seemed to have had his mind already prepared for these suggestions, "but I'm inclined to give it a hearing. The alternative so far as I can figure it out is to be scoured and whitewashed inside and out and then fired back into our own world—with a chance of hitting something hard on the way. You tell them, Mr. Catskill."

"Tell them," said Lord Barralonga, who had also been prepared. "It's a gamble, I admit. But there's situations when one has to gamble—or be gambled with. I'm all for the active voice."

"It's a gamble—certainly," said Mr. Catskill. "But upon this narrow peninsula, upon this square mile or so of territory, the fate, sir, of two universes awaits decision. This is no time for the faint heart and the paralysing touch of discretion. Plan swiftly—act swiftly. . . ."

"This is simply *thrilling!*" cried Miss Greeta Grey clasping her hands about her knees and smiling radiantly at Mr. Mush.

"These people," Mr. Barnstaple interrupted, "are three thousand years ahead of us. We are like a handful of Hottentots in a showman's van at Earl's Court, planning the conquest of London."

Mr. Catskill, hands on hips, turned with extraor-

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dinary good humour upon Mr. Barnstaple. "Three thousand years away from us—*yes!* Three thousand years ahead of us—*no!* That is where you and I join issue. You say these people are supermen. M'm—supermen. . . . I say they are degenerate men. Let me call your attention to my reasons for this belief—in spite of their beauty, their very considerable material and intellectual achievements and so forth. Ideal people, I admit. . . . What then? . . . My case is that they have reached a summit—and passed it, that they are going on by inertia and that they have lost the power not only of resistance to disease—that weakness we shall see develop more and more—but also of meeting strange and distressing emergencies. They are gentle. Altogether too gentle. They are ineffectual. They do not know what to do. Here is Father Amerton. He disturbed that first meeting in the most insulting way. (You know you did, Father Amerton. I'm not blaming you. You are morally—sensitive. And there were things to outrage you.) He was threatened—as a little boy is threatened by a feeble old woman. Something was to be done to him. Has anything been done to him?"

"A man and a woman came and talked to me," said Father Amerton.

"And what did you do?"

"Simply confuted them. Lifted up my voice and confuted them."

"What did they say?"

"What *could* they say?"

"We all thought tremendous things were going to

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be done to poor Father Amerton. Well, and now take a graver case. Our friend Lord Barralonga ran amuck with his car—and killed a man. M'm. Even at home they'd have endorsed your license you know. And fined your man. But here? . . . The thing has scarcely been mentioned since. Why? Because they don't know what to say about it or do about it. And now they have put us here and begged us to be good. Until they are ready to come and try experiments upon us and inject things into us and I don't know what. And if we submit, sir, if we submit, we lose one of our greatest powers over these people, our power of at once giving and resisting malaise, and in addition, I know not what powers of initiative that may very well be associated with that physiological toughness of which we are to be robbed. They may trifle with our ductless glands. But Science tells us that these very glands secrete our personalities. Mentally, morally we shall be dissolved. If we submit, sir—if we submit. But suppose we do not submit; what then?"

"Well," said Lord Barralonga, "what then?"

"They will not know what to do. Do not be deceived by any outward shows of beauty and prosperity. These people are living, as the ancient Peruvians were living in the time of Pizarro, in an enervating dream. They have drunken the debilitating draught of Socialism and, as in ancient Peru, there is no health nor power of will left in them any more. A handful of resolute men and women who can dare—may not only dare but triumph in the face of such a world. And thus it is I lay my plans before you."

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"You mean to jump this entire Utopian planet?" said Mr. Hunker.

"Big order," said Lord Barralonga.

"I mean, sir, to assert the rights of a more vigorous form of social life over a less vigorous form of social life. Here we are—in a fortress. It is a real fortress and quite defensible. While you others have been unpacking, Barralonga and Hunker and I have been seeing to that. There is a protected well so that if need arises we can get water from the cañon below. The rock is excavated into chambers and shelters; the wall on the land side is sound and high, glazed so that it cannot be scaled. This great archway can easily be barricaded. Steps go down through the rock to that little bridge which can if necessary be cut away. We have not yet explored all the excavations. In Mr. Hunker we have a chemist—he was a chemist before the moving picture claimed him as its master—and he says there is ample material in the laboratory for a store of bombs. This party, I find, can muster five revolvers with ammunition. I scarcely dared hope for that. We have food for many days."

"Oh! This is ridiculous!" cried Mr. Barnstaple standing up and then sitting down again. "This is preposterous! To turn on these friendly people! But they can blow this little headland to smithereens whenever they want to."

"Ah!" said Mr. Catskill and held him with his outstretched finger. "We've thought of that. But we can take a leaf from the book of Cortez—who, in the very centre of Mexico, held Montezuma as his

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prisoner and hostage. We too will have our hostage. Before we lift a finger— First our hostage. . . ."

"Aerial bombs!"

"Is there such a thing in Utopia? Or such an idea? And again—we must have our hostage."

"Somebody of importance," said Mr. Hunker.

"Cedar and Serpentine are both important people," said Mr. Burleigh in tones of disinterested observation.

"But surely, sir, you do not countenance this schoolboy's dream of piracy!" cried Mr. Barnstaple, sincerely shocked.

"Schoolboys!" cried Father Amerton. "A cabinet minister, a peer, and a great entrepreneur!"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Burleigh, "we are, after all, only envisaging eventualities. For the life of me, I do not see why we should not thresh out these possibilities. Though I pray to Heaven we may never have to realise them. You were saying, Rupert——?"

"We have to establish ourselves here and assert our independence and make ourselves *felt* by these Utopians."

"'Ear, 'ear!" said Mr. Ridley cordially. "One or two I'd like to make feel personally."

"We have to turn this prison into a capitol, into the first foothold of mankind in this world. It is like a foot thrust into a reluctant door that must nevermore close upon our race."

"It is closed," said Mr. Barnstaple. "Except by the mercy of these Utopians we shall never see our world again. And even with their mercy, it is doubtful."

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"That's been keeping me awake nights," said Mr. Hunker.

"It's an idea that must have occurred to all of us," said Mr. Burleigh.

"And it's an idea that's so thundering disagreeable that one hasn't cared to talk about it," said Lord Barralonga.

"I never 'ad it until this moment," said Penk. "You don't reely mean to say, sir, *we can't get back?*"

"Things will be as they will be," said Mr. Burleigh. "That is why I am anxious to hear Mr. Catskill's ideas."

Mr. Catskill rested his hands on his hips and his manner became very solemn. "For once," he said, "I am in agreement with Mr. Barnaby. I believe that the chances are *against* our ever seeing the dear cities of our world again."

"I felt that," said Lady Stella, with white lips. "I *knew* that two days ago."

"And so behold my week-end expand to an eternity!" said M. Dupont, and for a time no one said another word.

"It's as if—" Penk said at last. "Why! One might be dead!"

"But I *murst* be back," Miss Greeta Grey broke out abruptly, as one who sets aside a foolish idea. "It's absurd. I have to go on at the Alhambra on September the second. It's imperative. We came here quite easily; it's ridiculous to say I can't go back in the same way."

Lord Barralonga regarded her with affectionate malignity. "You wait," he said.

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"But I murst!" she sang.

"There's such things as impossibilities—even for Miss Greeta Grey."

"Charter a special aeroplane!" she said. "Anything."

He regarded her with an elfin grin and shook his head.

"My dear man," she said, "you've only seen me in a holiday mood, so far. Work is serious."

"My dear girl, that Alhambra of yours is about as far from us now as the Court of King Nebuchadnezzar. . . . It can't be done."

"But it *murst*," she said in her queenly way. "And that's all about it."

§ 3

Mr. Barnstaple got up from the table and walked apart to where a gap in the castle wall gave upon the darkling wilderness without. He sat down there. His eyes went from the little group talking around the supper-table to the sunlit crest of the cliffs across the cañon and to the wild and lonely mountain slopes below the headland. In this world he might have to live out the remainder of his days.

And those days might not be very numerous if Mr. Catskill had his way. Sydenham, and his wife and the boys were indeed as far—"as the Court of King Nebuchadnezzar."

He had scarcely given his family a thought since he had posted his letter at Victoria. Now he felt a queer twinge of desire to send them some word or

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token—if only he could. Queer that they would never hear from him or of him again! How would they get on without him? Would there be any difficulty about the account at the bank? Or about the insurance money? He had always intended to have a joint and several account with his wife at the bank, and he had never quite liked to do it. Joint and several. . . . A thing every man ought to do. . . . His attention came back to Mr. Catskill unfolding his plans.

"We have to make up our minds to what may be a prolonged, a very prolonged stay here. Do not let us deceive ourselves upon that score. It may last for years—it may last for generations."

Something struck Penk in that. "I don't 'ardly see," he said, "how that can be—*generations?*"

"I am coming to that," said Mr. Catskill.

"Un'appily," said Mr. Penk, and became profoundly restrained and thoughtful with his eyes on Lady Stella.

"We have to remain, a little alien community, in this world until we dominate it, as the Romans dominated the Greeks, and until we master its science and subdue it to our purpose. That may mean a long struggle. It may mean a very long struggle indeed. And meanwhile we must maintain ourselves as a community; we must consider ourselves a colony, a garrison, until that day of reunion comes. We must hold our hostages, sir, and not only our hostages. It may be necessary for our purpose, and if it is necessary for our purpose, so be it—to get in others of these Utopians, to catch them young, before this

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so-called education of theirs unfits them for our purpose, to train them in the great traditions of our Empire and our race."

Mr. Hunker seemed on the point of saying something but refrained.

M. Dupont got up sharply from the table, walked four paces away, returned and stood still, watching Mr. Catskill.

"Generations?" said Mr. Penk.

"Yes," said Mr. Catskill. "Generations. For here we are strangers—strangers, like that other little band of adventurers who established their citadel five-and-twenty centuries ago upon the Capitol beside the rushing Tiber. This is our Capitol. A greater Capitol—of a greater Rome—in a vaster world. And like that band of Roman adventurers we too may have to reinforce our scanty numbers at the expense of the Sabines about us, and take to ourselves servants and helpers and—*mates!* No sacrifice is too great for the high possibilities of this adventure."

M. Dupont seemed to nerve himself for the sacrifice.

"Duly married," injected Father Amerton.

"Duly married," said Mr. Catskill in parenthesis. "And so, sir, we will hold out here and maintain ourselves and dominate this desert countryside and spread our prestige and our influence and our spirit into the inert body of this decadent Utopian world. Until at last we are able to master the secret that Arden and Greenlake were seeking and recover the way back to our own people, opening to the crowded millions of our Empire——"

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§ 4

"Just a moment," said Mr. Hunker. "Just a moment! About this empire——!"

"Exactly," said M. Dupont, recalled abruptly from some romantic day-dream. "About your Empire!"

Mr. Catskill regarded them thoughtfully and defensively. "When I say Empire I mean it in the most general sense."

"Exactly," snapped M. Dupont.

"I was thinking generally of our—Atlantic civilisation."

"Before, sir, you go on to talk of Anglo-Saxon unity and the English-speaking race," said M. Dupont, with a rising note of bitterness in his voice, "permit me to remind you, sir, of one very important fact that you seem to be overlooking. The language of Utopia, sir, is French. I want to remind you of that. I want to recall it to your mind. I will lay no stress here on the sacrifices and martyrdoms that France has endured in the cause of Civilisation——"

The voice of Mr. Burleigh interrupted. "A very natural misconception. But, if you will pardon the correction, the language of Utopia is *not* French."

Of course, Mr. Barnstaple reflected, M. Dupont had not heard the explanation of the language difficulty.

"Permit me, sir, to believe the evidence of my own ears," the Frenchman replied with dignified politeness. "These Utopians, I can assure you, speak

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French and nothing but French—and very excellent French it is."

"They speak no language at all," said Mr. Burleigh.

"Not even English?" sneered M. Dupont.

"Not even English."

"Not League of Nations, perhaps? But—Bah! Why do I argue? They speak French. Not even a Boche would deny it. It needs an Englishman——"

A beautiful wrangle, thought Mr. Barnstaple. There was no Utopian present to undeceive M. Dupont and he stuck to his belief magnificently. With a mixture of pity and derision and anger, Mr. Barnstaple listened to this little band of lost human beings, in the twilight of a vast, strange and possibly inimical world, growing more and more fierce and keen in a dispute over the claims of their three nations to "dominate" Utopia, claims based entirely upon greeds and misconceptions. Their voices rose to shouts and sank to passionate intensity as their lifelong habits of national egotism reasserted themselves. Mr. Hunker would hear nothing of any "Empire"; M. Dupont would hear of nothing but the supreme claim of France. Mr. Catskill twisted and turned. To Mr. Barnstaple this conflict of patriotic prepossessions seemed like a dog-fight on a sinking ship. But at last Mr. Catskill, persistent and ingenious, made headway against his two antagonists.

He stood at the end of the table explaining that he had used the word Empire loosely, apologising for using it, explaining that when he said Empire he had all Western Civilisation in mind. "When I said it,"

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he said, turning to Mr. Hunker, "I meant a common brotherhood of understanding." He faced towards M. Dupont. "I meant our tried and imperishable Entente."

"There are at least no Russians here," said M. Dupont. "And no Germans."

"True," said Lord Barralonga. "We start ahead of the Hun here, and we can keep ahead."

"And I take it," said Mr. Hunker, "that Japanese are barred."

"No reason why we shouldn't start clean with a complete colour bar," reflected Lord Barralonga. "This seems to me a White Man's World."

"At the same time," said M. Dupont, coldly and insistently, "you will forgive me if I ask you for some clearer definition of our present relationship and for some guarantee, some effective guarantee, that the immense sacrifices France has made and still makes in the cause of civilised life, will receive their proper recognition and their due reward in this adventure. . . .

"I ask only for justice," said M. Dupont.

§ 5

Indignation made Mr. Barnstaple bold. He got down from his perch upon the wall and came up to the table.

"Are you mad," he said, "or am I?

"This squabble over flags and countries and fanciful rights and deserts—it is hopeless folly. Do you not realise even now the position we are in?"

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His breath failed him for a moment and then he resumed.

"Are you incapable of thinking of human affairs except in terms of flags and fighting and conquest and robbery? Cannot you realise the proportion of things and the quality of this world into which we have fallen? As I have said already, we are like some band of savages in a show at Earl's Court plotting the subjugation of London. We are like suppressed cannibals in the heart of a great city dreaming of a revival of our ancient and forgotten filthiness. What are our chances in this fantastic struggle?"

Mr. Ridley spoke reprovingly. "You're forgetting everythink you just been told. Everythink. 'Arf their population is laid out with flu and measles. And there's no such thing as a 'ealthy fighting will left in all Utopia."

"Precisely," said Mr. Catskill.

"Well, suppose you have chances? If that makes your scheme the more hopeful, it also makes it the more horrible. Here we are lifted up out of the troubles of our time to a vision, to a reality of civilisation such as our own world can only hope to climb to in scores of centuries! Here is a world at peace, splendid, happy, full of wisdom and hope! If our puny strength and base cunning can contrive it, we are to shatter it all! We are proposing to wreck a world! I tell you it is not an adventure. It is a crime. It is an abomination. I will have no part in it. I am against you in this attempt."

Father Amerton would have spoken but Mr. Burleigh arrested him by a gesture.

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"What would *you* have us do?" asked Mr. Burleigh.

"Submit to their science. Learn what we can from them. In a little while we may be cured of our inherent poisons and we may be permitted to return from this outlying desert of mines and turbines and rock, to those gardens of habitation we have as yet scarcely seen. There we too may learn something of civilisation. . . . In the end we may even go back to our own disordered world—with knowledge, with hope and help, missionaries of a new order."

"But why—?" began Father Amerton.

Again Mr. Burleigh took the word. "Everything you say," he remarked, "rests on unproven assumptions. You choose to see this Utopia through rose-tinted glasses. We others—for it is"—he counted—"eleven to one against you—see things without such favourable preconceptions."

"And may I ask, sir," said Father Amerton, springing to his feet and hitting the table a blow that set all the glasses talking. "May I ask, who *you* are, to set yourself up as a judge and censor of the common opinion of mankind? For I tell you, sir, that here in this lonely and wicked and strange world, we here, we twelve, do represent mankind. We are the advance-guard, the pioneers—in the new world that God has given us, even as He gave Canaan to Israel His chosen, three thousand years ago. Who are *you*——"

"Exactly," said Penk. "Who are you?"

And Mr. Ridley reinforced him with a shout: "Oo the 'ell are *you?*"

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Mr. Barnstaple had no platform skill to meet so direct an attack. He stood helpless. Astonishingly Lady Stella came to his rescue.

"That isn't fair, Father Amerton," she said. "Mr. Bastaple, whoever he is, has a perfect right to express his own opinion."

"And having expressed it," said Mr. Catskill, who had been walking up and down on the other side of the table to that on which Mr. Barnstaple stood, "M'm, having expressed it, to allow us to proceed with the business in hand. I suppose it was inevitable that we should find the conscientious objector in our midst—even in Utopia. The rest of us, I take it, are very much of one mind about our situation."

"We are," said Mr. Mush, regarding Mr. Barnstaple with a malevolent expression.

"Very well. Then I suppose we must follow the precedents established for such cases. We will not ask Mr.—Mr. Bastaple to share the dangers—and the honours—of a combatant. We will ask him merely to do civilian work of a helpful nature——"

Mr. Barnstaple held up his hand. "No," he said. "I am not disposed to be helpful. I do not recognise the analogy of the situation to the needs of the Great War, and, anyhow, I am entirely opposed to this project—this brigandage of a civilisation. You cannot call me a conscientious objector to fighting, because I do not object to fighting in a just cause. But this adventure of yours is not a just cause. . . . I implore you, Mr. Burleigh, you who are not merely a politician, but a man of culture and a philosopher, to reconsider what it is we are being urged towards

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—towards acts of violence and mischief from which there will be no drawing back!"

"Mr. Barnstaple," said Mr. Burleigh with grave dignity and something like a note of reproach in his voice, "I *have* considered. But I think I may venture to say that I am a man of some experience, some traditional experience, in human affairs. I may not altogether agree with my friend Mr. Catskill. Nay! I will go further and say that in many respects I do *not* agree with him. If I were the autocrat here I would say that we have to offer these Utopians resistance—for our self-respect—but not to offer them the violent and aggressive resistance that he contemplates. I think we could be far more subtle, far more elaborate, and far more successful than Mr. Catskill is likely to be. But that is my own opinion. Neither Mr. Hunker nor Lord Barralonga, nor Mr. Mush, nor M. Dupont shares it. Nor do Mr.—our friends, the ah!—technical engineers here share it. And what I do perceive to be imperative upon our little band of Earthlings, lost here in a strange universe, is *unity of action.* Whatever else betide, dissension must not betray us. We must hold together and act together as one body. Discuss if you will, when there is any time for discussion, but in the end *decide.* And having decided abide loyally by the decision. Upon the need of securing a hostage or two I have no manner of doubt whatever. Mr. Catskill is right."

Mr. Barnstaple was a bad debater. "But these Utopians are as human as we are," he said. "All that is most sane and civilised in ourselves is with them."

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Mr. Ridley interrupted in a voice designedly rough. "Oh Lord!" he said. "We can't go on jawing 'ere for ever. It's sunset, and Mr.—this gentleman 'as 'ad 'is say, and more than 'is say. We ought to 'ave our places and know what is expected of us before night. May I propose that we elect Mr. Catskill our Captain with full military powers?"

"I second that," said Mr. Burleigh with grave humility.

"Perhaps M. Dupont," said Mr. Catskill, "will act with me as associated Captain, representing our glorious ally, his own great country."

"In the absence of a more worthy representative," acquiesced M. Dupont, "and to see that French interests are duly respected."

"And if Mr. Hunker would act as my lieutenant? . . . Lord Barralonga will be our quartermaster and Father Amerton our chaplain and censor. Mr. Burleigh, it goes without saying, will be our civil head."

Mr. Hunker coughed. He frowned with the expression of one who makes a difficult explanation. "I won't be exactly lieutenant," he said. "I'll take no official position. I've a sort of distaste for—foreign entanglements. I'll be a looker-on—who helps. But I think you will find you can count on me, Gentlemen—when help is needed."

Mr. Catskill seated himself at the head of the table and indicated the chair next to his for M. Dupont. Miss Greeta Grey seated herself on his other hand between him and Mr. Hunker. Mr. Burleigh remained in his place, a chair or so from Mr. Hunker.

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The rest came and stood round the Captain except Lady Stella and Mr. Barnstaple.

Almost ostentatiously Mr. Barnstaple turned his back on the new command. Lady Stella, he saw, remained seated far down the table, looking dubiously at the little crowd of people at the end. Then her eyes went to the desolate mountain crest beyond.

She shivered violently and stood up. "It's going to be very cold here after sunset," she said, with nobody heeding her. "I shall go and unpack a wrap."

She walked slowly to her quarters and did not reappear.

§ 6

Mr. Barnstaple did not want to seem to listen to this Council of War. He walked to the wall of the old castle and up a flight of stone steps and along the rampart to the peak of the headland. Here the shattering and beating sound of the waters in the two convergent cañons was very loud.

There was still a bright upper rim of sunlit rock on the mountain face behind, but all the rest of the world was now in a deepening blue shadow, and a fleecy white mist was gathering in the cañons below and hiding the noisy torrents. It drifted up almost to the level of the little bridge that spanned the narrower cañon to a railed stepway from the crest on the further side. For the first time since he had arrived in Utopia Mr. Barnstaple felt a chill in the air. And loneliness like a pain.

Up the broader of the two meeting cañons some sort of engineering work was going on and periodic

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flashes lit the drifting mist. Far away over the mountains a solitary aeroplane, very high, caught the sun's rays ever and again and sent down quivering flashes of dazzling golden light, and then, as it wheeled about, vanished again in the deepening blue.

He looked down into the great courtyard of the ancient castle below him. The modern buildings in the twilight looked like phantom pavilions amidst the archaic masonry. Some one had brought a light, and Captain Rupert Catskill, the new Cortez, was writing orders, while his Commando stood about him.

The light shone on the face and shoulders and arms of Miss Greeta Grey; she was peering over the Captain's arm to see what he was writing. And as Mr. Barnstaple looked he saw her raise her hand suddenly to conceal an involuntary yawn.

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CHAPTER THE THIRD

MR. BARNSTAPLE AS A TRAITOR TO MANKIND

§ 1

Mr. Barnstaple spent a large part of the night sitting upon his bed and brooding over the incalculable elements of the situation in which he found himself.

What could he do? What ought he to do? Where did his loyalty lie? The dark traditions and infections of the Earth had turned this wonderful encounter into an ugly and dangerous antagonism far too swiftly for him to adjust his mind to the new situation. Before him now only two possibilities seemed open. Either the Utopians would prove themselves altogether the stronger and the wiser and he and all his fellow pirates would be crushed and killed like vermin, or the desperate ambitions of Mr. Catskill would be realised and they would become a spreading sore in the fair body of this noble civilisation, a band of robbers and destroyers, dragging Utopia year by year and age by age back to terrestrial conditions. There seemed only one escape from the dilemma; to get away from this fastness to the Utopians, to reveal the whole scheme of the Earthlings to them, and to throw himself and his associates upon their mercy. And this must be done soon, before the hostages were seized and bloodshed began.

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But in the first place it might be very difficult now to get away from the Earthling band. Mr. Catskill would already have organised watchers and sentinels, and the peculiar position of the crag exposed every avenue of escape. And in the next place Mr. Barnstaple had a lifelong habit of mind which predisposed him against tale-bearing and dissentient action. His school training had moulded him into subservience to any group or gang in which he found himself; his form, his side, his house, his school, his club, his party and so forth. Yet his intelligence and his limitless curiosities had always been opposed to these narrow conspiracies against the world at large. His spirit had made him an uncomfortable rebel throughout his whole earthly existence. He loathed political parties and political leaders, he despised and rejected nationalism and imperialism and all the tawdry loyalties associated with them; the aggressive conqueror, the grabbing financier, the shoving business man, he hated as he hated wasps, rats, hyenas, sharks, fleas, nettles, and the like: all his life he had been a citizen of Utopia exiled upon Earth. After his fashion he had sought to serve Utopia. Why should he not serve Utopia now? Because his band was a little and desperate band, that was no reason why he should serve the things he hated. If they were a desperate crew, the fact remained that they were also, as a whole, an evil crew. There is no reason why liberalism should degenerate into a morbid passion for minorities. . . .

Only two persons among the Earthlings, Lady Stella and Mr. Burleigh, held any of his sympathy. And he had his doubts about Mr. Burleigh. Mr.

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Burleigh was one of those strange people who seem to understand everything and feel nothing. He impressed Mr. Barnstaple as being intelligently irresponsible. Wasn't that really more evil than being unintelligently adventurous like Hunker or Barralonga?

Mr. Barnstaple's mind returned from a long excursion in ethics to the realities about him. Tomorrow he would survey the position and make his plans, and perhaps in the twilight he would slip away.

It was entirely in his character to defer action in this way for the better part of the day. His life had been one of deferred action almost from the beginning.

§ 2

But events could not wait for Mr. Barnstaple.

He was called at dawn by Penk, who told him that henceforth the garrison would be aroused every morning by an electric hooter he and Ridley had contrived. As Penk spoke a devastating howl from this contrivance inaugurated the new era. He handed Mr. Barnstaple a slip of paper torn from a note-book on which Mr. Catskill had written:—

"Non-comb. Barnaby. To assist Ridley prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner, times and menu on mess-room wall, clear away and wash up smartly and at other times to be at disposal of Lt. Hunker, in chemical laboratory for experimenting and bomb-making. Keep laboratory clean."

"That's your job," said Penk. "Ridley's waitin' for you."

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"Well," said Mr. Barnstaple, and got up. It was no use precipitating a quarrel if he was to escape. So he went to the scarred and bandaged Ridley, and they produced a very good imitation of a British military kitchen in that great raw year, 1914.

Every one was turned out to breakfast at half past six by a second solo on the hooter. The men were paraded and inspected by Mr. Catskill, with M. Dupont standing beside him; Mr. Hunker stood parallel with these two and a few yards away; all the other men fell in except Mr. Burleigh, who was to be civil commander in Utopia, and was, in that capacity, in bed, and Mr. Barnstaple the non-combatant. Miss Greeta Grey and Lady Stella sat in a sunny corner of the courtyard sewing at a flag. It was to be a blue flag with a white star, a design sufficiently unlike any existing national flag to avoid wounding the patriotic susceptibilities of any of the party. It was to represent the Earthling League of Nations.

After the parade the little garrison dispersed to its various posts and duties, M. Dupont assumed the chief command, and Mr. Catskill, who had watched all night, went to lie down. He had the Napoleonic quality of going off to sleep for an hour or so at any time in the day.

Mr. Penk went up to the top of the castle, where the hooter was installed, to keep a lookout.

There were some moments to be snatched between the time when Mr. Barnstaple had finished with Ridley and the time when Hunker would discover his help was available, and this time he devoted to an inspection of the castle wall on the side of the slopes.

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While he was standing on the old rampart, weighing his chances of slipping away that evening in the twilight, an aeroplane appeared above the crag and came down upon the nearer slope. Two Utopians descended, talked with their aviator for a time, and then turned their faces towards the fastness of the Earthlings.

A single note of the hooter brought out Mr. Catskill upon the rampart beside Mr. Barnstaple. He produced a field-glass and surveyed the approaching figures.

"Serpentine and Cedar," he said, lowering his field-glass. "And they come alone. Good."

He turned round and signalled with his hand to Penk, who responded with two short whoops of his instrument. This was the signal for a general assembly.

Down below in the courtyard appeared the rest of the Allied force and Mr. Hunker, and fell in with a reasonable imitation of discipline.

Mr. Catskill passed Mr. Barnstaple without taking any notice of him, joined M. Dupont, Mr. Hunker and their subordinates below and proceeded to instruct them in his plans for the forthcoming crisis. Mr. Barnstaple could not hear what was said. He noted with sardonic disapproval that each man, as Mr. Catskill finished with him, clicked his heels together and saluted. Then at a word of command they dispersed to their posts.

There was a partly ruined flight of steps leading down from the general level of the courtyard through this great archway in the wall that gave access to

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and from the slopes below. Ridley and Mush went down to the right of these steps and placed themselves below a projecting mass of masonry so as to be hidden from any one approaching from below. Father Amerton and Mr. Hunker concealed themselves similarly to the left. Father Amerton, Mr. Barnstaple noted, had been given a coil of rope, and then his roving eye discovered Mr. Mush glancing at a pistol in his hand and then replacing it in his pocket. Lord Barralonga took up a position for himself some steps above Mr. Mush and produced a revolver which he held in his one efficient hand. Mr. Catskill remained at the head of the stairs. He also was holding a revolver. He turned to the citadel, considered the case of Penk for a moment, and then motioned him down to join the others. M. Dupont, armed with a stout table leg, placed himself at Mr. Catskill's right hand.

For a time Mr. Barnstaple watched these dispositions without any realisation of their significance. Then his eyes went from the crouching figures within the castle to the two unsuspecting Utopians who were coming up towards them, and he realised that in a couple of minutes Serpentine and Cedar would be struggling in the grip of their captors. . . .

He perceived he had to act. And his had been a contemplative, critical life with no habit of decision.

He found himself trembling violently.

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§ 3

He still desired some mediatory intervention even in these fatal last moments. He raised an arm and cried "Hi!" as much to the Earthlings below as to the Utopians without. No one noticed either his gesture or his feeble cry.

Then his will seemed to break through a tangle of obstacles to one simple idea. Serpentine and Cedar must not be seized. He was amazed and indignant at his own vacillation. Of course they must not be seized! This foolery must be thwarted forthwith. In four strides he was on the wall above the archway and now he was shouting loud and clear. "Danger!" he shouted. "Danger!" and again "Danger!"

He heard Catskill's cry of astonishment and then a pistol bullet whipped through the air close to him.

Serpentine stopped short and looked up, touched Cedar's arm and pointed.

"These Earthlings want to imprison you. Don't come here! Danger!" yelled Mr. Barnstaple waving his arms and "*pat, pat, pat,*" Mr. Catskill experienced the disappointments of revolver shooting.

Serpentine and Cedar were turning back—but slowly and hesitatingly.

For a moment Mr. Catskill knew not what to do. Then he flung himself down the steps, crying, "After them! Stop them! Come on!"

"Go back!" cried Mr. Barnstaple to the Utopians. "Go back! Quickly! Quickly!"

Came a clatter of feet from below and then the eight men who constituted the combatant strength

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of the Earthling forces in Utopia emerged from under the archway running towards the two astonished Utopians. Mr. Mush led, with Ridley at his heels; he was pointing his revolver and shouting. Next came M. Dupont zealous and active. Father Amerton brought up the rear with the rope.

"Go back!" screamed Mr. Barnstaple, with his voice breaking.

Then he stopped shouting and watched—with his hands clinched.

The aviator was running down the slope from his machine to the assistance of Serpentine and Cedar. And above out of the blue two other aeroplanes had appeared.

The two Utopians disdained to hurry and in a few seconds their pursuers had come up with them. Hunker, Ridley, and Mush led the attack. M. Dupont, flourishing his stick, was abreast with them but running out to the right as though he intended to get between them and the aviator. Mr. Catskill and Penk were a little behind the leading three; the one-armed Barralonga was perhaps ten yards behind and Father Amerton had halted to recoil his rope more conveniently.

There seemed to be a moment's parley and then Serpentine had moved quickly as if to seize Hunker. A pistol cracked and then another went off rapidly three times. "Oh God!" cried Mr. Barnstaple. "Oh God!" as he saw Serpentine throw up his arms and fall backward, and then Cedar had grasped and lifted up Mush and hurled him at Mr. Catskill and Penk, bowling both of them over into one indistinguishable

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heap. With a wild cry M. Dupont closed in on Cedar but not quickly enough. His club shot into the air as Cedar parried his blow, and then the Utopian stooped, caught him by a leg, overthrew him, lifted him and whirled him round as one might whirl a rabbit, to inflict a stunning blow on Mr. Hunker.

Lord Barralonga ran back some paces and began shooting at the approaching aviator.

The confusion of legs and arms on the ground became three separate people again. Mr. Catskill, shouting directions, made for Cedar, followed by Penk and Mush and, a moment after, by Hunker and Dupont. They clung to Cedar as hounds will cling to a boar. Time after time he flung them off him. Father Amerton hovered unhelpfully with his rope.

For some moments Mr. Barnstaple's attention was concentrated upon this swaying and staggering attempt to overpower Cedar, and then he became aware of other Utopians running down the slope to join the fray. . . . The other two aeroplanes had landed.

Mr. Catskill realised the coming of these reinforcements almost as soon as Mr. Barnstaple. His shouts of "Back! Back to the castle!" reached Mr. Barnstaple's ears. The Earthlings scattered away from the tall dishevelled figure, hesitated, and began to walk and then run back towards the castle.

And then Ridley turned and very deliberately shot Cedar, who clutched at his breast and fell into a sitting position.

The Earthlings retreated to the foot of the steps that led up through the archway into the castle, and

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stood there in a panting, bruised and ruffled group. Fifty yards away Serpentine lay still, the aviator whom Barralonga had shot writhed and moaned, and Cedar sat up with blood upon his chest trying to feel his back. Five other Utopians came hurrying to their assistance.

"What is all this firing?" said Lady Stella, suddenly at Mr. Barnstaple's elbow.

"Have they caught their hostages?" asked Miss Greeta Grey.

"For the life of me!" said Mr. Burleigh, who had come out upon the wall a yard or so away, "this ought never to have happened. How did this get—*muffed*, Lady Stella?"

"I called out to them," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"*You*—called—out to them!" said Mr. Burleigh incredulous.

"Treason I did not calculate upon," came the wrathful voice of Mr. Catskill ascending out of the archway.

§ 4

For some moments Mr. Barnstaple made no attempt to escape the danger that closed in upon him. He had always lived a life of very great security and with him, as with so many highly civilised types, the power of apprehending personal danger was very largely atrophied. He was a spectator by temperament and training alike. He stood now as if he looked at himself, the central figure of a great and hopeless tragedy. The idea of flight came belatedly, in a reluctant and apologetic manner into his mind.

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"Shot as a traitor," he said aloud. "Shot as a traitor."

There was that bridge over the narrow gorge. He might still get over that, if he went for it at once. If he was quick—quicker than they were. He was too intelligent to dash off for it; that would certainly have set the others running. He walked along the wall in a leisurely fashion past Mr. Burleigh, himself too civilised to intervene. In a quickening stroll he gained the steps that led to the citadel. Then he stood still for a moment to survey the situation. Catskill was busy setting sentinels at the gate. Perhaps he had not thought yet of the little bridge and imagined that Mr. Barnstaple was at his disposal at any time that suited him. Up the slope the Utopians were carrying off the dead or wounded men.

Mr. Barnstaple ascended the steps as if buried in thought and stood on the citadel for some seconds, his hands in his trouser pockets, as if he surveyed the view. Then he turned to the winding staircase that went down to a sort of guard-room below. As soon as he was surely out of sight he began to think and move very quickly.

The guard-room was perplexing. It had five doors, any one of which except the one by which he had just entered the room might lead down to the staircase. Against one, however, stood a pile of neat packing-cases. That left three to choose from. He ran from one to the other leaving each door open. In each case stone steps ran down to a landing and a turning-place. He stood hesitating at the third and noted that a cold draught came blowing up it. Surely

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that meant that this went down to the cliff face, or whence came the air? Surely this was it!

Should he shut the doors he had opened? No! Leave them all open.

He heard a clatter coming down the staircase from the citadel. Softly and swiftly he ran down the steps and halted for a second at the corner landing. He was compelled to stop and listen to the movements of his pursuers. "This is the door to the bridge, sir!" he heard Ridley cry, and then he heard Catskill say, "The Tarpeian Rock," and Barralonga, "Exactly! Why should we waste a cartridge? Are you sure this goes to the bridge, Ridley?"

The footsteps pattered across the guard-room and passed—down one of the other staircases.

"A reprieve!" whispered Mr. Barnstaple and then stopped aghast.

He was trapped! The staircase they were on was the staircase to the bridge!

They would go down as far as the bridge and as soon as they got to it they would see that he was neither on it nor on the steps on the opposite side of the gorge and that therefore he could not possibly have escaped. They would certainly bar that way either by closing and fastening any door there might be or, failing such a barrier, by setting a sentinel, and then they would come back and hunt for him at their leisure.

What was it Catskill had been saying? The Tarpeian Rock? . . .

Horrible!

They mustn't take him alive. . . .

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He must fight like a rat in a corner and oblige them to shoot him. . . .

He went on down the staircase. It became very dark and then grew light again. It ended in an ordinary big cellar, which may once have been a gun-pit or magazine. It was fairly well lit by two unglazed windows cut in the rock. It now contained a store of provisions. Along one side stood an array of the flask-like bottles that were used for wine in Utopia; along the other was a miscellany of packing-cases and cubes wrapped in gold-leaf. He lifted one of the glass flasks by its neck. It would make an effective club. Suppose he made a sort of barrier of the packing-cases across the entrance and stood beside it and clubbed the pursuers as they came in! Glass and wine would smash over their skulls. . . . It would take time to make the barrier. . . . He chose and carried three of the larger flasks to the doorway where they would be handy for him. Then he had an inspiration and looked at the window.

He listened at the door of the staircase for a time. Not a sound came from above. He went to the window and lay down in the deep embrasure and wriggled forward until he could see out and up and down. The cliff below fell sheer; he could have spat on to the brawling torrent fifteen hundred feet perhaps below. The crag here was made up of almost vertical strata which projected and receded; a big buttress hid almost all of the bridge except the far end which seemed to be about twenty or thirty yards lower than the opening from which Mr. Barnstaple was looking. Mr. Catskill appeared upon this bridge, very small

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and distant, scrutinising the rocky stairway beyond the bridge. Mr. Barnstaple withdrew his head hastily. Then very discreetly he peeped again. Mr. Catskill was no longer to be seen. He was coming back.

To business! There was not much time.

In his earlier days before the Great War had made travel dear and uncomfortable Mr. Barnstaple had done some rock climbing in Switzerland and he had also had some experience in Cumberland and Wales. He surveyed now the rocks close at hand with an intelligent expertness. They were cut by almost horizontal joint-planes into which there had been a considerable infiltration chiefly of white crystalline material. This stuff, which he guessed was calcite, had weathered more rapidly than the general material of the rock, leaving a series of irregular horizontal grooves. With luck it might be possible to work along the cliff face, turn the buttress and scramble to the bridge.

And then came an even more hopeful idea. He could easily get along the cliff face to the first recess, flatten himself there and remain until the Earthlings had searched his cellar. After they had searched he might creep back to the cellar. Even if they looked out of the window they would not see him and even if he left finger-marks and so forth in the embrasure, they would be likely to conclude that he had either jumped or fallen down the crag into the gorge below. But at first it might be slow work negotiating the cliff face. . . . And this would cut him off from his weapons, the flasks. . . .

But the idea of hiding in the recess had taken a

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strong hold upon his imagination. Very cautiously he got out of the window, found a handhold, got his feet on to his ledge and began to work his way along towards his niche.

But there were unexpected difficulties, a gap of nearly five yards in the handhold—nothing. He had to flatten himself and trust to his feet and for a time he remained quite still in that position.

Further on was a rotten lump of the vein mineral and it broke away under him very disconcertingly, but happily his fingers had a grip and the other foot was firm. The detached crystals slithered down the rock face for a moment and then made no further sound. They had dropped into the void. For a time he was paralysed.

"I'm not in good form," whispered Mr. Barnstaple. "I'm not in good form."

He clung motionless and prayed.

With an effort he resumed his traverse.

He was at the very corner of the recess when some faint noise drew his eyes to the window from which he had emerged. Ridley's face was poked out slowly and cautiously, his eye red and fierce among his white bandages.

§ 5

He did not at first see Mr. Barnstaple. "Gawd!" he said when he did so and withdrew his head hastily.

Came a sound of voices saying indistinguishable things.

Some inappropriate instinct kept Mr. Barnstaple

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quite still, though he could have got into cover in the recess quite easily before Mr. Catskill looked out revolver in hand.

For some moments they stared at each other in silence.

"Come back or I shoot," said Mr. Catskill unconvincingly.

"Shoot!" said Mr. Barnstaple after a moment's reflection.

Mr. Catskill craned his head out and stared down into the shadowy blue depths of the cañon. "It isn't necessary," he answered. "We have to save cartridges."

"You haven't the guts," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"It's not quite that," said Mr. Catskill.

"No," said Mr. Barnstaple, "it isn't. You are fundamentally a civilised man."

Mr. Catskill scowled at him without hostility.

"You have a very good imagination," Mr. Barnstaple reflected. "The trouble is that you have been so damnably educated. What is the trouble with you? You are be-Kiplinged. Empire and Anglo-Saxon and boy-scout and sleuth are the stuff in your mind. If I had gone to Eton I might have been the same as you are, I suppose."

"Harrow," corrected Mr. Catskill.

"A perfectly *beastly* public school. Suburban place where the boys wear chignons and straw haloes. I might have guessed Harrow. But it's queer I bear you no malice. Given decent ideas you might have been very different from what you are. If I had been your schoolmaster— But it's too late now."

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"It is," said Mr. Rupert Catskill, smiling genially, and cocked his eye down into the cañon.

Mr. Barnstaple began to feel for his ledge round the corner with one foot.

"Don't go for a minute," said Mr. Catskill. "I'm not going to shoot."

A voice from within, probably Lord Barralonga's, said something about heaving a rock at Mr. Barnstaple. Some one else, probably Ridley, approved ferociously.

"Not without due form of trial," said Mr. Catskill over his shoulder. His face was inscrutable, but a fantastic idea began to run about in Mr. Barnstaple's mind that Mr. Catskill did not want to have him killed. He had thought about things and he wanted him now to escape—to the Utopians and perhaps rig up some sort of settlement with them.

"We intend to try you, sir," said Mr. Catskill. "We intend to try you. We cite you to appear."

Mr. Catskill moistened his lips and considered. "The court will sit almost at once." His little bright brown eyes estimated the chances of Mr. Barnstaple's position very rapidly. He craned towards the bridge. "We shall not waste time over our procedure," he said. "And I have little doubt of our verdict. We shall condemn you to death. So—there you are, sir. I doubt if we shall be more than a quarter of an hour before your fate is legally settled."

He glanced up trying to see the crest of the crag. "We shall probably throw rocks," he said.

"*Moriturus te saluo*," said Mr. Barnstaple with an air of making a witty remark. "If you will forgive

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me I will go on now to find a more comfortable position."

Mr. Catskill remained looking hard at him.

"I've never borne you any ill will," said Mr. Barnstaple. "Had I been your schoolmaster everything might have been different. Thanks for the quarter of an hour more you give me. And if by any chance——"

"Exactly," said Mr. Catskill.

They understood one another.

When Mr. Barnstaple stepped round the bend into the recess Mr. Catskill was still looking out and Lord Barralonga was faintly audible advocating the immediate heaving of rocks.

§ 6

The ways of the human mind are past finding out. From desperation Mr. Barnstaple's mood had passed to exhilaration. His first sick horror of climbing above this immense height had given place now to an almost boyish assurance. His sense of immediate death had gone. He was appreciating this adventure, indeed he was enjoying it, with an entire disregard now of how it was to end.

He made fairly good time until he got to the angle of the buttress, though his arms began to ache rather badly, and then he had a shock. He had now a full view of the bridge and up the narrow gorge. The ledge he was working along did not run to the bridge at all. It ran a good thirty feet below it. And what was worse, between himself and the bridge were two

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gullies and chimneys of uncertain depth. At this discovery he regretted for the first time that he had not stayed in the cellar and made a fight for it there.

He had some minutes of indecision—with the ache in his arms increasing.

He was roused from his inaction by what he thought at first was the shadow of a swift-flying bird on the rock. Presently it returned. He hoped he was not to be assailed by birds. He had read a story—but never mind that now.

Then came a loud crack overhead, and he glanced up to see a lump of rock which had just struck a little bulge above him fly to fragments. From which incident he gathered firstly that the court had delivered an adverse verdict rather in advance of Mr. Catskill's time, and secondly that he was visible from above. He resumed his traverse towards the shelter of the gully with feverish energy.

The gully was better than he expected, a chimney; difficult, he thought, to ascend, but quite practicable downward. It was completely overhung. And perhaps a hundred feet below there was a sort of step in it that gave a quite broad recess, sheltered from above and with room enough for a man to sprawl on it if he wanted to do so. There would be rest for Mr. Barnstaple's arms, and without any needless delay he clambered down to it and abandoned himself to the delightful sensation of not holding on to anything. He was out of sight and out of reach of his Earthling pursuers.

In the back of the recess was a trickle of water. He drank and began to think of food and to regret

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that he had not brought with him some provision from the store in the cellar. He might have opened one of those gold-leaf-covered cubes or pocketed a small flask of wine. Wine would be very heartening just now. But it did not do to think of that. He stayed for a long time, as it seemed to him, on this precious shelf, scrutinising the chimney below very carefully. It seemed quite practicable for a long way down. The sides became very smooth, but they seemed close enough together to get down with his back against one side and his feet against the other.

He looked at his wrist-watch. It was still not nine o'clock in the morning—it was about ten minutes to nine. He had been called by Ridley before half past five. At half past six he had been handing out breakfast in the courtyard. Serpentine and Cedar must have appeared about eight o'clock. In about ten minutes Serpentine had been murdered. Then the flight and the pursuit. How quickly things had happened! . . .

He had all day before him. He would resume his descent at half past nine. Until then he would rest. . . . It was absurd to feel hungry yet. . . .

He was climbing again before half past nine. For perhaps a hundred feet it was easy. Then by imperceptible degrees the gully broadened. He only realised it when he found himself slipping. He slipped, struggling furiously, for perhaps twenty feet, and then fell outright another ten and struck a rock and was held by a second shelf much broader than the one above: He came down on it with a jarring concussion and rolled—happily he rolled inward. He

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was bruised, but not seriously hurt. "My luck," he said. "My luck holds good."

He rested for a time, and then, confident that things would be all right, set himself to inspect the next stage of his descent. It was with a sort of incredulity that he discovered the chimney below his shelf was absolutely unclimbable. It was just a straight, smooth rock on either side for twenty yards at least and six feet wide. He might as well fling himself over at once as try to get down that. Then he saw that it was equally impossible to retrace his steps. He could not believe it; it seemed too silly. He laughed as one might laugh if one found one's own mother refusing to recognise one after a day's absence.

Then abruptly he stopped laughing.

He repeated every point in his examination. He fingered the smooth rocks about him. "But this is absurd," he said breaking out into a cold perspiration. There was no way out of this corner into which he had so painfully and laboriously got himself. He could neither go on nor go back. He was caught. His luck had given out.

§ 7

At midday by his wrist-watch Mr. Barnstaple was sitting in his recess as a weary invalid suffering from some incurable disease might sit up in an armchair during a temporary respite from pain, with nothing to do and no hope before him. There was not one chance in ten thousand that anything could happen

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to release him from this trap into which he had clambered. There was a trickle of water at the back but no food, not even a grass blade to nibble. Unless he saw fit to pitch himself over into the gorge, he must starve to death. . . . It would perhaps be cold at nights but not cold enough to kill him.

To this end he had come then out of the worried journalism of London and the domesticities of Sydenham.

Queer journey it was that he and the Yellow Peril had made!—Camberwell, Victoria, Hounslow, Slough, Utopia, the mountain paradise, a hundred fascinating and tantalising glimpses of a world of real happiness and order, that long, long aeroplane flight half round a world. . . . And now—death.

The idea of abbreviating his sufferings by jumping over had no appeal for him. He would stay here and suffer such suffering as there might be before the end. And three hundred yards away or so were his fellow Earthlings, also awaiting their fate. . . . It was amazing. It was prosaic. . . .

After all to this or something like this most humanity had to come.

Sooner or later people had to lie and suffer, they had to think and then think feverishly and then weakly, and so fade to a final cessation of thought.

On the whole, he thought, it was preferable to die in this fashion, preferable to a sudden death, it was worth while to look death in the face for a time, to have leisure to write *finis* in one's mind, to think over life and such living as one had done and to think it over with a detachment, an independence,

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that only an entire inability to alter one jot of it now could give.

At present his mind was clear and calm; a bleak serenity like a clear winter sky possessed him. There was suffering ahead, he knew, but he did not believe it would be intolerable suffering. If it proved intolerable the cañon yawned below. In that respect this shelf or rock was a better death-bed than most, a more convenient death-bed. Your sick-bed presented pain with a wide margin, set it up for your too complete examination. But to starve was not so very dreadful, he had read; hunger and pain there would be, most distressful about the third day, and after that one became feeble and did not feel so much. It would not be like the torture of many cancer cases or the agony of brain fever; it would not be one tithe as bad as that. Lonely it would be. But is one much less lonely on a death-bed at home? They come and say, "There! there!" and do little serviceable things —but are there any other interchanges? . . . You go your solitary way, speech and movement and the desire to speak or move passing from you, and their voices fade. . . . Everywhere death is a very solitary act, a going apart. . . .

A younger man would probably have found this loneliness in the gorge very terrible, but Mr. Barnstaple had outlived the intenser delusions of companionship. He would have liked a last talk with his boys and to have put his wife into a good frame of mind, but even these desires were perhaps more sentimental than real. When it came to talks with his boys he was apt to feel shy. As they had come

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to have personalities of their own and to grow through adolescence, he had felt more and more that talking intimately to them was an invasion of their right to grow up along their own lines. And they too he felt were shy with him, defensively shy. Perhaps later on sons came back to a man—that was a later on that he would never know now. But he wished he could have let them know what had happened to him. That troubled him. It would set him right in their eyes, it would perhaps be better for their characters, if they did not think—as they were almost bound to think—that he had run away from them or lapsed mentally or even fallen into bad company and been made away with. As it was they might be worried and ashamed, needlessly, or put to expense to find out where he was, and that would be a pity.

One had to die. Many men had died as he was going to die, fallen into strange places, lost in dark caverns, marooned on desert islands, astray in the Australian bush, imprisoned and left to perish. It was good to die without great anguish or insult. He thought of the myriads of men who had been crucified by the Romans—was it eight thousand or was it ten thousand of the army of Spartacus that they killed in that fashion along the Appian Way?—of negroes hung in chains to starve, and of an endless variety of such deaths. Shocking to young imaginations such things were and more fearful in thought than in reality. It is all a matter of a little more pain or a little less pain—but God will not have any great waste of pain. Cross, wheel, electric chair or bed of suffering—the thing is, *you die and have done.*

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It was pleasant to find that one could think stoutly of these things. It was good to be caught and to find that one was not frantic. And Mr. Barnstaple was surprised to find how little he cared, now that he faced the issue closely, whether he was immortal or whether he was not. He was quite prepared to find himself immortal or at least not ending with death, in whole or in part. It was ridiculous to be dogmatic and say that a part, an impression, of his conscience and even of his willing life might not go on in some fashion. But he found it impossible to imagine how that could be. It was unimaginable. It was not to be anticipated. He had no fear of that continuation. He had no thought nor fear of the possibility of punishment or cruelty. The universe had at times seemed to him to be very carelessly put together, but he had never believed that it was the work of a malignant imbecile. It impressed him as immensely careless but not as dominatingly cruel. He had been what he had been, weak and limited and sometimes silly, but the punishment of these defects lay in the defects themselves.

He ceased to think about his own death. He began to think of life generally, its present lowliness, its valiant aspiration. He found himself regretting bitterly that he was not to see more of this Utopian world, which was in so many respects so near an intimation of what our own world may become. It had been very heartening to see human dreams and human ideals vindicated by realisation, but it was distressing to have had the vision snatched away while he was still only beginning to examine it. He found

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himself asking questions that had no answers for him, about economics, about love and struggle. Anyhow, he was glad to have seen as much as he had. It was good to have been purged by this vision and altogether lifted out of the dreary hopelessness of Mr. Peeve, to have got life into perspective again.

The passions and conflicts and discomforts of A. D. 1921 were the discomforts of the fever of an uninoculated world. The Age of Confusion on the Earth also would, in its own time, work itself out, thanks to a certain obscure and indomitable righteousness in the blood of the human type. Squatting in a hole in the cliff of the great crag, with unclimbable heights and depths above him and below, chilly, hungry and uncomfortable, this thought was a profound comfort to the strangely constituted mind of Mr. Barnstaple.

But how miserably had he and his companions failed to rise to the great occasions of Utopia! No one had raised an effectual hand to restrain the puerile imaginations of Mr. Catskill and the mere brutal aggressiveness of his companions. How invincibly had Father Amerton headed for the rôle of the ranting, hating, persecuting, quarrel-making priest. How pitifully weak and dishonest Mr. Burleigh—and himself scarcely better! disapproving always and always in ineffective opposition. What an unintelligent beauty-cow that woman Greeta Grey was, receptive, acquisitive, impenetrable to any idea but the idea of what was due to her as a yielding female! Lady Stella was of finer clay, but fired to no service. Women, he thought, had not been well represented in this chance expedition, just one waster

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and one ineffective. Was that a fair sample of Earth's womankind?

All the use these Earthlings had had for Utopia was to turn it back as speedily as possible to the aggressions, subjugations, cruelties, and disorders of the Age of Confusion to which they belonged. Serpentine and Cedar, the man of scientific power and the man of healing, they had sought to make hostages to disorder, and failing that they had killed or sought to kill them.

They had tried to bring back Utopia to the state of Earth, and indeed but for the folly, malice and weakness of men Earth was now Utopia. Old Earth was Utopia now, a garden and a glory, the Earthly Paradise, except that it was trampled to dust and ruin by its Catskills, Hunkers, Barralongas, Ridleys, Duponts, and their kind. Against their hasty trampling folly nothing was pitted, it seemed, in the whole wide world at present but the whinings of the Peeves, the acquiescent disapproval of the Burleighs and such immeasurable ineffectiveness as his own protest. And a few writers and teachers who produced results at present untraceable.

Once more Mr. Barnstaple found himself thinking of his old friend, the school-inspector and schoolbook writer, who had worked so steadfastly and broken down and died so pitifully. He had worked for Utopia all his days. Were there hundreds or thousands of such Utopians yet on earth? What magic upheld them?

"I wish I could get some message through to them," said Mr. Barnstaple, "to hearten them."

For it was true, though he himself had to starve

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and die like a beast fallen into a pit, nevertheless Utopia triumphed and would triumph. The grabbers and fighters, the persecutors and patriots, the lynchers and boycotters and all the riff-raff of short-sighted human violence, crowded on to final defeat. Even in their lives they know no happiness, they drive from excitement to excitement and from gratification to exhaustion. Their enterprises and successes, their wars and glories, flare and pass. Only the true thing grows, the truth, the clear idea, year by year and age by age, slowly and invincibly as a diamond grows amidst the darkness and pressures of the earth, or as the dawn grows amidst the guttering lights of some belated orgy.

What would be the end of those poor little people up above there? Their hold on life was even more precarious than his own, for he might lie and starve here slowly for weeks before his mind gave its last flicker. But they had openly pitted themselves against the might and wisdom of Utopia, and even now the ordered power of that world must be closing in upon them. He still had a faint irrational remorse for his betrayal of Catskill's ambush. He smiled now at the passionate conviction he had felt at the time that if once Catskill could capture his hostages, Earth might prevail over Utopia. That conviction had rushed him into action. His weak cries had seemed to be all that was left to avert this monstrous disaster. But suppose he had not been there at all, or suppose he had obeyed the lingering instinct of fellowship that urged him to fight with the others; what then?

When he recalled the sight of Cedar throwing

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Mush about as one might throw a lap-dog about, and the height and shape of Serpentine, he doubted whether even upon the stairs in the archway it would have been possible for the Earthlings to have overpowered these two. The revolvers would have come into use just as they had come into use upon the slope, and Catskill would have got no hostages but only two murdered men.

How unutterably silly the whole scheme of Catskill had been! But it was no sillier than the behaviour of Catskill, Burleigh, and the rest of the world's statesmen had been on earth, during the last few years. At times during the world agony of the Great War it had seemed that Utopia drew near to earth. The black clouds and smoke of these dark years had been shot with the light of strange hopes, with the promise of a world reborn. But the nationalists, financiers, priests, and patriots had brought all those hopes to nothing. They had trusted to old poisons and infections and to the weak resistances of the civilised spirit. They had counted their weapons and set their ambushes and kept their women busy sewing flags of discord. . . .

For a time they had killed hope, but only for a time. For Hope, the redeemer of mankind, there is perpetual resurrection.

"Utopia will win," said Mr. Barnstaple and for a time he sat listening to a sound he had heard before without heeding it very greatly, a purring throb in the rocks about him, like the running of some great machine. It grew louder and then faded down to the imperceptible again.

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His thoughts came back to his erstwhile companions. He hoped they were not too miserable or afraid up there. He was particularly desirous that something should happen to keep up Lady Stella's courage. He worried affectionately about Lady Stella. For the rest it would be as well if they remained actively combative to the end. Possibly they were all toiling at some preposterous and wildly hopeful defensive scheme of Catskill's. Except Mr. Burleigh who would be resting—convinced that for him at least there would still be a gentlemanly way out. And probably not much afraid if there wasn't. Amerton and possibly Mush might lapse into a religious revival—that would irritate the others a little, or possibly even provide a mental opiate for Lady Stella and Miss Greeta Grey. Then for Penk there was wine in the cellar. . . .

They would follow the laws of their being, they would do the things that nature and habit would require of them. What else was possible?

Mr. Barnstaple plunged into a metaphysical gulf. . . .

Presently he caught himself looking at his wristwatch. It was twenty minutes past twelve. He was looking at his watch more and more frequently—or time was going more slowly. . . . Should he wind his watch or let it run down? He was already feeling very hungry. That could not be real hunger yet; it must be his imagination getting out of control.

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CHAPTER THE FOURTH

THE END OF QUARANTINE CRAG

§ 1

Mr. Barnstaple awoke slowly and reluctantly from a dream about cookery. He was Soyer, the celebrated chef of the Reform Club, and he was inventing and tasting new dishes. But in the pleasant way of dreamland he was not only Soyer, but at the same time he was a very clever Utopian biologist and also God Almighty. So that he could not only make new dishes, but also make new vegetables and meats to go into them. He was particularly interested in a new sort of fowl, the Chateaubriand breed of fowls, which was to combine the rich quality of very good beefsteak with the size and delicacy of a fowl's breast. And he wanted to stuff it with a blend of pimento, onion, and mushroom—except that the mushroom wasn't quite the thing. The mushrooms—he tasted them—indeed just the least little modification. And into the dream came an assistant cook, several assistant cooks, all naked as Utopians, bearing fowls from the pantry and saying that they had not kept, they had gone "high" and they were going higher. In order to illustrate this idea of their going higher these assistant cooks lifted the fowls above their heads and then began to climb the walls of the kitchen, which were rocky and for a kitchen remarkably close together. Their figures became dark. They were thrown up in black outline against the luminous

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steam arising from a cauldron of boiling soup. It was boiling soup, and yet it was cold soup and cold steam.

Mr. Barnstaple was awake.

In the place of luminous steam there was mist, brightly moonlit mist, filling the gorge. It threw up the figures of the two Utopians in black silhouette. . . .

What Utopians?

His mind struggled between dreaming and waking. He started up rigidly attentive. They moved with easy gestures, quite unaware of his presence so close to them. They had already got a thin rope ladder fixed to some point overhead, but how they had managed to do this he did not know. One still stood on the shelf, the other swayed above him stretched across the gully clinging to the rope with his feet against the rock. The head of a third figure appeared above the edge of the shelf. It swayed from side to side. He was evidently coming up by a second rope ladder. Some sort of discussion was in progress. It was borne in upon Mr. Barnstaple that this last comer thought that he and his companions had clambered high enough, but that the uppermost man insisted they should go higher. In a few moments the matter was settled.

The uppermost Utopian became very active, lunged upward, swung out and vanished by jerks out of Mr. Barnstaple's field of view. His companions followed him and one after the other was lost to sight, leaving nothing visible but the convulsively agitated rope ladder and a dangling rope

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that they seemed to be dragging up the crag with them.

Mr. Barnstaple's taut muscles relaxed. He yawned silently, stretched his painful limbs and stood up very cautiously. He peered up the gully. The Utopians seemed to have reached the shelf above and to be busy there. The rope that had dangled became taut. They were hauling up something from below. It was a large bundle, possibly of tools or weapons or material wrapped in something that deadened its impacts against the rock. It jumped into view, hung spinning for a moment and was then snatched upward as the Utopians took in a fresh reef of rope. A period of silence followed.

He heard a metallic clang and then, thud, thud, a dull intermittent hammering. Then he jumped back as the end of a thin rope, apparently running over a pulley, dropped past him. The sounds from above now were like filing and then some bits of rock fell past him into the void.

§ 2

He did not know what to do. He was afraid to call to these Utopians and make his presence known to them. After the murder of Serpentine he was very doubtful how a Utopian would behave to an Earthling found hiding in a dark corner.

He examined the rope ladder that had brought these Utopians to his level. It was held by a long spike the end of which was buried in the rock at the side of the gully. Possibly this spike had been fired

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at the rock from below while he was asleep. The ladder was made up of straight lengths and rings at intervals of perhaps two feet. It was of such light material that he would have doubted its capacity to bear a man if he had not seen the Utopians upon it. It occurred to him that he might descend by this now and take his chances with any Utopians who might be below. He could not very well bring himself to the attention of these three Utopians above except by some sudden and startling action which might provoke sudden and unpleasant responses, but if he appeared first clambering slowly from above any Utopians beneath would have time to realise and consider the fact of his proximity before they dealt with him. And also he was excessively eager to get down from this dreary ledge.

He gripped a ring, thrust a leg backward over the edge of the shelf, listened for some moments to the little noises of the three workers above him, and then began his descent.

It was an enormous descent. Presently he found himself regretting that he had not begun counting the rings of the ladder. He must already have handed himself down hundreds. And still when he craned his neck to look down, the dark gulf yawned below. It had become very dark now. The moonlight did not cut down very deeply into the cañon and the faint reflection from the thin mists above was all there was to break the blackness. And even overhead the moonlight seemed to be passing.

Now he was near the rock, now it fell away and the rope ladder seemed to fall plumb into lightless

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bottomless space. He had to feel for each ring, and his bare feet and hands were already chafed and painful. And a new and disagreeable idea had come into his head—that some Utopian might presently come rushing up the ladder. But he would get notice of that because the rope would tighten and quiver, and he would be able to cry out: "I am an Earthling coming down. I am a harmless Earthling."

He began to cry out these words experimentally. The gorge re-echoed them, and there was no answering sound.

He became silent again, descending grimly and as steadily as possible, because now an intense desire to get off this infernal rope ladder and rest his hot hands and feet was overmastering every other motive.

Clang, clang, and a flash of green light.

He became rigid peering into the depths of the cañon. Came the green flash again. It revealed the depths of the gorge, still as it seemed an immense distance below him. And up the gorge—something; he could not grasp what it was during that momentary revelation. At first he thought it was a huge serpent writhing its way down the gorge, and then he concluded it must be a big cable that was being brought along the gorge by a handful of Utopians. But how the three or four figures he had indistinctly seen could move this colossal rope he could not imagine. The head of this cable serpent seemed to be lifting itself obliquely up the cliff. Perhaps it was being dragged up by ropes he had not observed. He waited for a third flash, but none came. He listened.

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He could hear nothing but a throbbing sound he had already noted before, like the throbbing of an engine running very smoothly.

He resumed his descent.

When at last he reached a standing-place it took him by surprise. The rope ladder fell past it for some yards and ended. He was swaying more and more and beginning to realise that the rope ladder came to an end, when he perceived the dim indication of a nearly horizontal gallery cut along the rock face. He put out a foot and felt an edge and swung away out from it. He was now so weary and exhausted that for a time he could not relinquish his grip on the rope ladder and get a footing on the shelf. At last he perceived how this could be done. He released his feet and gave himself a push away from the rock with them. He swung back into a convenient position for getting a foothold. He repeated this twice, and then had enough confidence to abandon his ladder and drop on to the shelf. The ladder dangled away from him into the darkness and then came wriggling back to tap him playfully and startlingly on the shoulder blade.

The gallery he found himself in seemed to follow a great vein of crystalline material along the cliff face. Borings as high as a man ran into the rock. He peered and felt his way along the gallery for a time. Manifestly if this was a mine there would be some way of ascending to it and descending from it into the gorge. The sound of the torrent was much louder now, and he judged he had perhaps come down two-thirds of the height of the crag. He was

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inclined to wait for daylight. The illuminated dial of his wrist-watch told him it was now four o'clock. It would not be long before dawn. He found a comfortable face of rock for his back and squatted down.

Dawn seemed to come very quickly, but in reality he dozed away the interval. When he glanced at his watch again it was half past five.

He went to the edge of the gallery and peered up the gorge to where he had seen the cable. Things were pale and dim and very black and white, but perfectly clear. The walls of the cañon seemed to go up for ever and vanish at last in cloud. He had a glimpse of a Utopian below, who was presently hidden by the curve of the gorge. He guessed that the great cable must have been brought so close up to the Quarantine Crag as to be invisible to him.

He could find no down-going steps from the gallery, but some thirty or forty yards off were five or six cableways running at a steep angle from the gallery to the opposite side of the gorge. They looked very black and distinct. He went along to them. Each was a carrier cable on which ran a small carrier trolley with a big hook below. Three of the carrier cables were empty, but on two the trolley was hauled up. Mr. Barnstaple examined the trolleys and found a catch retained them. He turned over one of these catches and the trolley ran away promptly, nearly dropping him into the gulf. He saved himself by clutching the carrier cable. He watched the trolley swoop down like a bird to a broad stretch of sandy beach on the other side of the torrent and come to

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rest there. It seemed all right. Trembling violently, he turned to the remaining trolley.

His nerves and will were so exhausted now that it was a long time before he could bring himself to trust to the hook of the remaining trolley and to release its catch. Then smoothly and swiftly he swept across the gorge to the beach below. There were big heaps of crystalline mineral on this beach and a cable —evidently for raising it—came down out of the mists above from some invisible crane, but not a Utopian was in sight. He relinquished his hold and dropped safely on his feet. The beach broadened down-stream and he walked along it close to the edge of the torrent.

The light grew stronger as he went. The world ceased to be a world of greys and blacks; colour came back to things. Everything was heavily bedewed. And he was hungry and almost intolerably weary. The sand changed in its nature and became soft and heavy for his feet. He felt he could walk no farther. He must wait for help. He sat down on a rock and looked up towards Quarantine Crag towering overhead.

§ 3

Sheer and high the great headland rose like the prow of some gigantic ship behind the two deep blue cañons; a few wisps and layers of mist still hid from Mr. Barnstaple its crest and the little bridge across the narrower gorge. The sky above between the streaks of mist was now an intense blue. And even

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as he gazed the mists swirled and dissolved, the rays of the rising sun smote the old castle to blinding gold, and the fastness of the Earthlings stood out clear and bright.

The bridge and the castle were very remote and all that part of the crag was like a little cap on the figure of a tall upstanding soldier. Round beneath the level of the bridge at about the height at which the three Utopians had worked or were still working ran something dark, a rope-like band. He jumped to the conclusion that this must be the cable he had seen lit up by those green flashes in the night. Then he noted a peculiar body upon the crest of the more open of the two gorges. It was an enormous vertical coil, a coil flattened into a disc, which had appeared on the edge of the cliff opposite to Quarantine Crag. Less plainly seen because of a projecting mass of rock, was a similar coil in the narrower cañon close to the steps that led up from the little bridge. Two or three Utopians, looking very small because they were so high and very squat because they were so foreshortened, were moving along the cliff edge and handling something that apparently had to do with these coils.

Mr. Barnstaple stared at these arrangements with much the same uncomprehending stare as that with which some savage who had never heard a shot fired in anger might watch the loading of a gun.

Came a familiar sound, faint and little. It was the hooter of Quarantine Castle sounding the reveille. And almost simultaneously the little Napoleonic figure of Mr. Rupert Catskill emerged against the blue.

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The head and shoulders of Penk rose and halted and stood at attention behind him. The captain of the Earthlings produced his field-glasses and surveyed the coils through them.

"I wonder what he makes of them," said Mr. Barnstaple.

Mr. Catskill turned and gave some direction to Penk, who saluted and vanished.

A click from the nearer gorge jerked his attention back to the little bridge. It had gone. His eye dropped and caught it up within a few yards of the water. He saw the water splash and the metal framework crumple up and dance two steps and lie still, and then a moment later the crash and clatter of the fall reached his ears.

"Now who did that?" asked Mr. Barnstaple and Mr. Catskill answered his question by going hastily to that corner of the castle and staring down. Manifestly he was surprised. Manifestly therefore it was the Utopians who had cut the bridge.

Mr. Catskill was joined almost immediately by Mr. Hunker and Lord Barralonga. Their gestures suggested an animated discussion.

The sunlight was creeping by imperceptible degrees down the front of Quarantine Crag. It had now got down to the cable that encircled the crest; in the light this shone with a coppery sheen. The three Utopians who had awakened Mr. Barnstaple in the night became visible descending the rope ladder very rapidly. And once more Mr. Barnstaple was aware of that humming sound he had heard ever and again during the night, but now it was much

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louder and it sounded everywhere about him, in the air, in the water, in the rocks and in his bones.

Abruptly something black and spear-shaped appeared beside the little group of Earthlings above. It seemed to jump up beside them, it paused and jumped again half the height of a man and jumped again. It was a flag being hauled up a flagstaff, that Mr. Barnstaple had not hitherto observed. It reached the top of the staff and hung limp.

Then some eddy in the air caught it. It flapped out for a moment, displayed a white star on a blue ground and dropped again.

This was the flag of Earth—this was the flag of the crusade to restore the blessings of competition, conflict and warfare to Utopia. Beneath it appeared the head of Mr. Burleigh, examining the Utopian coils through his glasses.

§ 4

The throbbing and humming in Mr. Barnstaple's ears grew rapidly louder and rose acutely to an extreme intensity. Suddenly great flashes of violet light leaped across from coil to coil, passing through Quarantine Castle as though it was not there.

For a moment longer it *was* there.

The flag flared out madly and was torn from its staff. Mr. Burleigh lost his hat. A half-length of Mr. Catskill became visible struggling with his coat-tails which had blown up and enveloped his head. At the same time Mr. Barnstaple saw the castle rotating upon the lower part of the crag, exactly as

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though some invisible giant had seized the upper tenth of the headland and was twisting it round. And then it vanished.

As it did so, a great column of dust poured up into its place; the waters in the gorge sprang into the air in tall fountains and were splashed to spray, and a deafening thud smote Mr. Barnstaple's ears. Aerial powers picked him up and tossed him a dozen yards and he fell amidst a rain of dust and stones and water. He was bruised and stunned.

"My God!" he cried, "My God," and struggled to his knees, feeling violently sick.

He had a glimpse of the crest of Quarantine Crag, truncated as neatly as though it had been cheese cut with a sharp knife. And then fatigue and exhaustion had their way with him and he sprawled forward and lay insensible.

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BOOK THE THIRD

A NEOPHYTE IN UTOPIA

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CHAPTER THE FIRST

THE PEACEFUL HILLS BESIDE THE RIVER

§ 1

"God has made more universes than there are pages in all the libraries of earth; man may learn and grow for ever amidst the multitude of His worlds."

Mr. Barnstaple had a sense of floating from star to star and from plane to plane, through an incessant variety and wonder of existences. He passed over the edge of being; he drifted for ages down the faces of immeasurable cliffs; he travelled from everlasting to everlasting in a stream of innumerable little stars. At last came a phase of profound restfulness. There was a sky of level clouds, warmed by the light of a declining sun, and a sky-line of gently undulating hills, golden grassy upon their crests and carrying dark purple woods and thickets and patches of pale yellow like ripening corn upon their billowing slopes. Here and there were domed buildings and terraces, flowering gardens and little villas and great tanks of gleaming water.

There were many trees like the eucalyptus—only that they had darker leaves—upon the slopes immediately below and round and about him; and all the land fell at last towards a very broad valley down which a shining river wound leisurely in great semicircular bends until it became invisible in the evening haze.

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A slight movement turned his eyes to discover Lychnis seated beside him. She smiled at him and put her finger on her lips. He had a vague desire to address her, and smiled faintly and moved his head. She got up and slipped away from him past the head of his couch. He was too feeble and incurious to raise his head and look to see where she had gone. But he saw that she had been sitting at a white table on which was a silver bowl full of intensely blue flowers, and the colour of the flowers held him and diverted his first faint impulse of curiosity.

He wondered whether colours were really brighter in this Utopian world or whether something in the air quickened and clarified his apprehension.

Beyond the table were the white pillars of the loggia. A branch of one of these eucalyptus-like trees, with leaves bronze black, came very close outside.

And there was music. It was a little trickle of sound, that dripped and ran, a mere unobtrusive rivulet of little clear notes upon the margin of his consciousness, the song of some fairy-land Debussy.

Peace. . . .

§ 2

He was awake again.

He tried hard to remember.

He had been knocked over and stunned in some manner too big and violent for his mind to hold as yet.

Then people had stood about him and talked about him. He remembered their feet. He must

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have been lying on his face with his face very close to the ground. Then they had turned him over, and the light of the rising sun had been blinding in his eyes.

Two gentle goddesses had given him some restorative in a gorge at the foot of high cliffs. He had been carried in a woman's arms as a child is carried. After that there were cloudy and dissolving memories of a long journey, a long flight through the air. There was something next to this, a vision of huge complicated machinery that did not join on to anything else. For a time his mind held this up in an interrogative fashion and then dropped it wearily. There had been voices in consultation, the prick of an injection and some gas that he had had to inhale. And sleep—or sleeps, spells of sleep interspersed with dreams. . . .

Now with regard to that gorge; how had he got there?

The gorge—in another light, a greenish light—with Utopians who struggled with a great cable.

Suddenly hard and clear came the vision of the headland of Quarantine Crag towering up against the bright blue morning sky, and then the crest of it grinding round, with its fluttering flags and its dishevelled figures, passing slowly and steadily, as some great ship passes out of a dock, with its flags and passengers into the invisible and unknown. All the wonder of his great adventure returned to Mr. Barnstaple's mind.

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§ 3

He sat up in a state of interrogation and Lychnis reappeared at his elbow.

She seated herself on his bed close to him, shook up some pillows behind him and persuaded him to lie back upon them. She conveyed to him that he was cured of some illness and no longer infectious, but that he was still very weak. Of what illness? he asked himself. More of the immediate past became clear to him.

"There was an epidemic," he said. "A sort of mixed epidemic—of all our infections."

She smiled reassuringly. It was over. The science and organisation of Utopia had taken the danger by the throat and banished it. Lychnis, however, had had nothing to do with the preventive and cleansing work that had ended the career of these invading microbes so speedily; her work had been the help and care of the sick. Something came through to the intelligence of Mr. Barnstaple that made him think that she was faintly sorry that this work of pity was no longer necessary. He looked up into her beautiful kindly eyes and met her affectionate solicitude. She was not sorry Utopia was cured again; that was incredible; but it seemed to him that she was sorry that she could no longer spend herself in help and that she was glad that he at least was still in need of assistance.

"What became of those people on the rock?" he asked. "What became of the other Earthlings?"

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She did not know. They had been cast out of Utopia, she thought.

"Back to earth?"

She did not think they had gone back to earth. They had perhaps gone into yet another universe. But she did not know. She was one of those who had no mathematical aptitudes, and physicochemical science and the complex theories of dimensions that interested so many people in Utopia were outside her circle of ideas. She believed that the crest of Quarantine Crag had been swung out of the Utopian universe altogether. A great number of people were now intensely interested in this experimental work upon the unexplored dimensions into which physical processes might be swung, but these matters terrified her. Her mind recoiled from them as one recoils from the edge of a cliff. She did not want to think where the Earthlings had gone, what deeps they had reeled over, what immensities they had seen and swept down into. Such thoughts opened dark gulfs beneath her feet where she had thought everything fixed and secure. She was a conservative in Utopia. She loved life as it was and as it had been. She had given herself to the care of Mr. Barnstaple when she had found that he had escaped the fate of the other Earthlings, and she had not troubled very greatly about the particulars of that fate. She had avoided thinking about it.

"But where are they? Where have they gone?"

She did not know.

She conveyed to him haltingly and imperfectly her own halting and unsympathetic ideas of these new

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discoveries that had inflamed the Utopian imagination. The crucial moment had been the experiment of Arden and Greenlake that had brought the Earthlings into Utopia. That had been the first rupture of the hitherto invincible barriers that had held their universe in three spatial dimensions. That had opened these abysses. That had been the moment of release for all the new work that now filled Utopia. That had been the first achievement of practical results from an intricate network of theory and deduction. It sent Mr. Barnstaple's mind back to the humbler discoveries of earth, to Franklin snapping the captive lightning from his kite and Galvani, with his dancing frog's legs, puzzling over the miracle that brought electricity into the service of men. But it had taken a century and a half for electricity to make any sensible changes in human life because the earthly workers were so few and the ways of the world so obstructive and slow and spiteful. In Utopia to make a novel discovery was to light an intellectual conflagration. Hundreds of thousands of experimentalists in free and open co-operation were now working along the fruitful lines that Arden and Greenlake had made manifest. Every day, every hour now, new and hitherto fantastic possibilities of interspatial relationship were being made plain to the Utopians.

Mr. Barnstaple rubbed his head and eyes with both hands and then lay back, blinking at the great valley below him, growing slowly golden as the sun sank. He felt himself to be the most secure and stable of beings at the very centre of a sphere of glowing serenity. And that effect of an immense tran-

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quillity was a delusion; that still evening peace was woven of incredible billions of hurrying and clashing atoms.

All the peace and fixity that man has ever known or will ever know is but the smoothness of the face of a torrent that flies along with incredible speed from cataract to cataract. Time was when men could talk of everlasting hills. To-day a schoolboy knows that they dissolve under the frost and wind and rain and pour seaward, day by day and hour by hour. Time was when men could speak of Terra Firma and feel the earth fixed, adamantine beneath their feet. Now they know that it whirls through space eddying about a spinning, blindly driven sun amidst a sheep-like drift of stars. And this fair curtain of appearance before the eyes of Mr. Barnstaple, this still and level flush of sunset and the great cloth of starry space that hung behind the blue; that too was now to be pierced and torn and rent asunder. . . .

The extended fingers of his mind closed on the things that concerned him most.

"But where are my people?" he asked. "Where are their bodies? Is it just possible they are still alive?"

She could not tell him.

He lay thinking. . . . It was natural that he should be given into the charge of a rather backward-minded woman. The active-minded here had no more use for him in their lives than active-minded people on earth have for pet animals. She did not want to think about these spatial relations at all; the subject was too difficult for her; she was one of

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Utopia's educational failures. She sat beside him with a divine sweetness and tranquillity upon her face, and he felt his own judgment upon her like a committed treachery. Yet he wanted to know very badly the answer to his question.

He supposed the crest of Quarantine Crag had been twisted round and flung off into some outer space. It was unlikely that this time the Earthlings would strike a convenient planet again. In all probability they had been turned off into the void, into the interstellar space of some unknown universe. . . .

What would happen then? They would freeze. The air would instantly diffuse right out of them. Their own gravitation would flatten them out, crush them together, collapse them! At least they would have no time to suffer. A gasp, like some one flung into ice-cold water. . . .

He contemplated these possibilities.

"Flung out!" he said aloud. "Like a cageful of mice thrown over the side of a ship!"

"I don't understand," said Lychnis, turning to him.

He appealed to her. "And now—tell me. What is to become of me?"

§ 4

For a time Lychnis gave him no answer. She sat with her soft eyes upon the blue haze into which the great river-valley had now dissolved. Then she turned to him with a question:

"You want to stay in this world?"

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"Surely any Earthling would want to stay in this world. My body has been purified. Why should I not stay?"

"It seems a good world to you?"

"Loveliness, order, health, energy, and wonder; it has all the good things for which my world groans and travails."

"And yet our world is not content."

"I could be contented."

"You are tired and weak still."

"In this air I could grow strong and vigorous. I could almost grow young in this world. In years, as you count them here, I am still a young man."

Again she was silent for a time. The mighty lap of the landscape was filled now with indistinguishable blue, and beyond the black silhouettes of the trees upon the hillside only the sky-line of the hills was visible against the yellow green and pale yellow of the evening sky. Never had Mr. Barnstaple seen so peaceful a nightfall. But her words denied that peace. "Here," she said, "there is no rest. Every day men and women awake and say: What new thing shall we do to-day? What shall we change?"

"They have changed a wild planet of disease and disorder into a sphere of beauty and safety. They have made the wilderness of human motives bear union and knowledge and power."

"And research never rests, and curiosity and the desire for more power and still more power consumes all our world."

"A healthy appetite. I am tired now, as weak and weary and soft as though I had just been born; but

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presently when I have grown stronger I too may share in that curiosity and take a part in these great discoveries that now set Utopia astir. Who knows?"

He smiled at her kind eyes.

"You will have much to learn," she said.

She seemed to measure her own failure as she said these words.

Some sense of the profound differences that three thousand years of progress might have made in the fundamental ideas and ways of thinking of the race dawned upon Mr. Barnstaple's mind. He remembered that in Utopia he heard only the things he could understand, and that all that found no place in his terrestrial circle of ideas was inaudible to his mind. The gulfs of misunderstanding might be wider and deeper than he was assuming. A totally illiterate Gold Coast negro trying to master thermoelectricity would have set himself a far more hopeful task.

"After all it is not the new discoveries that I want to share," he said; "quite possibly they are altogether beyond me; it is this perfect, beautiful daily life, this life of all the dreams of my own time come true, that I want. I just want to be alive here. That will be enough for me."

"You are weak and tired yet," said Lychnis. "When you are stronger you may face other ideas."

"But what other ideas——?"

"Your mind may turn back to your own world and your own life."

"Go back to Earth!"

Lychnis looked out at the twilight again for a

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while before she turned to him with, "You are an Earthling born and made. What else can you be?"

"What else can I be?" Mr. Barnstaple's mind rested upon that, and he lay feeling rather than thinking amidst its implications as the pin-point lights of Utopia pricked the darkling blue below and ran into chains and groups and coalesced into nebulous patches.

He resisted the truth below her words. This glorious world of Utopia, perfect and assured, poised ready for tremendous adventures amidst untravelled universes, was a world of sweet giants and uncompanionable beauty, a world of enterprises in which a poor muddy-witted, weak-willed Earthling might neither help nor share. They had plundered their planet as one empties a purse; they thrust out their power amidst the stars. . . . They were kind. They were very kind. . . . But they were different. . . .

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CHAPTER THE SECOND

A LOITERER IN A LIVING WORLD

§ 1

In a few days Mr. Barnstaple had recovered strength of body and mind. He no longer lay in bed in a loggia, filled with self-pity and the beauty of a world subdued; he went about freely and was soon walking long distances over the Utopian countryside, seeking acquaintances and learning more and more of this wonderland of accomplished human desires.

For that is how it most impressed him. Nearly all the greater evils of human life had been conquered; war, pestilence and malaise, famine and poverty had been swept out of human experience. The dreams of artists, of perfected and lovely bodies and of a world transfigured to harmony and beauty had been realised; the spirits of order and organisation ruled triumphant. Every aspect of human life had been changed by these achievements.

The climate of this Valley of Rest was bland and sunny like the climate of south Europe, but nearly everything characteristic of the Italian or Spanish scene had gone. Here were no bent and aged crones carrying burthens, no chattering pursuit by beggars, no ragged workers lowering by the wayside. The puny terracing, the distressing accumulations of

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hand cultivation, the gnarled olives, hacked vines, the little patches of grain or fruit, and the grudged litigious irrigation of those primitive conditions, gave place to sweeping schemes of conservation, to a broad and subtle handling of slope and soil and sunshine. No meagre goats nor sheep, child-tended, cropped among the stones, no tethered cattle ate their apportioned circles of herbage and no more. There were no hovels by the wayside, no shrines with tortured, blood-oozing images, no slinking misbegotten curs nor beaten beasts sweating and panting between their overloaded paniers at the steeper places of rutted, rock-strewn and dung-strewn roads. Instead the great smooth indestructible ways swept in easy gradients through the land, leaping gorges and crossing valleys upon wide-arched viaducts, piercing cathedral-like aisles through the hillsides, throwing off bastions to command some special splendour of the land. Here were resting-places and shelters, stairways clambering to pleasant arbours and summer-houses where friends might talk and lovers shelter and rejoice. Here were groves and avenues of such trees as he had never seen before. For on earth as yet there is scarcely such a thing as an altogether healthy fully grown tree, nearly all our trees are bored and consumed by parasites, rotten and tumorous with fungi, more gnarled and crippled and disease-twisted even than mankind.

The landscape had absorbed the patient design of five-and-twenty centuries. In one place Mr. Barnstaple found great works in progress; a bridge was being replaced, not because it was outworn, but

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because some one had produced a bolder, more delightful design.

For a time he did not observe the absence of telephonic or telegraphic communication; the posts and wires that mark a modern countryside had disappeared. The reasons for that difference he was to learn later. Nor did he at first miss the railway, the railway-station and the wayside inn. He perceived that the frequent buildings must have specific functions, that people came and went from them with an appearance of interest and preoccupation, that from some of them seemed to come a hum and whir of activity; work of many sorts was certainly in progress; but his ideas of the mechanical organisation of this new world were too vague and tentative as yet for him to attempt to fix any significance to this sort of place or that. He walked agape like a savage in a garden.

He never came to nor saw any towns. The reason for any such close accumulations of human beings had largely disappeared. In certain places, he learned, there were gatherings of people for studies, mutual stimulation, or other convenient exchanges, in great series of communicating buildings; but he never visited any of these centres.

And about this world went the tall people of Utopia, fair and wonderful, smiling or making some friendly gesture as they passed him but giving him little chance for questions or intercourse. They travelled swiftly in machines upon the highroad or walked, and ever and again the shadow of a silent soaring aeroplane would pass over him. He went a

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little in awe of these people and felt himself a queer creature when he met their eyes. For like the gods of Greece and Rome theirs was a cleaned and perfected humanity, and it seemed to him that they were gods. Even the great tame beasts that walked freely about this world had a certain divinity that checked the expression of Mr. Barnstaple's friendliness.

§ 2

Presently he found a companion for his rambles, a boy of thirteen, a cousin of Lychnis, named Crystal. He was a curly-headed youngster, brown-eyed as she was; and he was reading history in a holiday stage of his education.

So far as Mr. Barnstaple could gather the more serious part of his intellectual training was in mathematical work interrelated to physical and chemical science, but all that was beyond an Earthling's range of ideas. Much of this work seemed to be done in co-operation with other boys, and to be what on earth we should call research. Nor could Mr. Barnstaple master the nature of some other sort of study which seemed to turn upon refinements of expression. But the history brought them together. The boy was just learning about the growth of the Utopian social system out of the efforts and experiences of the Ages of Confusion. His imagination was alive with the tragic struggles upon which the present order of Utopia was founded, he had a hundred questions for Mr. Barnstaple, and he was full of explicit

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information which was destined presently to sink down and become part of the foundations of his adult mind. Mr. Barnstaple was as good as a book to him, and he was as good as a guide to Mr. Barnstaple. They went about together talking upon a footing of the completest equality, this rather exceptionally intelligent Earthling and this Utopian stripling, who topped him by perhaps an inch when they stood side by side.

The boy had the broad facts of Utopian history at his fingers' ends. He could explain and find an interest in explaining how artificial and upheld the peace and beauty of Utopia still were. Utopians were in essence, he said, very much what their ancestors had been in the beginnings of the newer Stone Age, fifteen thousand or twenty thousand years ago. They were still very much what Earthlings had been in the corresponding period. Since then there had been only six hundred or seven hundred generations and no time for any very fundamental changes in the race. There had not been even a general admixture of races. On Utopia as on earth there had been dusky and brown peoples, and they remained distinct. The various races mingled socially but did not interbreed very much; rather they purified and intensified their racial gifts and beauties. There was often very passionate love between people of contrasted race, but rarely did such love come to procreation. There had been a certain deliberate elimination of ugly, malignant, narrow, stupid and gloomy types during the past dozen centuries or so; but except for the fuller realisation of his latent possibilities, the common man

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in Utopia was very little different from the ordinary energetic and able people of a later Stone Age or early Bronze Age community. They were infinitely better nourished, trained, and educated, and mentally and physically their condition was clean and fit, but they were the same flesh and nature as we are.

"But," said Mr. Barnstaple, and struggled with that idea for a time. "Do you mean to tell me that half the babies born on earth to-day might grow to be such gods as these people I meet?"

"Given our air, given our atmosphere."

"Given your heritage."

"Given our freedom."

In the past of Utopia, in the Age of Confusion, Mr. Barnstaple had to remember, every one had grown up with a crippled or a thwarted will, hampered by vain restrictions or misled by plausible delusions. Utopia still bore it in mind that human nature was fundamentally animal and savage and had to be adapted to social needs, but Utopia had learned the better methods of adaptation—after endless failures of compulsion, cruelty and deception. "On Earth we tame our animals with hot irons and our fellow men by violence and fraud," said Mr. Barnstaple, and described the schools and books, newspapers and public discussions of the early twentieth century to his incredulous companion. "You cannot imagine how beaten and fearful even decent people are upon Earth. You learn of the Age of Confusion in your histories but you do not know what the realities of a bad mental atmosphere, an atmosphere of feeble laws, hates and superstitions,

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are. As night goes round the Earth always there are hundreds of thousands of people who should be sleeping, lying awake, fearing a bully, fearing a cruel competition, dreading lest they cannot make good, ill of some illness they cannot comprehend, distressed by some irrational quarrel, maddened by some thwarted instinct or some suppressed and perverted desire. . . ."

Crystal admitted that it was hard to think now of the Age of Confusion in terms of misery. Much of the every-day misery of Earth was now inconceivable. Very slowly Utopia had evolved its present harmony of law and custom and education. Man was no longer crippled and compelled; it was recognised that he was fundamentally an animal and that his daily life must follow the round of appetites satisfied and instincts released. The daily texture of Utopian life was woven of various and interesting foods and drinks, of free and entertaining exercise and work, of sweet sleep and of the interest and happiness of fearless and spiteless love-making. Inhibition was at a minimum. But where the power of Utopian education began was after the animal had been satisfied and disposed of. The jewel on the reptile's head that had brought Utopia out of the confusions of human life was curiosity, the play impulse, prolonged and expanded in adult life into an insatiable appetite for knowledge and an habitual creative urgency. All Utopians had become as little children, learners and makers.

It was strange to hear this boy speaking so plainly and clearly of the educational process to which he

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was being subjected, and particularly to find he could talk so frankly of love.

An earthly bashfulness almost prevented Mr. Barnstaple from asking, "But you— You do not make Love?"

"I have had curiosities," said the boy, evidently saying what he had been taught to say. "But it is not necessary nor becoming to make love too early in life nor to let desire take hold of one. It weakens youth to become too early possessed by desire—which often will not leave one again. It spoils and cripples the imagination. I want to do good work as my father has done before me."

Mr. Barnstaple glanced at the beautiful young profile at his side and was suddenly troubled by memories of a certain study number four at school, and of some ugly phases of his adolescence, the stuffy, secret room, the hot and ugly fact. He felt a beastlier Earthling than ever. "Heigho!" he sighed. "But this world of yours is as clean as starlight and as sweet as cold water on a dusty day."

"Many people I love," said the boy, "but not with passion. Some day that will come. But one must not be too eager and anxious to meet passionate love or one might make-believe and give or snatch at a sham. . . . There is no hurry. No one will prevent me when my time comes. All good things come to one in this world in their own good time."

But work one does not wait for; one's work, since it concerns one's own self only, one goes to meet. Crystal thought very much about the work that he might do. It seemed to Mr. Barnstaple that work,

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in the sense of uncongenial toil, had almost disappeared from Utopia. Yet all Utopia was working. Every one was doing work that fitted natural aptitudes and appealed to the imagination of the worker. Every one worked happily and eagerly—as those people we call geniuses do on our Earth.

For suddenly Mr. Barnstaple found himself telling Crystal of the happiness of the true artist, of the true scientific worker, of the original man even on earth as it is to-day. They, too, like the Utopians, do work that concerns themselves and is in their own nature for great ends. Of all Earthlings they are the most enviable.

"If such men are not happy on earth," said Mr. Barnstaple, "it is because they are touched with vulgarity and still heed the soiled successes and honours and satisfactions of vulgar men, still feel neglect and limitation that should concern them no more. But to him who has seen the sun shine in Utopia surely the utmost honour and glory of earth can signify no more and be no more desirable than the complimentary spittle of the chieftain and a string of barbaric beads."

§ 3

Crystal was still of an age to be proud of his *savoir faire*. He showed Mr. Barnstaple his books and told him of his tutors and exercises.

Utopia still made use of printed books; books were still the simplest, clearest way of bringing statement before a tranquil mind. Crystal's books were very beautifully bound in flexible leather that his mother

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had tooled for him very prettily, and they were made of hand-made paper. The lettering was some fluent phonetic script that Mr. Barnstaple could not understand. It reminded him of Arabic; and frequent sketches, outline maps, and diagrams were interpolated. Crystal was advised in his holiday reading by a tutor for whom he prepared a sort of exercise report, and he supplemented his reading by visits to museums; but there was no educational museum convenient in the Valley of Peace for Mr. Barnstaple to visit.

Crystal had passed out of the opening stage of education which was carried on, he said, upon large educational estates given up wholly to the lives of children. Education up to eleven or twelve seemed to be much more carefully watched and guarded and taken care of in Utopia than upon earth. Shocks to the imagination, fear and evil suggestions were warded off as carefully as were infection and physical disaster; by eight or nine the foundations of a Utopian character were surely laid, habits of cleanliness, truth, candour, and helpfulness, confidence in the world, fearlessness and a sense of belonging to the great purpose of the race.

Only after nine or ten did the child go outside the garden of its early growth and begin to see the ordinary ways of the world. Until that age the care of the children was largely in the hands of nurses and teachers, but after that time the parents became more of a factor than they had been in a youngster's life. It was always a custom for the parents of a child to be near and to see that child in its nursery days, but

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just when earthly parents tended to separate from their children as they went away to school or went into business, Utopian parentage grew to be something closer. There was an idea in Utopia that between parent and child there was a necessary temperamental sympathy; children looked forward to the friendship and company of their parents, and parents looked forward to the interest of their children's adolescence, and though a parent had practically no power over a son or daughter, he or she took naturally the position of advocate, adviser and sympathetic friend. The friendship was all the franker and closer because of that lack of power, and all the easier because age for age the Utopians were so much younger and fresher-minded than Earthlings. Crystal it seemed had a very great passion for his mother. He was very proud of his father, who was a wonderful painter and designer; but it was his mother who possessed the boy's heart.

On his second walk with Mr. Barnstaple he said he was going to hear from his mother, and Mr. Barnstaple was shown the equivalent of correspondence in Utopia. Crystal carried a little bundle of wires and light rods; and presently coming to a place where a pillar stood in the midst of a lawn he spread this affair out like a long cat's cradle and tapped a little stud in the pillar with a key that he carried on a light gold chain about his neck. Then he took up a receiver attached to his apparatus, and spoke aloud and listened and presently heard a voice.

It was a very pleasant woman's voice; it talked to Crystal for a time without interruption, and then

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Crystal talked back, and afterwards there were other voices, some of which Crystal answered and some which he heard without replying. Then he gathered up his apparatus again.

This Mr. Barnstaple learned was the Utopian equivalent of letter and telephone. For in Utopia, except by previous arrangement, people do not talk together on the telephone. A message is sent to the station of the district in which the recipient is known to be, and there it waits until he chooses to tap his accumulated messages. And any that one wishes to repeat can be repeated. Then he talks back to the senders and despatches any other messages he wishes. The transmission is wireless. The little pillars supply electric power for transmission or for any other purpose the Utopians require. For example, the gardeners resort to them to run their mowers and diggers and rakes and rollers.

Far away across the valley Crystal pointed out the district station at which this correspondence gathered and was dispersed. Only a few people were on duty there; almost all the connections were automatic. The messages came and went from any part of the planet.

This set Mr. Barnstaple going upon a long string of questions.

He discovered for the first time that the message organisation of Utopia had a complete knowledge of the whereabouts of every soul upon the planet. It had a record of every living person and it knew in what message district he was. Every one was indexed and noted.

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To Mr. Barnstaple, accustomed to the crudities and dishonesties of earthly governments, this was an almost terrifying discovery. "On earth that would be the means of unending blackmail and tyranny," he said. "Every one would lie open to espionage. We had a fellow at Scotland Yard. If he had been in your communication department he would have made life in Utopia intolerable in a week. You cannot imagine the nuisance he was. . . ."

Mr. Barnstaple had to explain to Crystal what blackmail meant. It was like that in Utopia to begin with, Crystal said. Just as on earth so in Utopia there was the same natural disposition to use knowledge and power to the disadvantage of one's fellows, and the same jealousy of having one's personal facts known. In the Stone Age in Utopia men kept their true names secret and could only be spoken of by nicknames. They feared magic abuses. "Some savages still do that on earth," said Mr. Barnstaple. It was only very slowly that Utopians came to trust doctors and dentists and only very slowly that doctors and dentists became trustworthy. It was a matter of scores of centuries before the chief abuses of the confidences and trusts necessary to a modern social organisation could be effectively corrected.

Every young Utopian had to learn the Five Principles of Liberty, without which civilisation is impossible. The first was the Principle of Privacy. This is that all individual personal facts are private between the citizen and the public organisation to which he intrusts them, and can be used only for his convenience and with his sanction. Of course all such

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facts are available for statistical uses, but not as individual personal facts. And the second principle is the Principle of Free Movement. A citizen, subject to the due discharge of his public obligations, may go without permission or explanation to any part of the Utopian planet. All the means of transport are freely at his service. Every Utopian may change his surroundings, his climate and his social atmosphere as he will. The third principle is the Principle of Unlimited Knowledge. All that is known in Utopia, except individual personal facts about living people, is on record and as easily available as a perfected series of indices, libraries, museums, and inquiry offices can make it. Whatever the Utopian desires to know he may know with the utmost clearness, exactness and facility so far as his powers of knowing and his industry go. Nothing is kept from him and nothing is misrepresented to him. And that brought Mr. Barnstaple to the fourth Principle of Liberty, which was that Lying is the Blackest Crime.

Crystal's definition of lying was a sweeping one; the inexact statement of facts, even the suppression of a material fact, was lying.

"Where there are lies there cannot be freedom."

Mr. Barnstaple was mightily taken by this idea. It seemed at once quite fresh to him and one that he had always unconsciously entertained. Half the difference between Utopia and our world he asserted lay in this, that our atmosphere was dense and poisonous with lies and shams.

"When one comes to think of it," said Mr. Barnstaple, and began to expatiate to Crystal upon all

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the falsehoods of human life. The fundamental assumptions of earthly associations were still largely lies, false assumptions of necessary and unavoidable differences in flags and nationality, pretences of function and power in monarchy; impostures of organised learning, religious and moral dogmas and shams. And one must live in it; one is a part of it. You are restrained, taxed, distressed, and killed by these insane unrealities. "Lying the Primary Crime! How simple that is! How true and necessary it is! That dogma is the fundamental distinction of the scientific world-state from all preceding states." And going on from that Mr. Barnstaple launched out into a long and loud tirade against the suppression and falsifications of earthly newspapers.

It was a question very near his heart. The London newspapers had ceased to be impartial vehicles of news; they omitted, they mutilated, they misstated. They were no better than propaganda rags. Rags! *Nature*, within its field, was shiningly accurate and full, but that was a purely scientific paper; it did not touch the every-day news. The Press, he held, was the only possible salt of contemporary life, and if the salt had lost its savour——!

The poor man found himself orating as though he was back at his Sydenham breakfast-table after a bad morning's paper.

"Once upon a time Utopia was in just such a tangle," said Crystal consolingly. "But there is a proverb, 'Truth comes back where once she has visited.' You need not trouble so much as you do. Some day even your press may grow clear."

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"How do *you* manage about newspapers and criticism?" said Mr. Barnstaple.

Crystal explained that there was a complete distinction between news and discussion in Utopia. There were houses—one was in sight—which were used as reading-rooms. One went to these places to learn the news. Thither went the reports of all the things that were happening on the planet, things found, things discovered, things done. The reports were made as they were needed; there were no advertisement contracts to demand the same bulk of news every day. For some time Crystal said the reports had been very full and amusing about the Earthlings, but he had not been reading the paper for many days because of the interest in history the Earthling affair had aroused in him. There was always news of fresh scientific discoveries that stirred the imagination. One frequent item of public interest and excitement was the laying out of some wide scheme of research. The new spatial work that Arden and Greenlake had died for was producing much news. And when people died in Utopia it was the custom to tell the story of their lives. Crystal promised to take Mr. Barnstaple to a news place and entertain him by reading him some of the Utopian descriptions of earthly life which had been derived from the Earthlings, and Mr. Barnstaple asked that when this was done he might also hear about Arden and Greenlake, who had been not only great discoverers, but great lovers, and of Serpentine and Cedar, for whom he had conceived an intense admiration. Utopian news lacked of course the high

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spice of an earthly newspaper; the intriguing murders and amusing misbehaviours, the entertaining and exciting consequences of sexual ignorance and sexual blunderings, the libel cases and detected swindles, the great processional movements of Royalty across the general traffic, and the romantic fluctuations of the stock exchange and sport. But where the news of Utopia lacked liveliness, the liveliness of discussion made up for it. For the Fifth Principle of Liberty in Utopia was Free Discussion and Criticism.

Any Utopian was free to criticise and discuss anything in the whole universe provided he told no lies about it directly or indirectly; he could be as respectful or disrespectful as he pleased; he could propose anything however subversive. He could break into poetry or fiction as he chose. He could express himself in any literary form he liked or by sketch or caricature as the mood took him. Only he must refrain from lying; that was the one rigid rule of controversy. He could get what he had to say printed and distributed to the news-rooms. There it was read or neglected as the visitors chanced to approve of it or not. Often if they liked what they read they would carry off a copy with them. Crystal had some new fantastic fiction about the exploration of space among his books; imaginative stories that boys were reading very eagerly; they were pamphlets of thirty or forty pages printed on a beautiful paper that he said was made directly from flax and certain reeds. The librarians noted what books and papers were read and taken away, and these they replaced with fresh copies. The piles that went unread were pres-

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ently reduced to one or two copies and the rest went back to the pulping-mills. But many of the poets and philosophers and story-tellers whose imaginations found no wide popularity were nevertheless treasured and their memories kept alive by a few devoted admirers.

§ 4

"I am not at all clear in my mind about one thing," said Mr. Barnstaple. "I have seen no coins and nothing like money passing in this world. By all outward appearance this might be a Communism such as was figured in a book we used to value on Earth, a book called 'News from Nowhere' by an Earthling named William Morris. It was a graceful impossible book. In that dream every one worked for the joy of working and took what he needed. But I have never believed in Communism because I recognise, as here in Utopia you seem to recognise, the natural fierceness and greediness of the untutored man. There is joy in creation for others to use, but no natural joy in unrequited service. The sense of justice to himself is greater in man than the sense of service. Somehow here you must balance the work any one does for Utopia against what he destroys or consumes. How do you do it?"

Crystal considered. "There were Communists in Utopia in the Last Age of Confusion. In some parts of our planet they tried to abolish money suddenly and violently and brought about great economic confusion and want and misery. To step straight to

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communism failed—very tragically. And yet Utopia to-day is practically a communism, and except by way of curiosity I have never had a coin in my hand in all my life."

In Utopia just as upon earth, he explained, money came as a great discovery; as a method of freedom. Hitherto, before the invention of money, all service between man and man had been done through bondage or barter. Life was a thing of slavery and narrow choice. But money opened up the possibility of giving a worker a free choice in his reward. It took Utopia three thousand years and more to realise that possibility. The idea of money abounded in pitfalls and was easily corruptible; Utopia floundered its way to economic lucidity through long centuries of credit and debt, false and debased money; extravagant usury and every possibility of speculative abuse. In the matter of money more than in any other human concern, human cunning has set itself most vilely and treacherously to prey upon human necessity. Utopia once carried, as earth carries now, a load of parasitic souls, speculators, forestallers, gamblers, and bargain-pressing Shylocks, exacting every conceivable advantage out of the weaknesses of the monetary system; she had needed centuries of economic sanitation. It was only when Utopia had got to the beginnings of world-wide political unity and when there were sufficiently full statistics of world resources and world production, that human society could at last give the individual worker the assurance of a coin of steadfast significance, a coin that would mean for him to-day or to-morrow or at any

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time the certainty of a set quantity of elemental values. And with peace throughout the planet and increasing social stability, interest, which is the measure of danger and uncertainty, dwindled at last to nothing. Banking became a public service perforce, because it no longer offered profit to the individual banker. "Rentier classes," Crystal conveyed, "are not a permanent element in any community. They mark a phase of transition between a period of insecurity and high interest and a period of complete security and no interest. They are a dawn phenomenon."

Mr. Barnstaple digested this statement after an interval of incredulity. He satisfied himself by a few questions that young Utopia really had some idea of what a rentier class was, what its moral and imaginative limitations were likely to be and the rôle it may have played in the intellectual development of the world by providing a class of independent minds.

"Life is intolerant of all independent classes," said Crystal, evidently repeating an axiom. "Either you must earn or you must rob. . . . We have got rid of robbing."

The youngster still speaking by his book went on to explain how the gradual disuse of money came about. It was an outcome of the general progressive organisation of the economic system, the substitution of collective enterprises for competitive enterprises and of wholesale for retail dealing. There had been a time in Utopia when money changed hands at each little transaction and service. One paid

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money if one wanted a newspaper or a match or a bunch of flowers or a ride on a street conveyance. Everybody went about the world with pockets full of small coins paying on every slight occasion. Then as economic science became more stable and exact the methods of the club and the covering subscription extended. People were able to buy passes that carried them by all the available means of transport for a year or for ten years or for life. The State learned from clubs and hotels to provide matches, newspapers, stationery, and transport for a fixed annual charge. The same inclusive system spread from small and incidental things to great and essential matters, to housing and food and even clothing. The State postal system, which knew where every Utopian citizen was, was presently able in conjunction with the public banking system to guarantee his credit in any part of the world. People ceased to draw coin for their work; the various departments of service, and of economic, educational and scientific activity would credit the individual with his earnings in the public bank and debit him with his customary charges for all the normal services of life.

"Something of this sort is going on on earth even now," said Mr. Barnstaple. "We use money in the last resort, but a vast volume of our business is already a matter of bookkeeping."

Centuries of unity and energy had given Utopia a very complete control of many fountains of natural energy upon the planet, and this was the heritage of every child born therein. He was credited at his birth with a sum sufficient to educate and maintain

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him up to four or five and twenty, and then he was expected to choose some occupation to replenish his account.

"But if he doesn't?" said Mr. Barnstaple.

"Every one does."

"But if he didn't?"

"He'd be miserable and uncomfortable. I've never heard of such a case. I suppose he'd be discussed. Psychologists might examine him. . . . But one must do something."

"But suppose Utopia had no work for him to do?"

Crystal could not imagine that. "There is always something to be done."

"But in Utopia once, in the old times, you had unemployment?"

"That was part of the Confusion. There was a sort of hypertrophy of debt; it had become paralysis. Why, when they had unemployment at that same time there was neither enough houses nor food nor clothing. They had unemployment and shortage at one and the same time. It is incredible."

"Does every one earn about the same amount of pay?"

"Energetic and creative people are often given big grants if they seem to need the help of others or a command of natural resources. . . . And artists sometimes grow rich if their work is much desired."

"Such a gold chain as yours you had to buy?"

"From the maker in his shop. My mother bought it."

"Then there are shops?"

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"You shall see some. Places where people go to see new and delightful things."

"And if an artist grows rich, what can he do with his money?"

"Take time and material to make some surpassingly beautiful thing to leave the world. Or collect and help with the work of other artists. Or do whatever else he pleases to teach and fine the common sense of beauty in Utopia. Or just do nothing. . . . Utopia can afford it—if he can."

§ 5

"Cedar and Lion," said Mr. Barnstaple, "explained to the rest of us how it is that your government is as it were broken up and dispersed among the people who have special knowledge of the matters involved. The balance between interests, we gathered, was maintained by those who studied the general psychology and the educational organisation of Utopia. At first it was very strange to our earthly minds that there should be nowhere a pretended omniscience and a practical omnipotence, that is to say a sovereign thing, a person or an assembly whose *fiat* was final. Mr. Burleigh and Mr. Catskill thought that such a thing was absolutely necessary, and so, less surely, did I. 'Who will decide?' was their riddle. They expected to be taken to see the President or the Supreme Council of Utopia. I suppose it seems to you the most natural of things that there should be nothing of the sort, and that a question

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should go simply and naturally to the man who knows best about it."

"Subject to free criticism," said Crystal.

"Subject to the same process that has made him eminent and responsible. But don't people thrust themselves forward even here—out of vanity? And don't people get thrust forward in front of the best —out of spite?"

"There is plenty of spite and vanity in every Utopian soul," said Crystal. "But people speak very plainly and criticism is very searching and free. So that we learn to search our motives before we praise or question."

"What you say and do shows up here plainly at its true value," said Mr. Barnstaple. "You cannot throw mud in the noise and darkness unchallenged or get a false claim acknowledged in the disorder."

"Some years ago there was a man, an artist, who made a great trouble about the work of my father. Often artistic criticism is very bitter here, but he was bitter beyond measure. He caricatured my father and abused him incessantly. He followed him from place to place. He tried to prevent the allocation of material to him. He was quite ineffective. Some people answered him, but for the most part he was disregarded. . . ."

The boy stopped short.

"Well?"

"He killed himself. He could not escape from his own foolishness. Every one knew what he had said and done. . . ."

"But in the past there were kings and councils and

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conferences in Utopia," said Mr. Barnstaple, returning to the main point.

"My books teach me that our state could have grown up in no other way. We had to have these general dealers in human relationship, politicians and lawyers, as a necessary stage in political and social development. Just as we had to have soldiers and policemen to save people from mutual violence. It was only very slowly that politicians and lawyers came to admit the need for special knowledge in the things they had to do. Politicians would draw boundaries without any proper knowledge of ethnology or economic geography, and lawyers decide about will and purpose with the crudest knowledge of psychology. They produced the most preposterous and unworkable arrangements in the gravest fashion."

"Like Tristram Shandy's parish bull—which set about begetting the peace of the world at Versailles," said Mr. Barnstaple.

Crystal looked puzzled.

"A complicated allusion to a purely earthly matter," said Mr. Barnstaple. "This complete diffusion of the business of politics and law among the people with knowledge, is one of the most interesting things of all to me in this world. Such a diffusion is beginning upon earth. The people who understand world-health for instance are dead against political and legal methods, and so are many of our best economists. And most people never go into a law court, and wouldn't dream of doing so upon business of their own, from their cradles to their graves. What

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became of your politicians and lawyers? Was there a struggle?"

"As light grew and intelligence spread they became more and more evidently unnecessary. They met at last only to appoint men of knowledge as assessors and so forth, and after a time even these appointments became foregone conclusions. Their activities melted into the general body of criticism and discussion. In places there are still old buildings that used to be council-chambers and law-courts. The last politician to be elected to a legislative assembly died in Utopia about a thousand years ago. He was an eccentric and garrulous old gentleman; he was the only candidate and one man voted for him, and he insisted upon assembling in solitary state and having all his speeches and proceedings taken down in shorthand. Boys and girls who were learning stenography used to go to report him. Finally he was dealt with as a mental case."

"And the last judge?"

"I have not learned about the last judge," said Crystal. "I must ask my tutor. I suppose there was one, but I suppose nobody asked him to judge anything. So he probably got something more respectable to do."

§ 6

"I begin to apprehend the daily life of this world," said Mr. Barnstaple. "It is a life of demigods, very free, strongly individualised, each following an individual bent, each contributing to great racial ends. It is not only cleanly naked and sweet and lovely

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but full of personal dignity. It is, I see, a practical communism, planned and led up to through long centuries of education and discipline and collectivist preparation. I had never thought before that socialism could exalt and ennoble the individual and individualism degrade him, but now I see plainly that here the thing is proved. In this fortunate world—it is indeed the crown of all its health and happiness—there is no Crowd. The old world, the world to which I belong, was and in my universe alas still is, the world of the Crowd, the world of that detestable crawling mass of unfeatured, infected human beings.

"You have never seen a Crowd, Crystal; and in all your happy life you never will. You have never seen a Crowd going to a football-match or a race-meeting or a bull-fight or a public execution or the like crowd joy; you have never watched a Crowd wedge and stick in a narrow place or hoot or howl in a crisis. You have never watched it stream sluggishly along the streets to gape at a King, or yell for a war, or yell quite equally for a peace. And you have never seen the Crowd, struck by some Panic breeze, change from Crowd proper to Mob and begin to smash and hunt. All the Crowd celebrations have gone out of this world; all the Crowd's gods, there is no Turf here, no Sport, no war demonstrations, no Coronations and Public Funerals, no great shows, but only your little theatres. . . . Happy Crystal! who will never see a Crowd!"

"But I have seen Crowds," said Crystal.

"Where?"

"I have seen cinematograph films of Crowds

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photographed thirty centuries ago and more. They are shown in our history museums. I have seen Crowds streaming over downs after a great race-meeting, photographed from an aeroplane, and Crowds rioting in some public square and being dispersed by the police. Thousands and thousands of swarming people. But it is true what you say. There are no more Crowds in Utopia. Crowds and the crowd-mind have gone for ever."

§ 7

When after some days Crystal had to return to his mathematical studies, his departure left Mr. Barnstaple very lonely. He found no other companion. Lychnis seemed always near him and ready to be with him, but her want of active intellectual interests, so remarkable in this world of vast intellectual activities, estranged him from her. Other Utopians came and went, friendly, amused, polite, but intent upon their own business. They would question him curiously, attend perhaps to a question or so of his own, and depart with an air of being called away.

Lychnis, he began to realise, was one of Utopia's failures. She was a lingering romantic type and she cherished a great sorrow in her heart. She had had two children whom she had loved passionately. They were adorably fearless, and out of foolish pride she had urged them to swim out to sea and they had been taken by a current and drowned. Their father

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had been drowned in attempting their rescue and Lychnis had very nearly shared their fate. She had been rescued. But her emotional life had stopped short at that point—had, as it were, struck an attitude and remained in it. Tragedy possessed her. She turned her back on laughter and gladness and looked for distress. She had rediscovered the lost passion of pity, first pity for herself and then a desire to pity others. She took no interest any more in vigorous and complete people, but her mind concentrated upon the consolation to be found in consoling pain and distress in others. She sought her healing in healing them. She did not want to talk to Mr. Barnstaple of the brightness of Utopia; she wanted him to talk to her of the miseries of earth and of his own miseries. That she might sympathise. But he would not tell her of his own miseries because indeed, such was his temperament, he had none; he had only exasperations and regrets.

She dreamt, he perceived, of being able to come to earth and give her beauty and tenderness to the sick and poor. Her heart went out to the spectacle of human suffering and weakness. It went out to these things hungrily and desirously. . . .

Before he detected the drift of her mind he told her many things about human sickness and poverty. But he spoke of these matters not with pity but indignation, as things that ought not to be. And when he perceived how she feasted on these things he spoke of them hardly and cheerfully as things that would presently be swept away. "But they will still have suffered," she said. . . .

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Since she was always close at hand, she filled for him perhaps more than her legitimate space in the Utopian spectacle. She lay across it like a shadow. He thought very frequently about her and about the pity and resentment against life and vigour that she embodied. In a world of fear, weakness, infection, darkness and confusion, pity, the act of charity, the alms and the refuge, the deed of stark devotion, might show indeed like sweet and gracious presences; but in this world of health and brave enterprises, pity betrayed itself a vicious desire. Crystal, Utopian youth, was as hard as his name. When he had slipped one day on some rocks and twisted and torn his ankle, he had limped but he had laughed. When Mr. Barnstaple was winded on a steep staircase Crystal was polite rather than sympathetic. So Lychnis had found no confederate in the dedication of her life to sorrow; even from Mr. Barnstaple she could win no sympathy. He perceived that indeed so far as temperament went he was a better Utopian than she was. To him as to Utopia it seemed rather an occasion for gladness than sorrow that her man and her children had met death fearlessly. They were dead; a brave stark death; the waters still glittered and the sun still shone. But her loss had revealed some underlying racial taint in her, something very ancient in the species, something that Utopia was still breeding out only very slowly, the dark sacrificial disposition that bows and responds to the shadow. It was strange and yet perhaps it was inevitable that Mr. Barnstaple should meet again in Utopia that spirit which Earth knows so well, the

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spirit that turns from the Kingdom of Heaven to worship the thorns and the nails, which delights to represent its God not as the Resurrection and the Life but as a woful and defeated cadaver.

She would talk to him of his sons as if she envied him because of the loss of her own, but all she said reminded him of the educational disadvantages and narrow prospects of his boys and how much stouter and finer and happier their lives would have been in Utopia. He would have risked drowning them a dozen times to have saved them from being clerks and employees of other men. Even by earthly standards he felt now that he had not done his best by them; he had let many things drift in their lives and in the lives of himself and his wife that he now felt he ought to have controlled. Could he have his time over again he felt that he would see to it that his sons took a livelier interest in politics and science and were not so completely engulfed in the trivialities of suburban life, in tennis-playing, amateur theatricals, inane flirtations and the like. They were good boys in substance he felt, but he had left them to their mother; and he had left their mother too much to herself instead of battling with her for the sake of his own ideas. They were living trivially in the shadow of one great catastrophe and with no security against another; they were living in a world of weak waste and shabby insufficiency. And his own life also had been—weak waste.

His life at Sydenham began to haunt him. "I criticised everything but I altered nothing," he said. "I was as bad as Peeve. Was I any more use in that

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world than I am in this? But on Earth we are all wasters. . . ."

He avoided Lychnis for a day or so and wandered about the valley alone. He went into a great reading-room and fingered books he could not read; he was suffered to stand in a workshop, and he watched an artist make a naked girl of gold more lovely than any earthly statuette and melt her again dissatisfied; here he came upon men building, and here was work upon the fields, here was a great shaft in the hillside and something deep in the hill that flashed and scintillated strangely; they would not let him go in to it; he saw a thousand things he could not understand. He began to feel as perhaps a very intelligent dog must sometimes feel in the world of men, only that he had no master and no instincts that could find a consolation in canine abjection. The Utopians went about their business in the daytime, they passed him smiling and they filled him with intolerable envy. They knew what to do. They belonged. They went by in twos and threes in the evening, communing together and sometimes singing together. Lovers would pass him, their sweetly smiling faces close together, and his loneliness became an agony of hopeless desires.

Because, though he fought hard to keep it below the threshold of his consciousness, Mr. Barnstaple desired greatly to love and be loved in Utopia. The realisation that no one of these people could ever conceive of any such intimacy of body or spirit with him was a humiliation more fundamental even than his uselessness. The loveliness of the Utopian girls

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and women who glanced at him curiously or passed him with a serene indifference, crushed down his self-respect and made the Utopian world altogether intolerable to him. Mutely, unconsciously, these Utopian goddesses concentrated upon him the uttermost abasement of caste and race inferiority. He could not keep his thoughts from love where every one it seemed had a lover, and in this Utopian world love for him was a thing grotesque and inconceivable. . . .

Then one night as he lay awake distressed beyond measure by the thought of such things, an idea came to him whereby it seemed to him he might restore his self-respect and win a sort of citizenship in Utopia.

So that they might even speak of him and remember him with interest and sympathy.

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CHAPTER THE THIRD

THE SERVICE OF THE EARTHLING

§ 1

THE man to whom Mr. Barnstaple, after due inquiries, went to talk was named Sungold. He was probably very old, because there were lines of age about his eyes and over his fine brow. He was a ruddy man, bearded with an auburn beard that had streaks of white, and his eyes were brown and nimble under his thick eyebrows. His hair had thinned but little and flowed back like a mane, but its copper-red colour had gone. He sat at a table with papers spread before him, making manuscript notes. He smiled at Mr. Barnstaple, for he had been expecting him, and indicated a seat for him with his stout and freckled hand. Then he waited smilingly for Mr. Barnstaple to begin.

"This world is the triumph of the desire for order and beauty in men's minds," said Mr. Barnstaple. "But it will not tolerate a useless soul in it. Every one is happily active. Every one but myself. . . . I belong nowhere. I have nothing to do. And no one —is related to me."

Sungold moved his head slightly to show that he understood.

"It is hard for an Earthling, with an earthly want of training, to fall into any place here. Into any usual work or any usual relationship. One is—a

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stranger. . . . But it is still harder to have no place at all. In the new work, of which I am told you know most of any one and are indeed the centre and regulator, it has occurred to me that I might be of some use, that I might indeed be as good as a Utopian. . . . If so, I want to be of use. You may want some one just to risk death—to take the danger of going into some strange place—some one who desires to serve Utopia—and who need not have skill or knowledge—or be a beautiful or able person?"

Mr. Barnstaple stopped short.

Sungold conveyed the completest understanding of all that was in Mr. Barnstaple's mind.

Mr. Barnstaple sat interrogative while for a time Sungold thought.

Then words and phrases began to string themselves together in Mr. Barnstaple's mind.

Sungold wondered if Mr. Barnstaple understood either the extent or the limitations of the great discoveries that were now being made in Utopia. Utopia, he said, was passing into a phase of intense intellectual exaltation. New powers and possibilities intoxicated the imagination of the race, and it was indeed inconceivable that an unteachable and perplexed Earthling could be anything but distressed and uncomfortable amidst the vast strange activities that must now begin. Even many of their own people, the more backward Utopians, were disturbed. For centuries Utopian philosophers and experimentalists had been criticising, revising and reconstructing their former instinctive and traditional ideas of space and time, of form and substance, and now very

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rapidly the new ways of thinking were becoming clear and simple and bearing fruit in surprising practical applications. The limitations of space which had seemed for ever insurmountable were breaking down; they were breaking down in a strange and perplexing way but they were breaking down. It was now theoretically possible, it was rapidly becoming practicably possible, to pass from the planet Utopia to which the race had hitherto been confined, to other points in its universe of origin, that is to say to remote planets and distant stars. . . . That was the gist of the present situation.

"I cannot imagine that," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"You cannot imagine it," Sungold agreed, quite cordially. "But it is so. A hundred years ago it was inconceivable—here."

"Do you get there by some sort of backstairs in another dimension?" said Mr. Barnstaple.

Sungold considered this guess. It was a grotesque image, he said, but from the point of view of an Earthling it would serve. That conveyed something of its quality. But it was so much more wonderful. . . .

"A new and astounding phase has begun for life here. We learned long ago the chief secrets of happiness upon this planet. Life is good in this world. You find it good? . . . For thousands of years yet it will be our fastness and our home. But the wind of a new adventure blows through our life. All this world is in a mood like striking camp in the winter quarters when spring approaches."

He leaned over his papers towards Mr. Barnstaple,

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and held up a finger and spoke audible words as if to make his meaning plainer. It seemed to Mr. Barnstaple that each word translated itself into English as he spoke it. At any rate Mr. Barnstaple understood. "The collision of our planet Utopia with your planet Earth was a very curious accident, but an unimportant accident, in this story. I want you to understand that. Your universe and ours are two out of a great number of gravitation-time universes, which are translated together through the inexhaustible infinitude of God. They are similar throughout, but they are identical in nothing. Your planet and ours happen to be side by side, so to speak, but they are not travelling at exactly the same pace nor in a strictly parallel direction. They will drift apart again and follow their several destinies. When Arden and Greenlake made their experiment the chances of their hitting anything in your universe were infinitely remote. They had disregarded it, they were merely rotating some of our matter out of and then back into our universe. You fell into us—as amazingly for us as for you. The importance of our discoveries for us lies in our own universe and not in yours. We do not want to come into your universe nor have more of your world come into ours. You are too like us, and you are too dark and troubled and diseased—you are too contagious—and we, we cannot help you yet because we are not gods but men."

Mr. Barnstaple nodded.

"What could Utopians do with the men of Earth? We have no strong instinct in us to teach or dominate other adults. That has been bred out of us by

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long centuries of equality and free co-operation. And you would be too numerous for us to teach and much of your population would be grown up and set in bad habits. Your stupidities would get in our way, your quarrels and jealousies and traditions, your flags and religions and all your embodied spites and suppressions, would hamper us in everything we should want to do. We should be impatient with you, unjust, overbearing. You are too like us for us to be patient with your failures. It would be hard to remember constantly how ill-bred you were. In Utopia we found out long ago that no race of human beings was sufficiently great, subtle and powerful to think and act for any other race. Perhaps already you are finding out the same thing on Earth as your races come into closer contact. And much more would this be true between Utopia and Earth. From what I know of your people and their ignorance and obstinacies it is clear our people would despise you; and contempt is the cause of all injustice. We might end by exterminating you. . . . But why should we make that possible? . . . We must leave you alone. We cannot trust ourselves with you. . . . Believe me this is the only reasonable course for us."

Mr. Barnstaple assented silently.

"You and I—two individuals—can be friends and understand."

"What you say is true," said Mr. Barnstaple. "It is true. But it grieves me it is true. . . . Greatly. . . . Nevertheless, I gather, I at least may be of service in Utopia?"

"You can."

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"How?"

"By returning to your own world."

Mr. Barnstaple thought for some moments. It was what he had feared. But he had offered himself. "I will do that."

"By attempting to return, I should say. There is risk. You may be killed."

"I must take that."

"We want to verify all the data we have of the relations of our universe to yours. We want to reverse the experiment of Arden and Greenlake and see if we can return a living being to your world. We are almost certain now that we can do so. And that human being must care for us enough and care for his own world enough to go back and give us a sign that he has got there."

Mr. Barnstaple spoke huskily. "I can do that," he said.

"We can put you into that machine of yours and into the clothes you wore. You can be made again exactly as you left your world."

"Exactly. I understand."

"And because your world is vile and contentious and yet has some strangely able brains in it, here and there, we do not want your people to know of us, living so close to you—for we shall be close to you yet for some hundreds of years at least—we do not want them to know for fear that they should come here presently, led by some poor silly genius of a scientific man, come in their greedy, foolish, breeding swarms, hammering at our doors, threatening our lives, and spoiling our high adventures, and

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so have to be beaten off and killed like an invasion of rats or parasites."

"Yes," said Mr. Barnstaple. "Before men can come to Utopia, they must learn the way here. Utopia, I see, is only a home for those who have learned the way."

He paused and answered some of his own thoughts. "When I have returned," he said, "shall I begin to forget Utopia?"

Sungold smiled and said nothing.

"All my days the nostalgia of Utopia will distress me."

"And uphold you."

"I shall take up my earthly life at the point where I laid it down, but—on Earth—I shall be a Utopian. For I feel that having offered my service and had it accepted, I am no longer an outcast in Utopia. I belong. . . ."

"Remember you may be killed. You may die in the trial."

"As it may happen."

"Well—Brother!"

The friendly paw took Mr. Barnstaple's and pressed it and the deep eyes smiled.

"After you have returned and given us your sign, several of the other Earthlings may also be sent back."

Mr. Barnstaple sat up. "*But!*" he gasped. His voice rose high in amazement. "I thought they were hurled into the blank space of some outer universe and altogether destroyed!"

"Several were killed. They killed themselves by

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rushing down the side of the old fortress in the outer darkness as the Crag rotated. The men in leather. The man you call Long Barrow——"

"Barralonga?"

"Yes. And the man who shrugged his shoulders and said: 'What would you?' The others came back as the rotation was completed late in the day—asphyxiated and frozen but not dead. They have been restored to life, and we are puzzled now how to dispose of them. . . . They are of no use whatever in this world. They encumber us."

"It is only too manifest," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"The man you call Burleigh seems to be of some importance in your earthly affairs. We have searched his mind. His powers of belief are very small. He believes in very little but the life of a cultivated wealthy gentleman who holds a position of modest distinction in the councils of a largely fictitious empire. It is doubtful if he will believe in the reality of any of this experience. We will make sure anyhow that he thinks it has been an imaginative dream. He will consider it too fantastic to talk about because it is plain he is already very afraid of his imagination. He will find himself back in your world a few days after you reach it and he will make his way to his own home unobtrusively. He will come next after you. You will see him reappear in political affairs. Perhaps a little wiser."

"It might well be," said Mr. Barnstaple.

"And—what are the sounds of his name?—Rupert Catskill; he too will return. Your world would miss him."

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"Nothing will make *him* wiser," said Mr. Barnstaple with conviction.

"Lady Stella will come."

"I am glad she has escaped. She will say nothing about Utopia. She is very discreet."

"The priest is mad. His behaviour became offensive and obscene and he is under restraint."

"What did he do?"

"He made a number of aprons of black silk and set out with them to attack our young people in an undignified manner."

"You can send him back," said Mr. Barnstaple after reflection.

"But will your world allow that sort of thing?"

"*We* call that sort of thing Purity," said Mr. Barnstaple. "But of course if you like to keep him. . . ."

"He shall come back," said Sungold.

"The others you can keep," said Mr. Barnstaple. "In fact you will have to keep them. Nobody on Earth will trouble about them very much. In our world there are so many people that always a few are getting lost. As it is, returning even the few you propose to do may excite attention. Local people may begin to notice all these wanderers coming from nowhere in particular and asking their way home upon the Maidenhead Road. They might give way under questions. . . . . You cannot send any more. Put the rest on an island. Or something of that sort. I wish I could advise you to keep the priest also. But many people would miss him. They would suffer from suppressed Purity and begin to behave queerly. The pulpit of St. Barnabas satisfies a recog-

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nised craving. And it will be quite easy to persuade him that Utopia is a dream and delusion. All priests believe that naturally of all Utopias. He will think of it, if he thinks of it at all, as—what would he call it?—as a moral nightmare."

§ 2

Their business was finished, but Mr. Barnstaple was loath to go.

He looked Sungold in the eye and found something kindly there.

"You have told me all that I have to do," he said, "and it is fully time that I went away from you, for any moment in your life is more precious than a day of mine. Yet because I am to go so soon and so obediently out of this vast and splendid world of yours back to my native disorders, I could find it in my heart to ask you to unbend if you could, to come down to me a little, and to tell me simply and plainly of the greater days and greater achievements that are now dawning upon this planet. You speak of your being able presently to go out of this Utopia to remote parts in your universe. That perplexes my mind. Probably I am unfitted to grasp that idea, but it is very important to me. It has been a belief in our world that at last there must be an end to life because our sun and planets are cooling, and there seems no hope of escape from the little world upon which we have arisen. We were born with it and we must die with it. That robbed many of us of hope

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and energy: for why should we work for progress in a world that must freeze and die?"

Sungold laughed. "Your philosophers concluded too soon."

He sprawled over the table towards his hearer and looked him earnestly in the face.

"Your earthly science has been going on for how long?"

"Two hundred—three hundred years."

Sungold held up two fingers. "And men? How many men?"

"A few hundred who mattered in each generation."

"We have gone on for three thousand years now, and a hundred million good brains have been put like grapes into the wine-press of science. And we know to-day—how little we know. There is never an observation made but a hundred observations are missed in the making of it; there is never a measurement but some impish truth mocks us and gets away from us in the margin of error. I know something of where your scientific men are, all power to the poor savages! because I have studied the beginnings of our own science in the long past of Utopia. How can I express our distances? Since those days we have examined and tested and tried and retried a score of new ways of thinking about space, of which time is only a specialised form. We have forms of expression that we cannot get over to you so that things that used to seem difficult and paradoxical to us—that probably seem hopelessly difficult and paradoxical to you, lose all their difficulty in our minds. It is hard to convey to you. We think in terms of a

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space in which the space and time system, in terms of which you think, is only a specialised case. So far as our feelings and instincts and daily habits go we too live in another such system as you do—but not so far as our knowledge goes, not so far as our powers go. Our minds have exceeded our lives—as yours will. We are still flesh and blood, still hope and desire, we go to and fro and look up and down, but things that seemed remote are brought near, things that were inaccessible bow down, things that were insurmountable lie under the hollows of our hands."

"And you do not think your race nor, for the matter of that, ours, need ever perish?"

"Perish! We have hardly begun!"

The old man spoke very earnestly. Unconsciously he parodied Newton. "We are like little children who have been brought to the shores of a limitless ocean. All the knowledge we have gathered yet in the few score generations since first we began to gather knowledge, is like a small handful of pebbles gathered upon the shore of that limitless sea.

"Before us lies knowledge, endlessly, and we may take and take, and as we take, grow. We grow in power, we grow in courage. We renew our youth. For mark what I say, our worlds grow younger. The old generations of apes and sub-men before us had aged minds; their narrow reluctant wisdom was the meagre profit, hoarded and stale and sour, of innumerable lives. They dreaded new things; so bitterly did they value the bitterly won old. But to learn is, at length, to become young again, to be released, to begin afresh. Your world, compared with

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ours, is a world of unteachable incrusted souls, of bent and droning traditions, of hates and injuries and suchlike unforgettable things. But some day you too will become again like little children, and it will be you who will find your way through to us—to us, who will be waiting for you. Two universes will meet and embrace, to beget a yet greater universe. . . . You Earthlings do not begin to realise yet the significance of life. Nor we Utopians—scarcely more. . . . Life is still only a promise, still waits to be born, out of such poor stirrings in the dust as we. . . .

"Some day here and everywhere, Life of which you and I are but anticipatory atoms and eddies, Life will awaken indeed, one and whole and marvellous, like a child awaking to conscious life. It will open its drowsy eyes and stretch itself and smile, looking the mystery of God in the face as one meets the morning sun. We shall be there then, all that matters of us, you and I. . . .

"And it will be no more than a beginning, no more than a beginning. . . ."

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CHAPTER THE FOURTH

THE RETURN OF THE EARTHLING

§ 1

Too soon the morning came when Mr. Barnstaple was to look his last upon the fair hills of Utopia and face the great experiment to which he had given himself. He had been loath to sleep and he had slept little that night, and in the early dawn he was abroad, wearing for the last time the sandals and the light white robe that had become his Utopian costume. Presently he would have to struggle into socks and boots and trousers and collar; the strangest gear. It would choke him he felt, and he stretched his bare arms to the sky and yawned and breathed his lungs full. The valley below still drowsed beneath a coverlet of fleecy mists; he turned his face up-hill, the sooner to meet the sun.

Never before had he been out among the Utopian flowers at such an early hour; it was amusing to see how some of the great trumpets still drooped asleep and how many of the larger blossoms were furled and hung. Many of the leaves too were wrapped up, as limp as new-hatched moths. The gossamer spiders had been busy and everything was very wet with dew. A great tiger came upon him suddenly out of a side path and stared hard at him for some moments with round yellow eyes. Perhaps it was trying to remember the forgotten instincts of its breed.

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Some way up the road he passed under a vermilion archway and went up a flight of stone stairs that promised to bring him earlier to the crest.

A number of friendly little birds, very gaily coloured, flew about him for a time and one perched impudently upon his shoulder, but when he put up his hand to caress it it evaded him and flew away. He was still ascending the staircase when the sun rose. It was as if the hillside slipped off a veil of grey and blue and bared the golden beauty of its body.

Mr. Barnstaple came to a landing-place upon the staircase and stopped, and stood very still watching the sunrise search and quicken the brooding deeps of the valley below.

Far away, like an arrow shot from east to west, appeared a line of dazzling brightness on the sea.

§ 2

"Serenity," he murmured. "Beauty. All the works of men—in perfect harmony . . . minds brought to harmony. . . ."

According to his journalistic habit he tried over phrases. "An energetic peace . . . confusions dispersed. . . . A world of spirits, crystal clear. . . ."

What was the use of words?

For a time he stood quite still listening, for from some slope above a lark had gone heavenward, spraying sweet notes. He tried to see that little speck of song and was blinded by the brightening blue of the sky.

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Presently the lark came down and ceased. Utopia was silent, except for a burst of childish laughter somewhere on the hillside below.

It dawned upon Mr. Barnstaple how peaceful was the Utopian air in comparison with the tormented atmosphere of Earth. Here was no yelping and howling of tired or irritated dogs, no braying, bellowing, squealing and distressful outcries of uneasy beasts, no farmyard clamour, no shouts of anger, no barking and coughing, no sounds of hammering, beating, sawing, grinding, mechanical hooting, whistling, screaming and the like, no clattering of distant trains, clanking of automobiles or other ill-contrived mechanisms; the tiresome and ugly noises of many an unpleasant creature were heard no more. In Utopia the ear like the eye was at peace. The air which had once been a mud of felted noises was now—a purified silence. Such sounds as one heard lay upon it like beautiful printing on a generous sheet of fine paper.

His eyes returned to the landscape below as the last fleecy vestiges of mist dissolved away. Water-tanks, roads, bridges, buildings, embankments, colonnades, groves, gardens, channels, cascades, and fountains grew multitudinously clear, framed under a branch of dark foliage from a white-stemmed tree that gripped a hold among the rocks at his side.

"Three thousand years ago this was a world like ours. . . . Think of it—in a hundred generations. . . . In three thousand years we might make our poor waste of an Earth, jungle and desert, slag-heap and slum, into another such heaven of beauty and power. . . .

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"Worlds they are—similar, but not the same. . . .

"If I could tell them what I have seen! . . .

"Suppose all men could have this vision of Utopia. . . .

"They would not believe it if I told them. No. . . .

"They would bray like asses at me and bark like dogs! . . . They will have no world but their own world. It hurts them to think of any world but their own. Nothing can be done that has not been done already. To think otherwise would be humiliation. . . . Death, torture, futility—anything but humiliation! So they must sit among their weeds and excrement, scratching and nodding sagely at one another, hoping for a good dog-fight and to gloat upon pain and effort they do not share, sure that mankind stank, stinks, and must always stink, that stinking is very pleasant indeed, and that there is nothing new under the sun. . . ."

His thoughts were diverted by two young girls who came running one after the other up the staircase. One was dark even to duskiness and her hands were full of blue flowers; the other who pursued her was a year or so younger and golden fair. They were full of the limitless excitement of young animals at play. The former one was so intent upon the other that she discovered Mr. Barnstaple with a squeak of surprise after she had got to his landing. She stared at him with a quick glance of inquiry, flashed into impudent roguery, flung two blue flowers in his face and was off up the steps above. Her companion, intent on capture, flew by. They flickered up the stair-

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case like two butterflies of buff and pink; halted far above and came together for a momentary consultation about the stranger, waved hands to him and vanished.

Mr. Barnstaple returned their greeting and remained cheered.

§ 3

The view-point to which Lychnis had directed Mr. Barnstaple stood out on the ridge between the great valley in which he had spent the last few days and a wild and steep glen down which ran a torrent that was destined after some hundred miles of windings to reach the river of the plain. The view-point was on the crest of a crag, it had been built out upon great brackets so that it hung sheer over a bend in the torrent below; on the one hand was mountainous scenery and a rich and picturesque foam of green vegetation in the depths, on the other spread the broad garden spaces of a perfected landscape. For a time Mr. Barnstaple scrutinised this glen into which he looked for the first time. Five hundred feet or so below him, so that he felt that he could have dropped a pebble upon its outstretched wings, a buzzard was soaring.

Many of the trees below he thought must be fruit-trees, but they were too far off to see distinctly. Here and there he could distinguish a footpath winding up among the trees and rocks, and among the green masses were little pavilions in which he knew the wayfarer might rest and make tea for himself and find biscuits and suchlike refreshment and possibly

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a couch and a book. The whole world, he knew, was full of such summer-houses and kindly shelters. . . .

After a time he went back to the side of this view-place up which he had come, and regarded the great valley that went out towards the sea. The word Pisgah floated through his mind. For indeed below him was the Promised Land of human desires. Here at last, established and secure, were peace, power, health, happy activity, length of days and beauty. All that we seek was found here and every dream was realised.

How long would it be yet—how many centuries or thousands of years—before a man would be able to stand upon some high place on earth also and see mankind triumphant and wholly and for ever at peace? . . .

He folded his arms under him upon the parapet and mused profoundly.

There was no knowledge in this Utopia of which Earth had not the germs; there was no power used here that Earthlings might not use. Here, but for ignorance and darkness and the spites and malice they permit, was Earth to-day. . . .

Towards such a world as this Utopia Mr. Barnstaple had been striving weakly all his life. If the experiment before him succeeded, if presently he found himself alive again on Earth, it would still be towards Utopia that his life would be directed. And he would not be alone. On Earth there must be thousands, tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, who were also struggling in their minds and acts to find a way of escape for themselves and

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for their children from the disorders and indignities of the Age of Confusion, hundreds of thousands who wanted to put an end to wars and waste, to heal and educate and restore, to set up the banner of Utopia over the shams and divisions that waste mankind.

"Yes, but we fail," said Mr. Barnstaple and walked fretfully to and fro. "Tens and hundreds of thousands of men and women! And we achieve so little! Perhaps every young man and every young woman has had some dream at least of serving and bettering the world. And we are scattered and wasted, and the old things and the foul things, customs, delusions, habits, tolerated treasons, base immediacies, triumph over us!"

He went to the parapet again and stood with his foot on a seat, his elbow on his knee and his chin in his hand, staring at the loveliness of this world he was to leave so soon. . . .

"We could do it."

And suddenly it was borne in upon Mr. Barnstaple that he belonged now soul and body to the Revolution, to the Great Revolution that is afoot on Earth; that marches and will never desist nor rest again until old Earth is one city and Utopia set up therein. He knew clearly that this Revolution is life, and that all other living is a trafficking of life with death. And as this crystallised out in his mind he knew instantly that so presently it would crystallise out in the minds of countless others of those hundreds of thousands of men and women on Earth whose minds are set towards Utopia.

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He stood up. He began walking to and fro. "We shall do it," he said.

Earthly thought was barely awakened as yet to the task and possibilities before mankind. All human history so far had been no more than the stirring of a sleeper, a gathering discontent, a rebellion against the limitations set upon life, the unintelligent protest of thwarted imaginations. All the conflicts and insurrections and revolutions that had ever been on Earth were but indistinct preludes of the revolution that had still to come. When he had started out upon this fantastic holiday Mr. Barnstaple realised he had been in a mood of depression; earthly affairs had seemed utterly confused and hopeless to him; but now from the view-point of Utopia achieved, and with his health renewed, he could see plainly enough how steadily men on earth were feeling their way now, failure after failure, towards the opening drive of the final revolution. He could see how men in his own lifetime had been struggling out of such entanglements as the lie of monarchy, the lies of dogmatic religion and dogmatic morality towards public self-respect and cleanness of mind and body. They struggled now also towards international charity and the liberation of their common economic life from a network of pretences, dishonesties and impostures. There is confusion in all struggles; retractions and defeats; but the whole effect seen from the calm height of Utopia was one of steadfast advance. . . .

There were blunders, there were setbacks, because the forces of revolution still worked in the twilight.

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The great effort and the great failure of the socialist movement to create a new state in the world had been contemporaneous with Mr. Barnstaple's life; socialism had been the gospel of his boyhood; he had participated in its hopes, its doubts, its bitter internal conflicts. He had seen the movement losing sweetness and gathering force in the narrowness of the Marxist formulæ. He had seen it sacrifice its constructive power for militant intensity. In Russia he had marked its ability to overthrow and its inability to plan or build. Like every liberal spirit in the world he had shared the chill of Bolshevik presumption and Bolshevik failure, and for a time it had seemed to him that this open bankruptcy of a great creative impulse was no less and no more than a victory for reaction, that it gave renewed life to all the shams, impostures, corruptions, traditional anarchies and ascendencies that restrain and cripple human life. . . . But now from this high view-point in Utopia he saw clearly that the Phœnix of Revolution flames down to ashes only to be born again. While the noose is fitted round the Teacher's neck the youths are reading his teaching; Revolutions arise and die; the Great Revolution comes—incessantly and inevitably.

The time was near—and in what life was left to him, he himself might help to bring it nearer—when the forces of that last and real revolution would work no longer in the twilight but in the dawn, and a thousand sorts of men and women now far apart and unorganised and mutually antagonistic would be drawn together by the growth of a common vision

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of the world desired. The Marxist had wasted the forces of revolution for fifty years; he had had no vision; he had had only a condemnation for established things. He had estranged all scientific and able men by his pompous affectation of the scientific; he had terrified them by his intolerant orthodoxy; his delusion that all ideas are begotten by material circumstances had made him negligent of education and criticism. He had attempted to build social unity on hate and rejected every other driving force for the bitterness of a class war. But now, in its days of doubt and exhaustion, vision was returning to Socialism, and the dreary spectacle of a proletarian dictatorship gave way once more to Utopia, to the demand for a world fairly and righteously at peace, its resources husbanded and exploited for the common good, its every citizen freed not only from servitude but from ignorance, and its surplus energies directed steadfastly to the increase of knowledge and beauty. The attainment of that vision by more and more minds was a thing now no longer to be prevented. Earth would tread the path Utopia had trod. She too would weave law, duty, and education into a larger sanity than man had ever known. Men also would presently laugh at the things they had feared, and brush aside the impostures that had overawed them and the absurdities that had tormented and crippled their lives. And as this great revolution was achieved and earth wheeled into daylight, the burden of human miseries would lift, and courage oust sorrow from the hearts of men. Earth, which was now no more than a wilderness, sometimes horrible and

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at best picturesque, a wilderness interspersed with weedy scratchings for food and with hovels and slums and slag-heaps, Earth too would grow rich with loveliness and fair as this great land was fair. The sons of Earth also, purified from disease, sweet-minded and strong and beautiful, would go proudly about their conquered planet and lift their daring to the stars.

"Given the will," said Mr. Barnstaple. "Given only the will. . . ."

§ 4

From some distant place came the sound of a sweet-toned bell striking the hour.

The time for the service to which he was dedicated was drawing near. He must descend, and be taken to the place where the experiment was to be made.

He took one last look at the glen and then went back to the broad prospect of the great valley, with its lakes and tanks and terraces, its groves and pavilions, its busy buildings and high viaducts, its wide slopes of sunlit cultivation, its universal gracious amenity. "Farewell, Utopia," he said, and was astonished to discover how deeply his emotions were stirred.

"Dear Dream of Hope and Loveliness, Farewell!"

He stood quite still in a mood of sorrowful deprivation too deep for tears.

It seemed to him that the spirit of Utopia bent down over him like a goddess, friendly, adorable—and inaccessible.

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His very mind stood still.

"Never," he whispered at last, "for me. . . . Except to serve. . . . No. . . ."

Presently he began to descend the steps that wound down from the view-point. For a time he noted little of the things immediately about him. Then the scent of roses invaded his attention, and he found himself walking down a slanting pergola covered with great white roses and very active with little green birds. He stopped short and stood looking up at the leaves, light-saturated, against the sky. He put up his hands and drew down one of the great blossoms until it touched his cheek.

§ 5

They took Mr. Barnstaple back by aeroplane to the point upon the glassy road where he had first come into Utopia. Lychnis came with him and Crystal, who was curious to see what would be done.

A group of twenty or thirty people, including Sungold, awaited him. The ruined laboratory of Arden and Greenlake had been replaced by fresh buildings, and there were additional erections on the further side of the road; but Mr. Barnstaple could recognise quite clearly the place where Mr. Catskill had faced the leopard and where Mr. Burleigh had accosted him. Several new kinds of flowers were now out, but the blue blossoms that had charmed him on arrival still prevailed. His old car, the Yellow Peril, looking now the clumsiest piece of ironmongery conceivable, stood in the road. He went and examined it. It

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seemed to be in perfect order; it had been carefully oiled and the petrol-tank was full.

In a little pavilion were his bag and all his earthly clothes. They were very clean and they had been folded and pressed, and he put them on. His shirt seemed tight across his chest and his collar decidedly tight, and his coat cut him a little under the arms. Perhaps these garments had shrunken when they were disinfected. He packed his bag and Crystal put it in the car for him.

Sungold explained very simply all that Mr. Barnstaple had to do. Across the road, close by the restored laboratory, stretched a line as thin as gossamer. "Steer your car to that and break it," he said. "That is all you have to do. Then take this red flower and put it down exactly where your wheel tracks show you have entered your own world."

Mr. Barnstaple was left beside the car. The Utopians went back twenty or thirty yards and stood in a circle about him. For a few moments every one was still.

§ 6

Mr. Barnstaple got into his car, started his engine, let it throb for a minute and then put in the clutch. The yellow car began to move towards the line of gossamer. He made a gesture with one hand which Lychnis answered. Sungold and others of the Utopians also made friendly movements. But Crystal was watching too intently for any gesture.

"Good-bye, Crystal!" cried Mr. Barnstaple, and the boy responded with a start.

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Mr. Barnstaple accelerated, set his teeth and, in spite of his will to keep them open, shut his eyes as he touched the gossamer line. Came that sense again of unendurable tension and that sound like the snapping of a bowstring. He had an irresistible impulse to stop—go back. He took his foot from the accelerator, and the car seemed to fall a foot or so and stopped so heavily and suddenly that he was jerked forward against the steering-wheel. The oppression lifted. He opened his eyes and looked about him.

The car was standing in a field from which the hay had recently been carried. He was tilted on one side because of a roll in the ground. A hedge in which there was an open black gate separated this hay-field from the highroad. Close at hand was a board advertisement of some Maidenhead hotel. On the far side of the road were level fields against a background of low wooded hills. Away to the left was a little inn. He turned his head and saw Windsor Castle in the remote distance rising above poplar-studded meadows. It was not, as his Utopians had promised him, the exact spot of his departure from our Earth, but it was certainly less than a hundred yards away.

He sat still for some moments, mentally rehearsing what he had to do. Then he started the Yellow Peril again and drove it close up to the black gate.

He got out and stood with the red flower in his hand. He had to go back to the exact spot at which he had re-entered this universe and put that flower down there. It would be quite easy to determine that point by the track the car had made in the stub-

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ble. But he felt an extraordinary reluctance to obey these instructions. He wanted to keep this flower. It was the last thing, the only thing, he had now from that golden world. That and the sweet savour on his hands.

It was extraordinary that he had brought no more than this with him. Why had he not brought a lot of flowers? Why had they given him nothing, no little thing, out of all their wealth of beauty? He wanted intensely to keep this flower. He was moved to substitute a spray of honeysuckle from the hedge close at hand. But then he remembered that that would be infected stuff for them. He must do as he was told. He walked back along the track of his car to its beginning, stood for a moment hesitating, tore a single petal from that glowing bloom, and then laid down the rest of the great flower carefully in the very centre of his track. The petal he put in his pocket. Then with a heavy heart he went back slowly to his car and stood beside it, watching that star of almost luminous red.

His grief and emotion were very great. He was bitterly sorrowful now at having left Utopia.

It was evident the great drought was still going on, for the field and the hedges were more parched and brown than he had ever seen an English field before. Along the road lay a thin cloud of dust that passing cars continually renewed. This old world seemed to him to be full of unlovely sights and sounds and odours already half forgotten. There was the honking of distant cars, the uproar of a train, a thirsty cow mourning its discomfort; there was the irritation

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of dust in his nostrils and the smell of sweltering tar; there was barbed wire in the hedge near by and along the top of the black gate, and horse-dung and scraps of dirty paper at his feet. The lovely world from which he had been driven had shrunken now to a spot of shining scarlet.

Something happened very quickly. It was as if a hand appeared for a moment and took the flower. In a moment it had gone. A little eddy of dust swirled and drifted and sank. . . .

It was the end.

At the thought of the traffic on the main road Mr. Barnstaple stooped down so as to hide his face from the passers-by. For some minutes he was unable to regain his self-control. He stood with his arm covering his face, leaning against the shabby brown hood of his car. . . .

At last this gust of sorrow came to an end and he could get in again, start up the engine and steer into the main road.

He turned eastward haphazard. He left the black gate open behind him. He went along very slowly for as yet he had formed no idea of whither he was going. He began to think that probably in this old world of ours he was being sought for as a person who had mysteriously disappeared. Some one might discover him and he would become the focus of a thousand impossible questions. That would be very tiresome and disagreeable. He had not thought of this in Utopia. In Utopia it had seemed quite possible that he could come back into Earth unobserved. Now on earth that confidence seemed foolish. He

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saw ahead of him the board of a modest tea-room. It occurred that he might alight there, see a newspaper, ask a discreet question or so, and find out what had been happening to the world and whether he had indeed been missed.

He found a table already laid for tea under the window. In the centre of the room a larger table bore an aspidistra in a big green pot and a selection of papers, chiefly out-of-date illustrated papers. But there was also a copy of the morning's *Daily Express*.

He seized upon this eagerly, fearful that he would find it full of the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Burleigh, Lord Barralonga, Mr. Rupert Catskill, Mr. Hunker, Father Amerton, and Lady Stella, not to mention the lesser lights. . . . Gradually as he turned it over his fears vanished. There was not a word about any of them!

"But surely," he protested to himself, now clinging to his idea, "their friends must have missed them!"

He read through the whole paper. Of one only did he find mention and that was the last name he would have expected to find—Mr. Freddy Mush. The Princess de Modena-Frascati (*née* Higgisbottom) Prize for English literature had been given away to nobody in particular by Mr. Graceful Gloss owing to "the unavoidable absence of Mr. Freddy Mush abroad."

The problem of why there had been no hue and cry for the others opened a vast field of worldly speculation to Mr. Barnstaple in which he wandered for a time. His mind went back to that bright red

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blossom lying among the cut stems of the grass in the mown field and to the hand that had seemed to take it. With that the door that had opened so marvellously between that strange and beautiful world and our own had closed again.

Wonder took possession of Mr. Barnstaple's mind. That dear world of honesty and health was beyond the utmost boundaries of our space, utterly inaccessible to him now for evermore; and yet, as he had been told, it was but one of countless universes that move together in time, that lie against one another, endlessly like the leaves of a book. And all of them are as nothing in the endless multitudes of systems and dimensions that surround them. "Could I but rotate my arm out of the limits set to it," one of the Utopians had said to him: "I could thrust it into a thousand universes. . . ."

A waitress with his teapot recalled him to mundane things.

The meal served to him seemed tasteless and unclean. He drank the queer brew of the tea because he was thirsty but he ate scarcely a mouthful.

Presently he chanced to put his hand in his pocket and touched something soft. He drew out the petal he had torn from the red flower. It had lost its glowing red, and as he held it out in the stuffy air of the room it seemed to writhe as it shrivelled and blackened; its delicate scent gave place to a mawkish odour.

"Manifestly," he said. "I should have expected this."

He dropped the lump of decay on his plate, then

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picked it up again and thrust it into the soil in the pot of the aspidistra.

He took up *The Daily Express* again and turned it over, trying to recover his sense of this world's affairs.

§ 7

For a long time Mr. Barnstaple meditated over *The Daily Express* in the tea-room at Colnebrook. His thoughts went far so that presently the newspaper slipped to the ground unheeded. He roused himself with a sigh and called for his bill. Paying, he became aware of a pocketbook still full of pound notes. "This will be the cheapest holiday I have ever had," he thought. "I've spent no money at all." He inquired for the post-office, because he had a telegram to send.

Two hours later he stopped outside the gate of his little villa at Sydenham. He set it open—the customary bit of stick with which he did this was in its usual place—and steered the Yellow Peril with the dexterity of use and went past the curved flower-bed to the door of his shed. Mrs. Barnstaple appeared in the porch.

"Alfred! You're back at last?"

"Yes, I'm back. You got my telegram?"

"Ten minutes ago. Where have you been all this time? It's more than a month."

"Oh! just drifting about and dreaming. I've had a wonderful time."

"You ought to have written. You really ought to have written. . . . You *did*, Alfred. . . ."

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"I didn't bother. The doctor said I wasn't to bother. I told you. Is there any tea going? Where are the boys?"

"The boys are out. Let me make you some fresh tea." She did so and came and sat down in the cane chair in front of him and the tea-table. "I'm glad to have you back. Though I could scold you. . . .

"You're looking wonderfully well," she said. "I've never seen your skin so clear and brown."

"I've been in good air all the time."

"Did you get to the Lakes?"

"Not quite. But it's been good air everywhere. Healthy air."

"You never got lost?"

"Never."

"I had ideas of you getting lost—losing your memory. Such things happen. You didn't?"

"My memory's as bright as a jewel."

"But where did you go?"

"I just wandered and dreamt. Lost in a day-dream. Often I didn't ask the name of the place where I was staying. I stayed in one place and then in another. I never asked their names. I left my mind passive. Quite passive. I've had a tremendous rest—from everything. I've hardly given a thought to politics or money or social questions—at least, the sort of thing *we* call social questions—or any of these worries, since I started. . . . Is that this week's *Liberal?*"

He took it, turned it over, and at last tossed it on to the sofa. "Poor old Peeve," he said. "Of course I must leave that paper. He's like wall-paper on a

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damp wall. Just blotches and rustles and fails to stick. . . . Gives me mental rheumatics."

Mrs. Barnstaple stared at him doubtfully. "But I always thought that *The Liberal* was such a safe job."

"I don't want a safe job now. I can do better. There's other work before me. . . . Don't you worry. I can take hold of things surely enough after this rest. . . . How are the boys?"

"I'm a little anxious about Frankie."

Mr. Barnstaple had picked up *The Times*. An odd advertisement in the Agony column had caught his eye. It ran: "Cecil. Your absence exciting remark. Would like to know what you wish us to tell people. Write fully Scotch address. Di. ill with worry. All instructions will be followed."

"I beg your pardon, my dear?" he said putting the paper aside.

"I was saying that he doesn't seem to be settling down to business. He doesn't like it. I wish you could have a good talk to him. He's fretting because he doesn't *know* enough. He says he wants to be a science student at the Polytechnic and go on learning things."

"Well, he can. Sensible boy! I didn't think he had it in him. I meant to have a talk to him. But this meets me half-way. Certainly he shall study science."

"But the boy has to earn a living."

"That will come. If he wants to study science he shall."

Mr. Barnstaple spoke in a tone that was altogether

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new to Mrs. Barnstaple, a tone of immediate, quiet, and assured determination. It surprised her still more that he should use this tone without seeming to be aware that he had used it.

He bit his slice of bread-and-butter, and she could see that something in the taste surprised and displeased him. He glanced doubtfully at the remnant of the slice in his hand. "Of course," he said. "London butter. Three days' wear. Left about. Funny how quickly one's taste alters."

He picked up *The Times* again and ran his eye over its columns.

"This world is really very childish," he said. "Very. I had forgotten. Imaginary Bolshevik plots. Sinn Fein proclamations. The Prince. Poland. Obvious lies about the Chinese. Obvious lies about Egypt. People pulling Wickham Steed's leg. Shampious article about Trinity Sunday. The Hitchin murder. . . . H'm!—rather a nasty one. . . . The Pomfort Rembrandt. . . . Insurance. . . . Letter from indignant peer about Death Duties. . . . Dreary Sport. Boating, Tennis, Schoolboy cricket. Collapse of Harrow! as though such things were of the slightest importance! . . . How silly it is—all of it! It's like coming back to the quarrels of servants and the chatter of children."

He found Mrs. Barnstaple regarding him intently. "I haven't seen a paper from the day I started until this morning," he explained.

He put down the paper and stood up. For some minutes Mrs. Barnstaple had been doubting whether she was not the victim of an absurd hallucination.

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Now she realised that she was in the presence of the most amazing fact she had ever observed.

"Yes," she said. "It is so. Don't move! Keep like that. I know it sounds ridiculous, Alfred, but you have grown taller. It's not simply that your stoop has gone. You have grown oh!—two or three inches."

Mr. Barnstaple stared at her, and then held out his arm. Certainly he was showing an unusual length of wrist. He tried to judge whether his trousers had also the same grown-out-of look.

Mrs. Barnstaple came up to him almost respectfully. She stood beside him and put her shoulder against his arm. "Your shoulder used to be exactly level with mine," she said. "See where we are now!"

She looked up into his eyes. As though she was very glad indeed to have him back with her.

But Mr. Barnstaple remained lost in thought. "It must be the extreme freshness of the air. I have been in some wonderful air. . . . Wonderful! . . . But at my age! To have grown! And I *feel* as though I'd grown, inside and out, mind and body."

Mrs. Barnstaple presently began to put the tea-things together for removal.

"You seem to have avoided the big towns."

"I did."

"And kept to the country roads and lanes."

"Practically. . . . It was all new country to me. . . . Beautiful. . . . Wonderful. . . ."

His wife still watched him.

"You must take *me* there some day," she said. "I can see that it has done you a world of good."

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THE DREAM

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PART I

HOW HARRY MORTIMER SMITH WAS MADE

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CHAPTER THE FIRST

THE EXCURSION

§ 1

SARNAC had worked almost continuously for the better part of a year upon some very subtle chemical reactions of the nervous cells of the sympathetic system. His first inquiries had led to the opening out of fresh and surprising possibilities, and these again had lured him on to still broader and more fascinating prospects. He worked perhaps too closely; he found his hope and curiosity unimpaired, but there was less delicacy of touch in his manipulation, and he was thinking less quickly and accurately. He needed a holiday. He had come to the end of a chapter in his work and wished to brace himself for a new beginning. Sunray had long hoped to be away with him; she too was at a phase in her work when interruption was possible, and so the two went off together to wander among the lakes and mountains.

Their companionship was at a very delightful stage. Their close relationship and their friendship were of old standing, so that they were quite at their ease with one another, yet they were not too familiar to have lost the keen edge of their interest in each other's proceedings. Sunray was very much in love with Sarnac and glad, and Sarnac was always happy and pleasantly exalted when Sunray was near him. Sunray was the richer-hearted and cleverer lover.

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They talked of everything in the world but Sarnac's work, because that had to rest and grow fresh again. Of her own work Sunray talked abundantly. She had been making stories and pictures of happiness and sorrow in the past ages of the world, and she was full of curious speculations about the ways in which the ancestral mind has thought and felt.

They played with boats upon the great lake for some days, they sailed and paddled and drew up their canoe among the sweet-scented rushes of the islands and bathed and swam. They went from one guest-house to another upon the water and met many interesting and refreshing people. In one house an old man of ninety-eight was staying: he was amusing his declining years by making statuettes of the greatest beauty and humour; it was wonderful to see the clay take shape in his hands. Moreover, he had a method of cooking the lake-fish that was very appetising, and he made a great dish of them so that every one who was dining in the place could have some. And there was a musician who made Sunray talk about the days gone by, and afterwards he played music with his own hands on a clavier to express the ancient feelings of men. He played one piece that was, he explained, two thousand years old; it was by a man named Chopin, and it was called the "Revolutionary Etude." Sunray could not have believed a piano capable of such passionate resentment. After that he played grotesque and angry battle-music and crude marching-tunes from those half-forgotten times, and then he invented wrathful and passionate music of his own.

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Sunray sat under a golden lantern and listened to the musician and watched his nimble hands, but Sarnac was more deeply moved. He had not heard very much music in his life, and this player seemed to open shutters upon deep and dark and violent things that had long been closed to mankind. Sarnac sat, cheek on hand, his elbow on the parapet of the garden-wall, looking across the steely blue of the lake at the darkling night sky at the lower end. The sky had been starry, but a monstrous crescent of clouds like a hand that closes was now gathering all the stars into its fist of darkness. Perhaps there would be rain to-morrow. The lanterns hung still, except that ever and again a little shiver of the air set them swaying. Now and then a great white moth would come fluttering out of the night and beat about among the lanterns for a time and pass away. Presently it would return again or another moth like it would come. Sometimes there would be three or four of these transitory phantoms; they seemed to be the only insects abroad that night.

A faint ripple below drew his attention to the light of a boat, a round yellow light like a glowing orange, which came gliding close up to the terrace wall out of the blue of the night. There was the sound of a paddle being shipped and a diminishing drip of water, but the people in the boat sat still and listened until the musician had done altogether. Then they came up the steps to the terrace and asked the master of the guest-house for rooms for the night. They had dined at a place farther up the lake.

Four people came by this boat. Two were brother

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and sister, dark handsome people of Southern origin, and the others were fair women, one blue-eyed and one with hazel eyes, who were clearly very much attached to the brother and sister. They came and talked about the music and then of a climbing expedition they had promised themselves in the great mountains above the lakes. The brother and sister were named Radiant and Starlight, and their work in life, they explained, was to educate animals; it was a business for which they had an almost instinctive skill. The two fair girls, Willow and Firefly, were electricians. During the last few days Sunray had been looking ever and again at the glittering snowfields and desiring them; there was always a magic call for her in snowy mountains. She joined very eagerly in the mountain-talk, and it was presently suggested that she and Sarnac should accompany these new acquaintances up to the peaks they had in mind. But before they went on to the mountains, she and Sarnac wanted to visit some ancient remains that had recently been excavated in a valley that came down to the lake from the east. The four newcomers were interested in what she told them about these ruins, and altered their own plans to go with her and Sarnac to see them. Then afterwards all six would go into the mountains.

§ 2

These ruins were rather more than two thousand years old.

There were the remains of a small old town, a

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railway-station of some importance, and a railway-tunnel which came right through the mountains. The tunnel had collapsed, but the excavators had worked along it and found several wrecked trains in it which had evidently been packed with soldiers and refugees. The remains of these people, much disturbed by rats and other vermin, lay about in the trains and upon the railway-tracks. The tunnel had apparently been blocked by explosives and these train-loads of people entombed. Afterwards the town itself and all its inhabitants had been destroyed by poison-gas, but what sort of poison-gas it was the investigators had still to decide. It had had an unusual pickling effect, so that many of the bodies were not so much skeletons as mummies; and there were books, papers, papier-mâché objects or the like in a fair state of preservation in many of the houses. Even cheap cotton goods were preserved, though they had lost all their colour. For some time after the great catastrophe this part of the world must have remained practically uninhabited. A landslide had presently blocked the lower valley and banked back the valley waters so as to submerge the town and cover it with a fine silt and seal up the tunnel very completely. Now the barrier had been cut through and the valley drained again, and all these evidences of one of the characteristic disasters of the last war period in man's history had been brought back to the light once more.

The six holiday-makers found the visit to this place a very vivid experience, almost too vivid for their contentment. On Sarnac's tired mind it made a par-

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ticularly deep impression. The material collected from the town had been arranged in a long museum gallery of steel and glass. There were many almost complete bodies; one invalid old woman, embalmed by the gas, had been replaced in the bed from which the waters had floated her, and there was a shrivelled little baby put back again in its cradle. The sheets and quilts were bleached and browned, but it was quite easy to see what they had once been like. The people had been taken by surprise, it seemed, while the midday meal was in preparation; the tables must have been set in many of the houses; and now, after a score of centuries beneath mud and weeds and fishes, the antiquaries had disinterred and reassembled these old machine-made cloths and plated implements upon the tables. There were great stores of such pitiful discoloured litter from the vanished life of the past.

The holiday-makers did not go far into the tunnel; the suggestion of things there was too horrible for their mood, and Sarnac stumbled over a rail and cut his hand upon the jagged edge of a broken railway-carriage window. The wound pained him later, and did not heal so quickly as it should have done. It was as if some poison had got into it. It kept him awake in the night.

For the rest of the day the talk was all of the terrible days of the last wars in the world and the dreadfulness of life in that age. It seemed to Firefly and Starlight that existence must have been almost unendurable, a tissue of hate, terror, want and discomfort, from the cradle to the grave. But Radiant

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argued that people then were perhaps no less happy and no happier than himself; that for every one in every age there was a normal state, and that any exaltation of hope or sensation above that was happiness and any depression below it misery. It did not matter where the normal came. "They went to great intensities in both directions," he said. There was more darkness in their lives and more pain, but not more unhappiness. Sunray was inclined to agree with him.

But Willow objected to Radiant's psychology. She said that there could be permanently depressed states in an unhealthy body or in a life lived under restraint. There could be generally miserable creatures just as there could be generally happy creatures.

"Of course," interjected Sarnac, "given a standard outside themselves."

"But why did they make such wars?" cried Firefly. "Why did they do such horrible things to one another? They were people like ourselves."

"No better," said Radiant, "and no worse. So far as their natural quality went. It is not a hundred generations ago."

"Their skulls were as big and well shaped."

"Those poor creatures in the tunnel!" said Sarnac. "Those poor wretches caught in the tunnel! But every one in that age must have felt caught in a tunnel."

After a time a storm overtook them and interrupted their conversation. They were going up over a low pass to a guest-house at the head of the lake, and it was near the crest of the pass that the storm burst.

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The lightning was tremendous and a pine-tree was struck not a hundred yards away. They cheered the sight. They were all exhilarated by the elemental clatter and uproar; the rain was like a whip on their bare, strong bodies and the wind came in gusts that held them staggering and laughing, breathlessly unable to move forward. They had doubts and difficulties with the path; for a time they lost touch with the blazes upon the trees and rocks. Followed a steady torrent of rain, through which they splashed and stumbled down the foaming rocky pathway to their resting-place. They arrived wet as from a swim and glowing; but Sarnac, who had come behind the others with Sunray, was tired and cold. The master of this guest-house drew his shutters and made a great fire for them with pine-knots and pine-cones while he prepared a hot meal.

After a while they began to talk of the excavated town again and of the shrivelled bodies lying away there under the electric light of the still glass-walled museum, indifferent for evermore to the sunshine and thunder-storms of life without.

"Did they ever laugh as we do?" asked Willow. "For sheer happiness of living?"

Sarnac said very little. He sat close up to the fire, pitching pine-cones into it and watching them flare and crackle. Presently he got up, confessed himself tired, and went away to his bed.

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§ 3

It rained hard all through the night and until nearly midday, and then the weather cleared. In the afternoon the little party pushed on up the valley towards the mountains they designed to climb, but they went at a leisurely pace, giving a day and a half to what was properly only one day's easy walking. The rain had refreshed everything in the upper valley and called out a great multitude of flowers.

The next day was golden and serene.

In the early afternoon they came to a plateau and meadows of asphodel, and there they sat down to eat the provisions they had brought with them. They were only two hours' climb from the mountain-house in which they were to pass the night, and there was no need to press on. Sarnac was lazy; he confessed to a desire for sleep; in the night he had been feverish and disturbed by dreams of men entombed in tunnels and killed by poison-gas. The others were amused that any one should want to sleep in the daylight, but Sunray said she would watch over him. She found a place for him on the sward, and Sarnac lay down beside her and went to sleep with his cheek against her side as suddenly and trustfully as a child goes to sleep. She sat up—as a child's nurse might do—enjoining silence on the others by gestures.

"After this he will be well again," laughed Radiant, and he and Firefly stole off in one direction, while Willow and Starlight went off in another to climb a rocky headland near at hand, from which they

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thought they might get a very wide and perhaps a very beautiful view of the lakes below.

For some time Sarnac lay quite still in his sleep and then he began to twitch and stir. Sunray bent down attentively with her warm face close to his. He was quiet again for a time and then he moved and muttered, but she could not distinguish any words. Then he rolled away from her and threw his arms about and said: "I can't stand it. I can't endure it. Nothing can alter it now. You're unclean and spoiled." She took him gently and drew him into a comfortable attitude again, just as a nurse might do. "Dear," he whispered, and in his sleep reached out for her hand. . . .

When the others came back he had just awakened.

He was sitting up with a sleepy expression and Sunray was kneeling beside him with her hand on his shoulder. "Wake up!" she said.

He looked at her as if he did not know her and then with puzzled eyes at Radiant. "Then there *is* another life!" he said at last.

"Sarnac!" cried Sunray, shaking him. "Don't you know me?"

He passed a hand over his face. "Yes," he said slowly. "Your name is Sunray. I seem to remember. Sunray. . . . Not Hetty— No. Though you are very like Hetty. Queer! And mine—mine is Sarnac.

"Of course! I am Sarnac." He laughed at Willow. "But I thought I was Harry Mortimer Smith," he said. "I did indeed. A moment ago I *was* Henry Mortimer Smith. . . . Henry Mortimer Smith."

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He looked about him. "Mountains," he said, "sunshine, white narcissus. Of course, we walked up here this very morning. Sunray splashed me at a waterfall. . . . I remember it perfectly. . . . And yet I was in bed—shot. I was in bed. . . . A dream? . . . Then I have had a dream, a whole lifetime, two thousand years ago!"

"What do you mean?" said Sunray.

"A lifetime—childhood, boyhood, manhood. And death. He killed me. Poor rat!—he killed me!"

"A dream?"

"A dream—but a very vivid dream. The realest of dreams. If it *was* a dream. . . . I can answer all your questions now, Sunray. I have lived through a whole life in that old world. I know. . . .

"It is as though that life was still the real one and this only a dream. . . . I was in a bed. Five minutes ago I was in bed. I was dying. . . . The doctor said: 'He is going.' And I heard the rustle of my wife coming across the room. . . ."

"Your *wife!*" cried Sunray.

"Yes—my wife—Milly."

Sunray looked at Willow with raised eyebrows and a helpless expression.

Sarnac stared at her, dreamily puzzled. "Milly," he repeated very faintly. "She was by the window."

For some moments no one spoke.

Radiant stood with his arm on Firefly's shoulder.

"Tell us about it, Sarnac. Was it hard to die?"

"I seemed to sink down and down into quiet—and then I woke up here."

"Tell us now, while it is still so real to you."

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"Have we not planned to reach the mountain-house before nightfall?" said Willow, glancing at the sun.

"There is a little guest-house here, within five minutes' walk of us," said Firefly.

Radiant sat down beside Sarnac. "Tell us your dream now. If it fades out presently or if it is uninteresting, we can go on; but if it is entertaining, we can hear it out and sleep down here to-night. It is a very pleasant place here, and there is a loveliness about those mauve-coloured crags across the gorge, a faint mistiness in their folds, that I could go on looking at for a week without impatience. Tell us your dream, Sarnac."

He shook his friend. "Wake up, Sarnac!"

Sarnac rubbed his eyes. "It is so queer a story. And there will be so much to explain."

He took thought for a while.

"It will be a long story."

"Naturally, if it is a whole life."

"First let me get some cream and fruit from the guest-house for us all," said Firefly, "and then let Sarnac tell us his dream. Five minutes, Sarnac, and I will be back here."

"I will come with you," said Radiant, hurrying after her.

This that follows is the story Sarnac told.

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CHAPTER THE SECOND

THE BEGINNING OF THE DREAM

§ 1

"THIS dream of mine began," he said, "as all our lives begin, in fragments, in a number of disconnected impressions. I remember myself lying on a sofa, a sofa covered with a curious sort of hard, shiny material with a red-and-black pattern on it, and I was screaming, but I do not know why I screamed. I discovered my father standing in the doorway of the room looking at me. He looked very dreadful; he was partially undressed in trousers and a flannel shirt and his fair hair was an unbrushed shock; he was shaving and his chin was covered with lather. He was angry because I was screaming. I suppose I stopped screaming, but I am not sure. And I remember kneeling upon the same hard red-and-black sofa beside my mother and looking out of the window—the sofa used to stand with its back to the window-sill—at the rain falling on the roadway outside. The window-sill smelled faintly of paint; soft bad paint that had blistered in the sun. It was a violent storm of rain and the road was an ill-made road of a yellowish sandy clay. It was covered with muddy water and the storming rainfall made a multitude of flashing bubbles, that drove along before the wind and burst and gave place to others.

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" 'Look at 'em, dearie,' said my mother. 'Like sojers.'

"I think I was still very young when that happened, but I was not so young that I had not often seen soldiers with their helmets and bayonets marching by."

"That," said Radiant, "was some time before the Great War then, and the Social Collapse."

"Some time before," said Sarnac. He considered. "Twenty-one years before. This house in which I was born was less than two miles from the great military camp of the British at Lowcliff in England, and Lowcliff railway-station was only a few hundred yards away. 'Sojers' were the most conspicuous objects in my world outside my home. They were more brightly coloured than other people. My mother used to wheel me out for air every day in a thing called a perambulator, and whenever there were soldiers to be seen she used to say: 'Oh! PRITTY sojers!'

" 'Sojers' must have been one of my earliest words. I used to point my little wool-incased finger—for they wrapped up children tremendously in those days and I wore even gloves—and I would say: 'Sosher.'

"Let me try and describe to you what sort of home this was of mine and what manner of people my father and mother were. Such homes and houses and places have long since vanished from the world, not many relics of them have been kept, and though you have probably learned most of the facts concerning them, I doubt if you can fully realise the feel and the reality of the things I found about me. The name of the place was Cherry Gardens; it was about two

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miles from the sea at Sandbourne, one way lay the town of Cliffstone from which steamboats crossed the sea to France, and the other way lay Lowcliff and its rows and rows of ugly red brick barracks and its great drilling-plain, and behind us inland was a sort of plateau covered with raw new roads of loose pebbles —you cannot imagine such roads!—and vegetable-gardens and houses new-built or building, and then a line of hills, not very high but steep and green and bare, the Downs. The Downs made a graceful sky-line that bounded my world to the north as the sapphire line of the sea bounded it to the south, and they were almost the only purely beautiful things in that world. All the rest was touched and made painful by human confusion. When I was a very little boy I used to wonder what lay behind those Downs, but I never went up them to see until I was seven or eight years old."

"This was before the days of aeroplanes?" asked Radiant.

"They came into the world when I was eleven or twelve. I saw the first that ever crossed the Channel between the mainland of Europe and England. That was considered a very wonderful thing indeed. ("It *was* a wonderful thing," said Sunray.) I went with a lot of other boys, and we edged through a crowd that stood and stared at the quaint old machine; it was like a big canvas grasshopper with outspread wings; in a field—somewhere beyond Cliffstone. It was being guarded, and the people were kept away from it by stakes and a string.

"I find it hard to describe to you what sort of

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places Cherry Gardens and Cliffstone were like—even though we have just visited the ruins of Domodossola. Domodossola was a sprawling, aimless town enough, but these sprawled far more and looked with a far emptier aimlessness into the face of God. You see in the thirty or forty years before my birth there had been a period of comparative prosperity and productivity in human affairs. It was not of course in those days the result of any statesmanship or forethought; it just happened,—as now and then in the course of a rain-torrent there comes a pool of level water between the rapids. But the money and credit system was working fairly well; there was much trade and intercourse, no extensive pestilences, exceptionally helpful seasons, and few very wide-spread wars. As a result of this conspiracy of favourable conditions there was a perceptible rise in the standards of life of the common people, but for the most part it was discounted by a huge increase of population. As our schoolbooks say, 'In those days Man was his own Locust.' Later in my life I was to hear furtive whispers of a forbidden topic called Birth Control, but in the days of my childhood the whole population of the world, with very few exceptions, was in a state of complete and carefully protected ignorance about the elementary facts of human life and happiness. The surroundings of my childhood were dominated by an unforeseen and uncontrollable proliferation. Cheap proliferation was my scenery, my drama, my atmosphere."

"But they had teachers and priests and doctors and rulers to tell them better," said Willow.

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"Not to tell them better," said Sarnac. "These guides and pilots of life were wonderful people. They abounded, and guided no one. So far from teaching men and women to control births or avoid diseases or work generously together, they rather prevented such teaching. This place called Cherry Gardens had mostly come into existence in the fifty years before my birth. It had grown from a minute hamlet into what we used to call an 'urban district.' In that old world in which there was neither freedom nor direction, the land was divided up into patches of all sorts and sizes and owned by people who did what they liked with it, subject to a few vexatious and unhelpful restrictions. And in Cherry Gardens, a sort of men called speculative builders bought pieces of land, often quite unsuitable land, and built houses for the swarming increase of population that had otherwise nowhere to go. There was no plan about this building. One speculative builder built here and another there, and each built as cheaply as possible and sold or let what he had built for as much as possible. Some of the houses they built in rows and some stood detached each with a little patch of private garden—garden they called it, though it was either a muddle or a waste—fenced in to keep people out."

"Why did they keep people out?"

"They liked to keep people out. It was a satisfaction for them. They were not secret gardens. People might look over the fence if they chose. And each house had its own kitchen where food was cooked—there was no public eating-place in Cherry Gardens—and each, its separate store of household gear. In

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most houses there was a man who went out to work and earn a living—they didn't so much live in those days as earn a living—and came home to eat and sleep, and there was a woman, his wife, who did all the services, food and cleaning and everything, and also she bore children, a lot of unpremeditated children—because she didn't know any better. She was too busy to look after them well, and many of them died. Most days she cooked a dinner. She cooked it. . . . It *was* cooking!"

Sarnac paused—his brows knit. "Cooking! Well, well. That's over, anyhow," he said.

Radiant laughed cheerfully.

"Almost every one suffered from indigestion. The newspapers were full of advertisements of cures," said Sarnac, still darkly retrospective.

"I've never thought of that aspect of life in the old world," said Sunray.

"It was—fundamental," said Sarnac. "It was a world, in every way, out of health.

"Every morning, except on the Sunday, after the man had gone off to his day's toil and the children had been got up and dressed and those who were old enough sent off to school, the woman of the house tidied up a bit and then came the question of getting in food. For this private cooking of hers. Every day except Sunday a number of men with little pony-carts or with barrows they pushed in front of them, bearing meat and fish and vegetables and fruit, all of it exposed to the weather and any dirt that might be blowing about, came bawling along the roads of Cherry Gardens, shouting the sort of food they were

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selling. My memory goes back to that red-and-black sofa by the front window and I am a child once again. There was a particularly splendid fish-hawker. What a voice he had! I used to try to reproduce his splendid noises in my piping childish cries: 'Mackroo-E-y'are Macroo! Fine Macroo! Thee a Sheen. Mac-*roo!*'

"The housewives would come out from their domestic mysteries to buy or haggle and, as the saying went, 'pass the time of day' with their neighbours. But everything they wanted was not to be got from the hawkers, and that was where my father came in. He kept a little shop. He was what was called a greengrocer; he sold fruits and vegetables, such poor fruits and vegetables as men had then learned to grow—and also he sold coals and paraffin (which people burned in their lamps) and chocolate and ginger-beer and other things that were necessary to the barbaric housekeeping of the time. He also sold cut-flowers and flowers in pots, and seeds and sticks and string and weed-killer for the little gardens. His shop stood in a row with a lot of other shops; the row was like a row of the ordinary houses with the lower rooms taken out and replaced by the shop, and he 'made his living' and ours by buying his goods as cheaply as he could and getting as much as he could for them. It was a very poor living because there were several other able-bodied men in Cherry Gardens who were also greengrocers, and if he took too much profit then his customers would go away and buy from these competitors and he would get no profit at all.

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"I and my brother and sisters—for my mother had been unable to avoid having six babies and four of us were alive—lived by and in and round about this shop. In the summer we were chiefly out of doors or in the room above the shop; but in the cold weather it cost too much trouble and money to have a fire in that room—all Cherry Gardens was heated by open coal fires—and we went down into a dark underground kitchen where my mother, poor dear! cooked according to her lights."

"You were troglodytes!" said Willow.

"Practically. We always ate in that down-stairs room. In the summer we were sunburned and ruddy, but in the winter, because of this—inhumation, we became white and rather thin. I had an elder brother who was monstrous in my childish memory; he was twelve years older than I; and I had two sisters, Fanny and Prudence. My elder brother Ernest went out to work, and then he went away to London and I saw very little of him until I too went to London. I was the youngest of the lot; and when I was nine years old, my father, taking courage, turned my mother's perambulator into a little push-cart for delivering sacks of coals and suchlike goods.

"Fanny, my elder sister, was a very pretty girl, with a white face from which her brown hair went back in graceful, natural waves and curls, and she had very dark blue eyes. Prudence was also white but of a duller whiteness, and her eyes were grey. She would tease me and interfere with me, but Fanny was either negligent or gracefully kind to me and I adored her. I do not, strangely enough, remember

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my mother's appearance at all distinctly, though she was, of course, the dominant fact of my childish life. She was too familiar, I suppose, for the sort of attention that leaves a picture on the mind.

"I learned to speak from my family and chiefly from my mother. None of us spoke well; our common idioms were poor and bad, we mispronounced many words, and long words we avoided as something dangerous and pretentious. I had very few toys: a tin railway-engine I remember, some metal soldiers, and an insufficient supply of wooden building-bricks. There was no special place for me to play, and if I laid out my toys on the living-room table, a meal was sure to descend and sweep them away. I remember a great longing to play with the things in the shop, and especially with the bundles of firewood and some fire-kindlers that were most seductively shaped like wheels, but my father discouraged such ambitions. He did not like to have me about the shop until I was old enough to help, and the indoor part of most of my days was spent in the room above it or in the underground room below it. After the shop was closed it became a very cold, cavernous, dark place to a little boy's imagination; there were dreadful shadows in which terrible things might lurk, and even holding fast to my mother's hand on my way to bed, I was filled with fear to traverse it. It had always a faint, unpleasant smell, a smell of decaying vegetation varying with the particular fruit or vegetable that was most affected, and a constant element of paraffin. But on Sundays when it was closed all day the shop was different, no longer darkly

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threatening but very very still. I would be taken through it on my way to church or Sunday-school. (Yes—I will tell you about church and Sunday-school in a minute.) When I saw my mother lying dead—she died when I was close upon sixteen—I was instantly reminded of the Sunday shop. . . .

"Such, my dear Sunray, was the home in which I found myself. I seemed to have been there since my beginning. It was the deepest dream I have ever had. I had forgotten even you."

§ 2

"And how was this casually begotten infant prepared for the business of life?" asked Radiant. "Was he sent away to a Garden?"

"There were no Children's Gardens such as we know them, in that world," said Sarnac. "There was a place of assembly called an elementary school. Thither I was taken, twice daily, by my sister Prudence, after I was six years old.

"And here again I find it hard to convey to you what the reality was like. Our histories tell you of the beginning of general education in that distant time and of the bitter jealousy felt by the old priesthoods and privileged people for the new sort of teachers, but they give you no real picture of the ill-equipped and understaffed schoolhouses and of the gallant work of the underpaid and ill-trained men and women who did the first rough popular teaching. There was in particular a gaunt dark man with a cough who took the elder boys, and a little freckled

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woman of thirty or so who fought with the lower children, and, I see now, they were holy saints. His name I forget, but the little woman was called Miss Merrick. They had to handle enormous classes, and they did most of their teaching by voice and gesture and chalk upon a blackboard. Their equipment was miserable. The only materials of which there was enough to go round were a stock of dirty reading-books, Bibles, hymn-books, and a lot of slabs of slate in frames on which we wrote with slate-pencils to economise paper. Drawing materials we had practically none; most of us never learned to draw. Yes. Lots of sane adults in that old world never learned to draw even a box. There was nothing to count with in that school and no geometrical models. There were hardly any pictures except a shiny one of Queen Victoria and a sheet of animals, and there were very yellow wall-maps of Europe and Asia twenty years out of date. We learned the elements of mathematics by recitation. We used to stand in rows, chanting a wonderful chant called our Tables:—

"'*Twi*-swun-two.
Twi-stewer four.
Twi-sfree'r six.
Twi-sfour'rate.'

"We used to sing—in unison—religious hymns for the most part. The school had a second-hand piano to guide our howlings. There had been a great fuss in Cliffstone and Cherry Gardens when this piano was bought. They called it a luxury, and pampering the working-classes."

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"Pampering the working-classes!" Firefly repeated. "I suppose it's all right. But I'm rather at sea."

"I can't explain everything," said Sarnac. "The fact remains that England grudged its own children the shabbiest education, and so for the matter of fact did every other country. They saw things differently in those days. They were still in the competitive cave. America, which was a much richer country than England, as wealth went then, had if possible meaner and shabbier schools for her common people. . . . My dear! it *was* so. I'm telling you a story, not explaining the universe. . . . And naturally, in spite of the strenuous efforts of such valiant souls as Miss Merrick, we children learned little and we learned it very badly. Most of my memories of school are memories of boredom. We sat on wooden forms at long worn wooden desks, rows and rows of us—I can see again all the little heads in front of me—and far away was Miss Merrick with a pointer trying to interest us in the Rivers of England:—

"Ty. Wear. Teasumber."

"Is that what they used to call swearing?" asked Willow.

"No. Only Jogriphy. And History was:—

"Wi-yum the Conqueror. Tessisstysiss.
Wi-yum Ruefiss. Ten eighty-seven."

"What did it mean?"

"To us children? Very much what it means to

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you—gibberish. The hours, those interminable hours of childhood in school! How they dragged! Did I say I lived a life in my dream? In school I lived eternities. Naturally we sought such amusement as was possible. One thing was to give your next-door neighbour a pinch or a punch and say, 'Pass it on.' And we played furtive games with marbles. It is rather amusing to recall that I learned to count, to add and subtract and so forth, by playing marbles in despite of discipline."

"But was that the best your Miss Merrick and your saint with the cough could do?" asked Radiant.

"Oh! *they* couldn't help themselves. They were in a machine, and there were periodic Inspectors and examinations to see that they kept in it."

"But," said Sunray, "that Incantation about 'Wi-yum the Conqueror' and the rest of it. It meant something? At the back of it, lost to sight perhaps, there was some rational or semirational idea?"

"Perhaps," reflected Sarnac. "But I never detected it."

"They called it history," said Firefly helpfully.

"They did," Sarnac admitted. "Yes, I think they were trying to interest the children of the land in the doings of the Kings and Queens of England, probably as dull a string of monarchs as the world has ever seen. If they rose to interest at times it was through a certain violence; there was one delightful Henry VIII with such a craving for love and such a tender conscience about the sanctity of marriage that he always murdered one wife before he took another. And there was one Alfred who burned some cakes—

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I never knew why. In some way it embarrassed the Danes, his enemies."

"But was that all the history they taught you?" cried Sunray.

"Queen Elizabeth of England wore a ruff and James the First of England and Scotland kissed his men favourites."

"But history!"

Sarnac laughed. "It *is* odd. I see that—now that I am awake again. But indeed that was all they taught us."

"Did they tell you nothing of the beginnings of life and the ends of life, of its endless delights and possibilities?"

Sarnac shook his head.

"Not at school," said Starlight, who evidently knew her books; "they did that at church. Sarnac forgets the churches. It was, you must remember, an age of intense religious activity. There were places of worship everywhere. One whole day in every seven was given up to the Destinies of Man and the study of God's Purpose. The worker ceased from his toil. From end to end of the land the air was full of the sound of church-bells and of congregations singing. Wasn't there a certain beauty in that, Sarnac?"

Sarnac reflected and smiled. "It wasn't quite like that," he said. "Our histories, in that matter, need a little revision."

"But one sees the churches and chapels in the old photographs and cinema pictures. And we still have many of their cathedrals. And some of those are quite beautiful."

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"And they have all had to be shored up and underpinned and tied together with steel," said Sunray, "because they were either so carelessly or so faithlessly built. And anyhow, these were not built in Sarnac's time."

"Mortimer Smith's time," Sarnac corrected.

"They were built hundreds of years earlier than that."

§ 3

"You must not judge the religion of an age by its temples and churches," said Sarnac. "An unhealthy body may have many things in it that it cannot clear away, and the weaker it is the less it can prevent abnormal and unserviceable growths. . . . Which sometimes may be in themselves quite bright and beautiful growths.

"But let me describe to you the religious life of my home and upbringing. There was a sort of State Church in England, but it had lost most of its official standing in regard to the community as a whole; it had two buildings in Cherry Gardens—one an old one dating from the hamlet days with a square tower and rather small as churches went, and the other new and spacious with a spire. In addition there were the chapels of two other Christian communities, the Congregationalists and the Primitive Methodists, and also one belonging to the old Roman Catholic communion. Each professed to present the only true form of Christianity and each maintained a minister, except the larger Church of England place, which had two, the vicar and the curate. You might sup-

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pose that, like the museums of history and the Temples of Vision we set before our young people, these places would display in the most moving and beautiful forms possible the history of our race and the great adventure of life in which we are all engaged, they would remind us of our brotherhood and lift us out of selfish thoughts. . . . But let me tell you how I saw it:—

"I don't remember my first religious instruction. Very early I must have learned to say a rhymed prayer to—

> "'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
> Look on me, a little child.'

And also another prayer about 'Trespassing' which I thought referred to going into fields or woods where there was no public footpath, and which began with the entirely incomprehensible words, 'Our Father Charting Heaven, Haloed B thy Name.' Also one asked for one's 'daily bread' and that God's Kingdom should come. I learned these two prayers from my mother at an incredibly early age, and said them every night and sometimes in the morning. She held these words in far too great reverence to explain them, and when I wanted to ask for my 'daily bread and butter,' she scolded me bitterly. I also wanted to ask what would happen to good Queen Victoria when God's Kingdom came, but I never mustered courage to ask my mother that. I had a curious idea that there could be a marriage but that nobody had thought of that solution. This must have been very early in my life, because Victoria the Good died when

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I was five, during the course of a long, far-away, and now almost-forgotten struggle called the Boer War.

"These infantile perplexities deepened and then gave way to a kind of self-protective apathy when I was old enough to go to church and Sunday-school.

"Sunday morning was by far the most strenuous part of all the week for my mother. We had all had a sort of bath overnight in the underground kitchen, except my father and mother, who I don't think ever washed all over—I don't know for certain—and on Sunday morning we rose rather later than usual and put on our 'clean things' and our best clothes. (Everybody in those days wore a frightful lot of clothes. You see, they were all so unhealthy they could not stand the least exposure to wet or cold.) Breakfast was a hurried and undistinguished meal on the way to greater things. Then we had to sit about, keeping out of harm's way, avoiding all crumpling or dirt, and pretending to be interested in one of the ten or twelve books our home possessed, until church time. Mother prepared the Sunday meal, almost always a joint of meat in a baking-dish which my elder sister took in to the baker's next door but one to be cooked while we worshipped. Father rose later than any one and appeared strangely transformed in a collar, dickey and cuffs and a black coat and his hair smoothed down and parted. Usually some unforeseen delay arose; one of my sisters had a hole in her stocking, or my boots wouldn't button and nobody could find the button-hook, or a prayer-book was mislaid. This engendered an atmosphere of flurry. There were anxious moments when the

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church-bell ceased to ring and began a monotonous 'tolling-in.'

" 'Oh! we shall be late *again!*' said my mother. 'We shall be late *again.*'

" 'I'll go on with Prue!' my father would say.

" 'Me too!' said Fanny.

" 'Not till you've found that button-'ook, Miss Huzzy,' my mother would cry. 'For well I know you've 'ad it.'

"Fanny would shrug her shoulders.

" 'Why 'e carn't 'ave lace-up shoes to 'is feet like any other kid, I *carn't* understand,' my father would remark unhelpfully.

"My mother, ashen white with flurry, would wince and say, 'Lace-up shoes at '*is* age! Let alone that 'e'd break the laces.'

" 'What's that on the chiffoneer?' Fanny would ask abruptly.

" 'Ah! Naturally you know.'

" 'Naturally I use my eyes.'

" 'Tcha! Got your answer ready! Oh, you *wicked* girl!'

"Fanny would shrug her shoulders again and stare out of the window. There was more trouble afoot than a mislaid button-hook between her and my mother. Overnight 'Miss Huzzy' had been abroad long after twilight, a terrible thing from a mother's point of view, as I will make plain to you later.

"My mother, breathing hard, would button my boots in a punitive manner and then off we would go, Prue hanging onto father ahead, Fanny a little apart and scornful, and I trying to wriggle my little

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white-cotton-gloved hand out of my mother's earnest grip.

"We had what was called a 'sitting' at church, a long seat with some hassocks and a kind of little praying-ledge at the back of the seat in front. We filed into our sitting and knelt and rose up, and were ready for the function known as morning service."

§ 4

"And this service again was a strange thing. We read about these churches and their services in our histories and we simplify and idealise the picture; we take everything in the account, as we used to say in that old world, at its face value. We think that the people understood and believed completely the curious creeds of those old-world religions; that they worshipped with a simple ardour; that they had in their hearts a secret system of comforts and illusions which some of us even now try to recover. But life is always more complicated than any account or representation of it can be. The human mind in those days was always complicating and overlaying its ideas, forgetting primary in secondary considerations, substituting repetition and habit for purposive acts, and forgetting and losing its initial intentions. Life has grown simpler for men as the ages have passed because it has grown clearer. We were more complicated in our lives then because we were more confused. And so we sat in our pews on Sunday, in a state of conforming inattention, not really thinking out what we were doing, feeling rather than knowing

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significances and with our thoughts wandering like water from a leaky vessel. We watched the people about us furtively and minutely and we were acutely aware that they watched us. We stood up, we half knelt, we sat, as the ritual of the service required us to do. I can still recall quite vividly the long complex rustle of the congregation as it sat down or rose up in straggling unison.

"This morning service was a mixture of prayers and recitations by the priests—vicar and curate we called them—and responses by the congregation, chants, rhymed hymns, the reading of passages from the Hebrew-Christian Bible, and at last a discourse. Except for this discourse all the service followed a prescribed course set out in a prayer-book. We hopped from one page of the prayer-book to another, and 'finding your place' was a terrible mental exercise for a small boy with a sedulous mother on one side and Prue on the other.

"The service began lugubriously and generally it was lugubrious. We were all miserable sinners, there was no health in us; we expressed our mild surprise that our Deity did not resort to violent measures against us. There was a long part called the Litany in which the priest repeated with considerable gusto every possible human misfortune, war, pestilence, famine, and so on, and the congregation interjected at intervals, 'Good Lord deliver us!' although you might have thought that these were things within the purview of our international and health and food administrators rather than matters for the Supreme Being. Then the officiating priest went on to a series

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of prayers for the Queen, the rulers of the State, heretics, unfortunate people, travellers, and the harvest, all of which I concluded were being dangerously neglected by Divine Providence, and the congregation reinforced the priest's efforts by salvos of 'We beseech Thee to hear us, Good Lord.' The hymns were of very variable quality, but the greater part were effusive praises of our Maker, with frequent false rhymes and bad quantities. We thanked Heaven for our 'blessings,' and that without a thought of irony. Yet you would imagine that a Deity of Infinite Power might easily have excused our gratitude for the precarious little coal and greengrocery business in Cherry Gardens and all my mother's toil and anxieties and my father's worries.

"The general effect of this service beneath its surface adulation of the worshipped God, was to blame Him thoroughly and completely for every human misfortune and to deny the responsibility of mankind for its current muddle and wretchedness. Throughout the land and throughout most of the world, Sunday after Sunday, by chant and hymn and prayer and gesture, it was being dinned into the minds of young people, whenever for a moment the service broke through the surface of their protective instinctive inattention, that mankind was worthless and hopeless, the helpless plaything of a moody, impulsive, vain, and irresistible Being. This rain of suggestion came between their minds and the Sun of Life; it hid the Wonderful from them; it robbed them of access to the Spirit of Courage. But so alien was this doctrine of abasement from the heart of man,

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that for the most part the congregation sat or stood or knelt in rows in its pews repeating responses and singing mechanically, with its minds distracted to a thousand distant more congenial things, watching the deportment of its neighbours, scheming about business or pleasure, wandering in reverie.

"There would come at times into this service, sometimes but not always, parts of another service, the Communion Service. This was the reduced remainder of that Catholic Mass of which we have all learned in our histories. As you know, the world of Christianity was still struggling, nineteen hundred years after Christianity had begun, to get rid of the obsession of a mystical blood sacrifice, to forget a traditional killing of a God-man, that was as old as agriculture and the first beginnings of human settlement. The English State Church was so much a thing of compromise and tradition that in the two churches it had in Cherry Gardens the teaching upon this issue was diametrically opposed; one, the new and showy one, St. Jude's, was devoted to an exaggeration of the importance of the Communion, called it the Mass, called the table on which it was celebrated the Altar, called the Rev. Mr. Snapes the Priest, and generally emphasised the ancient pagan interpretation, while the other, the little old church of St. Osyth, called its priest a Minister, its altar the Lord's Table, and the Communion the Lord's Supper, denied all its mystical importance, and made it merely a memorial of the life and death of the Master. These age-long controversies between the immemorial temple-worship of our race and the new

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life of intellectual and spiritual freedom that had then been dawning in the world for three or four centuries were far above my poor little head as I fretted and 'behaved myself' in our sitting. To my youthful mind the Communion Service meant nothing more than a long addition to the normal tediums of worship. In those days I had a pathetic belief in the magic of prayer, and oblivious of the unflattering implications of my request I would whisper throughout the opening prayers and recitations of the morning: 'Pray God there *won't* be a Communion Service. Pray God there *won't* be a Communion Service.'

"Then would come the sermon, the original composition of the Rev. Mr. Snapes, and the only thing in the whole service that was not set and prescribed and that had not been repeated a thousand times before.

"Mr. Snapes was a youngish pinkish man with pinkish golden hair and a clean-shaven face; he had small chubby features like a cluster of *champignons*, an expression of beatific self-satisfaction, and a plump voice. He had a way of throwing back the ample white sleeve of his surplice when he turned the pages of his manuscript, a sort of upthrow of the posed white hand, that aroused in me one of the inexplicable detestations of childhood. I used to hate this gesture, watch for its coming and squirm when it came.

"The sermons were so much above my head that I cannot now tell what any of them were about. He would talk of things like the 'Comfort of the Blessed

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Eucharist' and the 'Tradition of the Fathers of the Church.' He would discourse too of what he called the Feasts of the Church, though a collection-plate was the nearest approach to feasting we saw. He made much of Advent and Epiphany and Whitsuntide, and he had a common form of transition to modern considerations, 'And we too, dear Brethren, in these latter days have our Advents and our Epiphanies.' Then he would pass to King Edward's proposed visit to Lowcliff or to the recent dispute about the Bishop of Natal or the Bishop of Zanzibar. You cannot imagine how remote it was from anything of moment in our normal lives.

"And then suddenly, when a small boy was losing all hope of this smooth voice ever ceasing, came a little pause and then the blessed words of release: 'And now to God the Father, God the Son——'

"It was over! There was a stir throughout the church. We roused ourselves, we stood up. Then we knelt for a brief moment of apparent prayer and then we scrabbled for hats, coats, and umbrellas, and so out into the open-air, a great pattering of feet upon the pavement, dispersing this way and that, stiff greetings of acquaintances, Prue to the baker's for the Sunday dinner and the rest of us straight home.

"Usually there were delightful brown potatoes under the Sunday joint and perhaps there would be a fruit-pie also. But in the spring came rhubarb, which I hated. It was held to be peculiarly good for me, and I was always compelled to eat exceptionally large helpings of rhubarb tart.

"In the afternoon there was Sunday-school or else

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'Children's Service,' and, relieved of the presence of our parents, we three children went to the school-house or to the church again to receive instruction in the peculiarities of our faith. In the Sunday-school untrained and unqualified people whom we knew in the week-days as shop assistants and an auctioneer's clerk and an old hairy deaf gentleman named Spendilow, collected us in classes and discoursed to us on the ambiguous lives and doings of King David of Israel and of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the misbehaviour of Queen Jezebel and the like topics. And we sang easy hymns in unison. At times our teachers spoke of the Master of Mankind, but they spoke without understanding; they spoke of him as a sort of trickster who worked miracles and achieved jail delivery from the tomb. And so had 'saved' us —in spite of the manifest fact that we were anything but saved. The teaching of the Master was, you know, buried under these tales of Resurrection and Miracles for two thousand years. He was a light shining in the darkness and the darkness knew it not. And of the great past of life, of the races of men and their slow growth in knowledge, of fears and dark superstitions and the dawning victories of truth, of the conquest and sublimation of human passions through the ages, of the divinity of research and discovery, of the latent splendour of our bodies and senses, and the present dangers and possibilities amidst which the continually more crowded masses of our race were then blundering so tragically and yet with such bright gleams of hope and promise, we heard no talk at all. We were given no intimation

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that there was so much as a human community with a common soul and an ultimate common destiny. It would have been scandalous and terrifying to those Sunday-school teachers to have heard any such things spoken about in Sunday-school.

"And mind you," said Sarnac, "there was no better preparation for life in all the world then than the sort of thing I was getting. The older church of St. Osyth was in the hands of the Rev. Thomas Benderton, who dispersed a dwindling congregation by bellowing sermons full of the threat of hell. He had scared my mother to the church of St. Jude by his frequent mention of the devil, and the chief topic of his discourse was the sin of idolatry; he treated it always with especial reference to the robes adopted by Mr. Snapes when he celebrated Holy Communion and to something obscure that he did with small quantities of bread and wine upon his Communion-table.

"Of what the Congregationalists and the Primitive Methodists did and taught in their places of resort, their chapels and Sunday-schools, I do not know very exactly, because my mother would have been filled with a passion of religious terror if ever I had gone near those assemblies. But I know that their procedure was only a plainer version of our church experiences with still less of the Mass and still more of the devil. The Primitive Methodists, I know, laid their chief stress upon the belief that the greater portion of mankind, when once they had done with the privations and miseries of this life, would be tortured exquisitely for ever and ever in hell. I got this very

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clearly because a Primitive Methodist boy a little older than myself conveyed his anxieties to me one day when we had gone for a walk into Cliffstone.

"He was a bent sort of boy with a sniff and he wore a long white woollen comforter; there hasn't been such a figure in the world now for hundreds of years. We walked along the promenade that followed the cliff edge, by the band-stand and by the people lounging in deck-chairs. There were swarms of people in their queer holiday clothes, and behind, rows of the pallid grey houses in which they lodged. And my companion bore his testimony. 'Mr. Molesly 'e says that the Day of Judgment might come any minute—come in fire and glory before ever we get to the end of these Leas. And all them people'd be tried.' . . .

" 'Jest as they are?'

" 'Jest as they are. That woman there with the dog and that fat man asleep in 'is chair and—the policeman.'

"He paused, a little astonished at the Hebraic daring of his thoughts. 'The policeman,' he repeated. 'They'd be weighed and found wanting, and devils would come and torture them. Torture that policeman. Burn him and cut him about. And everybody. Horrible, horrible torture. . . .'

"I had never heard the doctrines of Christianity applied with such particularity before. I was dismayed.

" 'I sh'd 'ide,' I said.

" ''*E*'d see you. '*E*'d see you and tell the devils,' said my little friend. ''*E* sees the wicked thoughts in us now. . . .'"

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"But did people really believe such stuff as that?" cried Sunray.

"As far as they believed anything," said Sarnac. "I admit it was frightful, but so it was. Do you realise what cramped distorted minds grew up under such teaching in our undernourished, infected bodies?"

"Few people could have really believed so grotesque a fairy-tale as hell," said Radiant.

"More people believed than you would think," said Sarnac. "Few people, of course, held it actively for long—or they would have gone mad—but it was in the background of a lot of minds. And the others? The effect of this false story about the world upon the majority of minds was a sort of passive rejection. They did not deny, but they refused to incorporate the idea with the rest of their thoughts. A kind of dead place, a *scar*, was made just where there ought to have been a sense of human destiny, a vision of life beyond the immediate individual life . . .

"I find it hard to express the state of mind into which one grew. The minds of the young had been outraged by these teachings; they were no longer capable of complete mental growth, a possibility had been destroyed. Perhaps we never did really take into ourselves and believe that grotesque fairy-tale, as you call it, about hell but, because of what it had done to our minds we grew up without a living faith and without a purpose. The nucleus of our religious being was this suppressed fear of hell. Few of us ever had it out fairly into the light of day. It was considered to be bad taste to speak of any such things,

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or indeed of any of the primaries of life, either by way of belief or denial. You might allude circuitously. Or joke. Most of the graver advances in life were made under a mask of facetiousness.

"Mentally that world in the days of Mortimer Smith was a world astray. It was astray like a lost dog and with no idea of direction. It is true that the men of that time were very like the men of this time —in their possibilities—but they were unhealthy in mind as well as body, they were adrift and incoherent. Walking as we do in the light, and by comparison simply and directly, their confusion, the tortuous perplexity of their thoughts and conduct is almost inconceivable to us. There is no sort of mental existence left in our world now, to which it can be compared."

§ 5

"I think I mentioned the line of hills, the Downs that bounded the world of my upbringing to the north. What lay beyond them was a matter for wonder and speculation to me long before I was able to clamber to their crests. In summertime the sun set behind them to the north-west often in a glow of gold and splendour, and I remember that among my fancies was a belief that the Day of Judgment was over there and that Celestial City to which Mr. Snapes would some day lead us—in procession, of course, and with a banner.

"My first ascent of this childhood's boundary must have occurred when I was eight or nine. I do not remember with whom I went or any other par-

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ticulars, but I have a very acute memory of my disappointment at looking down a long, very gentle slope and seeing nothing but fields and hedges and groups of large sheep feeding. What I had expected to find I cannot now remember. I seem to have noted only the foreground then, and it must have been after many such excursions that I began to realise the variegated spaciousness of the country to the north. The view indeed went very far; on a clear day we saw blue hills nearly twenty miles away; there were woodlands and parklands, brown ridges of ploughland that became golden ridges of corn in summer-time, village churches amidst clustering greenery, and the gleaming of ponds and lakes. Southward the horizon lifted as the Downs were ascended and the breadth of the sea-belt increased. It was my father drew my attention to that, on the first occasion of our crossing the Downs together.

"'Go as 'igh as you like, 'Arry,' he said, 'and the sea goes up as 'igh. There it is, you see—level with us and we ever so 'igh above Cherry Gardens. And yet it don't *drown'd* Cherry Gardens! And why don't it drown'd Cherry Gardens seeing that it might? Tell me that, 'Arry.'

"I couldn't.

"'Providence,' said my father triumphantly. 'Providence does it. 'Olds back the sea, Thus Far. And over there, see 'ow plain it is! is France.'

"I saw France and it was exceptionally plain.

"'Sometimes you see France and sometimes you don't,' said my father. 'There's a lesson in that too, my boy, for those who care to take it.'

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"It had always been the custom of my father to go out after tea on Sundays, summer and winter alike, and walk right over the Downs to Chessing Hanger, six miles and more away. He went, I knew, to see my Uncle John, Uncle John Julip, my mother's brother, who was gardener to Lord Bramble of Chessing Hanger Park. But it was only when he began to take me with him that I realised that these walks had any other motive than fraternal (in law) affection and the natural desire of a pent-up shopkeeper for exercise. But from the first journey on I knew that the clew to these expeditions lay in the burdens with which we returned to Cherry Gardens. Always there was supper in the cosey little gardener's cottage, and always as we departed we picked up an unobtrusive load of flowers, fruit, or vegetables, celery, peas, aubergines, mushrooms, or what-not, and returned through the dusk or moonlight or darkness or drizzle as the season and the weather might determine to the little shop. And sometimes my father would be silent or whistle softly and sometimes he would improve our journey with a discourse on the wonders of nature, the beauty of goodness, and the beneficence of Providence to man.

"He talked of the moon one moonlight night. 'Look at it, 'Arry,' he said—'a dead world. Like a skull it is, up there, stripped of its soul which is its flesh so to speak and all its trees, which, if you take me, were its 'air and its whiskers—stripped and dead for ever and ever. Dry as a bone. And every one who lived there gone too. Dust and ashes and gone.'

"'Where they gone, farver?' I would ask.

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" 'Gorn to their judgment,' he would explain with gusto. 'Kings and greengroshers, all the lot of 'em, tried and made sheep and goats of, and gone to their bliss or their sufferings, 'Arry. According to their iniquities. Weighed and found wanting.'

"Long pause.

" 'It's a pity,' he said.

" 'What is, farver?' "

" 'Pity it's over. It 'ud be something to look at, them running about up there. Friendly-like it 'ud be. But that's questioning the ways of Providence, that is. I suppose we'd be always staring up and falling over things. . . . You never see a thing in this world, 'Arry, that you think isn't right but what when you come to think it out it isn't wiser than you knew. Providence is as deep as 'E is I and you can't get be'ind 'im. And don't go banging them pears against your side, my boy; they'm Wi'yums, and they won't like it.'

"About the curious habits of animals and the ways and migrations of birds my father would also talk very freely.

" 'Me and you, 'Arry, we walk by the light of reason. We 'ave reasonable minds given us to do it with. But animals and birds and worms and things, they live by Instink; they jus' feel they 'ave to do this or that and they do it. It's Instink keeps the whale in the sea and the bird in the air; but we go where our legs carry us as reason 'as directed. You can't ask an animal Why did you do this? or Why did you do that?—you just '*it* it; but a man you ask and 'e 'as to answer, being a reasonable creature.

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That's why we 'as jails and punishment and are answerable for our sins, 'Arry. Every sin we 'as to answer for, great or small. But an animal don't 'ave to answer. It's innocent. You '*it* it or else you leave it be. . . .'

"My father thought for a time. 'Except for dogs and some *old* cats,' he said. He mused among his memories for a time. 'I've known some *sinful* cats, 'Arry,' he said.

"He would enlarge on the wonders of instinct.

"He would explain how swallows and starlings and storks and suchlike birds were driven by instincts thousands of miles, getting drowned on the way and dashed to pieces against lighthouses. 'Else they'd freeze and starve where they was, 'Arry,' said my father. And every bird knew by instinct what sort of nest it had to build, no one ever showing it or telling it. Kangaroos carried their young in pouches by instinct, but man being a reasonable creature made perambulators. Chickens ran about by instinct directly they were born; not like human children, who had to be carried and taken care of until reason came. And jolly lucky that was for the chicken, 'For 'ow a 'en would carry them,' said my father, 'I *carn't* imagine.'

"I remember that I put my father into a difficulty by asking him why Providence had not given birds an instinct against beating themselves against lighthouses and moths against the gas-jet and the candle-flame. For in the room over the shop on a summer's night it was quite unpleasant to read a book because of the disabled flies and moths that fell scorched upon

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its pages. 'It's to teach 'em some lesson,' said my father at last. 'But what it's to teach them, 'Arry, I don't rightly know.'

"And sometimes he would talk, with illustrative stories, of ill-gotten gold never staying with the getter, and sometimes he would talk of murders—for there were still many murders in the world—and how they always came out, 'hide them as you may.' And always he was ready to point out the goodness and wisdom, the cleverness, forethought, ingenuity, and kindliness of Providence in the most earnest and flattering manner.

"With such high discourse did we enliven our long trudges between Cherry Gardens and Chessing Hanger, and my father's tone was always so exalted that with a real shock I presently came to realise that every Sunday evening we were in plain English stealing and receiving stolen produce from Lord Bramble's gardens. Indeed, I cannot imagine how we should have got along without that weekly raid. Our little home at Cherry Gardens was largely supported by my father's share in the profits of these transactions. When the produce was too good and costly for Cherry Gardens' needs, he would take it down to Cliffstone and sell it to a friend there who had a fashionable trade."

Sarnac paused.

"Go on," said Radiant. "You are making us believe in your story. It sounds more and more as if you had been there. It is so circumstantial. Who was this Lord Bramble? I have always been curious about Lords."

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§ 6

"Let me tell my story in my own way," said Sarnac. "If I answer questions I shall get lost. You are all ready to ask a hundred questions already about things I have mentioned and points familiar to me but incomprehensible to you because our world has forgotten them, and if I weaken towards you you will trail me away and away further and further from my father and my Uncle Julip. We shall just talk about manners and customs and about philosophy and history. I want to tell my story."

"Go on with your story," said Sunray.

"This Uncle John Julip of mine, although he was my mother's brother, was a cynical, opinionated man. He was very short and fatter than was usual among gardeners. He had a smooth white face and a wise self-satisfied smile. To begin with, I saw him only on Sundays and in white shirt-sleeves and a large straw hat. He made disparaging remarks about my physique and about the air of Cherry Gardens every time he saw me. His wife had been a dissenter of some sort and had become a churchwoman under protest. She too was white-faced and her health was bad. She complained of pains. But my Uncle John Julip disparaged her pains because he said they were not in a reasonable place. There was stomachache and backache and heartburn and the wind, but her pains were neither here nor there; they were therefore pains of the imagination and had no claim upon our sympathy.

"When I was nearly thirteen years old my father

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and uncle began planning for me to go over to the Chessing Hanger gardens and be an under-gardener. This was a project I disliked very greatly; not only did I find my uncle unattractive, but I thought weeding and digging and most of the exercises of a garden extremely tiring and boring. I had taken very kindly to reading—I like languages—I inherited something of my father's loquaciousness, and I had won a special prize for an essay in my school. This had fired the most unreasonable ambitions in me—to write, to write in newspapers, possibly even to write books. At Cliffstone was what was called a public library to which the householders of Cliffstone had access and from which members of their families could borrow books—during holidays I would be changing my book almost every day—but at Chessing Hanger there were no books at all. My sister Fanny encouraged me in my reading; she too was a voracious reader of novels, and she shared my dislike of the idea that I should become a gardener.

"In those days, you must understand, no attempt was made to gauge the natural capacity of a child. Human beings were expected to be grateful for any opportunity of 'getting a living.' Parents bundled their children into any employment that came handy, and so most people followed occupations that were misfits, that did not give full scope for such natural gifts as they possessed and which commonly cramped or crippled them. This in itself diffused a vague discontent throughout the community, and inflicted upon the great majority of people strains and restraints and suppressions that ate away their pos-

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sibility of positive happiness. Most youngsters as they grew up, girls as well as boys, experienced a sudden tragic curtailment of freedom and discovered themselves forced into some unchosen specific drudgery from which it was very difficult to escape. One summer holiday came, when, instead of enjoying delightful long days of play and book-devouring in Cliffstone, as I had hitherto done, I was sent off over the hills to stay with Uncle John Julip, and 'see how I got on' with him. I still remember the burning disgust, the sense of immolation, with which I lugged my little valise up the hills and over the Downs to the gardens.

"This Lord Bramble, Radiant, was one of the landlords who were so important during the reigns of the Hanoverian Kings up to the time of Queen Victoria the Good. They owned large areas of England as private property; they could do what they liked with it. In the days of Victoria the Good and her immediate predecessors these landlords who had ruled the Empire through the House of Lords made a losing fight for predominance against the new industrialists, men who employed great masses of people for their private gain in the iron and steel industries, cotton and wool, beer and shipping, and these again gave way to a rather different type who developed advertisement and a political and financial use of newspapers and new methods of finance. The old landholding families had to adapt themselves to the new powers or be pushed aside. Lord Bramble was one of those pushed aside, an indignant, old-fashioned, impoverished landowner. He was in a slough of debts.

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His estates covered many square miles; he owned farms and woodlands, a great white uncomfortable house, far too roomy for his shrunken means, and two square miles of park. The park was greatly neglected, it was covered with groups of old trees infested and rotten with fungus; rabbits and moles abounded, and thistles and nettles. There were no young trees there at all. The fences and gates were badly patched; and here and there ran degenerating roads. But boards threatening trespassers abounded, and notices saying 'NO THOROUGHFARE.' For it was the dearest privilege of the British landlord to restrict the free movements of ordinary people, and Lord Bramble guarded his wilderness with devotion. Great areas of good land in England in those days were in a similar state of picturesquely secluded dilapidation."

"Those were the lands where they did the shooting," said Radiant.

"How did you know?"

"I have seen a picture. They stood in a line along the edge of a copse, with brown-leaved trees and a faint smell of decay and a touch of autumnal dampness in the air, and they shot lead pellets at birds."

"They did. And the beaters—I was pressed into that service once or twice—drove the birds, the pheasants, towards them. Shooting-parties used to come to Chessing Hanger, and the shooting used to go on day after day. It was done with tremendous solemnity."

"But why?" asked Willow.

"Yes," said Radiant. "Why did men do it?"

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"I don't know," said Sarnac. "All I know is that at certain seasons of the year the great majority of the gentlemen of England who were supposed to be the leaders and intelligence of the land, who were understood to guide its destinies and control its future, went out into the woods or on the moors to massacre birds of various sorts with guns, birds bred specially at great expense for the purpose of this slaughter. These noble sportsmen were marshalled by gamekeepers; they stood in rows, the landscape was animated with the popping of their guns. The highest in the land participated gravely in this national function and popped with distinction. The men of this class were in truth at just that level above imbecility where the banging of a gun and the thrill of seeing a bird swirl and drop is inexhaustibly amusing. They never tired of it. The bang of the gun seems to have been essential to the sublimity of the sensations of these sportsmen. It wasn't mere killing, because in that case these people could also have assisted in killing the sheep and oxen and pigs required by the butchers, but this sport they left to men of an inferior social class. Shooting birds on the wing was the essential idea. When Lord Bramble was not killing pheasants or grouse he shot in the south of France at perplexed pigeons with clipped wings just let out of traps. Or he hunted—not real animal-hunting, not a fair fight with bear or tiger or elephant in a jungle, but the chasing of foxes—small stinking red animals about the size of water-spaniels, which were sedulously kept from extinction for this purpose of hunting; they were hunted across culti-

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vated land, and the hunters rode behind a pack of dogs. Lord Bramble dressed himself up with extreme care in a red jacket and breeches of pigskin to do this. For the rest of his time the good man played a card game called bridge, so limited and mechanical that any one nowadays would be able to read out the results and exact probabilities of every deal directly he saw his cards. There were four sets of thirteen cards each. But Lord Bramble, who had never learned properly to count up to thirteen, found it full of dramatic surprises and wonderful sensations. A large part of his time was spent in going from race-course to race-course; they raced a specially flimsy breed of horses in those days. There again he dressed with care. In the illustrated papers in the public library I would see photographs of Lord Bramble, with a silk hat—a top hat, *you* know—cocked very much on one side 'in the Paddock' or 'snapped with a lady-friend.' There was much betting and knowingness about this horse-racing. His Lordship dined with comparative intelligence, erring only a little on the excessive side with the port. People still smoked in those days, and Lord Bramble would consume three or four cigars a day. Pipes he thought plebeian and cigarettes effeminate. He could read a newspaper but not a book, being incapable of sustained attention; after dinner in town he commonly went to a theatre or music-hall where women could be seen, more or less undraped. The clothing of that time filled such people as Lord Bramble with a coy covetousness for nakedness. The normal beauty of the human body was a secret and a mystery, and half

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the art and decoration of Chessing Hanger House played stimulatingly with the forbidden vision.

"In that past existence of mine I took the way of life of Lord Bramble as a matter of course, but now that I recall it I begin to see the enormous absurdity of these assassins of frightened birds, these supporters of horses and ostlers, these peepers at feminine thighs and shoulder-blades. Their women sympathised with their gunmanship, called their horses 'the dears,' cultivated dwarfed and crippled breeds of pet dogs, and yielded the peeps expected of them.

"Such was the life of the aristocratic sort of people in those days. They set the tone of what was considered a hard, bright, healthy life. The rest of the community admired them greatly and imitated them to the best of its ability. The tenant farmer, if he could not shoot pheasants, shot rabbits, and if he could not bet twenty-pound notes at the fashionable race-meeting at Goodwood, put his half-crown upon his fancy at the Cliffstone races on Byford Downs—with his hat cocked over one eye as much like Lord Bramble and King Edward as possible.

"Great multitudes of people there were whose lives were shaped completely by the habits and traditions of these leaders. There was my Uncle John Julip for example. His father had been a gardener and his grandfather before him, and almost all his feminine ancestry and his aunts and cousins were, as the phrase went, 'in service.' None of the people round and about the down-stairs of Chessing Hanger had natural manners; all were dealing in some more or less plausible imitation of some real lady or gen-

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tleman. My Uncle John Julip found his ideal in a certain notorious Sir John ffrench-Cuthbertson. He sought similar hats and adopted similar attitudes.

"He bet heavily in imitation of his model, but he bet less fortunately. This my aunt resented, but she found great comfort in the way in which his clothing and gestures understudied Sir John.

" 'If only he'd been *born* a gentleman,' said my aunt, 'everything 'ud a-been all right. 'E's a natural sportsman; 'e eats 'is 'eart out in the gardens.'

"He certainly did not work his heart out. I do not remember ever seeing him dig or carry or wheel a barrow. My memory of him in the garden is of one who stood, one hand gripping a hoe as if it were a riding-whip under the tail of his coat, and the other gesticulating or pointing out what had to be done.

"To my father and myself he was always consciously aristocratic, bearing himself in the grand manner. This he did, although my father was a third as tall again as he was and far more abundantly intelligent. He always called my father 'Smith.'

" 'What are you going to do with that boy, Smith?' he would ask. 'Seems to me, wants feedin' up and open air.'

"My father, who secretly shared the general view that my Uncle John under happier stars would have made a very fine gentleman, always tried, as he expressed it, 'to keep his end up' by calling my uncle 'John.' He would answer, 'Carn't say as I've rightly settled that, John. 'E's a regular bookworm nowadays, say what you like to him.'

" 'Books!' said my Uncle John Julip with a con-

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centrated scorn of books that was essentially English. 'You can't get anything out of books that 'asn't been put into them. It stands to reason. There's nothing in books that didn't first come out of the sile. Books is flattened flowers at the best, as 'is Lordship said at dinner only the other night.'

"My father was much struck by the idea. 'That's what I tell 'im,' he said—inexactly.

" 'Besides, who's going to put anything into a book that's worth knowing?' said my uncle. 'It's like expecting these here tipsters in the papers to give away something worth keeping to theirselves. Not it!'

" ''Arf the time,' my father agreed, 'I expect they're telling you lies in these books of yours and larfing at you. All the same,' he reflected with an abrupt lapse from speculation to reverence, 'there's One Book, John.'

"He had remembered the Bible.

" 'I wasn't speaking of that, Smith,' said my uncle sharply. 'Sufficient unto the day— I mean, that's Sunday Stuff.'

"I hated my days of trial in the gardens. Once or twice during that unpleasant month I was sent with messages up to the kitchen and once to the pantry of the great house. There I said something unfortunate for my uncle, something that was to wipe out all possibility of a gardener's career for me.

"The butler, Mr. Petterton, was also a secondary aristocrat, but in a larger and quite different manner from that of my uncle. He towered up and looked down the slopes of himself, his many chins were pink

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and stabbed by his collar, and his hair was yellow and very shiny. I had to deliver into his hands a basket of cucumbers and a bunch of blue flowers called borage used in the mixing of summer drinks. He was standing at a table talking respectfully to a foxy little man in tweeds who was eating bread-and-cheese and drinking beer; this I was to learn later was Lord Bramble's agent. There was also a young footman in this room, a subterranean room it was with heavily barred windows, and he was cleaning silver plate with exemplary industry.

" 'So you brought this from the gardens,' said Mr. Petterton with fine irony. 'And may I ask why Mr.—why *Sir John* did not condescend to bring them himself?'

" ''E tole me to bring them,' I said.

" 'And pray who may you be?'

" 'I'm 'Arry Smith,' I said. 'Mr. Julip, 'e's my uncle.'

" 'Ah!' said Mr. Petterton and was struck by a thought. 'That's the son of Smith who's a sort of greengrosher in Cliffstone.'

" 'Cherry Gardens, sir, we live at.'

" 'Haven't seen you over here before, my boy. Have you ever visited us before?'

" 'Not 'ere, sir.'

" 'Not here! But you come over to the gardens perhaps?'

" 'Nearly every Sunday, sir.'

" 'Exactly. And usually I suppose, Master Smith, there's something to carry back?'

" 'Almost always, sir.'

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" 'Something a bit heavy?'

" 'Not *too* heavy,' I said bravely.

" 'You see, sir?' said Mr. Petterton to the foxy little man in tweeds.

"I began to realise that something unpleasant was in the wind when this latter person set himself to cross-examine me in a rapid, snapping manner. What was it I carried? I became very red about the face and ears and declared I did not know. Did I ever carry grapes? I didn't know. Pears? I didn't know. Celery? I didn't know.

" 'Well, *I* know,' said the agent. '*I* know. So why should I ask you further? Get out of here.'

"I went back to my uncle and said nothing to him of this very disagreeable conversation, but I knew quite well even then that I had not heard the last of this matter."

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CHAPTER THE THIRD

MISFORTUNES COME UPON THE SMITH FAMILY

§ 1

"And now," said Sarnac, "I have to tell of a tornado of mischances that broke up our precarious little home at Cherry Gardens altogether. In that casual, planless, overpopulated world there were no such things as security or social justice as we should understand these words nowadays. It is hard for us to imagine its universal ramshackle insecurity. Think of it. The whole world floated economically upon a cash-and-credit system that was fundamentally fictitious and conventional, there were no adequate protections against greedy abuses of those monetary conventions, no watch kept over world-production and world-consumption, no knowledge of the variations of climate year by year, and the fortunes not only of individuals but of states and nations fluctuated irrationally and uncontrollably. It was a world in which life was still almost as unsafe for men and women as life remains to-day for a field-mouse or a midge, which is never safe from one moment to another in a world of cats and owls and swallows and the like. People were born haphazard, gladdened, distressed, glorified or killed haphazard, and no one was ready for either their births or their deaths.

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Sudden death there is still in the world, a bright adventure—that lightning yesterday might have killed all or any of us, but such death is a rare thing and a clean thing. There is none of the distressful bearing-down to death through want, anxiety, and illness ill-tended and misunderstood, that was the common experience in the past. And one death does not devastate a dozen or more lives as deaths often did in the old days. A widow in the old days had lost not only her lover but her 'living.' Yet life is full of subtle compensations. We did not feel our endless dangers in those days. We had a wonderful power of disregard until the chances struck us.

"All children," said Sarnac, "start with an absolute confidence in the permanence of the things they find about them. Disillusionment about safety postulates clear-headedness. You could not realise your dangers unless you were clear-headed, and if you were clear-headed you had the fortitude to face your dangers. That old world was essentially a world of muddle-headed sophisticated children, blind to the universal catastrophe of the top-heavy and collapsing civilisation in which they played their parts. They thought that life was generally safe in a world of general insecurity. Misfortune astonished every one in those days, though I cannot understand why they should have been astonished at any misfortune.

"The first blow fell without notice about six weeks after I had come back from Chessing Hanger to my last half-year of schooling before I became a gardener. It was late afternoon and I was home from school. I

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was down-stairs reading a book and my mother was clearing away tea and grumbling at Fanny who wanted to go out. The lamp was lit, and both I and my father who was having what he called 'a bit of a read at the noosepaper' were as close up to its insufficient light as we could get. We heard the shop-bell jangle overhead.

" 'Drat it!' said my father. 'Whaddey want this time o' day?'

"He removed his spectacles. He had bought a pair haphazard at a pawnbroker's shop and always used them when he read. They magnified his large mild eyes very greatly. He regarded us protestingly. What *did* they want? We heard the voice of Uncle John Julip calling down the staircase:

" 'Mort'mer,' he said in a voice that struck me as unusual. I had never heard him call my father anything but Smith before.

" 'That you, John?' said my father standing up.

" 'It's me. I want to speak to you.'

" 'Come down and 'ave some tea, John,' cried my father at the bottom of the stairs.

" 'Somethin' to tell you. You better come up here. Somethin' serious.'

"I speculated if it could be any misdeed of mine he had come over about. But my conscience was fairly clear.

" 'Now whatever can it be?' asked my father.

" 'You better go up and arst 'im,' my mother suggested.

"My father went.

"I heard my uncle say something about, 'We're

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busted. We've bin give away and we're busted,' and then the door into the shop closed. We all listened to the movements above. It sounded as though Uncle Julip was walking up and down as he talked. My sister Fanny in her hat and jacket flitted unobtrusively up the stairs and out. After a time Prue came in; she had been helping teacher tidy up, she said, though I knew better. Then after a long interval my father came down-stairs alone.

"He went to the hearth-rug like one in a trance and stood, staring portentously in order to make my mother ask what was the matter. 'Why hasn't John come down for a bit of tea or something? Where's he gone, Morty?'

"''E's gorn for a van,' said my father; 'that's where 'e's gone. For a van.'

"'Whatever for?' asked my mother.

"'For a removal,' said my father. 'That's what for.'

"'Removal?'

"'We got to put 'em up 'ere for a night or so.'

"'Put 'em up! Who?'

"''Im and Adelaide. He's coming to Cherry Gardens.'

"'You done mean, Morty, 'e's lost 'is situation?'

"'I do. S'Lordship turned against 'im. Mischief 'as been made. Spying. And they managed to get 'im out of it. Turned out 'e is. Tole to go.'

"'But surely they give 'im notice!'

"'Not a bit of it. S'Lordship came down to the gardens 'ot and strong. "'Ere," 'e said, "get out of it!" Like that 'e said it. "You thank your lucky stars," 'e said, "I ain't put the 'tecs on to you and

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your snivellin' brother-in-law." Yes. S'Lordship said that.'

" 'But what did 'e mean by it, Morty?'

" 'Mean. 'E meant that certain persons who shall be nameless 'ad put a suspicion on John, told lies about 'im and *watched* 'im. Watched 'im they did and me. They've drawed me into it, Martha. They've drawed in young 'Arry. They've made up a tale about us. . . . I always said we was a bit too regular. . . . There it is, 'e ain't a 'ead gardener any more. 'E ain't going to 'ave references give 'im; 'e ain't ever going to 'ave another regular job. 'E's been betrayed and ruined, and there we are!'

" 'But they say 'e took sompthing?—my brother John took sompthing?'

" 'Surplus projuce. What's been a perquisite of every gardener since the world began. . . .'

"I sat with burning ears and cheeks pretending not to hear this dreadful conversation. No one knew of my own fatal share in my uncle's downfall. But already in my heart, like the singing of a lark after a thunder-storm, was arising a realisation that now I might never become a gardener. My mother expressed her consternation brokenly. She asked incredulous questions which my father dealt with in an oracular manner. Then suddenly my mother pounced savagely on my sister Prue, reproaching her for listening to what didn't concern her instead of washing up."

"This is a very circumstantial scene," said Radiant.

"It was the first great crisis of my dream life," said Sarnac. "It is very vivid in my memory. I can

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see again that old kitchen in which we lived and the faded table-cloth and the paraffin lamp with its glass container. I think if you gave me time I could tell you everything there was in that room."

"What's a hearth-rug?" asked Firefly suddenly. "What sort of thing was your hearth-rug?"

"Like nothing on earth to-day. A hearth-rug was a sort of rug you put in front of a coal-fire, next to the fender, which prevented the ashes creeping into the room. This one my father had made out of old clothes, trousers and suchlike things, bits of flannel and bits of coarse sacking, cut into strips and sewn together. He had made it in the winter evenings as he sat by the fireside, sewing industriously."

"Had it any sort of pattern?"

"None. But I shall never tell my story, if you ask questions. I remember that my uncle, when he had made his arrangements about the van, came in for a bread-and-cheese supper before he walked back to Chessing Hanger. He was very white and distressed-looking, Sir John had all faded away from him; he was like a man who had been dragged out from some hiding-place, he was a very distressed and pitiful man exposed to the light. I remember my mother asked him, ''Ow's Adelaide taking it?'

"My uncle assumed an expression of profound resignation. 'Starts a new pain,' he said bitterly. 'At a time like this.'

"My father and mother exchanged sympathetic glances.

" 'I tell you—,' said my uncle, but did not say what he told us.

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"A storm of weak rage wrung him. 'If I knew who'd done all this,' he said. 'That—that *cat* of a 'ousekeeper—cat I call her—she's got some one what wanted my place. If she and Petterton framed it up——'

"He struck the table, but half-heartedly.

"My father poured him out some beer.

" 'Ugh!' said my uncle and emptied the glass.

" 'Got to face it,' said my uncle, feeling better. 'Got to go through with it. I suppose with all these tuppenny-apenny villa gardens 'ere there's jobbing work to be got. I'll get something all right. . . . Think of it! Jobbing gardener! Me—a Jobber! By the Day! It'll set up some of these 'ere season-ticket clerks no end to 'ave Lord Bramble's gardener dragging a lawn-mower for them. I can see 'em showing me to their friends out of the window. Bin 'ead-gardener to a Lord, they'll say. Well, well——!'

" 'It's a come-down,' said my father when my uncle had departed. 'Say what you like, it's a come-down.'

"My mother was preoccupied with the question of their accommodation. 'She'll 'ave to 'ave the sofa in the sitting-room I expect, and 'e'll 'ave a bit of a shake-up on the floor. Don't suppose she'll like it. They'll 'ave their own bedding of course. But Adelaide isn't the sort to be comfortable on a sofa.'

"Poor woman! she was not. Although my uncle and my father and mother all pointed out to her the untimeliness and inconsiderateness of her conduct she insisted upon suffering so much that a doctor had to

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be called in. He ordered a prompt removal to a hospital for an immediate operation.

"Those were days," said Sarnac, "of the profoundest ignorance about the body. The ancient Greeks and the Arabs had done a little anatomy during their brief phases of intellectual activity, but the rest of the world had only been studying physiology in a scientific way for about three hundred years. People in general still knew practically nothing of vital processes. As I have told you they even bore children by accident. And living the queer lives they did, with abnormal and ill-prepared food in a world of unchecked infections, they found the very tissues of the bodies going wrong and breaking out into the queerest growths. Parts of these bodies would cease to do anything but change into a sort of fungoid proliferation——"

"Their bodies were like their communities!" said Radiant.

"The same sort of thing. They had tumours and cancers and suchlike things in their bodies and Cherry Garden urban-districts on their countrysides. But these growths!—they are dreadful even to recall."

"But surely," said Willow, "in the face of such a horrible possibility which might afflict any one, all the world must have wanted to push on with physiological research."

"Didn't they see," said Sunray, "that all these things were controllable and curable?"

"Not a bit of it," said Sarnac. "They didn't positively *like* these tumours and cancers, but the community was too undervitalised to put up a real fight

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against these miseries. And every one thought that he or she would escape—until it had them. There was a general apathy. And the priests and journalists and so forth, the common opinion-makers, were jealous of scientific men. They did their best to persuade people that there was nothing hopeful in scientific research, they did all they could to discredit its discoveries, to ridicule its patient workers and set people against them."

"That's what puzzles me most," said Sunray.

"Their mental habits were different. Their minds hadn't been trained to comprehensive thinking. Their thinking was all in compartments and patches. The morbid growths in their bodies were nothing to the morbid growths in their minds."

§ 2

"My aunt in the hospital, with that lack of consideration for my uncle that had always distinguished her, would neither recover nor die. She was a considerable expense to him and no help; she added greatly to his distresses. After some days and at the urgent suggestion of my mother he removed himself from our sitting-room to a two-roomed lodging in the house of a bricklayer in an adjacent street; into this he crowded his furniture from Chessing Hanger, but he frequented my father's shop and showed a deepening attachment to my father's company.

"He was not so successful a jobbing gardener as he had anticipated. His short contemptuous way

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with his new clients in the villas of Cliffstone failed to produce the respect he designed it to do; he would speak of their flower-beds as 'two penn'orths of all-sorts' and compare their gardens to a table-cloth or a window-box; and instead of welcoming these home-truths, they resented them. But they had not the manliness to clear up this matter by a good straight-forward argument in which they would have had their social position very exactly defined; they preferred to keep their illusions and just ceased to employ him. Moreover, his disappointment with my aunt produced a certain misogyny, which took the form of a refusal to take orders from the wives of his patrons when they were left in sole charge of the house. As many of these wives had a considerable influence over their husbands, this too injured my uncle's prospects. Consequently there were many days when he had nothing to do but stand about our shop to discuss with my father as hearer the defects of Cliffstone villa-residents, the baseness of Mr. Petterton and that cat ('*cat*' he called her) and the probable unworthiness of any casual customer who strayed into range of comment.

"Nevertheless my uncle was resolved not to be defeated without a struggle. There was a process which he called 'keeping his pecker up,' which necessitated, I could not but perceive, periodic visits to the Wellington public house at the station corner. From these visits he returned markedly more garrulous, more like Sir John ffrench-Cuthbertson, and exhaling a distinctively courageous smell when he coughed or breathed heavily. After a time, as his business

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difficulties became more oppressive, my father participated in these heartening excursions. They broadened his philosophical outlook but made it, I fancied, rather less distinct.

"My uncle had some indefinite sum of money in the Post-Office Savings Bank, and in his determination not to be beaten without a struggle he did some courageous betting on what he called 'certs' at the race-meetings on Byford Downs."

" 'Cert' beats me altogether," said Radiant.

"A 'cert' was a horse that was certain to win and never did. A 'dead cert' was an extreme form of the 'cert.' You cannot imagine how the prospects and quality of the chief race-horses were discussed throughout the land. The English were not a nomadic people, only a minority could ride horses, but everybody could bet on them. The King was, so to speak, head of the racing just as he was head of the army. He went in person to the great race-meetings as if to bless and encourage the betting of his subjects. So that my Uncle John Julip was upheld by the most loyal and patriotic sentiments when he wasted his days and his savings on Byford Downs. On several of these occasions my father went with him and wrestled with fortune also. They lost generally, finally they lost most of what they had, but on one or two occasions, as my uncle put it, they 'struck it rich.' One day they pitched upon a horse called Rococo, although it was regarded as the very reverse of a 'cert' and the odds were heavy against it, but an inner light seems to have guided my uncle; it came in first and they won as much as thirty-five

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pounds, a very large sum for them. They returned home in a state of solemn exaltation, which was only marred by some mechanical difficulty in pronouncing the name of the winning horse. They began well but after the first syllable they went on more like a hen that had laid an egg than like rational souls who had spotted a winner. 'Rococococo' they would say or 'Rococococococo.' Or they would end in a hiccup. And though each tried to help the other out, they were not really helpful to each other. They diffused an unusually powerful odour of cigars and courage. Never had they smelled so courageous. My mother made them tea.

"'*Tea!*' said my uncle meaningly. He did not actually refuse the cup she put before him, but he pushed it a little aside.

"For some moments it seemed doubtful whether he was going to say something very profound or whether he was going to be seriously ill. Mind triumphed over matter. 'Knew it would come, Marth,' he said. 'Knew allong it would come. Directly I heard name. Roc—' He paused.

"'Cococo,' clucked my father.

"'Cococococo—hiccup,' said my uncle. 'I knew our 'our 'ad come. Some men, Smith, some men 'ave that instink. I would 'ave put my shirt on that 'orse, Marth—only. . . . They wouldn't 'ave took my shirt.'

"He looked suddenly very hard at me. 'They wouldn't 'ave took it, 'Arry,' he said. 'They done *take* shirts! No,' he said and became profoundly thoughtful.

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"Then he looked up. 'Thirty-six to one against,' he said. 'We'd 'ave 'ad shirts for a lifetime.'

"My father saw it from a wider, more philosophical point of view. 'Might never 'ave been spared to wear 'em out,' he said. 'Better as it is, John.'

" 'And mind you,' said my uncle; 'this is only a beginning. Once I start spotting 'em I go on spotting 'em—mind that. This Roc——'

" 'Cococo.'

" 'Cococococo—whatever it is, s'only a beginning. S'only the firs'-ray-sunlight 'v' a glorious day.'

" 'In that case,' said my mother, ' 't'seems to me some of us might have a share.'

" 'Certainly,' said my uncle, 'certainly, Marth.' And amazingly he handed me a ten-shilling piece—in those days we had gold coins and this was a little disc of gold. Then he handed Prue the same. He gave a whole sovereign, a golden pound, to Fanny and a five-pound Bank of England note to my mother.

" 'Hold on!' said my father warningly.

" 'Tha's a' right, Smith,' said my uncle with a gesture of princely generosity. '*You* share, seventeen pounce ten. Six pounce ten leaves 'leven. Lessee. One 'n' five six—seven—eight—nine—ten—'leven. *Here!*'

"My father took the balance of the money with a puzzled expression. Something eluded him. 'Yers,' he said; 'but——'

"His mild eye regarded the ten-shilling piece I still held exposed in my hand. I put it away immediately but his gaze followed my hand towards my

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pocket until it met the table-edge and got into difficulties.

" ''Thout the turf, Smith, there wouldn't be such a country as England,' said my Uncle John, and rounded his remarks off with, 'Mark my words.'

"My father did his best to do so."

§ 3

"But this hour of success was almost the only bright interlude in a steady drift to catastrophe. In a little while I gathered from a conversation between my mother and my father that we were 'behind with the rent.' That was a quarterly payment we paid to the enterprising individual who owned our house. I know all that sounds odd to you, but that is the way things were done. If we got behind with our rent the owner could turn us out."

"But where?" asked Firefly.

"Out of the house. And we weren't allowed to stay in the street. But it is impossible for me to explain everything of that sort in detail. We were behind with the rent and catastrophe impended. And then my sister Fanny ran away from us.

"In no other respect," said Sarnac, "is it so difficult to get realities over to you and make you understand how I thought and felt in that other life than in matters of sex. Nowadays sex is so simple. Here we are free and frank men and women; we are trained so subtly that we scarcely know we are trained, not to be stupidly competitive, to control jealous impulses, to live generously, to honour the young. Love

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is the link and flower of our choicest friendships. We take love by the way as we take our food and our holidays, the main thing in our lives is our creative work. But in that dark tormented world in which I passed my dream-life, all the business of love was covered over and netted in by restraints and put in fetters that fretted and tortured. I will tell you at last how I was killed. Now I want to convey to you something of the reality of this affair of Fanny.

"Even in this world," said Sarnac, "my sister Fanny would have been a conspicuously lovely girl. Her eyes could be as blue as heaven, or darken with anger or excitement so that they seemed black. Her hair had a brave sweep in it always. Her smile made you ready to do anything for her; her laughter made the world clean and brightly clear about her even when it was touched with scorn. And she was ignorant— I can hardly describe her ignorance.

"It was Fanny first made me feel that ignorance was shameful. I have told you the sort of school we had and of our religious teachers. When I was nine or ten and Fanny was fifteen, she was already scolding me for fumbling with the pronunciation of words and particularly with the dropping of the aspirate.

" 'Harry,' she said, 'if you call me Fenny again it's war and pinching. My name's Fanny and your's is Harry and don't you forget it. It's not English we talk in this place; it's mud.'

"Something had stung her. She had been talking with some one with a better accent and she had been humiliated. I think that some one may have mocked her. Some chance acquaintance it must have been,

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some ill-bred superior boy upon the Cliffstone promenade. But Fanny was setting out now to talk good English and make me do the same, with a fury all her own.

" 'If only I could talk French,' she said. 'There's France in sight over there; all its lighthouses winking at us, and all we've got to say is, "*Parley vous Francy*," and grin as if it was a joke.' She brought home a sixpenny book which professed but failed to teach her French. She was reading voraciously, greedily, to know. She read endless novels but also she was reading all sorts of books, about the stars, about physiology (in spite of my mother's wild scoldings at the impropriety of reading a book 'with pictures of yer insides' in it), about foreign countries. Her passion that I should learn was even greater than her own passion for knowledge.

"At fourteen she left school and began to help earn her living. My mother had wanted her to go into 'service,' but she had resisted and resented this passionately. While that proposal was still hanging over her, she went off by herself to Cliffstone and got a job as assistant bookkeeper in a pork-butcher's shop. Before a year was out she was bookkeeper, for her mind was as neat as it was nimble. She earned enough money to buy books and drawing material for me and to get herself clothes that scandalised all my mother's ideas of what was becoming. Don't imagine she 'dressed well,' as we used to say; she experimented boldly, and some of her experiments were cheap and tawdry.

"I could lecture to you for an hour," said Sarnac,

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"of what dress and the money to buy dresses meant for a woman in the old world.

"A large part of my sister's life was hidden from me; it would have been hidden altogether but for the shameless tirades of my mother, who seemed to prefer to have an audience while she scolded Fanny. I can see now that my mother was bitterly jealous of Fanny because of her unexhausted youth, but at the time I was distressed and puzzled at the gross hints and suggestions that flew over my head. Fanny had a maddening way of not answering back or answering only by some minor correction. 'It's horrible, mother,' she would say. 'Not 'orrible.'

"Behind her defensive rudenesses, unlit, unguided, poor Fanny was struggling with the whole riddle of life, presented to her with an urgency no man can fully understand. Nothing in her upbringing had ever roused her to the passion for real work in the world; religion for her had been a grimace and a threat; the one great reality that had come through to her thoughts was love. The novels she read all told of love, elusively, partially, and an impatience in her imagination and in her body leaped to these hints. Love whispered to her in the light and beauty of things about her; in the moonlight, in the spring breezes. Fanny could not but know that she was beautiful. But such morality as our world had then was a morality of abject suppression. Love was a disgrace, a leering fraud, a smutty joke. She was not to speak about it, not to look towards it until some good man—the pork-butcher was a widower and seemed likely to be the good man in her case—came

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and spoke not of love indeed but marriage. He would marry her and hurry home with his prize and tear the wrappings from her loveliness, clumsily, stupidly, in a mood of morbidly inflamed desire."

"Sarnac," said Firefly, "you are horrible."

"No," said Sarnac. "But that world of the past was horrible. Most of the women, your ancestors, suffered such things. And that was only the beginning of the horror. Then came the birth and desecration of the children. Think what a delicate, precious and holy thing a child is! They were begotten abundantly and abnormally, born reluctantly, and dropped into the squalor and infection of an overcrowded disordered world. Bearing a child was not the jolly wholesome process we know to-day; in that diseased society it was an illness, it counted as an illness, for nearly every woman. Which the man her husband resented—grossly. Five or six children in five or six years and a pretty girl was a cross, worried wreck of a woman, bereft of any shred of spirit or beauty. My poor scolding worried mother was not fifty when she died. And one saw one's exquisite infants grow up into ill-dressed, undernourished, ill-educated children. Think of the agony of shamed love that lay beneath my poor mother's slaps and scoldings! The world has forgotten now the hate and bitterness of disappointed parentage. That was the prospect of the moral life that opened before my sister Fanny; that was the antistrophe to the siren song of her imagination.

"She could not believe this of life and love. She experimented with love and herself. She was, my

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mother said, 'a bold, bad girl.' She began I know with furtive kissings and huggings in the twilight, with boy schoolfellows, with clerks and errand boys. Some gleam of nastiness came into these adventures of the dusk and made her recoil. At any rate she became prim and aloof to Cherry Gardens, but only because she was drawn to the bands and lights and prosperity of Cliffstone. That was when she began to read and correct her accent. You have heard of our old social stratifications. She wanted to be like a lady; she wanted to meet a gentleman. She imagined there were gentlemen who were really gentle, generous, wise and delightful, and she imagined that some of the men she saw on the cliff promenade at Cliffstone were gentlemen. She began to dress herself as I have told.

"There were scores of such girls in every town in Europe," said Sarnac, "turning their backs on their dreadful homes. In a sort of desperate hope.

"When you hear about the moral code of the old world," Sarnac went on, "you are apt to think of it as a rule that every one respected in exactly the same way that you think every one believed the professed religions. We have not so much a moral code now as a moral training, and our religion involves no strain on reason or instincts, and so it is difficult for us to understand the tortuosity and evasions and defiances and general furtiveness and meanness of a world in which nobody really understood and believed the religious creeds, not even the priests, and nobody was really convinced to the bone of the sweetness and justice of the moral code. In that distant age almost

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everybody was sexually angry or uncomfortable or dishonest; the restraints we had did not so much restrain as provoke people. It is difficult to imagine it now."

"Not if you read the old literature," said Sunray. "The novels and plays are pathological."

"So you have my pretty sister Fanny, drawn by impulses she did not understand, flitting like a moth out of our dingy home in Cherry Gardens to the lights, bright lights of hope they seemed to her, about the band-stand and promenade of Cliffstone. And there staying in the lodging-houses and boarding-houses and hotels were limited and thwarted people, keeping holiday, craving for bright excitements, seeking casual pleasures. There were wives who had tired of their husbands and husbands long weary of their wives, there were separated people who could not divorce and young men who could not marry because they could not afford to maintain a family. With their poor hearts full of naughtiness, rebellious suppressions, jealousies, resentments. And through this crowd, eager, provocative, and defenceless, flitted my pretty sister Fanny."

§ 4

"On the evening before Fanny ran away my father and my uncle sat in the kitchen by the fire discoursing of politics and the evils of life. They had both been keeping up their peckers very resolutely during the day and this gave a certain rambling and recurrent quality to their review. Their voices were hoarse,

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and they drawled and were loud and emphatic and impressive. It was as if they spoke for the benefit of unseen listeners. Often they would both be talking together. My mother was in the scullery washing up the tea-things and I was sitting at the table near the lamp trying to do some home-work my teacher had given me, so far as the distraction of this conversation so close to me and occasional appeals to me to 'mark' this or that, would permit. Prue was reading a book called 'Ministering Children' to which she was much addicted. Fanny had been helping my mother until she was told she was more a hindrance than a help. Then she came and stood at my side looking over my shoulder at what I was doing.

" 'What's spoiling trade and ruining the country,' said my uncle, 'is these 'ere strikes. These 'ere strikes reg'ler destrushion—destruction for the country.'

" 'Stop everything,' said my father. 'It stands to reason.'

" 'They didn't ought to be allowed. These 'ere miners'r paid and paid 'andsomely. Paid 'andsomely they are. 'Andsomely. Why! I'd be glad of the pay they get, glad of it. They 'as bulldogs, they 'as pianos. Champagne. Me and you, Smith, me and you and the middle classes generally; we don't get pianos. We don't get champagne. Not-tit. . . .'

" 'Ought to be a Middle Classes Union,' said my father, 'keep these 'ere workers in their places. They 'old up the country and stop trade. Trade! Trade's orful. Why! people come in now and look at what you got and arst the price of this and that. Think twice they do before they spend a sixpence. . . .

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And the coal you're expected to sell nowadays! I tell 'em, if this 'ere strike comes off this 's 'bout the last coal you're likely to see, good *or* bad. Straight out, I tell 'em. . . .'

"'You're not working, Harry,' said Fanny without troubling to lower her voice. 'Don't see how you *can* work, with all this jawing going on. Come out for a walk.'

"I glanced up at her and rose at once. It wasn't often Fanny asked me to go for a walk with her. I put my books away.

"'Going out for a bit of fresh air, mother,' said Fanny, taking her hat down from its peg.

"'No, you don't—not at this time,' cried my mother from the scullery. 'Ain't I said, once and for all——?'

"'It's all right, mother, Harry's going with me. He'll see no one runs away with me and ruins me. . . . You've said it once and for all—times enough.'

"My mother made no further objection, but she flashed a look of infinite hate at my sister.

"We went up-stairs and out into the street.

"For a time we said nothing, but I had a sense that I was going to be 'told things.'

"'I've had about enough of all this,' Fanny began presently. 'What's going to become of us? Father and uncle 've been drinking all day; you can see they're both more than half-screwed. Both of 'em. It's every day now. It's worse and worse and worse. Uncle hasn't had a job these ten days. Father's always with him. The shop's getting filthy. He doesn't sweep it out now for days together.'

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"'Uncle seems to have lost 'eart,' I said, 'since he heard that Aunt Adelaide would have to have that second operation.'

"'Lost heart! He never had any heart to lose.' My sister Fanny said no more of my uncle—by an effort. '*What* a home!' she cried.

"She paused for a moment. 'Harry,' she said, 'I'm going to get out of this. Soon.'

"I asked what she meant by that.

"'Never mind what I mean. I've got a situation. A different sort of situation. . . . Harry, you—you care for me, Harry?'

"Professions of affection are difficult for boys of thirteen. 'I'd do anything for you, Fanny,' I said after a pause. 'You know I would.'

"'And you wouldn't tell on me?'

"'Whad you take me for?'

"'Nohow?'

"'No'ow.'

"'I knew you wouldn't,' said Fanny. 'You're the only one of the whole crew I'll be sorry to leave. I *do* care for you, Harry. Straight, I do. I used to care for mother. Once. But that's different. She's scolded me and screamed at me till it's gone. Every bit of it. I can't help it,—it's gone. I'll think of you, Harry—often.'

"I realised that Fanny was crying. Then when I glanced at her again her tears were over.

"'Look here, Harry,' she said, 'would you do—something—for me. Something—not so very much—and not tell? Not tell afterwards, I mean.'

"'I'd do anything, Fanny.'

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" 'It's not so very much really. There's that little old portmanteau up-stairs. I've put some things in it. And there's a little bundle. I've put 'em both under the bed at the back where even Prying Prue won't think of looking. And to-morrow—when father's out with uncle like he is now every day, and mother's getting dinner down-stairs and Prue's pretending to help her and sneaking bits of bread—if you'd bring those down to Cliffstone to Crosby's side-door. . . . They aren't so very heavy.'

" 'I ain't afraid of your portmanteau, Fanny. I'd carry it more miles than that for you. But where's this new situation of yours, Fanny? and why ain't you saying a word about it at home?'

" 'Suppose I asked you something harder than carrying a portmanteau, Harry?'

" 'I'd do it, Fanny, if I could do it. You know that, Fanny.'

" 'But if it was just to ask no questions of where I am going and what I am going to do. It's—it's a good situation, Harry. It isn't hard work.'

"She stopped short. I saw her face by the yellow light of a street-lamp and I was astonished to see it radiant with happiness. And yet her eyes were shining with tears. What a Fanny it was, who could pass in a dozen steps from weeping to ecstasy!

" 'Oh! I wish I could tell you all about it, Harry,' she said. 'I wish I could tell you all about it. Don't you worry about me, Harry, or what's going to happen to me. You help me, and after a bit I'll write to you. I will indeed, Harry.'

" 'You aren't going to run away and marry?' I

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asked abruptly. 'It'd be like you, Fanny, to do that.'

" 'I won't say I am; I won't say I'm not; I won't say anything, Harry. But I'm as happy as the sunrise, Harry! I could dance and sing. If only I can do it, Harry.'

" 'There's one thing, Fanny.'

"She stopped dead. 'You're not going back on me, Harry?'

" 'No. I'll do what I've promised, Fanny. But—' I had a moral mind. I hesitated. 'You're not doing anything wrong, Fanny?'

"She shook her head and did not answer for some moments. The look of ecstasy returned.

" 'I'm doing the rightest thing that ever I did, Harry, the rightest thing. If only I can do it. And you are a dear to help me, a perfect dear.'

"And suddenly she put her arms about me and drew my face to hers and kissed me and then she pushed me away and danced a step. 'I love all the world to-night,' said Fanny. 'I love all the world. Silly old Cherry Gardens! You thought you'd got me! You thought I'd never get away!'

"She began a sort of chant of escape. 'To-morrow's my last day at Crosby's, my very last day. For ever and ever. Amen. He'll never come too near me again and breathe down my neck. He'll never put his fat hand on my bare arm and shove his face close to mine while he looks at my cash-sheet. When I get to—, wherever I'm going, Harry, I'll want to send him a post-card. Good-bye, Mr. Crosby, good-bye, *dear* Mr. Crosby. For ever and ever. Amen!'

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She made what I knew to be her imitation of Mr. Crosby's voice. 'You're the sort of girl who ought to marry young and have a steady husband older than yourself, my dear. Did I ought? And who said you might call me your dear, dear Mr. Crosby? Twenty-five shillings a week and pawings about and being called *dear*, thrown in. . . . I'm wild to-night, Harry—wild to-night. I could laugh and scream, and yet I want to cry, Harry, because I'm leaving you. And leaving them all! Though why I care I don't know. Poor boozy old father! Poor silly scolding mother! Some day perhaps I may help them if only I get away. And you—you've got to go on learning and improving, Harry, learning, learning. Learn and get out of Cherry Gardens. Never drink. Never let drink cross your lips. Don't smoke. For why should any one smoke? Take the top side of life, for it's easier up there. Indeed, it's easier. Work and read, Harry. Learn French—so that when I come back to see you, we can both talk together.'

" 'You're going to learn French? You're going to France?'

" 'Farther than France. But not a word, Harry. Not a word of it. But I wish I could tell you everything. I can't. I mustn't. I've given my promise. I've got to keep faith. All one has to do in the world is to love and keep faith. But I wish mother had let me help wash up to-night, my last night. She hates me. She'll hate me more yet. . . . I wonder if I'll keep awake all night or cry myself to sleep. Let's race as far as the goods-station, Harry, and then walk home.' "

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§ 5

"The next night Fanny did not come home at all. As the hours passed and the emotion of my family deepened I began to realise the full enormity of the disaster that had come upon our home."

Sarnac paused and smiled. "Never was there so *clinging* a dream. I am still half Harry Mortimer Smith and only half myself. I am still not only in memory but half in feeling also that young English barbarian in the Age of Confusion. And yet all the time I am looking at my story from our point of view and telling it in Sarnac's voice. Amidst this sunshine. . . . Was it really a dream? . . . I don't believe I am telling you a dream."

"It isn't a bit like a dream," said Willow. "It is a story—a real story. Do you think it was a dream?"

Sunray shook her head. "Go on," she said to Sarnac. "Whatever it is, tell it. Tell us how your family behaved when Fanny ran away."

"You must keep in mind that all these poor souls were living in a world of repressions such as seem almost inconceivable now. You think they had ideas about love and sex and duty different from our ideas. We are taught that they had different ideas. But that is not the truth; the truth is that they had no clear, thought-out ideas about such things at all. They had fears and blank prohibitions and ignorances where we have ideas. Love, sex, these were things like the enchanted woods of a fairy-tale. It was forbidden even to go in. And—none of us knew to what extent—Fanny had gone in.

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"So that evening was an evening of alarm deepening to a sort of moral panic for the whole household. It seemed to be required of my family that they should all behave irrationally and violently. My mother began to fret about half past nine. 'I've tole 'er, once for all,' she said, partly to herself but also for my benefit. 'It's got to stop.' She cross-examined me about where Fanny might be. Had she said anything about going on the pier? I said I didn't know. My mother fumed and fretted. Even if Fanny had gone on the pier she ought to be home by ten. I wasn't sent to bed at the usual hour so that I saw my father and uncle come in after the public house had closed. I forget now why my uncle came in to us instead of going straight home, but it was not a very unusual thing for him to do so. They were already disposed to despondency and my mother's white face and anxious tidings deepened their gloom.

" 'Mortimer,' said my mother, 'that gal of yours 'as gone a bit too far. Sarf-pars' ten and she isn't 'ome yet.'

" ''Aven't I tole 'er time after time,' said my father, 'she's got to be in by nine?'

" 'Not times enough you 'aven't,' said my mother, 'and 'ere's the fruit!'

" 'I've tole 'er time after time,' said my father. 'Time after time.' And he continued to repeat this at intervals throughout the subsequent discussion until another refrain replaced it.

"My uncle said little at first. He took up his position on the hearth-rug my father had made and stood there, swaying slightly, hiccupping at inter-

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vals behind his hand, frowning and scrutinising the faces of the speakers. At last he delivered his judgment. 'Somethin'sappened to that girl,' he said. 'You mark my words.'

"Prue had a mind apt for horrors. 'She's bin in 'naccident per'aps,' she said. 'She may've bin knocked down.'

" 'I've tole 'er,' said my father, 'time after time.'

" 'If there's bin 'naccident,' said my uncle sagely. 'Well . . . 'nything ma've 'appened.' He repeated this statement in a louder firmer voice. ''Nything ma've 'appened.'

" ''Stime you went to bed, Prue,' said my mother, ''igh time. 'N' you too, 'Arry.'

"My sister got up with unusual promptitude and went out of the room. I think she must have had an idea then of looking for Fanny's things. I lingered.

" 'May've been 'naccident, may not,' said my mother darkly. 'Sworse things than accidents.'

" 'Whaddyoumean by that, Marth?' asked my uncle.

" 'Never mind what I mean. That girl's worried me times and oft. There's worse things than accidents.'

"I listened thrilled. 'You be orf to bed, 'Arry,' said my mother.

" 'Whaddyou got to do,—simple,' said my uncle, leaning forward on his toes. 'Telephone 'ospitals. Telephone p'lice. Old Crow at the *Wellington* won't-'ve gone to bed. 'Sgot telephone. Good customers. 'E'll telephone. Mark my words—s'snaccident.'

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"And then Prue reappeared at the top of the stairs.

" '*Mother!*' she said in a loud whisper.

" 'You be orf to bed, miss,' said my mother. ''Aven't I got worries enough?'

" 'Mother,' said Prue. 'You know that little old portmantle of Fanny's?'

"Every one faced a new realisation.

" ' 'Sgorn,' said Prue. 'And her two best 'ats and all 'er undercloe's and 'er other dress—gorn too.'

" 'Then she's took 'em!' said my father.

" 'And 'erself!' said my mother.

" 'Time after time I tole her,' said my father.

" 'She's run away!' said my mother with a scream in her voice. 'She's brought shame and disgrace on us! She's run away!'

" 'Some one's got 'old of 'er,' said my father.

"My mother sat down abruptly. 'After all I done for 'er!' she cried, beginning to weep. 'With an honest man ready to marry 'er! Toil and sacrifice, care and warnings, and she's brought us to shame and dishonour! She's run away! That I should 'ave lived to see this day! Fanny!'

"She jumped up suddenly to go and see with her own eyes that Prue's report was true. I made myself as inconspicuous as possible, for I feared some chance question might reveal my share in our family tragedy. But I didn't want to go to bed; I wanted to hear things out.

" ' 'Sanny good my going to the p'lice-station for you on my way 'ome?' my uncle asked.

" 'P'lice!' said my father. 'What good's p'lice? Gaw! If I 'ad my 'ands on that villain's throat—

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I'd p'lice 'im! Bringing shame on me and mine! *P'lice!* 'Ere's Fanny, my little daughter Fanny, beguiled and misled and carried away! . . . I'm 'asty. . . . Yes, John. You go in and tell the p'lice. It's on your way. Tell 'em from me. I won't leave not a single stone unturned so's to bring 'er back.'

"My mother came back whiter than ever. 'It's right enough,' she said. 'She's gorn! She's off. While we stand 'ere, disgraced and shamed, she's away.'

"'Who with?' said my father. 'That's the question, who with? 'Arry, 'ave you ever seen any one about with your sister? Any one 'anging about? Any suspicious-looking sort of dressed-up fancy man? 'Ave you ever?'

"I said I hadn't.

"But Prue had evidence. She became voluble. About a week ago she had seen Fanny and a man coming along from Cliffstone, talking. They hadn't seen her; they had been too wrapped up in each other. Her description of the man was very vague and was concerned chiefly with his clothes; he had worn a blue serge suit and a grey felt hat; he was 'sort of a gentleman-like.' He was a good lot older than Fanny—Prue wasn't sure whether he had a moustache or not.

"My father interrupted Prue's evidence by a tremendous saying which I was to hear him repeat time after time during the next week. 'Sooner'n this sh'd 've 'appened,' said my father, 'I'd 've seen 'er lying dead at my feet—*gladly* I'd 've seen 'er lying dead at my feet!'

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"'Poor girl!' said my uncle. 'Sabitter lesson she 'as before 'er. A *bitter* lesson! Poo' chile! Poo' little Fanny!'

"'Poor Fanny indeed!' cried my mother vindictively, seeing it all, I perceived, from an entirely different angle. 'There she is prancin' about with 'er fancy gentleman now in all 'er fallals; dinners and wine she'll 'ave, flowers she'll 'ave, dresses and everything! Be took about and shown things! Shown off and took to theaytres. The shame of it! And us 'ere shamed and disgraced and not a word to say when the neighbours ask us questions! 'Ow can I look 'em in the face? 'Ow can I look Mr. Crosby in the face? That man was ready to go down on 'is bended knees to 'er and worship 'er. Stout though 'e was. 'E'd 'ave given 'er anything she arst for—in reason. What 'e could see in 'er, I could never make out. But see it 'e did. And now I've got to face 'im and tell 'im I've told 'im wrong. Time after time I've said to 'im—"*You wait. You wait, Mr. Crosby.*" And that 'uzzy!—sly and stuck-up and deep! Gorn!'

"My father's voice came booming over my mother's shrill outcry. 'Sooner'n this should 've 'appened I'd 've seen 'er dead at my feet!'

"I was moved to protest. But for all my thirteen years I found myself weeping. ''Ow d'you *know*,' I blubbered, 'that Fanny 'asn't gone away and got married? 'Ow d'you know?'

"'Married!' cried my mother. 'Why should she run away to be merried! If it was merridge, what was to prevent 'er bringing 'im 'ome and having 'im

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interjuced to us all, right and proper? Isn't her own father and mother and 'ome good enough for her, that she 'as to run away and get merried? When she could 'ave 'ad it 'ere at St. Jude's nice and respectable with your father and your uncle and all of us and white favours and a carriage and all. I wish I could 'ope she was merried! I wish there was a chance of it!'

"My uncle shook his head in confirmation.

" 'Sooner 'n this should 've 'appened,' boomed my father, 'I'd 've seen 'er dead at my feet!'

" 'Last night,' said Prue, 'she said 'er prayers.'

" 'Didn't she *always* say 'er prayers?' asked my uncle, shocked.

" 'Not kneeling down,' said Prue. 'But last night she was kneeling quite a long time. She thought I was asleep but I watched 'er.'

" 'That looks bad,' said my uncle. 'Y'know, Smith; that looks bad. I don't like that praying. Sominous. I don't like it.'

"And then suddenly and violently Prue and I were packed off up-stairs to bed.

"For long the sound of their voices went on; the three of them came up into the shop and stood at the front door while my uncle gradually took leave. What further things they said I did not hear. But I remember that suddenly I had a brilliant idea, suggested no doubt by Prue's scrap of evidence. I got out of bed and knelt down and said, 'Pray God, be kind to my Fanny! Pray God, not to be hard on Fanny! I'm sure she means to get merried. For ever and ever. Amen.' And after putting Providence upon

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his honour, so to speak, in this fashion, I felt less mentally distracted and got back into bed and presently I fell asleep."

Sarnac paused.

"It's all rather puzzling," said Willow.

"It seemed perfectly natural at the time," said Sarnac.

"That pork-butcher was evidently a repulsive creature," said Firefly. "Why didn't they object to him?"

"Because the importance of the marriage ceremonial was so great in those days as to dominate the entire situation. I knew Crosby quite well; he was a cunning-faced, oily-mannered humbug with a bald head, fat red ears, a red complexion, and a paunch. There are no such people in the world now; you must recall some incredible gross old world caricature to imagine him. Nowadays you would as soon think of coupling the life of a girl with some gross heavy animal as with such a man. But that mattered nothing to my father or my mother. My mother I suspect rather liked the idea of the physical humiliation of Fanny. She no doubt had had her own humiliations —for the sexual life of this old world was a tangle of clumsy ignorances and secret shames. Except for my mother's real hostility to Fanny I remember scarcely a scrap of any simple natural feeling, let alone any reasonable thinking, in all that terrible fuss they made. Men and women in those days were so much more complex and artificial than they are now; in a muddled way they were amazingly intricate. You know that monkeys, even young monkeys, have old

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and wrinkled faces, and it is equally true that in the Age of Confusion life was so perplexing and irrational that while we were still children our minds were already old and wrinkled. Even to my boyish observation it was clear that my father was acting the whole time; he was behaving as he imagined he was expected to behave. Never for a moment either when drunk or sober did he even attempt to find out, much less to express, what he was feeling naturally about Fanny. He was afraid to do so. And that night we were all acting—all of us. We were all afraid to do anything but act in what we imagined would be regarded as a virtuous rôle."

"But what were you afraid of?" asked Radiant. "Why did you act?"

"I don't know. Afraid of blame. Afraid of the herd. A habit of fear. A habit of inhibition."

"What was the objection to the real lover?" asked Firefly. "I don't understand all this indignation."

"They guessed rightly enough that he did not intend to marry Fanny."

"What sort of a man was he?"

"I never saw him until many years afterwards. But I will tell you about that when I come to it."

"Was he—the sort of man one could love?"

"Fanny loved him. She had every reason to do so. He took care of her. He got her the education she craved for. He gave her a life full of interest. I believe he was an honest and delightful man."

"They stuck to each other?"

"Yes."

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"Then why didn't he marry her—if it was the custom?"

"He was married already. Marriage had embittered him. It embittered many people. He'd been cheated. He had been married by a woman who pretended love to impose herself upon him and his fortunes and he had found her out."

"Not a very difficult discovery," said Firefly.

"No."

"But why couldn't they divorce?"

"In those days it took two to make a divorce. She wouldn't let him loose. She just stuck on and lived on his loneliness. If he had been poor he would probably have tried to murder her, but as it happened he had the knack of success and he was rich. Rich people could take liberties with marriage restrictions that were absolutely impossible for the poor. And he was, I should guess, sensitive, affectionate and energetic. Heaven knows what sort of mind he was in when he came upon Fanny. He 'picked her up,' as people used to say casually. The old world was full of such pitiful adventures in encounter. Almost always they meant disaster, but this was an exceptional case. Perhaps it was as lucky for him that he met her as it was for her that she met him. Fanny, you know, was one of those people you have to be honest with; she was acute and simple; she cut like a clean sharp knife. They were both in danger and want; the ugliest chances might have happened to her and he was far gone on the way to promiscuity and complete sexual degradation. . . . But I can't go off on Fanny's story. In the end

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she probably married him. They were going to marry. In some way the other woman did at last make it possible."

"But why don't you know for certain?"

"Because I was shot before that happened. If it happened at all."

§ 6

"*No!*" cried Sarnac, stopping a question from Willow by a gesture.

"I shall never tell my story," said Sarnac, "if you interrupt with questions. I was telling you of the storm of misfortunes that wrecked our household at Cherry Gardens. . . .

"My father was killed within three weeks of Fanny's elopement. He was killed upon the road between Cherry Gardens and Cliffstone. There was a young gentleman named Wickersham with one of the new petrol-driven motor-cars that were just coming into use; he was hurrying home as fast as possible, he told the coroner, because his brakes were out of order and he was afraid of an accident. My father was walking with my uncle along the pavement, talking. He found the pavement too restricted for his subject and gestures, and he stepped off suddenly into the roadway and was struck by the car from behind and knocked headlong and instantly killed.

"The effect upon my uncle was very profound. For some days he was thoughtful and sober and he missed a race-meeting. He was very helpful over the details of the funeral.

"'You can't say 'e wasn't prepared, Marth,' he

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told my mother. 'You can't say 'e wasn't prepared. Very moment 'e was killed, 'e 'ad the name 'v' Providence on 'is lips. 'E'd been saying 'ow sorely 'e'd been tried by this and that.'

" ' 'E wasn't the only one,' said my mother.

" ' 'E was saying 'e knew it was only to teach 'im some lesson though he couldn't rightly say what the lesson was. 'E was convinced that everything that 'appened to us, good though it seemed or bad though it seemed, was surely for the best. . . .'

"My uncle paused dramatically.

" 'And then the car 'it 'im,' said my mother, trying to picture the scene.

" 'Then the car 'it 'im,' said my uncle."

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CHAPTER THE FOURTH

THE WIDOW SMITH MOVES TO LONDON

§ 1

"In those days," said Sarnac, "the great majority of the dead were put into coffins and buried underground. Some few people were burned, but that was an innovation and contrary to the very materialistic religious ideas of the time. This was a world in which you must remember people were still repeating in perfect good faith a creed which included 'the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.' Intellectually old Egypt and her dreaming mummies still ruled the common people of the European world. The Christian creeds were themselves mummies from Lower Egypt. As my father said on one occasion when he was discussing this question of cremation: 'It might prove a bit orkward at the Resurrection. Like not 'aving a proper wedding-garment so to speak. . . .

" 'Though there's sharks,' said my father, whose mental transitions were sometimes abrupt. 'And them as 'ave been eat by lions. Many of the best Christian martyrs in their time was eat by lions. . . . They'd *certainly* be given bodies. . . .

" 'And if *one* is given a body why not another?' said my father, lifting mild and magnified eyes in inquiry.

" 'It's a difficult question,' my father decided.

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"At any rate there was no discussion of cremation in his case. We had a sort of hearse-coach with a place for the coffin in front to take him to the cemetery, and in this vehicle my mother and Prue travelled also; my elder brother Ernest, who had come down from London for the occasion, and my uncle and I walked ahead and waited for it at the cemetery gates and followed the coffin to the grave-side. We were all in black clothes, even black gloves, in spite of the fact that we were wretchedly poor.

" ' 'Twon't be my last visit to this place this year,' said my uncle despondently, 'not if Adelaide goes on as she's doing.'

"Ernest was silent. He disliked my uncle and was brooding over him. From the moment of his arrival he had shown a deepening objection to my uncle's existence.

" 'There's luck they say in funerals,' said my uncle presently, striking a brighter note. 'Fi keep my eye open I dessay I may get a 'int of somethin'.'

"Ernest remained dour.

"We followed the men carrying the coffin towards the cemetery chapel in a little procession led by Mr. Snapes in his clerical robes. He began to read out words that I realised were beautiful and touching and that concerned strange and far-away things: 'I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth in Me though he were dead yet shall he live. . . .

" 'I know that my Redeemer liveth and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. . . .

" 'We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. The Lord gave,

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and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord.'

"Suddenly I forgot the bickerings of my uncle and brother and was overcome with tenderness and grief for my father. A rush from my memory of many clumsy kindlinesses, a realisation of the loss of his companionship came to me. I recalled the happiness of many of my Sunday tramps by his side in springtime, on golden summer evenings, in winter when the frost had picked out every twig in the downland hedgerows. I thought of his endless edifying discourses about flowers and rabbits and hillsides and distant stars. And he was gone. I should never hear his voice again. I should never see again his dear old eyes magnified to an immense wonder through his spectacles. I should never have a chance of telling him how I cared for him. And I had never told him I cared for him. Indeed, I had never realised I cared for him until now. He was lying stiff and still and submissive in that coffin, a rejected man. Life had treated him badly. He had never had a dog's chance. My mind leaped forward beyond my years and I understood what a tissue of petty humiliations and disappointments and degradations his life had been. I saw then as clearly as I see now the immense pity of such a life. Sorrow possessed me. I wept as I stumbled along after him. I had great difficulty in preventing myself from weeping aloud."

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§ 2

"After the funeral my brother Ernest and my uncle had a violent wrangle about my mother's future. Seeing that my Aunt Adelaide was for all practical purposes done for, my uncle suggested that he should sell up most of his furniture, 'bring his capital' into the greengrocery business, and come and live with his sister. But my brother declared that the greengrocery business was a dying concern, and was for my mother moving into a house in Cliffstone where she might let lodgings. Prue would be 'no end of a 'elp' in that. At first this was opposed by my uncle and then he came round to the idea on condition that he participated in the benefits of the scheme, but this Ernest opposed, asking rather rudely what sort of help my uncle supposed he would be in a lodging-house. 'Let alone you're never out of bed before ten,' he said, though how he knew of this fact did not appear.

"Ernest had been living in London, working at a garage; he drove hired cars by the month or job, and his respect for the upper classes had somehow disappeared. The dignity of Sir John ffrench-Cuthbertson at second-hand left him cold and scornful. 'You ain't going to 'ave *my* mother to work for you and wait on you, no'ow,' he said.

"While this dispute went on my mother with the assistance of Prue was setting out the cold collation which in those days was the redeeming feature of every funeral. There was cold ham and chicken. My uncle abandoned his position of vantage on my

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father's rag hearth-rug and we all sat down to our exceptional meal.

"For some little time the cold ham and chicken made a sort of truce between my brother Ernest and my uncle, but presently my uncle sighed, drank off his beer and reopened the argument. 'You know I think, Marth,' he said spearing a potato from the dish neatly with his fork, '*you* ought to 'ave some voice in what is going to become of you. Me and this young man from London 've been 'aving a bit of a difference 'bout what you ought to do.'

"I realised abruptly from the expression of my mother's white face, a sort of white intentness which her widow's cap seemed to emphasise, that she was quite determined to have not only some voice but a decisive voice in this matter, but before she could say anything my brother Ernest had intervened.

" 'It's like this, mother,' he said, 'you got to do something, 'aven't you?'

"My mother was about to reply when Ernest snatched a sort of assent from her and proceeded: 'Well, naturally I ask, what sort of thing can you do? And *as* naturally, I answer Lodgings. You carn't expect to go on being a greengrocer, because that ain't natural for a woman, considering the weights and coal that 'as to be lifted.'

" 'And could be lifted easy, with a man to 'elp 'er,' said my uncle.

" 'If 'e *was* a man,' said my brother Ernest with bitter sarcasm.

" 'Meaning—?' asked my uncle with cold hauteur.

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"'What I say,' said brother Ernest. 'No more, no less. So if you take my advice, mother, what you'll do is this. You go down early to-morrow to Cliffstone to look for a suitable little 'ouse big enough to 'old lodgers and not so big as to break your back, and I'll go and talk to Mr. Bulstrode about ending up your tenancy 'ere. Then we'll be able to see where we are.'

"Again my mother attempted to speak and was overborne.

"''Fyou think I'm going to be treated as a nonentity,' said my uncle, 'you're making the biggest mistake you ever made in your life. See? Now you listen to me, Marth——'

"'You shut up!' said my brother. 'Mother's *my* business first and foremost.'

"'*Shut up!*' echoed my uncle. 'Wot *manners!* At a funeral. From a chap not a third my age, a mere 'azardous empty boy! *Shut* up! You shut up yourself, my boy, and listen to those who know a bit more about life than you do. I've smacked your 'ed before to-day. Not once or twice either. And I warmed your 'ide when you stole them peaches—and much good it did you! I oughter 've took yer skin off! You and me 'ave never got on much, and unless you keep a civil tongue in your head we ain't going to get on now.'

"'Seeing which,' said brother Ernest with a dangerous calmness; 'the sooner you make yourself scarce the better for all concerned.'

"'Not to leave my on'y sister's affairs in the 'ands of a cub like you.'

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"Again my mother essayed to speak, but the angry voices disregarded her.

" 'I tell you you're going to get out, and if you can't get out of your own discretion I warn you I'll 'ave to 'elp you.'

" 'Not when you're in mourning,' said my mother. 'Not wearing your mourning. And besides——'

"But they were both too heated now to attend to her.

" 'You're pretty big with your talk,' said my uncle, 'but don't you preshume too far on my forbearance. I've 'ad about enough of this.'

" 'So've I,' said my brother Ernest and stood up.

"My uncle stood up too and they glared at one another.

" 'That's the door,' said my brother darkly.

"My uncle walked back to his wonted place on the hearth-rug. 'Now don't let's 'ave any quarrelling on a day like this,' he said. 'If you 'aven't any consideration for your mother you might at least think of 'Im who has passed beyond. My objec' 'ere is simply to try n'range things so's be best for all. And what I say is this, the ideer of your mother going into a lodging-'ouse alone, without a man's 'elp, is ridiculous, perfectly ridiculous, and only a first-class inconsiderate young fool——'

"My brother Ernest went and stood close to my uncle. 'You've said enough,' he remarked. 'This affair's between me and my mother and your motto is Get Out. See?'

"Again my mother had something to say and again she was silenced. 'This is man's work, mother,' said Ernest. 'Are you going to shift it, uncle?'

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"My uncle faced up to this threat of Ernest. 'I've a juty to my sister——'

"And then I regret to say my brother laid hands on him. He took him by the collar and by the wrist and for a moment the two black-clad figures swayed.

" 'Lea' go my coat,' said my uncle. 'Lea' go my coat-collar.'

"But a thirst for violence had taken possession of Ernest. My mother and Prue and I stood aghast.

" 'Ernie!' cried my mother. 'You forget yourself!'

" ''Sall *right*, mother,' said Ernie, and whirled my uncle violently from the hearth-rug to the bottom of the staircase. Then he shifted his grip from my uncle's wrist to the seat of his tight black trousers and partly lifted and partly impelled him up the staircase. My uncle's arms waved wildly as if he clutched at his lost dignity.

" 'John!' cried my mother. ' 'Ere's your 'at!'

"I had a glimpse of my uncle's eye as he vanished up the staircase. He seemed to be looking for his hat. But he was now offering no serious opposition to my brother Ernest's handling of him.

" 'Give it 'im, 'Arry,' said my mother. 'And there's 'is gloves too.'

"I took the black hat and the black gloves and followed the struggle up-stairs. Astonished and unresisting my uncle was propelled through the front door into the street and stood there panting and regarding my brother. His collar was torn from its stud and his black tie disarranged. Ernest was breathing heavily. 'Now you be orf and mind your own business,' said Ernie.

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"Ernie turned with a start as I pushed past him. ' 'Ere's your 'at and gloves, uncle,' I said, handing them to him. He took them mechanically, his eyes still fixed on Ernest.

" 'And you're the boy I trained to be 'onest,' said my uncle to my brother Ernest, very bitterly. 'Leastways I tried to. You're the young worm I fattened up at my gardens and showed such kindness to! *Gratitood!*'

"He regarded the hat in his hand for a moment as though it was some strange object, and then by a happy inspiration put it on his head.

" 'God 'elp your poor mother,' said my Uncle John Julip. 'God 'elp 'er.'

"He had nothing more to say. He looked up the street and down and then turned as by a sort of necessity in the direction of the *Wellington* public house. And in this manner was my Uncle John Julip on the day of my father's funeral cast forth into the streets of Cherry Gardens, a prospective widower and a most pathetic and unhappy little man. That dingy little black figure in retreat still haunts my memory. Even from the back he looked amazed. Never did a man who has not been kicked look so like a man who has been. I never saw him again. I have no doubt that he carried his sorrows down to the *Wellington* and got himself thoroughly drunk, and I have as little doubt that he missed my father dreadfully all the time he was doing so.

"My brother Ernest returned thoughtfully to the kitchen. He was already a little abashed at his own violence. I followed him respectfully.

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"'You didn't ought t'ave done that,' said my mother.

"'What right 'as 'e to plant 'imself on you to be kept and waited on?'

"''E wouldn't 'ave planted 'imself on me,' my mother replied. 'You get 'eated, Ernie, same as you used to do, and you won't listen to anything.'

"'I never did fancy uncle,' said Ernie.

"'When you get 'eated, Ernie, you seem to forget everything,' said my mother. 'You might 've remembered 'e was my brother.'

"'Fine brother!' said Ernie. 'Why!—who started all that stealing? Who led poor father to drink and bet?'

"'All the same,' said my mother, 'you 'adn't no right to 'andle 'im as you did. And your poor father 'ardly cold in 'is grave!' She wept. She produced a black-bordered handkerchief and mopped her eyes. 'I did 'ope your poor father would 'ave a nice funeral—all the trouble and expense—and now you've spoiled it. I'll never be able to look back on this day with pleasure, not if I live to be a 'undred years. I'll always remember 'ow you spoiled your own father's funeral—turning on your uncle like this.'

"Ernest had no answer for her reproaches. 'He shouldn't 've argued and said what he did,' he objected.

"'And all so unnecessary! All along I've been trying to tell you you needn't worry about me. I don't want no lodging-'ouse in Cliffstone—*with* your uncle or *without* your uncle. I wrote to Matilda Good

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a week come Tuesday and settled everything with 'er—everything. It's settled.'

"'What d'you mean?' asked Ernest.

"'Why, that 'ouse of hers in Pimlico. She's been wanting trusty 'elp for a long time, what with her varicose veins up and down stairs and one thing 'nother, and directly she got my letter about your poor dear father she wrote orf to me. "You need never want a 'ome," she says, "so long as I got a lodger. You and Prue are welcome," she says, "welcome 'elp, and the boy can easy find work up 'ere—much easier than 'e can in Cliffstone." All the time you was planning lodging-'ouses and things for me I was trying to tell you——'

"'You mean it's settled?'

"'It's settled.'

"'And what you going to do with your bits of furniture 'ere?'

"'Sell some and take some. . . .'

"'It's feasible,' said Ernest after reflection.

"'And so we needn't reely 'ave 'ad that—bit of a' argument?' said Ernest after a pause. 'Not me and uncle?'

"'Not on *my* account you needn't,' said my mother.

"'Well—we '*ad* it,' said Ernest after another pause and without any visible signs of regret."

§ 3

"If my dream was a dream," said Sarnac, "it was a most circumstantial dream. I could tell you a hundred details of our journey to London and how we

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disposed of the poor belongings that had furnished our home in Cherry Gardens. Every detail would expose some odd and illuminating difference between the ideas of those ancient days and our own ideas. Brother Ernest was helpful, masterful and irascible. He got a week's holiday from his employer to help mother to settle up things, and among other things that were settled up I believe my mother persuaded him and my uncle to 'shake hands,' but I do not know the particulars of that great scene, I did not see it, it was merely mentioned in my hearing during the train journey to London. I would like to tell you also of the man who came round to buy most of our furniture, including that red-and-black sofa I described to you, and how he and my brother had a loud and heated argument about some damage to one of its legs, and how Mr. Crosby produced a bill, that my mother understood he had forgiven us on account of Fanny long ago. There was also some point about something called 'tenant's fixtures' that led my brother and the landlord, Mr. Bulstrode, to the verge of violence. And Mr. Bulstrode, the landlord, brought accusations of damage done to the fabric of his house that were false, and he made extravagant claims for compensation based thereon and had to be rebutted with warmth. There was also trouble over carting a parcel of our goods to the railway-station, and when we got to the terminus of Victoria in London it was necessary, I gathered, that Ernest should offer to fight a railway-porter—you have read of railway-porters?—before we received proper attention.

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"But I cannot tell you all these curious and typical incidents now because at that rate I should never finish my story before our holidays are over. I must go on now to tell you of this London, this great city, the greatest city it was in the world in those days, to which we had transferred our fates. All the rest of my story, except for nearly two years and a half I spent in the training-camp and in France and Germany during the First World War, is set in the scenery of London. You know already what a vast congestion of human beings London was; you know that within a radius of fifteen miles a population of seven and a half million people were gathered together, people born out of due time into a world unready for them and born mostly through the sheer ignorance of their procreators, gathered together into an area of not very attractive clay country by an urgent need to earn a living, and you know the terrible fate that at last overwhelmed this sinfully crowded accumulation; you have read of west-end and slums, and you have seen the cinema pictures of those days showing crowded streets, crowds gaping at this queer ceremony or that, a vast traffic of clumsy automobiles and distressed horses in narrow unsuitable streets, and I suppose your general impression is a nightmare of multitudes, a suffocating realisation of jostling discomfort and uncleanness and of an unendurable strain on eye and ear and attention. The history we learn in our childhood enforces that lesson.

"But though the facts are just as we are taught they were, I do not recall anything like the distress at London you would suppose me to have felt, and

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I do remember vividly the sense of adventure, the intellectual excitement and the discovery of beauty I experienced in going there. You must remember that in this strange dream of mine I had forgotten all our present standards; I accepted squalor and confusion as being in the nature of things, and the aspects of this city's greatness, the wonder of this limitless place and a certain changing and evanescent beauty, rise out of a sea of struggle and limitation as forgetfully as a silver birch rises out of the swamp that bears it.

"The part of London in which we took up our abode was called Pimlico. It bordered upon the river, and once there had been a wharf there to which ships came across the Atlantic from America. This word Pimlico had come with other trade in these ships; in my time it was the last word left alive of the language of the Algonquin Red Indians, who had otherwise altogether vanished from the earth. The Pimlico wharf had gone, the American trade was forgotten, and Pimlico was now a great wilderness of streets of dingy grey houses in which people lived and let lodgings. These houses had never been designed for the occupation of lodgers; they were faced with a lime-plaster called stucco which made a sort of pretence of being stone; each one had a sunken underground floor originally intended for servants, a door with a portico and several floors above which were reached by a staircase. Beside each portico was a railed pit that admitted light to the front underground room. As you walked along these Pimlico streets these porticoes receded in long perspectives and each portico of

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that endless series represented ten or a dozen misdirected, incomplete and rather unclean inhabitants, infected mentally and morally. Over the grey and dingy architecture rested a mist or a fog, rarely was there a precious outbreak of sunlight; here and there down the vista a grocer's boy or a greengrocer's boy or a fish-hawker would be handing in food over the railings to the subterranean members of a household, or a cat (there was a multitude of cats) would be peeping out of the railings alert for the danger of a passing dog. There would be a few pedestrians, a passing cab or so, and perhaps in the morning a dust-cart collecting refuse filth—set out for the winds to play with in boxes and tin receptacles at the pavement edge—or a man in a uniform cleaning the streets with a hose. It seems to you that it must have been the most depressing of spectacles. It wasn't, though I doubt if I can make clear to you that it wasn't. I know I went about Pimlico thinking it rather a fine place and endlessly interesting. I assure you that in the early morning and by my poor standards it had a sort of grey spaciousness and dignity. But afterwards I found the thing far better done, that London architectural aquatint, in Belgravia and round about Regent's Park.

"I must admit that I tended to drift out of those roads and squares of lodging-houses either into the streets where there were shops and street-cars or southward to the Embankment along the Thames. It was the shops and glares that drew me first as the lights began to fail and, strange as it may seem to you, my memories of such times are rich with beauty.

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We feeble children of that swarming age had I think an almost morbid gregariousness; we found a subtle pleasure and reassurance in crowds and a real disagreeableness in being alone; and my impressions of London's strange interest and charm are I confess very often crowded impressions of a kind this world no longer produces, or impressions to which a crowded foreground or background was essential. But they were beautiful.

"For example there was a great railway-station, a terminus, within perhaps half a mile of us. There was a great disorderly yard in front of the station in which hackney automobiles and omnibuses assembled and departed and arrived. In the late twilight of an autumn day this yard was a mass of shifting black shadows and gleams and lamps, across which streamed an incessant succession of bobbing black heads, people on foot hurrying to catch the trains: as they flitted by the lights one saw their faces gleam and vanish again. Above this foreground rose the huge brown-grey shapes of the station-buildings and the façade of a big hotel, reflecting the flares below and pierced here and there by a lit window; then very sharply came the sky-line and a sky still blue and luminous, tranquil and aloof. And the innumerable sounds of people and vehicles wove into a deep, wonderful and continually varying drone. Even to my boyish mind there was an irrational conviction of unity and purpose in this spectacle.

"The streets where there were shops were also very wonderful and lovely to me directly the too-lucid and expository daylight began to fade. The variously

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coloured lights in the shop-windows which displayed a great diversity of goods for sale splashed the most extraordinary reflections upon the pavements and roadway, and these were particularly gem-like if there had been rain or a mist to wet the reflecting surfaces. One of these streets—it was called Lupus Street, though why it had the name of an abominable skin disease that has long since vanished from the earth I cannot imagine—was close to our new home and I still remember it as full of romantic effectiveness. By daylight it was an exceedingly sordid street, and late at night empty and echoing, but in the magic hours of London it was a bed of black and luminous flowers, the abounding people became black imps and through it wallowed the great shining omnibuses, the ships of the street, filled with light and reflecting lights.

"There were endless beauties along the river-bank. The river was a tidal one held in control by a stone embankment, and the roadway along the embankment was planted at the footway edge with plane-trees and lit by large electric lights on tall standards. These planes were among the few trees that could flourish in the murky London air, but they were unsuitable trees to have in a crowded city because they gave off minute specules that irritated people's throats. That however I did not know; what I did know was that the shadows of the leaves on the pavements thrown by the electric glares made the most beautiful patternings I had ever seen. I would walk along on a warm night rejoicing in them, more particularly if now and then a light breeze set them dancing and quivering.

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"One could walk from Pimlico along this Thames Embankment for some miles towards the east. One passed little black jetties with dangling oil-lamps; there was a traffic of barges and steamers on the river altogether mysterious and romantic to me; the frontages of the houses varied incessantly, and ever and again were cleft by crowded roadways that brought a shining and twinkling traffic up to the bridges. Across the river was a coming and going of trains along a railway viaduct; it contributed a restless *motif* of clanks and concussion to the general drone of London, and the engines sent puffs of fire-lit steam and sudden furnace-glows into the night. One came along this Embankment to the great buildings at Westminster, by daylight a pile of imitation Gothic dominated by a tall clock-tower with an illuminated dial, a pile which assumed a blue dignity with the twilight and became a noble portent standing at attention, a forest of spears, in the night. This was the Parliament House, and in its chambers a formal King, an ignoble nobility and a fraudulently elected gathering of lawyers, financiers, and adventurers took upon themselves, amidst the general mental obscurity of those days, a semblance of wisdom and empire. As one went on beyond Westminster along the Embankment came great grey-brown palaces and houses set behind green gardens, a railway bridge and then two huge hotels, standing high and far back, bulging with lit windows; there was some sort of pit or waste beneath them, I forget what, very black, so that at once they loomed over one and seemed magically remote. There was an

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Egyptian obelisk here, for all the European capitals of my time, being as honest as magpies and as original as monkeys, had adorned themselves with obelisks stolen from Egypt. And farther along was the best and noblest building in London, St. Paul's Cathedral; it was invisible by night, but it was exceedingly serene and beautiful on a clear, blue, windy day. And some of the bridges were very lovely with gracious arches of smutty grey stone, though some were so clumsy that only night could redeem them.

"As I talk I remember," said Sarnac. "Before employment robbed me of my days I pushed my boyish explorations far and wide, wandering all day and often going without any meal, or, if I was in pocket, getting a bun and a glass of milk in some small shop for a couple of pennies. The shop-windows of London were an unending marvel to me; and they would be to you too if you could remember them as I do; there must have been hundreds of miles of them, possibly thousands of miles. In the poorer parts they were chiefly food-shops and cheap clothing-shops and the like, and one could exhaust their interest, but there were thoroughfares like Regent Street and Piccadilly and narrow Bond Street and Oxford Street crammed with all the furnishings of the life of the lucky minority, the people who could spend freely. You will find it difficult to imagine how important a matter the mere buying of things was in the lives of those people. In their houses there was a vast congestion of objects neither ornamental nor useful; *purchases* in fact; and the women spent large portions of every week-day in buying things, clothes,

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table-litter, floor-litter, wall-litter. They had no work; they were too ignorant to be interested in any real thing; they had nothing else to do. That was the world's reward, the substance of success—purchases. Through them you realised your well-being. As a shabby half-grown boy I pushed my way among these spenders, crowds of women dressed, wrapped up rather, in layer after layer of purchases, scented, painted. Most of them were painted to suggest a health-flushed face, the nose powdered a leprous white.

"There is one thing to be said for the old fashion of abundant clothing; in that crowded jostling world it saved people from actually touching each other.

"I would push through these streets eastward to less prosperous crowds in Oxford Street and to a different multitude in Holborn. As you went eastward the influence of women diminished and that of young men increased. Cheapside gave you all the material for building up a twentieth-century young man from the nude. In the shop-windows he was disarticulated and priced: hat five and sixpence, trousers eighteen shillings, tie one and six; cigarettes tenpence an ounce; newspaper a halfpenny, cheap novel sevenpence; on the pavement outside there he was put together and complete and the cigarette burning, under the impression that he was a unique immortal creature and that the ideas in his head were altogether his own. And beyond Cheapside there was Clerkenwell with curious little shops that sold scarcely anything but old keys or the parts of broken-up watches or the like detached objects. Then there

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were great food-markets at Leadenhall Street and Smithfield and Covent Garden, incredible accumulations of raw stuff. At Covent Garden they sold fruits and flowers that we should think poor and undeveloped, but which every one in those days regarded as beautiful and delicious. And in Caledonian Market were innumerable barrows where people actually bought and took away every sort of broken and second-hand rubbish, broken ornaments, decaying books with torn pages, second-hand clothing—a wonderland of litter for any boy with curiosity in his blood. . . .

"But I could go on talking endlessly about this old London of mine and you want me to get on with my story. I have tried to give you something of its endless, incessant, multitudinous glittering quality and the way in which it yielded a thousand strange and lovely effects to its changing lights and atmosphere. I found even its fogs, those dreaded fogs of which the books tell, romantic. But then I was a boy at the adventurous age. The fog was often very thick in Pimlico. It was normally a soft creamy obscurity that turned even lights close at hand into luminous blurs. People came out of nothingness within six yards of you, were riddles and silhouettes before they became real. One could go out and lose oneself within ten minutes of home and perhaps pick up with a distressed automobile driver and walk by his headlights, signalling to him where the pavement ended. That was one sort of fog, the dry fog. But there were many sorts. There was a sort of yellow darkness, like blackened bronze, that hovered about

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you and did not embrace you and left a clear nearer world of deep browns and blacks. And there was an unclean wet mist that presently turned to drizzle and made every surface a mirror."

"And there was daylight," said Willow, "sometimes surely there was daylight."

"Yes," Sarnac reflected; "there was daylight. At times. And sometimes there was quite a kindly and redeeming sunshine in London. In the spring, in early summer or in October. It did not blaze, but it filled the air with a mild warmth, and turned the surfaces it lit not indeed to gold but to amber and topaz. And there were even hot days in London with skies of deep blue above, but they were rare. And sometimes there was daylight without the sun. . . .

"Yes," said Sarnac and paused. "At times there was a daylight that stripped London bare, showed its grime, showed its real ineffectiveness, showed the pitiful poverty of intention in its buildings, showed the many-coloured billstickers' hoardings for the crude and leprous things they were, brought out the shabbiness of unhealthy bodies and misfitting garments. . . .

"Those were terrible, veracious, unhappy days. When London no longer fascinated but wearied and offended, when even to an uninstructed boy there came some intimation of the long distressful journey that our race had still to travel before it attained even to such peace and health and wisdom as it has to-day."

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§ 4

Sarnac stopped short in his talk and rose with something between a laugh and a sigh. He stood facing westward and Sunray stood beside him.

"This story will go on for ever if I digress like this. See! the sun will be behind that ridge in another ten minutes. I cannot finish this evening, because most of the story part still remains to be told."

"There are roast fowls with sweet corn and chestnuts," said Firefly. "Trout and various fruits."

"And some of that golden wine?" said Radiant.

"Some of that golden wine."

Sunray, who had been very still and intent, awoke. "Sarnac dear," she said, slipping her arm through his. "What became of Uncle John Julip?"

Sarnac reflected. "I forget," he said.

"Aunt Adelaide Julip died?" asked Willow.

"She died quite soon after we left Cherry Gardens. My uncle wrote, I remember, and I remember my mother reading the letter at breakfast like a proclamation and saying, 'Seems if she was reely ill after all.' If she had not been ill then surely she had carried malingering to the last extremity. But I forget any particulars about my uncle's departure from this world. He probably outlived my mother, and after her death the news of his end might easily have escaped me."

"You have had the most wonderful dream in the world, Sarnac," said Starlight, "and I want to hear the whole story and not interrupt, but I am sorry not to hear more of your Uncle John Julip."

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"He was such a perfect little horror," said Firefly. . . .

Until the knife-edge of the hills cut into the molten globe of the sun, the holiday-makers lingered watching the shadows in their last rush up to the mountain crests, and then, still talking of this particular and that in Sarnac's story, the six made their way down to the guest-house and supper.

"Sarnac was shot," said Radiant. "He hasn't even begun to get shot yet. There is no end of story still to come."

"Sarnac," asked Firefly, "you weren't killed in the Great War, were you? Suddenly? In some inconsequent sort of way?"

"Not a bit of it," said Sarnac. "I am really beginning to be shot in this story though Radiant does not perceive it. But I must tell my story in my own fashion."

At supper what was going on was explained to the master of the guest-house. Like so many of these guest-house-keepers he was a jolly, convivial, simple soul, and he was amused and curious at Sarnac's alleged experience. He laughed at the impatience of the others; he said they were like children in a Children's Garden, agog for their go-to-bed fairy-tale. After they had had coffee they went out for a time to see the moonlight mingle with the ruddy afterglow above the peaks: and then the guest-master led the way in, made up a blazing pinewood fire and threw cushions before it, set out an after-dinner wine, put out the lights and prepared for a good night's story-telling.

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Sarnac remained thoughtful, looking into the flames until Sunray set him off again by whispering: "Pimlico?"

§ 5

"I will tell you as briefly as I can of the household in Pimlico where we joined forces with my mother's old friend, Matilda Good," said Sarnac; "but I confess it is hard to be reasonably brief when one's mind is fuller of curious details than this fire is of sparks."

"That's excellent!" said the master of the guest-house. "That's a perfect story-teller's touch!" and looked brightly for Sarnac to continue.

"But we are all beginning to believe that he has *been there*," whispered Radiant, laying a restraining hand on the guest-master's knee. "And he"—Radiant spoke behind his hand—"he believes it altogether."

"Not *really?*" whispered the guest-master. He seemed desirous of asking difficult questions and then subsided into an attention that was at first a little constrained and presently quite involuntary.

"These houses in Pimlico were part of an enormous proliferation of houses that occurred between a hundred years and seventy years before the Great War. There was a great amount of unintelligent building enterprise in those decades in London, and all the building, as I have already told you I think, was done on the supposition that there was an endless supply of fairly rich families capable of occupying a big house and employing three or four domestic servants. There were underground kitchens and servants'

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rooms, there was a dining-room and master's study at the ground level, there was a 'drawing-room floor' above, two rooms convertible into one by a device known as folding doors, and above this were bedrooms on a scale of diminishing importance until one came to attics without fireplaces in which the servants were to sleep. In large areas and particularly in Pimlico, these fairly rich families of the builder's imagination, with servile domestics all complete, never appeared to claim the homes prepared for them, and from the first, poorer people, for whom of course no one had troubled to plan houses, adapted these porticoed plaster mansions to their own narrower needs. My mother's friend, Matilda Good, was a quite typical Pimlico householder. She had been the trusted servant of a rich old lady in Cliffstone who had died and left her two or three hundred pounds of money——"

The master of the guest-house was endlessly perplexed and made an interrogative noise.

"Private property," said Radiant very rapidly. "Power of bequest. Two thousand years ago. Made a Will, you know. Go on, Sarnac."

"With that and her savings," said Sarnac, "she was able to become tenant of one of these Pimlico houses and to furnish it with a sort of shabby gentility. She lived herself in the basement below and in the attic above, and all the rest of the house she had hoped to let in pieces, floor by floor or room by room to rich or at least prosperous old ladies, and to busy herself in tending them and supplying their needs and extracting a profit and living out of them,

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running up and down her staircase as an ant runs up and down a rose-stem tending its aphides. But old ladies of any prosperity did not come into Pimlico. It was low and foggy, the children of its poorer streets were rough and disrespectful, and it was close to the river-embankment over which rich useless old ladies naturally expected to be thrown. So Matilda Good had to console herself with less succulent and manageable lodgers.

"I remember Matilda Good giving us an account of those she had as we sat in her front down-stairs room having a kind of tea supper on the evening of our arrival. Ernest had declined refreshment and departed, his task as travel conductor done, but there were my mother and Prue and myself, all in dingy black and all a little stiff and strange, thawing slowly to tea and hot buttered toast with a poached egg each, our mouths very full and our eyes and ears very attentive to Matilda Good.

"She appeared quite a grand lady to me that night. She was much larger than any lady I had hitherto been accustomed to; she had a breadth and variety of contour like scenery rather than a human being; the thought of her veins being varicose, indeed of all her anatomy being varicose and fantastic, seemed a right and proper one. She was dressed in black with outbreaks of soiled lace, a large gold-rimmed brooch fastened her dress at the neck and she had a gold chain about her, and on her head was what was called a 'cap,' an affair like the lower shell of an oyster inverted, made of layers of dingy lace and adorned with a black velvet bow and a gold buckle. Her face had

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the same landscape unanatomical quality as her body; she had a considerable moustache, an overhung slightly mischievous mouth and two different large dark-grey eyes with a slightly vertical cast in them and very marked eyelashes. She sat sideways. One eye looked at you rather sidelong, the other seemed to watch something over your head. She spoke in a whisper which passed very easily into wheezy, not unkindly laughter.

" 'You'll get no end of exercise on these stairs, my dear,' she said to sister Prue, 'no end of exercise. There's times when I'm going up to bed when I start counting 'em, just to make sure that they aren't taking in lodgers like the rest of us. There's no doubt this 'ouse will strengthen your legs, my dear. Mustn't get 'em too big and strong for the rest of you. But you can easy manage that by carrying something, carrying something every time you go up or down. Ugh—ugh. That'll equalise you. There's always something to carry, boots it is, hot water it is, a scuttle of coals or a parcel.'

" 'I expect it's a busy 'ouse,' said my mother, eating her buttered toast like a lady.

" 'It's a toilsome 'ouse,' said Matilda Good. 'I don't want to deceive you, Martha; it's a toilsome 'ouse.

" 'But it's a 'ouse that keeps full,' said Matilda Good, challenging me with one eye and ignoring me with the other. 'Full I am now, and full I've been since last Michaelmas, full right up; two permanents I've 'ad three years on end and those my best floors. I've something to be thankful for, all things con-

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sidered, and now I got 'elp of a sort that won't slide down-stairs on a tea-tray or lick the ground-floor's sugar lump by lump, knowing the lumps was counted and never thinking that wetness tells, the slut! we'll get on swimmingly. The sluts I've 'ad, Martha! These board-schools turn them out a 'orror to God and a danger to men. I can't tell you. It's a comfort to set eyes on any girl as I can see at once 'as been brought up to take a pride in 'erself. 'Ave a little of that watercress with your toast, my dear. It'll do that complexion of yours good.'

"My sister Prue reddened and took some watercress.

" 'The drawing-room floor,' said Matilda Good, 'is a lady. It isn't often you keep a lady three years, what with the things they know and the things they fancy they know, but I've kept her. She's a real lady —born. Bumpus 'er name is—Miss Beatrice Bumpus. I don't know whether you'll like her, Martha, when you set eyes on her, but she's got to be studied. She's a particular sort of Warwickshire Bumpus that hunts. She'll ask you if you want the vote, Martha, directly she sees you're a fresh face. It isn't *a* vote or *any* old vote she asks you to want, it's *the* vote.' The whispering voice grew thicker and richer and a persuasive smile spread far and wide over the face. 'If it's all the same to you, Martha, you better say you do.'

"My mother was sipping her fourth cup of tea. 'I don't know,' she said, 'as I altogether 'old with this vote.'

"Matilda Good's great red hands which had been

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lying apparently detached in her lap, produced short arms and lace cuffs and waved about in the air, waving my mother's objections away. ''Old with it on the drawing-room floor,' wheezed Matilda. ''Old with it on the drawing-room floor.'

" 'But if she arsts questions?'

" 'She won't wait to have them answered. It won't be difficult, Martha. I wouldn't put you into a position of difficulty, not if I could 'elp it. You just got to 'old with 'er quietly and she'll do the rest.'

" 'Mother,' said Prue, who was still too overawed by Matilda Good to address her directly. 'Mother, what *is* this here vote?'

" 'Vote for Parliament, my dear,' said Matilda Good.

" 'When shall we get it?' asked my mother.

" 'You won't get it,' said Matilda Good.

" 'But if we did, what should we have to do with it, like?'

" '*Nothing*,' said Matilda Good with bottomless contempt. 'All the same it's a great movement, Martha, and don't you forget it. And Miss Bumpus she works night and day, Martha, gets 'it about by policemen, and once she was actually in prison a night, getting you and me the vote.'

" 'Well, it shows a kind nature,' said my mother.

" 'My ground floor's a gentleman. The worst of 'im is the books there are to dust, books *and* books. Not that 'e ever reads 'em much. . . . Very likely you'll 'ear 'im soon playing his pianola. You can 'ear it down 'ere almost as if you were inside it. Mr. Plaice, 'e's an Oxford gentleman and he works at a

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firm of publishers, Burrows and Graves they're called; a very 'igh-class firm I'm told—don't go in for advertisements or anything vulgar. He's got photographs of Greek and Latin statues and ruins round above his book-shelves and shields with College arms. Naked some of the statues are, but for all that none of them are anything but quite nice and genteel, *quite* genteel. You can see at once he's a University gentleman. And photographs of Switzerland he's got. He goes up mountains in Switzerland and speaks the language. He's a smoker; sets with a pipe writing or reading evening after evening and marking things with his pencil. Manuscripts he reads and proofs. Pipes he has with a pipe for every day in the week, and a smoker's outfit all made with bee-utiful stone, serpentine they call it, sort of blood-shot green it is; tobacco-jar and a pot for feathers to clean his pipes, little places for each day's pipe, everything all of stone; it's a regular monument. And when you're dusting it—remember if you drop this here serpentine it breaks like earthenware. Most of the maids I've 'ad 'ave 'ad a chip at that tobacco-graveyard of 'is. And mind you—' Matilda Good leaned forward and held out her hand to arrest any wandering of my mother's attention. *''E don't 'old with Votes for Women!* See?'

" 'One's got to be careful,' said my mother.

" 'One has. He's got one or two little whims, has Mr. Plaice, but if you mind about them he don't give you much trouble. One of 'is whims is to pretend to 'ave a bath every morning. Every morning he 'as a shallow tin bath put out in his room and a

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can of cold water and a sponge, and every morning he pretends to splash about in it something fearful and makes a noise like a grampus singing a hymn—calls it 'is Tub, he does; though it's a lot more like a canary's saucer. Says he must have it as cold as possible even if there's ice on it. Well——'

"Matilda Good performed a sort of landslide over the arm of her chair, her head nodded, and the whisper became more confidential. 'He *doesn't,*' wheezed Matilda Good.

" 'You mean he doesn't get into the bath?'

" 'Not-tit,' said Matilda Good. 'You can see when he's really been in by his wet footmarks on the floor. Not 'arf the time does he have that bath. Per'aps 'e used to have it when he was a young man at College. I wonder. But it's always got to be put out and the can always got to be lugged up and poured out and poured away again, and nobody's ever to ask if he'd like the chill taken off. Not the sort of thing you ask a University gentleman. No. All the same,' said Matilda Good, 'all the same I've caught 'im pouring his hand and shaving water into that water-splash in the winter, after he'd been going dirty for a week. But have a can of warm? Have the chill taken off his water? Not Tim! It's curious, ain't it? But that's one of his whims.

" 'I sometimes think,' said Matilda Good still more extravagantly confidential, 'that perhaps he climbs all those mountains in Switzerland same way as he takes his bath. . . .'

"She rolled back large portions of her person into a less symmetrical attitude. 'This Mr. Plaice you

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must know,' she said, 'has a voice between a clergyman's and a schoolmaster's, sort of hard and superior, and when you say anything to him he's apt to make a noise, "Arrr . . . Arrr . . . Arrr," a sort of slow neighing it is, as though he doesn't think much of you but doesn't want to blame you for that and anyhow can't attend to you properly. You mustn't let it annoy you. It's the way he's been brought up. And he has a habit of using long condescending sort of words to you. And calling you insulting names. He'll think nothing of calling you "My worthy Abigail," or "Come in, my rosy-fingered Aurora," when you knock in the morning. Just as though a girl could keep 'er 'ands pink and clean with all these fires to light! He'll ask of me "How's the Good Matilda? How's honest Matilda Good today?"—sort of fiddling about with your name. Of course he don't mean to be rude; it's just his idea of being pleasant and humorous, and making you feel you're being made fun of in a gentle sort of way instead of being terrible like he might be, and—seeing he's good pay and very little trouble, Martha—it's no good getting offended with him. All the same I can't help thinking at times of how he'd get on if I answered 'im back, and which of us two would be left alive if we had a fair match of it, making fun of one another. The things—the things I could say! But that,' said Matilda Good, breaking into an ingratiating smile of extraordinary extent and rolling one eye at me—'is just a dream. It isn't the sort of dream to indulge in in this 'ouse. I've rehearsed it a bit, I admit. Says 'e—but never mind what 'e says or

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what I says back to him. . . . Ugh! Ugh! . . . He's good pay and regular, my dear; he ain't likely to lose his job and he ain't likely ever to get another, and in this Vale anyhow we got to put up with 'is whims. And——'

"Matilda Good spoke as one who confesses to a weakness. 'His pianola cheers me up at times. I will say that for 'im. It's almost the only noise one hears from him. Except when he takes off his boots.

" 'Well, up above my drawing-room at present is my second-floor front, the Reverend Moggeridge and his good lady. They been here five months now and they seem like taking root.'

" 'Not a clergyman?' said my mother respectfully.

" 'A very poor clergyman,' said Matilda, 'but a clergyman. So much to our credit, Martha. Oh! but they're poor old things! Poor old things! Been curate or something all his life in some out-of-the-world place. And lost his job. Somebody had the heart to turn 'em out. Or something happened. I wonder. 'E's a funny old man. . . .

" 'He dodders off nearly every Saturday on supply, they call it, to take services somewhere over the Sunday, and like as not he comes back with his cold worse than ever, sniffing and sniffing. It's cruel how they treat these poor old parsons on supply, fetch 'em from the station in open traps they do, in the worst of weather, and often the rectory teetotal without a drop of anything for a cold. Christianity! I suppose it's *got* to be. . . . The two of them just potter about up-stairs and make shift to get their meals, such as they are, over the bedroom fire. She

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even does a bit of her own washing. Dragging about. Poor old things! Old and forgotten and left about. But they're very little trouble and there it is. And as I say—anyhow—he's a clergyman. And in the other room at the back there's a German lady who teaches—well, anything she can persuade any one to be taught. She hasn't been here more than a month, and I don't know whether I like her or not, but she seems straight enough and she keeps herself pretty much to herself and when one has a room to let one can't always pick and choose.

" 'And that's the lot, my dear. To-morrow we'll have to begin. You'll go up presently and settle into your two rooms at the top. There's a little one for Mortimer and a rather bigger one for you and Prue. There's pegs and curtains for your things. I'm next door to you. I'll give you my little old alarum-clock and show you all about it and to-morrow at seven sharp down we come, you and me and Prue. My Lord, I suppose, has the privilege of his sex and doesn't come down until half-past! Oh! I'm a suffragette, Martha,—same as Miss Bumpus. First thing is this fire, and unless we rake the ashes well forward the boiler won't heat. Then there's fires and boots, dust the front rooms and breakfasts: Mr. Plaice at eight sharp and mind it is, and Miss Bumpus at eight-thirty, and get away with Mr. Plaice if you can first because of the shortness of tablespoons. Five I got altogether and before I lost my last third floor back I 'ad seven. 'E was a nice lot; 'e was. The old people get their own breakfast when they want it, and Frau Buchholz has a tray, just bread and

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butter and tea, whenever we can manage it after the drawing-room's been seen to. That's the programme, Martha.'

" 'I'll do my best, 'Tilda,' said my mother. '*As* you know.'

" 'Hullo!' said Matilda indicating the ceiling, 'the concert's going to begin. That bump's him letting down the pianola pedals.'

"And then suddenly through the ceiling into our subterranean tea-party came a rush of clavier notes —I can't describe it.

"One of the few really good things of that age was the music. Mankind perfected some things very early; I suppose precious stonework and goldwork have never got very much beyond the levels it reached under the Seventeenth Dynasty in Egypt, ages ago, and marble statuary came to a climax at Athens before the conquests of Alexander. I doubt if there has ever come very much sweeter music into the world than the tuneful stuff we had away back there in the Age of Confusion. This music Mr. Plaice was giving us was some bits of Schumann's *Carnival* music; we hear it still played on the clavier; and it was almost the first good music I ever heard. There had been brass bands on Cliffstone promenade, of course, but they simply made a glad row. I don't know if you understand what a pianola was. It was an instrument for playing the clavier with hammers directed by means of perforated rolls, for the use of those who lacked the intelligence and dexterity to read music and play the clavier with their hands. Because every one was frightfully unhandy in those days. It thumped

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a little and struck undiscriminating chords, but Mr. Plaice managed it fairly well and the result came, filtered through the ceiling— As we used to say in those days, it might have been worse.

"At the thought of that music I recall—and whenever I hear Schumann as long as I live I shall recall —the picture of that underground room, the little fireplace with the kettle on a hob, the kettle-holder and the toasting-fork beside the fireplace jamb, the steel fender, the ashes, the small blotched looking-glass over the mantel, the little china figures of dogs in front of the glass, the gaslight in a frosted glass globe hanging from the ceiling and lighting the tea-things on the table. (Yes, the house was lit by coal-gas; electric light was only just coming in. . . . My dear Firefly! can I possibly stop my story to tell you what coal-gas was? A good girl would have learned that long ago.)

"There sat Matilda Good reduced to a sort of imbecile ecstasy by these butterflies of melody. She nodded her cap, she rolled her head and smiled; she made appreciative rhythmic gestures with her hands; one eye would meet you in a joyous search for sympathy while the other contemplated the dingy wall-paper beyond. I too was deeply stirred. But my mother and sister Prue sat in their black with an expression of forced devotion, looking very refined and correct, exactly as they had sat and listened to my father's funeral service five days before.

" 'Sputiful,' whispered my mother, like making a response in church, when the first piece came to an end. . . .

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"I went to sleep that night in my little attic with fragments of Schumann, Bach, and Beethoven chasing elusively about my brain. I perceived that a new phase of life had come to me. . . .

"Jewels," said Sarnac. "Some sculpture, music—just a few lovely beginnings there were already of what man could do with life. Such things I see now were the seeds of the new world of promise already there in the dark matrix of the old."

§ 6

"Next morning revealed a new Matilda Good, active and urgent, in a loose and rather unclean mauve cotton wrapper and her head wrapped up in a sort of turban of figured silk. This costume she wore most of the day except that she did her hair and put on a cotton lace cap in the afternoon. (The black dress and the real lace cap and the brooch, I was to learn, were for Sundays and for week-day evenings of distinction.) My mother and Prue were arrayed in rough aprons which Matilda had very thoughtfully bought for them. There was a great bustle in the basement of the house, and Prue a little before eight went up with Matilda to learn how to set out breakfast for Mr. Plaice. I made his acquaintance later in the day when I took up the late edition of *The Evening Standard* to him. I found him a stooping, tall gentleman with a cadaverous face that was mostly profile, and he made great play with my Christian name.

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" 'Mortimer,' he said and neighed his neigh. 'Well —it might have been Norfolk-Howard.'

"There was an obscure allusion in that: for once upon a time, ran the popular legend, a certain Mr. Bugg seeking a less entomological name had changed his to Norfolk-Howard, which was in those days a very aristocratic one. . . . Whereupon vulgar people had equalised matters by calling the offensive bed-bugs that abounded in London, 'Norfolk-Howards.'

"Before many weeks were past it became evident that Matilda Good had made an excellent bargain in her annexation of our family. She had secured my mother's services for nothing, and it was manifest that my mother was a born lodging-house woman. She behaved like a partner in the concern, and the only money Matilda ever gave her was to pay her expenses upon some specific errand or to buy some specific thing. Prue, however, with unexpected firmness, insisted upon wages, and enforced her claim by going out and nearly getting employment at a dressmaker's. In a little while Matilda became to the lodgers an unseen power for righteousness in the basement and all the staircase work was left to my mother and Prue. Often Matilda did not go up above the ground level once all day until, as she said, she 'toddled up to bed.'

"Matilda made some ingenuous attempts to utilise me also in the service of the household: I was exhorted to carry up scuttles of coal, clean boots and knives and make myself useful generally. She even put it to me one day whether I wouldn't like a nice suit with buttons—in those days they still used to

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put small serving-boys in tight suits of green or brown cloth, with rows of gilt buttons as close together as possible over their little chests and stomachs. But the very thought of it sent my mind to Chessing Hanger, where I had conceived an intense hatred and dread of 'service' and 'livery,' and determined me to find some other employment before Matilda Good's large and insidious will enveloped and overcame me. And oddly enough a talk I had with Miss Beatrice Bumpus helped me greatly in my determination.

"Miss Bumpus was a slender young woman of about five-and-twenty I suppose. She had short brown hair, brushed back rather prettily from a broad forehead, and she had freckles on her nose and quick red-brown eyes. She generally wore a plaid tweed costume rather short in the skirt and with a coat cut like a man's; she wore green stockings and brown shoes—I had never seen green stockings before—and she would stand on her hearth-rug in exactly the attitude Mr. Plaice adopted on his hearth-rug down-stairs. Or she would be sitting at a writing-desk against the window, smoking cigarettes. She asked me what sort of man I intended to be, and I said with the sort of modesty I had been taught to assume as becoming my station, that I hadn't thought yet.

"To which Miss Bumpus answered, 'Liar.'

"That was the sort of remark that either kills or cures. I said: 'Well, Miss, I want to get educated and I don't know how to do it. And I don't know what I ought to do.'

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"Miss Bumpus held me with a gesture while she showed how nicely she could send out smoke through her nose. Then she said: 'Avoid Blind Alley Occupations.'

" 'Yes, Miss.'

" 'But you don't know what Blind Alley Occupations are?'

" 'No, Miss.'

" 'Occupations that earn a boy wages and lead nowhere. One of the endless pitfalls of this silly man-made pseudocivilisation. Never do anything that doesn't lead somewhere. Aim high. I must think your case out, Mr. Harry Mortimer. I might be able to help you. . . .'

"This was the opening of quite a number of conversations between myself and Miss Bumpus. She was a very stimulating influence in my adolescence. She pointed out that although it was now late in the year there were many evening classes of various sorts that I might attend with profit. She told me of all sorts of prominent and successful people who had begun their careers from beginnings as humble and hopeless as mine. She said I was 'unhampered' by my sex. She asked me if I was interested in the suffrage movement, and gave me tickets for two meetings at which I heard her speak, and she spoke, I thought, very well. She answered some interrupters with extreme effectiveness, and I cheered myself hoarse for her. Something about her light and gallant attitude to life reminded me of Fanny. I said so one day, and found myself, before I knew it, telling her reluctantly and shamefully the story of our

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family disgrace. Miss Bumpus was much interested.

" 'She wasn't like your sister Prue?'

" 'No, Miss.'

" 'Prettier?'

" 'A lot prettier. Of course—you could hardly call Prue *pretty*, Miss.'

" 'I hope she's got on all right,' said Miss Bumpus. 'I don't blame her a bit. But I hope she got the best of it.'

" 'I'd give anything, Miss, to hear Fanny was all right. . . . I did care for Fanny, Miss. . . . I'd give anything almost to see Fanny again. . . . You won't tell my mother, Miss, I told you anything about Fanny? It kind of slipped out like.'

" 'Mortimer,' said Miss Bumpus, 'you're a sticker. I wish I had a little brother like you. There! I won't breathe a word.'

"I felt we had sealed a glorious friendship. I adopted Votes for Women as the first plank of my political platform. (No, Firefly, I *won't* explain. I won't explain anything. You must guess what a political platform was and what its planks were.) I followed up her indications and found out about classes in the district where I could learn geology and chemistry and how to speak French and German. Very timidly I mooted the subject of my further education in the basement living-room."

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§ 7

Sarnac looked round at the fire-lit faces of his listeners.

"I know how topsyturvy this story must seem to you, but it is a fact that before I was fourteen I had to plead for education against the ideas and wishes of my own family. And the whole household from top to bottom was brought into the discussion by Matilda or my mother. Except for Miss Bumpus and Frau Buchholz every one was against the idea.

" 'Education,' said Matilda, shaking her head slowly from side to side and smiling deprecatingly. 'Education! That's all very well for those who have nothing better to do, but *you* want to get on in the world. You've got to be earning, young man.'

" 'But if I have education I'll be able to earn more.'

"Matilda screwed up her mouth in a portentous manner and pointed to the ceiling to indicate Mr. Plaice. '*That's* what comes of education, young man. A room frowsty with books and just enough salary not to be able to do a blessed thing you want to do. And giving yourself Airs. Business is what you want, young man, not education.'

" 'And who's to pay for all these classes?' said my mother. 'That's what *I* want to know.'

" 'That's what we all want to know,' said Matilda Good.

" 'If I can't get education—' I said, and left the desperate sentence unfinished. I am afraid I was near weeping. To learn nothing beyond my present ignorance seemed to me then like a sentence of im-

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prisonment for life. It wasn't I who suffered that alone. Thousands of poor youngsters of fourteen or fifteen in those days knew enough to see clearly that the doors of practical illiteracy were closing in upon them, and yet did not know enough to find a way of escape from this mental extinction.

" 'Look here!' I said, 'if I can get some sort of job during the day, may I pay for classes in the evening?'

" 'If you can earn enough,' said Matilda. 'It's no worse I suppose than going to these new cinema shows or buying sweets for girls.'

" 'You've got to pay in for your room here and your keep, Morty, first,' said my mother. 'It isn't fair on Miss Good if you don't.'

" 'I know,' I said, with my heart sinking. 'I'll pay in for my board and lodging. Some'ow. I don't want to be dependent.'

" 'What good you think it will do you,' said Matilda Good, 'I *don't* know. You'll pick up a certain amount of learning perhaps, get a certificate or something and ideas above your station. You'll give all the energy you might use in shoving your way up in some useful employment. You'll get round-shouldered and near-sighted. And just to grow up a discontented misfit. Well—have it your own way if you must. If you earn the money yourself it's yours to spend.'

"Mr. Plaice was no more encouraging. 'Well, my noble Mortimer,' he said, 'they tell me *Arr* that you aspire to university honours.'

" 'I want to learn a little more than I know, sir.'

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"'And join the ranks of the half-educated proletariat?'

"It sounded bad. 'I hope not, sir,' I said.

"'And what classes do you propose to attend, Mortimer?'

"'Whatever there are.'

"'No plan? No aim?'

"'I thought they'd know.'

"'Whatever they give you—eh? A promiscuous appetite. And while you—while you *Arr* indulge in this mixed feast of learning, this futile rivalry with the children of the leisured classes, somebody I suppose will have to keep *you*. Don't you think it's a bit hard on that kind mother of yours who toils day and night for you, that you shouldn't work and do *your* bit, eh? One of the things, Mortimer, we used to learn in our much-maligned public schools, was something we called *playing cricket*. Well, I ask you, is this—this disinclination to do a bit of the earning, *Arr*, is it playing cricket? I could expect such behaviour from an 'Arry, you know, but not from a Mortimer. *Noblesse oblige*. You think it over, my boy. There's such a thing as learning, but there's such a thing as Duty. Many of us have to be content with lives of unassuming labour. Many of us. Men who under happier circumstances might have done great things. . . .'

"The Moggeridges were gently persuasive in the same strain. My mother had put her case to them also. Usually I was indisposed to linger in the Moggeridge atmosphere; they had old-fashioned ideas about draughts, and there was a peculiar aged flavour

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about them; they were, to be plain, a very dirty old couple indeed. With declining strength they had relaxed by imperceptible degrees from the not very exacting standards of their youth. I used to cut into their room and out of it again as quickly as I could.

"But half a century of the clerical life among yielding country-folk had given these bent, decaying, pitiful creatures a wonderful way with their social inferiors. 'Morning, sir and mam,' I said, and put down the coals I had brought and took up the empty scuttle-lining I had replaced.

"Mrs. Moggeridge advanced shakily so as to intercept my retreat. She had silvery hair, a wrinkled face and screwed-up red-rimmed eyes; she was short-sighted and came peering up very close to me whenever she spoke to me, breathing in my face. She held out a quivering hand to arrest me; she spoke with a quavering voice. 'And how's Master Morty this morning?' she said, with kindly condescending intonations.

" 'Very well thank you, mam,' I said.

" 'I've been hearing rather a sad account of you, Morty, rather a sad account.'

" 'Sorry, mum,' I said, and wished I had the courage to tell her that my life was no business of hers.

" 'They say you're discontented, Morty. They say you complain of God's Mercies.'

"Mr. Moggeridge had been sitting in the armchair by the fireplace. He was in his slippers and shirt-sleeves and he had been reading a newspaper. Now he looked at me over his silver-rimmed spectacles and spoke in a rich succulent voice.

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" 'I'm sorry you should be giving trouble to that dear mother of yours,' he said. 'Very sorry. She's a devoted saintly woman.'

" 'Yessir,' I said.

" 'Very few boys nowadays have the privilege of such an upbringing as yours. Some day you may understand what you owe her.'

("I begin to," interjected Sarnac.)

" 'It seems you want to launch out upon some extravagant plan of classes instead of settling down quietly in your proper sphere. Is that so?'

" 'I don't feel I know enough yet, sir,' I said. 'I feel I'd like to learn more.'

" 'Knowledge isn't always happiness, Morty,' said Mrs. Moggeridge close to me—much too close to me.

" 'And what may these classes be that are tempting you to forget the honour you owe your dear good mother?' said Mr. Moggeridge.

" 'I don't know yet, sir. They say there's classes in geology and French and things like that.'

"Old Mr. Moggeridge waved his hand in front of himself with an expression of face as though it was I who emitted an evil odour. 'Geology!' he said. 'French—the language of Voltaire. Let me tell you one thing plainly, my boy, your mother is quite right in objecting to these classes. Geology—geology is—All Wrong. It has done more harm in the last fifty years than any other single influence whatever. It undermines faith. It sows doubt. I do not speak ignorantly, Mortimer. I have seen lives wrecked and destroyed and souls lost by this same geology. I am an old learned man, and I have examined the work

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of many of these so-called geologists—Huxley, Darwin and the like; I have examined it very very carefully and very very tolerantly, and I tell you they are all, all of them, *hopelessly mistaken men*. . . . And what good will such knowledge do you? Will it make you happier? Will it make you better? No, my lad. But I know of something that will. Something older than geology. Older and better. Sarah dear, give me that book there, please. Yes'—reverentially—'*the* Book.'

"His wife handed him a black-bound Bible, with its cover protected against rough usage by a metal edge. 'Now, my boy,' he said, 'let me give you this —this old familiar book, with an old man's blessing. In that is all the knowledge worth having, all the knowledge you will ever need. You will always find something fresh in it and always something beautiful.' He held it out to me.

"Accepting it seemed the shortest way out of the room, so I took it. 'Thank you, sir,' I said.

" 'Promise me you will read it.'

" 'Oh, yes, sir.'

"I turned to go. But giving was in the air.

" 'Now, Mortimer,' said Mrs. Moggeridge, 'do please promise me to seek strength where strength is to be found and try to be a better son to that dear struggling woman.' And as she spoke she proffered for my acceptance an extremely hard, small, yellow orange.

" 'Thank you, mam,' I said, made shift to stow her gift in my pocket, and with the Bible in one hand and the empty coal-scuttle-lining in the other escaped.

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"I returned wrathfully to the basement and deposited my presents on the window-sill. Some impulse made me open the Bible, and inside the cover I found, imperfectly erased, the shadowy outlines of these words, printed in violet ink: 'Not to be Removed from the Waiting-Room.' I puzzled over the significance of this for some time."

"And what did it signify?" asked Firefly.

"I do not know to this day," said Sarnac. "But apparently the reverend gentleman had acquired that Book at a railway-station during one of his journeys as a Sunday supply."

"You mean—?" said Firefly.

"No more than I say. He was in many ways a peculiar old gentleman, and his piety was I fancy an essentially superficial exudation. He was—I will not say 'dishonest,' but 'spasmodically acquisitive.' And like many old people in those days he preferred his refreshment to be stimulating rather than nutritious, and so he may have blurred his ethical perceptions. An odd thing about him—Matilda Good was the first to point it out—was that he rarely took an umbrella away with him when he went on supply and almost always he came back with one—and once he came back with two. But he never kept his umbrellas; he would take them off for long walks and return without them, looking all the brighter for it. I remember one day I was in the room when he returned from such an expedition, there had been a shower and his coat was wet. Mrs. Moggeridge made him change it and lamented that he had lost his umbrella *again*.

" 'Not *lost*,' I heard the old man say in a voice of

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infinite gentleness. 'Not lost, dear. Not lost; but gone before. . . . Gone before the rain came. . . . The Lord gave. . . . Lord hath taken 'way.'

"For a time he was silent, coat in hand. He stood with his shirt-sleeve resting on the mantel-shelf, his foot upon the fender, and his venerable hairy face gazing down into the fire. He seemed to be thinking deep, sad things. Then he remarked in a thoughtful, less obituary tone: 'Ten'n-sixpence. A jolly *goo'* 'mbrella.'"

§ 8

"Frau Buchholz was a poor lean distressful woman of five-and-forty or more, with a table littered with the documents of some obscure litigation. She did not altogether discourage my ambitions but she laid great stress on the hopelessness of attempting Kultur without a knowledge of German, and I am inclined to think that her attitude was determined mainly by a vague and desperate hope that I might be induced to take lessons in German from her.

"Brother Ernest was entirely against my ambition. He was shy and vocally inexpressive, and he took me to the Victoria Music Hall and spent a long evening avoiding the subject. It was only as we drew within five minutes of home that he spoke of it.

" 'What's all this about your not being satisfied with your education, 'Arry?' he asked. 'I thought you'd had a pretty decent bit of schooling.'

" 'I don't feel I know anything,' I said. 'I don't know history or geography or anything. I don't even know my own grammar.'

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"'You know enough,' said Ernest. 'You know enough to get a job. Knowing more would only make you stuck-up. We don't want any more stuck-ups in the family, God knows.'

"I knew he referred to Fanny, but of course neither of us mentioned her shameful name.

"'Anyhow, I suppose I'll have to chuck it,' I said bitterly.

"'That's about it, 'Arry. I know you're a sensible chap—at bottom. You got to be what you got to be.'

"The only encouragement I got to resist mental extinction was from Miss Beatrice Bumpus, and after a time I found even that source of consolation was being cut off from me. For my mother began to develop the most gross and improbable suspicions about Miss Bumpus. You see I stayed sometimes as long as ten or even twelve minutes in the drawing-room, and it was difficult for so good a woman as my mother, trained in the most elaborate precautions of separation between male and female, to understand that two young people of opposite sex could have any liking for each other's company unless some sort of gross familiarity was involved. The good of those days, living as they did in a state of inflamed restraint, had very exaggerated ideas of the appetites, capacities and uncontrollable duplicity of normal human beings. And so my mother began to manœuvre in the most elaborate way to replace me by Prue as a messenger to Miss Bumpus. And when I was actually being talked to—and even talking—in the drawing-room I had an increasing sense of that poor misguided woman hovering upon the landing

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outside, listening in a mood of anxious curiosity and ripening for a sudden inrush, a disgraceful exposure, wild denunciation of Miss Bumpus, and the rescue of the vestiges of my damaged moral nature. I might never have realised what was going on if it had not been for my mother's direct questionings and warnings. Her conception of a proper upbringing for the young on these matters was a carefully preserved ignorance hedged about by shames and foul terrors. So she was at once extremely urgent and extraordinarily vague with me. What was I up to—staying so long with that woman? I wasn't to listen to anything she told me. I was to be precious careful what I got up to up there. I might find myself in more trouble than I thought. There were women in this world of a shamelessness it made one blush to think of. She'd always done her best to keep me from wickedness and nastiness."

"But she was mad!" said Willow.

"All the countless lunatic asylums of those days wouldn't have held a tithe of the English people who were as mad in that way as she was."

"But the whole world was mad?" said Sunray. "*All* those people, except perhaps Miss Bumpus, talked about your education like insane people! Did none of them understand the supreme wickedness of hindering the growth of a human mind?"

"It was a world of suppression and evasion. You cannot understand anything about it unless you understand that."

"But the whole world!" said Radiant.

"Most of it. It was still a fear-haunted world.

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'Submit,' said the ancient dread, 'do nothing—lest you offend. And from your children—*hide*.' What I am telling you about the upbringing of Harry Mortimer Smith was generally true of the upbringing of the enormous majority of the inhabitants of the earth. It was not merely that their minds were starved and poisoned. Their minds were stamped upon and mutilated. That world was so pitiless and confused, so dirty and diseased because it was cowed and dared not learn of remedies. In Europe in those days we used to be told the most extraordinary stories of the wickedness and cruelty of the Chinese, and one favourite tale was that little children were made to grow up inside great porcelain jars in order to distort their bodies to grotesque shapes so that they could be shown at fairs or sold to rich men. The Chinese certainly distorted the feet of young women for some obscure purpose, and this may have been the origin of this horrible legend. But our children in England were mentally distorted in exactly the same fashion except that for porcelain jars we used mental tin cans and dust-bins. . . . My dears! when I talk of this I cease to be Sarnac! All the rage and misery of crippled and thwarted Harry Mortimer Smith comes back to me."

"Did you get to those classes of yours?" asked Sunray. "I hope you did."

"Not for a year or two—though Miss Bumpus did what she could for me. She lent me a lot of books—in spite of much ignorant censorship on the part of my mother—and I read voraciously. But, I don't know if you will understand it, my relations with

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Miss Bumpus were slowly poisoned by the interpretations my mother was putting upon them. I think you will see how easy it was for a boy in my position to fall in love, fall into a deep emotional worship of so bright and friendly a young woman. Most of us young men nowadays begin by adoring a woman older than ourselves. Adoring is the word rather than loving. It's not a mate we need at first but the helpful kindly goddess who stoops to us. And of course I loved her. But I thought much more of serving her or dying for her than of embracing her. When I was away from her my imagination might go so far as to dream of kissing her hands.

"And then came my mother with this hideous obsession of hers, jealous for something she called my purity, treating this white passion of gratitude and humility as though it was the power that drags a blow-fly to some heap of offal. A deepening shame and ungraciousness came into my relations with Miss Bumpus. I became red-eared and tongue-tied in her presence. Possibilities I might never have thought of but for my mother's suggestions grew disgustingly vivid in my mind. I dreamt about her grotesquely. When presently I found employment for my days my chances of seeing her became infrequent. She receded as a personality and friend, and quite against my will became a symbol of femininity.

"Among the people who called to see her a man of three or four and thirty became frequent. My spirit flamed into an intense and impotent jealousy on account of this man. He would take tea with her and stay for two hours or more. My mother took care

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to mention his visits in my hearing at every opportunity. She called him Miss Bumpus's 'fancy man,' or alluded to him archly: 'A certain person called again to-day, Prue. When good-lookin' young men are shown in at the door, votes flies out of the winder.' I tried to seem indifferent but my ears and cheeks got red and hot. My jealousy was edged with hate. I avoided seeing Miss Bumpus for weeks together. I sought furiously for some girl, any girl, who would serve to oust her image from my imagination."

Sarnac stopped abruptly and remained for a time staring intently into the fire. His expression was one of amused regret. "How little and childish it seems now!" he said; "and how bitter—oh! how bitter it was at the time!"

"Poor little errand-boy!" said Sunray, stroking his hair. "Poor little errand-boy in love."

"What an uncomfortable distressful world it must have been for all young things!" said Willow.

"Uncomfortable and pitiless," said Sarnac.

§ 9

"My first employment in London was as an errand-boy—'junior porter' was the exact phrase—to a draper's shop near Victoria Station: I packed parcels and carried them to their destinations; my next job was to be boy in general to a chemist named Humberg in a shop beyond Lupus Street. A chemist then was a very different creature from the kind of man or woman we called a chemist to-day; he was much more like the Apothecary we find in Shakespear's plays

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and suchlike old literature; he was a dealer in drugs, poisons, medicines, a few spices, colouring matters and suchlike odd commodities. I washed endless bottles, delivered drugs and medicines, cleared up a sort of back yard, and did anything else that there was to be done within the measure of my capacity.

"Of all the queer shops one found in that old world London, the chemists' shops were I think the queerest. They had come almost unchanged out of the Middle Ages, as we used to call them, when western Europe, superstitious, dirty, diseased and degenerate, thrashed by the Arabs and Mongols and Turks, afraid to sail the ocean or fight out of armour, cowered behind the walls of its towns and castles, stole, poisoned, assassinated and tortured, and pretended to be the Roman Empire still in being. Western Europe in those days was ashamed of its natural varieties of speech and talked bad Latin; it dared not look a fact in the face but nosed for knowledge among riddles and unreadable parchments; it burned men and women alive for laughing at the absurdities of its Faith, and it thought the stars of Heaven were no better than a greasy pack of cards by which fortunes were to be told. In those days it was that the tradition of the 'Pothecary was made; you know him as he figures in 'Romeo and Juliet'; the time in which I lived this life was barely four centuries and a half from old Shakespear. The 'Pothecary was in a conspiracy of pretentiousness with the almost equally ignorant doctors of his age, and the latter wrote and he 'made up' prescriptions in occult phrases and symbols. In our window there were great glass

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bottles of red-and-yellow and blue-tinted water, through which our gas-lamps within threw a mystical light on the street pavement."

"Was there a stuffed alligator?" asked Firefly.

"No. We were just out of the age of stuffed alligators, but below these coloured bottles in the window we had stupendous china jars with gilt caps mystically inscribed—let me see! Let me think! One was *Sem. Coriand.* Another was *Rad. Sarsap.* Then—what was the fellow in the corner? *Marant. Ar.* And opposite him—*C. Cincordif.* And behind the counter to look the customer in the face were neat little drawers with golden and precious letters thereon; *Pil. Rhubarb.* and *Pil. Antibil.* and many more bottles, *Ol. Amyg.* and *Tinct. Iod.*, rows and rows of bottles, mystic, wonderful. I do not remember ever seeing Mr. Humberg take anything, much less sell anything, from all this array of erudite bottles and drawers; his normal trade was done in the bright little packets of an altogether different character that were piled all over the counter, bright unblushing little packets that declared themselves to be Gummidge's Fragrant and Digestive Tooth-Paste, Hooper's Corn Cure, Luxtone's Lady's Remedy, Tinker's Pills for All Occasions, and the like. Such things were asked for openly and loudly by customers; they were our staple trade. But also there were many transactions conducted in undertones which I never fully understood. I would be sent off to the yard on some specious pretext whenever a customer was discovered to be of the *sotto-voce* variety, and I can only suppose that Mr. Humberg was accustomed at times

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to go beyond the limits of his professional qualification and to deal out advice and instruction that were legally the privileges of the qualified medical man. You must remember that in those days many things that we teach plainly and simply to every one were tabooed and made to seem occult and mysterious and very very shameful and dirty.

"My first reaction to this chemist's shop was a violent appetite for Latin. I succumbed to its suggestion that Latin was the key to all knowledge, and that indeed statements did not become knowledge until they had passed into the Latin tongue. For a few coppers I bought in a second-hand bookshop an old and worn Latin 'Principia' written by a namesake Smith; I attacked it with great determination and found this redoubtable language far more understandable, reasonable, and straightforward than the elusive irritable French and the trampling coughing German I had hitherto attempted. This Latin was a dead language, a skeleton language plainly articulated; it never moved about and got away from one as a living language did. In a little while I was able to recognise words I knew upon our bottles and drawers and in the epitaphs upon the monuments in Westminster Abbey, and soon I could even construe whole phrases. I dug out Latin books from the second-hand booksellers' boxes, and some I could read and some I could not. There was a war history of that first Cæsar, Julius Cæsar, the adventurer who extinguished the last reek of the decaying Roman Republic, and there was a Latin New Testament; I got along fairly well with both. But there was a Latin

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poet, Lucretius, I could not construe; even with an English verse translation on the opposite page I could not construe him. But I read that English version with intense curiosity. It is an extraordinary thing to note, but that same Lucretius, an old Roman poet who lived and died two thousand years before my time, four thousand years from now, gave an account of the universe and of man's beginnings, far truer and more intelligible than the old Semitic legends I had been taught in my Sunday-school.

"One of the queerest aspects of those days was the mingling of ideas belonging to different ages and phases of human development due to the irregularity and casualness of such educational organisation as we had. In school and church alike, obstinate pedantry darkened the minds of men. Europeans in the twentieth Christian century mixed up the theology of the Pharaohs, the cosmogony of the priest-kings of Sumeria, with the politics of the seventeenth century and the ethics of the cricket-field and prize-ring, and that in a world which had got to aeroplanes and telephones.

"My own case was typical of the limitations of the time. In that age of ceaseless novelty there was I, trying to get back by way of Latin to the half knowledge of the Ancients. Presently I began to struggle with Greek also, but I never got very far with that. I found a chance of going once a week on what was called early-closing night, after my day's work was done, to some evening classes in chemistry. And this chemistry I discovered had hardly anything in common with the chemistry of a chemist's shop.

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The story of matter and force that it told belonged to another and a newer age. I was fascinated by these wider revelations of the universe I lived in, I ceased to struggle with Greek and I no longer hunted the dingy book-boxes for Latin classics but for modern scientific works. Lucretius I found was hardly less out of date than Genesis. Among the books that taught me much were one called 'Physiography' by a writer named Gregory, Clodd's 'Story of Creation' and Lankester's 'Science from an Easy Chair.' I do not know if they were exceptionally good books; they were the ones that happened to come to my hand and awaken my mind. But do you realise the amazing conditions under which men were living at that time, when a youngster had to go about as eager and furtive as a mouse seeking food, to get even such knowledge of the universe and himself as then existed? I still remember how I read first of the differences and resemblances between apes and men and speculations arising thencefrom about the nature of the submen who came before man. It was in the shed in the yard that I sat and read. Mr. Humberg was on the sofa in the parlour behind the shop sleeping off his midday meal with one ear acock for the shop-bell, and I, with one ear acock for the shop-bell and the other for any sounds of movement in the parlour, read for the first time of the forces that had made me what I was—when I ought to have been washing out bottles.

"At one point in the centre of the display behind the counter in the shop was a row of particularly brave and important-looking glass jars wearing about

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their bellies the gold promises of *Aqua Fortis, Amm. Hyd.* and suchlike names, and one day as I was sweeping the floor I observed Mr. Humberg scrutinising these. He held one up to the light and shook his head at its flocculent contents. 'Harry,' he said, 'see this row of bottles?'

" 'Yessir.'

" 'Pour 'em all out and put in fresh water.'

"I stared, broom in hand, aghast at the waste. 'They won't blow up if I mix 'em?' I said.

" 'Blow up!' said Mr. Humberg. 'It's only stale water. There's been nothing else in these bottles for a score of years. Stuff I want is behind the dispensary partition—and it's different stuff nowadays. Wash 'em out—and then we'll put in some water from the pump. We just have 'em for the look of 'em. The old women wouldn't be happy if we hadn't got 'em there.' "

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PART II

THE LOVES AND DEATH OF HARRY MORTIMER SMITH

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CHAPTER THE FIFTH

FANNY DISCOVERS HERSELF

§ 1

"And now," said Sarnac, "I can draw near to the essentials of life and tell you the sort of thing love was in that crowded, dingy, fear-ruled world of the London fogs and the amber London sunshine. It was a slender, wild-eyed, scared and daring emotion in a dark forest of cruelties and repressions. It soon grew old and crippled, bitter-spirited and black-hearted, but as it happened, death came early enough for me to die with a living love still in my heart. . . ."

"To live again," said Sunray very softly.

"And love again," said Sarnac, patting her knee. "Let me see——. . . ."

He took a stake that had fallen from the fire and thrust it into the bright glow at the centre and watched it burst into a sierra of flames.

"I think that the first person I was in love with was my sister Fanny. When I was a boy of eleven or twelve I was really in love with her. But somehow about that time I was also in love with an undraped plaster nymph who sat very bravely on a spouting dolphin in some public gardens near the middle of Cliffstone. She lifted her chin and smiled and waved one hand and she had the sweetest smile and the dearest little body imaginable. I loved her back particularly, and there was a point where you

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looked at her from behind and just caught the soft curve of her smiling cheek and her jolly little nose-tip and chin and the soft swell of her breast under her lifted arm. I would sneak round her furtively towards this particular view-point, having been too well soaked in shame about all such lovely things to look openly. But I never seemed to look my fill.

"One day as I was worshipping her in this fashion, half turned to her and half turned to a bed of flowers and looking at her askance, I became aware of an oldish man with a large white face, seated on a garden-seat and leaning forward and regarding me with an expression of oafish cunning as if he had found me out and knew my secret. He looked like the spirit of lewdness incarnate. Suddenly panic overwhelmed me and I made off—and never went near that garden again. Angels with flaming shames prevented me. Or a terror of again meeting that horrible old man. . . .

"Then with my coming to London Miss Beatrice Bumpus took control of my imagination and was Venus and all the goddesses; and this increased rather than diminished after she had gone away. For she went away and, I gather, married the young man I hated; she went away and gave up her work for the Vote and was no doubt welcomed back by those Warwickshire Bumpuses (who hunted) with the slaughter of a fatted fox and every sort of rejoicing. But her jolly frank and boyish face was the heroine's in a thousand dreams. I saved her life in adventures in all parts of the world and sometimes she saved mine; we clung together over the edges of terrific precipices

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until I went to sleep, and when I was the conquering Mahomet after a battle, she stood out among the captive women and answered back when I said I would never love her, with two jets of cigarette smoke and the one word, 'Liar!'

"I met no girls of my own age at all while I was errand boy to Mr. Humberg, my evening classes and my reading kept me away from the facile encounters of the streets. Sometimes, however, when I could not fix my attention upon my books, I would slip off to Wilton Street and Victoria Street where there was a nocturnal promenade under the electric lamps. There schoolgirls and little drabs and errand boys and soldiers prowled and accosted one another. But though I was attracted to some of the girlish figures that flitted by me I was also shy and fastidious. I was drawn by an overpowering desire for something intense and beautiful that vanished whenever I drew near to reality."

§ 2

"Before a year was over there were several changes in the Pimlico boarding-house. The poor old Moggeridges caught influenza, a variable prevalent epidemic of the time, and succumbed to inflammation of the lungs following the fever. They died within three days of each other, and my mother and Prue were the only mourners at their dingy little funeral. Frau Buchholz fades out of my story; I do not remember clearly when she left the house nor who succeeded her. Miss Beatrice Bumpus departed, and the

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second floor was taken by an extremely intermittent couple who roused my mother's worst suspicions and led to serious differences of opinion between her and Matilda Good.

"You see these newcomers never settled in with any grave and sober luggage; they would come and stay for a day or so and then not reappear for a week or more, and they rarely arrived or departed together. This roused my mother's moral observation, and she began hinting that perhaps they were not properly married after all. She forbade Prue ever to go to the drawing-room floor, and this precipitated a conflict with Matilda. 'What's this about Prue and the drawing-room?' Matilda asked. 'You're putting ideas into the girl's head.'

" 'I'm trying to keep them from 'er,' said my mother. 'She's got eyes.'

" '*And* fingers,' said Matilda with dark allusiveness. 'What's Prue been seeing now?'

" 'Marks,' said my mother.

" 'What marks?' said Matilda.

" 'Marks enough,' said my mother. ''*Is* things are marked one name and '*Er's* another, and neither of them Milton, which is the name they've given us. And the way that woman speaks to you, as though she felt you might notice sumpthing—friendly-like and a bit afraid of you. And that ain't all! By no means all! I'm not blind and Prue isn't blind. There's kissing and making love going on at all times in the day! Directly they've got 'ere sometimes. Hardly waiting for one to get out of the room. I'm not a perfect fool, Matilda. I been married.'

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" 'What's that got to do with us? We're a lodging-house, not a set of Nosey Parkers. If Mr. and Mrs. Milton like to have their linen marked a *hundred* different names, what's that to us? Their book's always marked *paid in advance with thanks, Matilda Good*, and that's married enough for me. See? You're an uneasy woman to have in a lodging-house, Martha, an uneasy woman. There's no give-and-take about you. No save-your-fare. There was that trouble you made about the boy and Miss Bumpus—ridiculous it was—and now seemingly there's going to be more trouble about Prue and Mrs. Milton—who's a lady, mind you, say what you like, and—what's more—a gentlewoman. I wish you'd mind your own business a bit more, Martha, and let Mr. and Mrs. Milton mind theirs. If they aren't properly married it's they've got to answer for it in the long run, not you. You'll get even with them all right on the Last Great Day. Meanwhile do they do 'arm to any one? A quieter couple and less trouble to look after I've never had in all my lodging-house days.'

"My mother made no answer.

" 'Well?' challenged Matilda.

" 'It's hard to be waiting on a shameless woman,' said my mother, obstinate and white-lipped.

" 'It's harder still to be called a shameless woman because you've still got your maiden name on some of your things,' said Matilda Good. 'Don't talk such Rubbish, Martha.'

" 'I don't see why '*E* should 'ave a maiden name too—on '*is* pyjamas,' said my mother rallying after a moment.

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" 'You don't know Anything, Martha,' said Matilda, fixing her with one eye of extreme animosity and regarding the question in the abstract with the other. 'I've often thought it of you and now I say it to you. You don't know Anything. I'm going to keep Mr. and Mrs. Milton as long as I can, and if you're too pernikkety to wait on them, there's those who will. I won't have my lodgers insulted. I won't have their underclothes dragged up against them. Why! Come to think of it! Of course! He *borrowed* those pyjamas of 'is! Or they was given him by a gentleman friend they didn't fit. Or he's been left money and had to change his name sudden-like. It often happens. Often. You see it in the papers. And things get mixed in the wash. Some laundries, they're regular Exchanges. Mr. Plaice, he once had a collar with *Fortescue* on it. Brought it back after his summer holiday. Fortescue! There's evidence for you. You aren't going to bring up something against Mr. Plaice on account of that, Martha? You aren't going to say he's been living a double life and isn't properly a bachelor. Do think a little clearer, Martha. And don't think so much evil. There's a hundred ways round before you think evil. But you *like* to think evil, Martha. I've noticed it times and oft. You fairly wallow in it. You haven't the beginnings of a germ of Christian charity.'

" 'One can't help seeing things,' said my mother rather shattered.

" '*You* can't,' said Matilda Good. 'There's those who can't see an inch beyond their noses, and yet they see too much. And the more I see of you the

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more I'm inclined to think you're one of that sort. Anyhow, Mr. and Mrs. Milton stay here—whoever else goes. Whoever else goes. That's plain, I hope, Martha.'

"My mother was stricken speechless. She bridled and subsided and then, except for necessary and unavoidable purposes, remained hurt and silent for some days, speaking only when she was spoken to. Matilda did not seem to mind. But I noticed that when presently Matilda sent Prue up-stairs with the Miltons' tea my mother's stiffness grew stiffer, but she made no open protest."

§ 3

"And then suddenly Fanny reappeared in my world.

"It was a mere chance that restored Fanny to me. All our links had been severed when we removed from Cliffstone to London. My brother Ernest was her herald.

"We were at supper in the basement room and supper was usually a pleasant meal. Matilda Good would make it attractive with potatoes roasted in their jackets, or what she called a 'frying-pan' of potatoes and other vegetables in dripping or suchlike heartening addition to cold bacon and bread and cheese and small beer. And she would read bits out of the newspaper to us and discuss them, having a really very lively intelligence, or she would draw me out to talk of the books I'd been reading. She took a great interest in murders and suchlike cases, and

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we all became great judges of motive and evidence under her stimulation. 'You may say it's morbid, Martha, if you like,' she said; 'but there never was a murder yet that wasn't brimful of humanity. Brimful. I doubt sometimes if we know what any one's capable of until they've committed a murder or two.'

"My mother rarely failed to rise to her bait. 'I can't think 'ow you can say such things, Matilda,' she would say. . . .

"We heard the sound of a motor-car in the street above. Brother Ernest descended by the area steps and my sister Prue let him in. He appeared in his chauffeur's uniform, cap in hand, leather jacket and gaiters.

" 'Got a night off?' asked Matilda.

" 'Court Theatre at eleven,' said Ernest. 'So I thought I'd come in for a bit of a warm and a chat.'

" 'Have a snack?' said Matilda. 'Prue, get him a plate and a knife and fork and a glass. One glass of *this* beer won't hurt your driving. Why! we haven't seen you for ages!'

" 'Thank you, Miss Good,' said Ernest, who was always very polite to her, 'I *will* 'ave a snack. I bin here, there and everywhere, but it isn't that I haven't wanted to call on you.'

"Refreshment was administered and conversation hung fire for a while. One or two starts were made and came to an early end. Ernest's manner suggested preoccupation and Matilda regarded him keenly. 'And what have you got to tell us, Ernie?' she said suddenly.

" 'We-el,' said Ernest, 'it's a curious thing you

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should say that, Miss Good, for I *'ave* got something to tell you. Something—well, I don't know 'ow to put it—curious-like.'

"Matilda refilled his glass.

" 'I seen Fanny,' said Ernest, coming to it with violent abruptness.

" '*No!*' gasped my mother, and for a moment no one else spoke.

" 'So!' said Matilda, putting her arms on the table and billowing forward, 'you've seen Fanny! Pretty little Fanny that I used to know. And where did you see her, Ernie?'

"Ernest had some difficulty in shaping out his story. 'It was a week last Tuesday,' he said after a pause.

" 'She wasn't—not one of Them—about Victoria Station?' panted my mother.

" 'Did you see her first or did she see you?' asked Matilda.

" 'A week ago last Tuesday,' my brother repeated.

" 'And did you speak to her?'

" 'Not at the time I didn't. No.'

" 'Did she speak to you?'

" 'No.'

" 'Then 'ow d'you know it was our Fanny?' asked Prue, who had been listening intently.

" 'I thought she'd gone to 'er fate in some foreign country—being so near Boulogne,' my mother said. 'I thought them White Slave Traders 'ad the decency to carry a girl off right away from 'er 'ome. . . . Fanny! On the streets of London! Near 'ere. I told 'er what it would come to. Time and again I

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told 'er. Merry an 'onest man I said, but she was greedy and 'eadstrong. . . . 'Eadstrong and vain. . . . She didn't try to follow you, Ernie, to find out where we were or anything like that?'

"My brother Ernest's face displayed his profound perplexity. 'It wasn't at all like that, mother,' he said. 'It wasn't—that sort of thing. You see——'

"He began a struggle with the breast-pocket of his very tightly fitting leather jacket and at last produced a rather soiled letter. He held it in his hand, neither attempting to read it nor offering it to us. But holding it in his hand seemed to crystallise his very rudimentary narrative powers. 'I better tell you right from the beginning,' he said. 'It isn't at all what you'd suppose. Tuesday week it was; last Tuesday week.'

"Matilda Good laid a restraining hand on my mother's arm. 'In the evening I suppose?' she helped.

" 'It was a dinner and fetch,' said my brother. 'Of course you understand I 'adn't set eyes on Fanny for pretty near six years. It was 'er knew me.'

" 'You had to take these people to a dinner and fetch them back again?' said Matilda.

" 'Orders,' said Ernest, 'was to go to one-oh-two Brantismore Gardens Earl's Court top flat, to pick up lady and gentleman for number to be given in Church Row Hampstead and call there ten-thirty and take home as directed. Accordingly I went to Brantismore Gardens and told the porter in the 'all —it was one of these 'ere flat places with a porter in livery—that I was there to time waiting. 'E telephoned up in the usual way. After a bit, lady and

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gentleman came out of the house and I went to the door of the car as I usually do and held it open. So far nothing out of the ornary. He was a gentleman in evening dress, like most gentlemen; she'd got a wrap with fur, and her hair, you know, was done up nice for an evening party with something that sparkled. Quite the lady.'

"'And it was Fanny?' said Prue.

"Ernest struggled mutely with his subject for some moments. 'Not yet, like,' he said.

"'You mean you didn't recognise her then?' said Matilda.

"'No. But she just looked up at me and seemed kind of to start and got in. I saw her sort of leaning forward and looking at me as 'E got in. Fact is, I didn't think much of it. I should have forgotten all about it if it 'adn't been for afterwards. But when I took them back something happened. I could see she was looking at me. . . . We went first to one-oh-two Brantismore Gardens again and then he got out and says to me, "Just wait a bit here" and then he helped her out. It sort of seemed as though she was 'arf inclined to speak to me and then she didn't. But this time I thinks to myself: "I seen you before, somewhere, my Lady." Oddly enough I never thought of Fanny then at all. I got as near as thinking she was a bit like 'Arry 'ere. But it never entered my 'ead it might be Fanny. Strordinary! They went up the steps to the door; one of these open entrances it is to several flats, and seemed to have a moment's confabulation under the light, looking towards me. Then they went on up to the flat.'

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" 'You didn't know her even then?' said Prue.

" ''E came down the steps quarternour after perhaps, looking thoughtful. White wescoat, 'e 'ad, and coat over 'is arm. Gave me an address near Sloane Street. Got out and produced his tip, rather on the large side it was, and stood still kind of thoughtful. Seemed inclined to speak and didn't know what to say. "I've an account at the garage," 'e says, "you'll book the car," and then: "You're not my usual driver," 'e says. "What's your name?" "Smith," I says. "Ernest Smith," he says. "Yes, sir," I says, and it was only as I drove off that I asked myself 'Ow the 'Ell—I reely beg your pardon, Miss Good.'

" 'Don't mind me,' said Matilda. 'Go on.'

" ''Ow the Juice d'e know that my name was Ernest? I nearly 'it a taxi at the corner of Sloane Square I was so took up puzzling over it. And it was only about three o'clock in the morning, when I was lying awake still puzzling over it, that it came into my 'ead——'

"Ernest assumed the manner of a narrator who opens out his culminating surprise. '—that that young lady I'd been takin' out that evening was——'

"He paused before his climax.

" 'Fenny,' whispered Prue.

" 'Sister Fanny,' said Matilda Good.

" 'Our Fanny,' said my mother.

" '*No less a person than Fanny!*' said my brother Ernest triumphantly and looked round for the amazement proper to such a surprise.

" 'I thought it was going to be Fenny,' said Prue.

" 'Was she painted up at all?' asked Matilda.

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" 'Not nearly so much painted as most of 'em are,' said my brother Ernest. 'Pretty nearly every one paints nowadays. Titled people. Bishops' ladies. Widows. Every one. She didn't strike me—well, as belonging to the painted sort particularly, not in the least. Kind of fresh and a little pale—like Fanny used to be.'

" 'Was she dressed like a lady—quiet-like?'

" 'Prosperous,' said Ernest. 'Reely prosperous. But nothing what you might call extravagant.'

" 'And the house you took 'em to—noisy? Singing and dancing and the windows open?'

" 'It was a perfectly respectable quiet sort of 'ouse. Blinds down and no row whatever. A private 'ouse. The people who came to the door to say good night might 'ave been any gentleman and any lady. I see the butler. 'E came down to the car. 'E wasn't 'ired for the evening. 'E was a *real* butler. The other guests had a private limousine with an oldish careful sort of driver. Whadyou'd speak of as nice people.'

" 'Hardly what you might call being on the streets of London,' said Matilda, turning to my mother. 'What was the gentleman like?'

" 'I don't want to 'ear of 'im,' said my mother.

" 'Dissipated sort of man about town—and a bit screwed?' asked Matilda.

" ''E was a lot soberer than most dinner fetches,' said Ernest. 'I see that when 'e 'andled 'is money. Lots of 'em—oh! quite 'igh-class people get—'ow shall I say it?—just a little bit funny. 'Umerous-like. Bit 'nnacurate with the door. '*E* wasn't. That's

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what I can't make out. . . . And then there's this letter.'

" 'Then there's this letter,' said Matilda. 'You better read it, Martha.'

" 'How did you get that letter?' asked my mother, not offering to touch it. 'You don't mean to say she gave you a letter!'

" 'It came last Thursday. By post. It was addressed to me, Ernest Smith, Esq., at the Garage. It's a curious letter—asking about us. I can't make 'ead or tail of the whole business. I been thinking about it and thinking about it. Knowing 'ow set mother was about Fanny—I 'esitated.'

"His voice died away.

" 'Somebody,' said Matilda in the pause that followed, 'had better read that letter.'

"She looked at my mother, smiled queerly with the corners of her mouth down, and then held out her hand to Ernest."

§ 4

"It was Matilda who read that letter; my mother's aversion from it was all too evident. I can still remember Matilda's large red face thrust forward over the supper-things and a little on one side so as to bring the eye she was using into focus and get the best light from the feeble little gas-bracket. Beside her was Prue, with a slack curious face and a restive glance that went ever and again to my mother's face, as a bandsman watches the conductor's baton. My mother sat back with a defensive expression on her

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white face, and Ernest was posed, wide and large, in a non-committal attitude, ostentatiously unable to 'make 'ead or tail' of the affair.

" 'Let's see,' said Matilda, and took a preliminary survey of the task before her. . . .

" '*My dear Ernie,*' she says. . . .

" '*My dear Ernie:*

" '*It was wonderful seeing you again. I could hardly believe it was you even after Mr.—Mr.—* She's written it and thought better of it and scratched it out again, Mr. Somebody—Mr. Blank—*had asked your name. I was beginning to fear I'd lost you all. Where are you living and how are you getting on? You know I went to France and Italy for a holiday—lovely lovely places—and when I came back I slipped off at Cliffstone because I wanted to see you all again and couldn't bear leaving you as I had done without a word.*'

" 'She should 've thought of that before,' said my mother.

" '*She told me, Mrs. Bradley did, about poor father's accident and death—the first I heard of it. I went to his grave in the cemetery and had a good cry. I couldn't help it. Poor old Daddy! It was cruel hard luck getting killed as he did. I put a lot of flowers on his grave and arranged with Ropes the Nurseryman about having the grass cut regularly.*'

" 'And 'im,' said my mother, 'lying there! 'E'd 've rather seen 'er lying dead at 'is feet, 'e said, than 'ave 'er the fallen woman she was. And she putting

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flowers over 'im. 'Nough to make 'im turn in 'is grave.'

" 'But very likely he's come to think differently now, Martha,' said Matilda soothingly. 'There's no knowing really, Martha. Perhaps in heaven they aren't so anxious to see people dead at their feet. Perhaps they get sort of kind up there. Let me see, —where was I? Ah?—*grass cut regularly.*

" '*Nobody knew where mother and the rest of you were. Nobody had an address. I went on to London very miserable, hating to have lost you. Mrs. Bradley said that mother and Prue and Morty had gone to London to friends, but where she didn't know. And then behold! after nearly two years, you bob up again! It's too good to be true. Where are the others? Is Morty getting educated? Prue must be quite grown up? I would love to see them again and help them if I can. Dear Ernie, I do want you to tell mother and all of them that I am quite safe and happy. I am being helped by a friend. The one you saw. I'm not a bit fast or bad. I lead a very quiet life. I have my tiny little flat here and I read a lot and get educated. I work quite hard. I've passed an examination, Ernie, a university examination. I've learned a lot of French and Italian and some German and about music. I've got a pianola and I'd love to play it to you or Morty. He was always the one for music. Often and often I think of you. Tell mother, show her this letter, and let me know soon about you all and don't think unkind things of me. 'Member the good times we had, Ernie, when we dressed up at Christmas and father didn't know us in the shop, and*

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how you made me a doll's house for my birthday. Oh! and cheese pies, Ernie! Cheese pies!'

"'What were cheese-pies?' asked Matilda.

"'It was a sort of silly game we had—passing people. I forget exactly. But it used to make us laugh—regular roll about we did.'

"'Then she gets back to you, Morty,' said Matilda.

"'*I'd love to help Morty if he still wants to be educated. I could now. I could help him a lot. I suppose he's not a boy any longer. Perhaps he's getting educated himself. Give him my love. Give mother my love and tell her not to think too badly of me. Fanny.*'

"'Fanny. Embossed address on her note-paper. That's all.'

"Matilda dropped the letter on the table. 'Well?' she said in a voice that challenged my mother. 'Seems to me that the young woman has struck one of the Right Sort—the one straight man in ten thousand . . . seems to have taken care of her almost more than an ordinary husband might've done. . . . What'r you going to do about it, Martha?'

"Matilda collected herself slowly from the table and leaned back in her chair, regarding my mother with an expression of faintly malevolent irony."

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§ 5

"I turned from Matilda's quizzical face to my mother's drawn intentness.

" 'Say what you like, Matilda, that girl is living in sin.'

" 'Even that isn't absolutely proved,' said Matilda.

" 'Why should 'e—?' my mother began and stopped.

" 'There's such things as feats of generosity,' said Matilda. 'Still——'

" 'No,' said my mother. 'We don't want 'er 'elp. I'd be ashamed to take it. While she lives with that man——'

" 'Apparently she doesn't. But go on.'

" ''Stainted money,' said my mother. 'It's money she 'as from 'im. It's the money of a Kep Woman.'

"Her anger kindled. 'I'd sooner die than *touch* 'er money.'

"Her sense of the situation found form and expression. 'She leaves 'er 'ome. She breaks 'er father's 'eart. Kills 'im, she does. 'E was never the same man after she'd gone; never the same. She goes off to shamelessness and luxury. She makes 'er own brother drive 'er about to 'er shame.'

" 'Hardly—*makes*,' protested Matilda.

" ''Ow was *'E* to avoid it? And then she writes this—this letter. Impudent I call it. Impudent! Without a word of repentance—not a single word of repentance. Does she 'ave the decency to say she's ashamed of 'erself? Not a word. Owns she's still living with a fancy man and means to go on doing

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it, glories in it. And offers us 'er kind assistance—us, what she's disgraced and shamed. Who was it that made us leave Cherry Gardens to 'ide our 'eads from our neighbours in London? *'Er!* And now she's to come 'ere in 'er moty-car and come dancing down these steps, all dressed up and painted, to say a kind word to poor mother. 'Aven't we suffered enough about 'er without 'er coming 'ere to show 'erself off at us? It's topsyturvy. Why! if she comes 'ere at all, which I doubt—if she comes 'ere at all she ought to come in sackcloth and ashes and on 'er bended knees.'

" 'She won't do that, Martha,' said Matilda Good.

" 'Then let 'er keep away. We don't want the disgrace of 'er. She's chosen 'er path and let 'er abide by it. But *'ere!* To come *'ere!* 'Ow'r you going to explain it?'

" '*I'd* explain it all right,' said Matilda unheeded.

" ''Ow am *I* going to explain it? And here's Prue! Here's this Mr. Pettigrew she's met at the Week-day Evening Social and wants to bring to tea! 'Ow's she going to explain 'er fine lady sister to 'im? Kep Woman! Yes, Matilda, I say it. It's the name for it. That's what she is. A Kep Woman! Nice thing to tell Mr. Pettigrew. 'Ere's my sister, the Kep Woman! 'E'd be off in a jiffy. Shocked 'e'd be out of 'is seven senses. 'Ow would Prue ever 'ave the face to go to the Week-day Evening Social again after a show-up like that? And Ernie. What's 'E going to say about it to the other chaps at the garage when they throw it up at him that 'is sister's a Kep Woman?'

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"'Don't you worry about *that*, mother,' said Ernest gently but firmly. 'There's nobody ever throws anything up against me at the garage anyhow—and there won't be. Nohow. Not unless 'E wants to swaller 'is teeth.'

"'Well, there's 'Arry. 'E goes to 'is classes, and what if some one gets 'old of it there? 'Is sister, a Kep Woman. They'd 'ardly let 'im go on working after such a disgrace.'

"'Oh I'd soon—' I began, following in my brother's wake. But Matilda stopped me with a gesture. Her gesture swept round and held my mother, who was indeed drawing near the end of what she had to say.

"'I can see, Martha,' said Matilda, 'just 'ow you feel about Fanny. I suppose it's all natural. Of course, this letter——'

"She picked up the letter. She pursed her great mouth and waggled her clumsy head slowly from side to side. 'For the life of me I can't believe the girl who wrote this is a bad-hearted girl,' she said. 'You're bitter with her, Martha. You're bitter.'

"'After all—' I began, but Matilda's hand stopped me again.

"'Bitter!' cried my mother. 'I *know* 'er. She can put on that in'cent air just as though nothing 'ad 'appened and try and make you feel in the wrong——'

"Matilda ceased to waggle and began to nod. 'I see,' she said. 'I see. But why should Fanny take the trouble to write this letter, if she hadn't a real sort of affection for you all? As though she need have bothered herself about the lot of you! You're no sort of help to her. There's kindness in the letter,

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Martha, and something more than kindness. Are you going to throw it back at her? Her and her offers of help? Even if she doesn't crawl and repent as she ought to do! Won't you even answer her letter?'

"'I won't be drawn into a correspondence with 'er,' said my mother. 'No! So long as she's a Kep Woman, she's no daughter of mine. I wash my 'ands of 'er. And as for 'er 'Elp! 'Elp indeed! It's 'Umbug! If she'd wanted to 'elp us she could have married Mr. Crosby, as fair and honest a man as any woman could wish for.'

"'So that's *that*,' said Matilda Good conclusively.

"Abruptly she swivelled her great head round to Ernest. 'And what are you going to do, Ernie? Are *you* for turning down Fanny? And letting the cheese pies just drop into the mud of Oblivium, as the saying goes, and be forgotten for ever and ever and ever?'

"Ernest sat back, put his hand in his trouser-pockets and remained thoughtful for some moments. 'It's orkward,' he said.

"Matilda offered him no assistance.

"'There's my Young Lady to consider,' said Ernest and flushed an extreme scarlet.

"My mother turned her head sharply and looked at him. Ernest with a stony expression did not look at my mother.

"'O—oh!' said Matilda. 'Here's something new. And who may your Young Lady be, Ernie?'

"'Well, I 'adn't proposed to discuss 'er 'ere just yet. So never mind what 'er name is. She's got a

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little millinery business. I'll say that for 'er. And a cleverer nicer girl never lived. We met at a little dance. Nothing isn't fixed up yet beyond a sort of engagement. There's been presents. Given 'er a ring and so forth. But naturally I've never told 'er anything about Fanny. I 'aven't discussed family affairs with 'er much, not so far. Knows we were in business of some sort and 'ad losses and father died of an accident; that's about all. But Fanny—Fanny's certainly going to be orkward to explain. Not that I want to be *'ard* on Fanny!'

" 'I see,' said Matilda. She glanced a mute interrogation at Prue and found her answer in Prue's face. Then she picked up the letter again and read very distinctly: 'One hundred and two, Brantismore Gardens, Earl's Court.' She read this address slowly as though she wanted to print it on her memory. 'Top flat, you said it was, Ernie? . . .'

"She turned to me. 'And what are you going to do, Harry, about all this?'

" 'I want to see Fanny for myself,' I said. 'I don't believe——'

" ''Arry,' said my mother, 'now—once for all—I forbid you to go near 'er. I won't 'ave you corrupted.'

" 'Don't forbid him, Martha,' said Matilda. 'It's no use forbidding him. *Because he will!* Any boy with any heart and spunk in him would go and see her after that letter. One hundred and two, Brantismore Gardens, Earl's Court,'—she was very clear with the address—'it's not very far from here.'

" 'I forbid you to go near 'er, 'Arry,' my mother reiterated. And then realising too late the full im-

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portance of Fanny's letter, she picked it up. 'I won't 'ave this answered. I'll burn it as it deserves. And forget about it. Banish it from my mind. *There.*'

"And then my mother stood up and making a curious noise in her throat like the strangulation of a sob, she put Fanny's letter into the fire and took the poker to thrust it into the glow and make it burn. We all stared in silence as the letter curled up and darkened, burst into a swift flame and became in an instant a writhing, agonised, crackling black cinder. Then she sat down again, remained still for a moment, and then after a fierce struggle with her skirt-pocket dragged out a poor old dirty pocket-handkerchief and began to weep—at first quietly and then with a gathering passion. The rest of us sat aghast at this explosion.

" 'You mustn't go near Fanny, 'Arry; not if mother forbids,' said Ernest at last, gently but firmly.

"Matilda looked at me in grim inquiry.

" 'I *shall,*' I said, and was in a terror lest the unmanly tears behind my eyes should overflow.

" ''Arry!' cried my mother amidst her sobs. 'You'll break—you'll break my heart! First Fanny! Then you.'

" 'You see!' said Ernest.

"The storm of her weeping paused as though she waited to hear my answer. My silly little face must have been very red by this time and there was something wrong and uncontrollable about my voice, but I said what I meant to say. 'I shall go to Fanny,' I said, 'and I shall just ask her straight out whether she's leading a bad life.'

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"'And suppose she is?' asked Matilda.

"'I shall reason with her,' I said. 'I shall do all I can to save her. Yes—even if I have to find some work that will keep her. . . . She's my sister. . . .'

"I wept for a moment or so. 'I can't help it, mother,' I sobbed. 'I got to see Fanny!'

"I recovered my composure with an effort.

"'*So,*' said Matilda, regarding me, I thought, with rather more irony and rather less admiration than I deserved. Then she turned to my mother. 'I don't see that Harry can say fairer than that,' she said. 'I think you'll have to let him see her after that. He'll do all he can to save her, he says. Who knows? He might bring her to repentance.'

"'More likely the other way about,' said my mother, wiping her eyes, her brief storm of tears now over.

"'I can't 'elp feeling it's a mistake,' said Ernest, 'for 'Arry to go and see 'er.'

"'Well, anyhow don't give it up because you've forgotten the address, Harry,' said Matilda, 'or else you *are* done. Let it be your own free will and not forgetfulness, if you throw her over. One hundred and two Brantismore Gardens, Earl's Court. You'd better write it down.'

"'One hundred and two—Brantismore Gardens.'

"I went over to my books on the corner table to do as she advised sternly and resolutely in a fair round hand on the fly-leaf of Smith's 'Principia Latina.'"

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§ 6

"My first visit to Fanny's flat was quite unlike any of the moving scenes I acted in my mind beforehand. I went round about half past eight when shop was done on the evening next but one after Ernest's revelation. The house seemed to me a very dignified one and I went up a carpeted staircase to her flat. I rang the bell and she opened the door herself.

"It was quite evident at once that the smiling young woman in the doorway had expected to see some one else instead of the gawky youth who stood before her, and that for some moments she had not the slightest idea who I was. Her expression of radiant welcome changed to a defensive coldness. 'What do you want, please?' she said to my silent stare.

"She had altered very much. She had grown, though now I was taller than she was, and her wavy brown hair was tied by a band of black velvet with a brooch on one side of it, adorned with clear-cut stones of some sort that shone and twinkled. Her face and lips had a warmer colour than I remembered. And she was wearing a light soft greenish-blue robe with loose sleeves; it gave glimpses of her pretty neck and throat and revealed her white arms. She seemed a magically delightful being, soft and luminous and sweet-scented and altogether wonderful to a young barbarian out of the London streets. Her delicacy overawed me. I cleared my throat. 'Fanny!' I said hoarsely, 'don't you know me?'

"She knitted her pretty brows and then came her old delightful smile. 'Why! It's Harry!' she cried

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and drew me into the little hall and hugged and kissed me. 'My little brother Harry, grown as big as I am! How wonderful!'

"Then she went by me and shut the door and looked at me doubtfully. 'But why didn't you write to me first to say you were coming? Here am I dying for a talk with you and here's a visitor who's coming to see me. May come in at any moment. Now what am I to do? Let me see!'

"The little hall in which we stood was bright with white paint and pretty Japanese pictures. It had cupboards to hide away coats and hats and an old oak chest. Several doors opened into it and two were ajar. Through one I had a glimpse of a sofa and things set out for coffee, and through the other I saw a long mirror and a chintz-covered armchair. She seemed to hesitate between these two rooms and then pushed me into the former one and shut the door behind us.

" 'You should have written to tell me you were coming,' she said. 'I'm dying to talk to you and here's some one coming who's dying to talk to *me*. But never mind! let's talk all we can. How are you? *Well*—I can see that. But are you getting educated? And mother, how's mother? What's happened to Prue? And is Ernest as hot-tempered as ever?'

"I attempted to tell her. I tried to give her an impression of Matilda Good and to hint not too harshly at my mother's white implacability. I began to tell her of my chemist's shop and how much Latin and Chemistry I knew, and in the midst of it she darted away from me and stood listening.

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"It was the sound of a latch-key at the door.

" 'My other visitor,' she said, hesitated a moment and was out of the room, leaving me to study her furniture and the coffee-machine that bubbled on the table. She had left the door a little ajar and I heard all too plainly the sound of a kiss and then a man's voice. I thought it was rather a jolly voice.

" 'I'm tired, little Fanny; oh! I'm tired to death. This new paper is the devil. We've started all wrong. But I shall pull it off. Gods! if I hadn't this sweet pool of rest to plunge into, I'd go off my head! I'd have nothing left to me but head-lines. Take my coat; there's a dear. I smell coffee.'

"I heard a movement as though Fanny had checked her visitor almost at the door of the room I was in. I heard her say something very quickly about a brother.

" 'Oh, *Damn!*' said the man very heartily. 'Not another of 'em! How many brothers have you got, Fanny? Send him away. I've only got an hour altogether, my dear——'

"Then the door closed sharply—Fanny must have discovered it was ajar—and the rest of the talk was inaudible.

"Fanny reappeared, a little flushed and bright-eyed and withal demure. She had evidently been kissed again.

" 'Harry,' she said, 'I hate to ask you to go and come again, but that other visitor—I'd promised him first. Do you mind, Harry? I'm longing for a good time with you, a good long talk. You get your Sundays, Harry? Well, why not come here at three on

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Sunday when I'll be quite alone and we'll have a regular good old tea? Do you mind, Harry?'

"I said I didn't. In that flat ethical values seemed quite different to what they were outside.

" 'After all, you did ought to have written first,' said Fanny, 'instead of just jumping out on me out of the dark.'

"There was no one in the hall when she showed me out and not even a hat or coat visible. 'Give me a kiss, Harry,' she said and I kissed her very readily. 'Quite sure you don't mind?' she said at her door.

" 'Not a bit,' I said. 'I ought to have written.'

" 'Sunday at three,' she said, as I went down the carpeted staircase.

" 'Sunday at three,' I replied at the bend of the stairs.

"Down-stairs there was a sort of entrance hall to all the flats with a fire burning in a fireplace and a man ready to call a cab or taxi for any one who wanted one. The prosperity and comfort of it all impressed me greatly, and I was quite proud to be walking out of such a fine place. It was only when I had gone some way along the street that I began to realise how widely my plans for the evening had miscarried.

"I had not asked her whether she was living a bad life or not and I had reasoned with her not at all. The scenes I had rehearsed in my mind beforehand, of a strong and simple and resolute younger brother saving his frail but lovable sister from terrible degradations, had indeed vanished altogether from my

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mind when her door had opened and she had appeared. And here I was with the evening all before me and nothing to report to my family but the profound difference that lies between romance and reality. I decided not to report to my family at all yet, but to go for a very long walk and think this Fanny business over thoroughly, returning home when it would be too late for my mother to cross-examine me and 'draw me out' at any length.

"I made for the Thames Embankment, for that afforded uncrowded pavements and the solemnity and incidental beauty appropriate to a meditative promenade.

"It is curious to recall now the phases of my mind that night. At first the bright realities I came from dominated me: Fanny pretty and prosperous, kindly and self-assured, in her well-lit, well-furnished flat, and the friendly and confident voice I had heard speaking in the hall, asserted themselves as facts to be accepted and respected. It was delightful after more than two years of ugly imaginations to have the glimpse of my dear sister again so undefeated and loved and cared for and to look forward to a long time with her on Sunday and a long confabulation upon all I had done in the meantime and all I meant to do. Very probably these two people were married after all, but unable for some obscure reason to reveal the fact to the world. Perhaps Fanny would tell me as much in the strictest confidence on Sunday and I could go home and astonish and quell my mother with the whispered secret. And even as I developed and cuddled this idea it grew clear and

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cold and important in my mind that they were not married at all, and the shades of a long-accumulated disapproval dimmed that first bright impression of Fanny's little nest. I felt a growing dissatisfaction with the part I had played in our encounter. I had let myself be handled and thrust out as though I had been a mere boy instead of a brother full of help and moral superiority. Surely I ought to have said something, however brief, to indicate our relative moral positions! I ought to have faced that man too, the Bad Man, lurking no doubt in the room with the mirror and the chintz-covered chair. He had avoided seeing me—because he could not face me! And from these new aspects of the case I began to develop a whole new dream of reproach and rescue. What should I have said to the Bad Man? 'And so, sir, at last we meet——'

"Something like that.

"My imagination began to leap and bound and soar with me. I pictured the Bad Man, dressed in that 'immaculate evening dress' which my novels told me marked the deeper and colder depths of male depravity, cowering under my stream of simple eloquence. 'You took her,' I would say, 'from our homely but pure and simple home. You broke her father's heart'—yes, I imagined myself saying that! —'And what have you made of her?' I asked. 'Your doll, your plaything! to be pampered while the whim lasts and then to be cast aside!' Or—'tossed aside'?

"I decided 'tossed aside' was better.

"I found myself walking along the Embankment, gesticulating and uttering such things as that."

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"But you knew better?" said Firefly. "Even then."

"I knew better. But that was the way our minds worked in the ancient days."

§ 7

"But," said Sarnac, "my second visit to Fanny, like my first, was full of unexpected experiences and unrehearsed effects. The carpet on the pleasant staircase seemed to deaden down my moral tramplings, and when the door opened and I saw my dear Fanny again, friendly and glad, I forgot altogether the stern interrogations with which that second interview was to have opened. She pulled my hair and kissed me, took my hat and coat, said I had grown tremendously and measured herself against me, pushed me into her bright little sitting-room, where she had prepared such a tea as I had never seen before, little ham sandwiches, sandwiches of a delightful stuff called Gentleman's Relish, strawberry jam, two sorts of cake, and little biscuits to fill in any odd corners. 'You are a dear to come and see me, Harry. But I had a sort of feeling that whatever happened you would come along.'

" 'We two always sort of hung together,' I said.

" 'Always,' she agreed. 'I think mother and Ernie might have written me a line. Perhaps they will later. Ever seen an electric kettle, Harry? This is one. And you put that plug in there.'

" 'I know,' I said, and did as I was told. 'There's resistances embedded in the coating. I've been do-

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ing some electricity and chemistry. Council classes. Six'r seven subjects altogether. And there's a shop-window in Tothill Street full of such things.'

" 'I expect you know all about them,' she said. 'I expect you've learned all sorts of sciences,' and so we came to the great topic of what I was learning and what I was going to do.

"It was delightful to talk to some one who really understood the thirst for knowledge that possessed me. I talked of myself and my dreams and ambitions, and meanwhile, being a growing youth, my arm swept like a swarm of locusts over Fanny's wonderful tea. Fanny watched me with a smile on her face and steered me with questions towards the things she most wanted to know. And when we had talked enough for a time she showed me how to play her pianola and I got a roll of Schumann that Mr. Plaice had long ago made familiar to me and had the exquisite delight of playing it over for myself. These pianolas were quite easy things to manage, I found; in a little while I was already playing with conscious expression.

"Fanny praised me for my quickness, cleared her tea-things away while I played, and then came and sat beside me and listened and talked and we found we had learned quite a lot about music since our parting. We both thought great things of Bach,—whom I found I was calling quite incorrectly Batch—and Mozart, who also had to be pronounced a little differently. And then Fanny began to question me about the work I wanted to do in the world. 'You mustn't stay with that old chemist much longer,' she

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declared. How would I like to do some sort of work that had to do with books, bookselling or helping in a library or printing and publishing books and magazines? 'You've never thought of writing things?' asked Fanny. 'People do.'

" 'I made some verses once or twice,' I confessed, 'and wrote a letter to *The Daily News* about temperance. But they didn't put it in.'

" 'Have you ever wanted to write?'

" 'What, books? Like Arnold Bennett? *Rather!*'

" 'But you didn't quite know how to set about it.'

" 'It's difficult to begin,' I said, as though that was the only barrier.

" 'You ought to leave that old chemist's shop,' she repeated. 'If I were to ask people I know and found out some better sort of job for you, Harry, would you take it?'

" '*Rather!*' said I."

"Why not altogether?" interrupted Firefly.

"Oh! we used to say *Rather*," said Sarnac. "It was artistic understatement. But you realise how dreadfully I lapsed from all my preconceived notions about Fanny and myself. We talked the whole evening away. We had a delightful cold picnic-supper in a pretty little dining-room with a dresser, and Fanny showed me how to make a wonderful salad with onions very finely chopped and white wine and sugar in the dressing. And afterwards came some more of that marvel, the pianola, and then very reluctantly I took my leave. And when I found myself in the streets again I had once more my former sense of having dropped abruptly from one world into another,

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colder, bleaker, harder, and with entirely different moral values. Again I felt the same reluctance to go straight home and have my evening dimmed and destroyed by a score of pitiless questions. And when at last I did go home I told a lie. 'Fanny's got a pretty place and she's as happy as can be,' I said. 'I'm not quite sure, but from what she said, I believe that man's going to marry her before very long.'

"My cheeks and ears grew hot under my mother's hostile stare.

" 'Did she tell you that?'

" 'Practically,' I lied. 'I kind of got it out of her.'

" 'But 'e's married already!' said my mother.

" 'I believe there is something,' I said.

" '*Something!*' said my mother scornfully. 'She's stolen another woman's man. 'E belongs to 'er—for ever. No matter what there is against 'er. "Whomsoever God Hath Joined, Let No Man Put Asunder"!—that's what I was taught and what I believe. 'E may be older; 'e may have led her astray, but while she and 'e harbour together the sin is 'ers smutch as 'is. Did you see 'im?'

" 'He wasn't there.'

" ''Adn't the face. That's so much to their credit. And are you going there again?'

" 'I've kind of promised——'

" 'It's against my wishes, 'Arry. Every time you go near Fanny, 'Arry, you disobey me. Mark that. Let's be plain about that, once and for all.'

"I felt mulish. 'She's my sister,' I said.

" 'And I'm your mother. Though nowadays mothers are no more than dirt under their children's

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feet. Marry 'er indeed! Why *should* 'e? Likely. 'E'll marry the next one. Come, Prue, take that bit of coal off the fire and we'll go up to bed.' "

§ 8

"And now," said Sarnac, "I must tell you of the queer business organisation of Thunderstone House and the great firm of Crane & Newberry, for whom, at Fanny's instance, I abandoned Mr. Humberg and his gold-labelled bottles of nothingness. Crane & Newberry were publishers of newspapers, magazines and books, and Thunderstone House was a sort of fountain of printed paper, spouting an unending wash of reading-matter into the lives of the English people.

"I am talking of the world two thousand years ago," said Sarnac. "No doubt you have all been good children and have read your histories duly, but at this distance in time things appear very much foreshortened, and changes that occupied lifetimes and went on amidst dense clouds of doubt, misunderstanding and opposition seem to be the easiest and most natural of transitions. We were all taught that the scientific method came into human affairs first of all in the world of material things, and later on in the matters of psychology and human relationship, so that the large-scale handling of steel, and railways, automobiles, telegraphs, flying-machines and all the broad material foundations of the new age were in existence two or three generations before social, political and educational ideas and methods were modified in correspondence with the new necessities these

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things had created. There was a great unanticipated increase in the trade and population of the world and much confusion and conflict, violent social stresses and revolutions and great wars, before even the need of a scientific adjustment of human relationships was recognised. It is easy enough to learn of such things in general terms but hard to explain just what these processes of blind readjustment meant in anxiety, suffering and distress to the countless millions who found themselves born into the swirl of this phase of change. As I look back to that time in which I lived my other life I am reminded of a crowd of people in one of my old Pimlico fogs. No one had any vision of things as a whole; everybody was feeling his way slowly and clumsily from one just perceptible thing to another. And nearly everybody was uneasy and disposed to be angry.

"It is clear beyond question to us now, that the days of illiterate drudges were already past in the distant nineteenth century, for power-machinery had superseded them. The new world, so much more complicated and dangerous, so much richer and ampler, was a world insisting upon an educated population, educated intellectually and morally. But in those days these things were not at all clear, and it was grudgingly and insufficiently that access to knowledge and enlightenment was given by the learned and prosperous classes to the rapidly accumulating masses of the population. They insisted that it should be done by special channels and in a new and different class of school. I have told you of what passed for my education, reading and writing,

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rudimentary computations, 'jogfry' and so forth. That sort of process, truncated by employment at thirteen or fourteen, when curiosity and interest were just beginning to awaken, was as far as education had gone for the bulk of the common men and women in the opening years of the twentieth century. It had produced a vast multitude of people, just able to read, credulous and uncritical and pitifully curious to learn about life and things, pitifully wanting to see and know. As a whole the community did nothing to satisfy the vague aspirations of those half-awakened swarms; it was left to 'private enterprise' to find what profits it could in their dim desires. A number of great publishing businesses arose to trade upon the new reading public that this 'elementary' education, as we called it, had accumulated.

"In all ages people have wanted stories about life. The young have always wanted to be told about the stage on which they are beginning to play their parts, to be shown the chances and possibilities of existence, vividly and dramatically, so that they may imagine and anticipate their own reactions. And even those who are no longer youthful have always been eager to supplement their experiences and widen their judgment by tales and histories and discussions. There has been literature since there has been writing, since indeed there was enough language for story-telling and reciting. And always literature has told people what their minds were prepared to receive, searching for what it should tell rather in the mind and expectation of the hearer or reader—who was the person who paid—than in the unendowed wilder-

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nesses of reality. So that the greater part of the literature of every age has been a vulgar and ephemeral thing interesting only to the historian and psychologist of later times because of the light it threw upon the desires and imaginative limitations of its generation. But the popular literature of the age in which Harry Mortimer Smith was living was more abundant, more cynically insincere, lazy, cheap and empty than anything that the world had ever seen before.

"You would accuse me of burlesque if I were to tell you the stories of the various people who built up immense fortunes by catering for the vague needs of the new reading crowds that filled the hypertrophied cities of the Atlantic world. There was a certain Newnes of whom legend related that one day after reading aloud some item of interest to his family he remarked, 'I call that a regular tit-bit.' From that feat of nomenclature he went on to the idea of a weekly periodical full of scraps of interest, cuttings from books and newspapers and the like. A hungry multitude, eager and curious, was ready to feed greedily on such *hors d'œuvre*. So *Tit-Bits* came into existence, whittled from a thousand sources by an industrious and not too expensive staff, and Newnes became a man of wealth and a baronet. His first experiment upon the new public encouraged him to make a number of others. He gave it a monthly magazine full of short stories drawn from foreign sources. At first its success was uncertain, and then a certain Doctor Conan Doyle rose to fame in it and carried it to success with stories about crime and the

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detection of crime. Every intelligent person in those days, every one indeed intelligent or not, was curious about the murders and suchlike crimes which still abounded. Indeed, there could have been no more fascinating and desirable subject for us; properly treated such cases illuminated the problems of law, training and control in our social welter as nothing else could have done. The poorest people bought at least a weekly paper in order to quicken their wits over murder mysteries and divorces, driven by an almost instinctive need to probe motives and judge restraints. But Conan Doyle's stories had little of psychology in them; he tangled a skein of clews in order to disentangle it again, and his readers forgot the interest of the problem in the interest of the puzzle.

"Hard upon the heels of Newnes came a host of other competitors, among others a certain Arthur Pearson and a group of brothers Harmsworth who rose to great power and wealth from the beginning of a small weekly paper called *Answers*, inspired originally by the notion that people liked to read other people's letters. You will find in the histories how two of these Harmsworths, men of great thrust and energy, became Lords of England and prominent figures in politics, but I have to tell of them now simply to tell you of the multitude of papers and magazines they created to win the errand boy's guffaw, the heart of the factory girl, the respect of the aristocracy and the confidence of the *nouveau riche*. It was a roaring factory of hasty printing. Our own firm at Thunderstone House was of an older stand-

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ing than these Newnes, Pearson, Harmsworth concerns. As early as the eighteenth century the hunger for knowledge had been apparent, and a certain footman turned publisher, named Dodsley, had produced a book of wisdom called the 'Young Man's Companion.' Our founder, Crane, had done the same sort of thing in Early Victorian times. He had won his way to considerable success with a *Home Teacher* in monthly parts and with Crane's 'Circle of the Sciences' and a weekly magazine and so forth. His chief rivals had been two firms called Cassell's and Routledge's, and for years, though he worked upon a smaller capital, he kept well abreast of them. For a time the onrush of the newer popular publishers had thrust Crane and his contemporaries into the background and then, reconstructed and reinvigorated by a certain Sir Peter Newberry, the old business had won its way back to prosperity, publishing a shoal of novelette magazines and cheap domestic newspapers for women, young girls and children, reviving the *Home Teacher* on modern lines with a memory training system and a 'Guide to Success' by Sir Peter Newberry thrown in, and even launching out into scientific handbooks of a not too onerous sort.

"It is difficult for you to realise," said Sarnac, "what a frightful lot of printed stuff there was in that old world. It was choked with printed rubbish just as it was choked with human rubbish and a rubbish of furniture and clothing and every sort of rubbish; there was too much of the inferior grades of everything. And good things incredibly rare! You cannot imagine how delightful it is for me to sit here

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again, naked and simple, talking plainly and nakedly in a clear and beautiful room. The sense of escape, of being cleansed of unnecessary adhesions of any sort, is exquisite. We read a book now and then and talk and make love naturally and honestly and do our work and thought and research with well-aired well-fed brains, and we live with all our senses and abilities taking a firm and easy grip upon life. But stress was in the air of the twentieth century. Those who had enough courage fought hard for knowledge and existence, and to them we sold our not very lucid or helpful *Home Teacher* and our entirely base 'Guide to Success'; but great multitudes relaxed their hold upon life in a way that is known now only to our morbid psychologists. They averted their attention from reality and gave themselves up to reverie. They went about the world distraught in a day-dream, a day-dream that they were not really themselves, but beings far nobler and more romantic, or that presently things would change about them into a dramatic scene centring about themselves. These novelette magazines and popular novels that supplied the chief part of the income of Crane & Newberry, were really helps to reverie—mental drugs. Sunray, have you ever read any twentieth-century novelettes?"

"One or two," said Sunray. "It's as you say. I suppose I have a dozen or so. Some day you shall see my little collection."

"Very likely *ours*—half of them,—Crane & Newberry's I mean. It will be amusing to see them again. The great bulk of this reverie material was written for Crane & Newberry by girls and women and by a

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type of slack imaginative men. These 'authors,' as we called them, lived scattered about London or in houses on the countryside, and they sent their writings by post to Thunderstone House, where we edited them in various ways and put the stuff into our magazines and books. Thunderstone House was a great rambling warren of a place opening out of Tottenham Court Road, with a yard into which huge lorries brought rolls of paper and from which vans departed with our finished products. It was all aquiver with the roar and thudding of the printing machinery. I remember very vividly to this day how I went there first, down a narrow roadway out of the main thoroughfare, past a dingy public house and the stage-door of a theatre."

"What were you going to do—pack up books? Or run errands?" asked Radiant.

"I was to do what I could. Very soon I was on the general editorial staff."

"Editing popular knowledge?"

"Yes."

"But why did they want an illiterate youngster like yourself at Thunderstone House?" asked Radiant. "I can understand that this work of instructing and answering the first crude questions of the new reading classes was necessarily a wholesale improvised affair, but surely there were enough learned men at the ancient universities to do all the editing and instructing that was needed!"

Sarnac shook his head. "The amazing thing is that there weren't," he said. "They produced men enough of a sort but they weren't the right sort."

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His auditors looked puzzled.

"The rank and file of the men they sent out labelled M.A. and so forth from Oxford and Cambridge were exactly like those gilt-lettered jars in Mr. Humberg's shop, that had nothing in them but stale water. The pseudoeducated man of the older order couldn't teach, couldn't write, couldn't explain. He was pompous and patronising and prosy; timid and indistinct in statement, with no sense of the common need or the common quality. The promoted office boy, these new magazine and newspaper people discovered, was brighter and better at the job, comparatively modest and industrious, eager to know things and impart things. The editors of our periodicals, the managers of our part publications and so forth were nearly all of the office-boy class, hardly any of them, in the academic sense, educated. But many of them had a sort of educational enthusiasm and all of them a boldness that the men of the old learning lacked. . . ."

Sarnac reflected. "In Britain at the time I am speaking about—and in America also—there were practically two educational worlds and two traditions of intellectual culture side by side. There was all this vast fermenting hullabaloo of the new publishing, the new press, the cinema theatres and so forth, a crude mental uproar arising out of the new elementary schools of the nineteenth century, and there was the old aristocratic education of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which had picked up its tradition from the Augustan age of Rome. They didn't mix. On the one hand were these office-boy

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fellows with the intellectual courage and vigour—oh! of Aristotle and Plato, whatever the quality of their intellectual equipment might be; on the other the academic man, affectedly Grecian, like the bought-and-sold learned man of the days of Roman slavery. He had the gentility of the household slave; he had the same abject respect for patron, prince and patrician; he had the same meticulous care in minor matters, and the same fear of uncharted reality. He criticised like a slave, sneering and hinting, he quarrelled like a slave, despised all he dared despise with the eagerness of a slave. He was incapable of serving the multitude. The new reading-crowd, the working masses, the 'democracy' as we used to call it, had to get its knowledge and its wisdom without him.

"Crane, our founder, had had in his day some inkling of the educational function such businesses as his were bound to serve in the world, but Sir Peter Newberry had been a hard tradesman, intent only on recovering the prosperity that the newer popular publishers had filched away from our firm. He was a hard driving man; he drove hard, he paid in niggardly fashion and he succeeded. He had been dead now for some years and the chief shareholder and director of the firm was his son Richard. He was nicknamed the Sun; I think because some one had quoted Shakespear about the winter of our discontent being made summer by this Sun of York. He was by contrast a very genial and warming person. He was acutely alive to the moral responsibility that lay behind the practical irresponsibility of a popular publisher. If anything, he drove harder than his father, but he

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paid generously; he tried to keep a little ahead of the new public instead of a little behind; the times moved in his favour and he succeeded even more than his father had done. I had been employed by Crane & Newberry for many weeks before I saw him, but in the first office I entered in Thunderstone House I saw the evidences of his personality in certain notices upon the wall. They were printed in clear black letters on cards and hung up. It was his device for giving the house a tone of its own.

"I remember 'We lead; the others imitate,' and 'If you are in any doubt about its being too good put it in.' A third was: 'If a man doesn't know what you know that's no reason for writing as if he was an all-round fool. Rest assured there is something he knows better than you do.' "

§ 9

"It took me some time to get from the yard of Thunderstone House to the office in which these inscriptions were displayed. Fanny had told me to ask for Mr. Cheeseman, and when I had discovered and entered the doorway up a flight of steps, which had at first been masked by two large vans, I made this demand of an extremely small young lady inclosed in a kind of glass cage. She had a round face and a bright red button of a nose. She was engaged, I realised slowly, in removing a foreign stamp from a fragment of envelope by licking the back of the paper. She did not desist from this occupation but mutely asked my business with her eyes.

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" 'Oran-amoiment?' she asked, still licking.

" 'Pardon?'

" 'Oran-amoiment?'

" 'I'm sorry,' I said, 'I don't get it quite.'

" 'Mus' be deaf,' she said, putting down the stamp and taking a sufficient breath for slow loud speech. ''Ave you *gottonappointment?*'

" 'Oh!' I said. 'Yes. I was told to come here today and see Mr. Cheeseman between ten and twelve.'

She resumed her struggle with the stamp for a time. 'S'pose you don't c'lect stamps?' she asked. ''Sintresting 'obby. Mr. Cheeseman's written a little 'andbook about it. Looking for a job, I suppose? May 'ave to wait a bit. Will you fill up that bit of paper there? Formality we 'ave to insist on. Pencil. . . .'

"The paper demanded my name and my business and I wrote that the latter was 'literary employment.'

" 'Lordy,' said the young lady when she read it. 'I thought you was in for the ware'ouse. I say, Florence,' she said to another considerably larger girl who had appeared on the staircase, 'look at 'im. 'E's after litry emplyment.'

" 'Cheek!' said the second young lady after one glance at me, and sat down inside the glass box with a piece of chewing-gum and a novelette just published by the firm. The young lady with the button nose resumed her stamp-damping. They kept me ten minutes before the smaller one remarked: 'S'pose I better take this up to Mr. Cheeseman, Flo,' and departed with my form.

"She returned after five minutes or so. 'Mr.

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Cheeseman says 'e can see you now for *one* minute,' she said, and led the way up a staircase and along a passage that looked with glass windows into a printer's shop and down a staircase and along a dark passage to a small apartment with an office table, one or two chairs, and book-shelves covered with paper-covered publications. Out of this opened another room, and the door was open. 'You better sit down here,' said the young lady with the button nose.

" 'That Smith?' asked a voice. 'Come right in.'

"I went in, and the young lady with the button nose vanished from my world.

"I discovered a gentleman sunken deeply in an armchair before a writing-table, and lost in contemplation of a row of vivid drawings which were standing up on a shelf against the wall of the room. He had an intensely earnest, frowning, red face, a large broad mouth intensely compressed, and stiff black hair that stood out from his head in many directions. His head was slightly on one side and he was chewing the end of a lead-pencil. 'Don't see it,' he whispered. 'Don't see it.' I stood awaiting his attention. 'Smith,' he murmured, still not looking at me, 'Harry Mortimer Smith. Smith, were you by any chance educated at a Board-School?'

" 'Yessir,' I said.

" 'I hear you have literary tastes.'

" 'Yessir.'

" 'Then come here and stand by me and look at these damned pictures there. Did you ever see such stuff?'

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"I stood by his side but remained judiciously silent. The drawings I now perceived were designs for a magazine cover. Upon all of them appeared the words 'The New World' in very conspicuous lettering. One design was all flying-machines and steamships and automobiles; two others insisted upon a flying-machine; one showed a kneeling loin-clothed man saluting the rising sun—which however rose behind him. Another showed a planet earth half illuminated, and another was simply a workman going to his work in the dawn.

" 'Smith,' said Mr. Cheeseman; 'it's you've got to buy this magazine, not me. Which of these covers do you prefer? It's your decision. *Fiat experimentum in corpore vile.*'

" 'Meaning me, sir?' I said brightly.

"His bristle eyebrows displayed a momentary surprise. 'I suppose we're all fitted with the same tags nowadays,' he remarked. 'Which do you find most attractive?'

" 'Those aeroplane things, sir, seem to me to be shoving it a bit too hard,' I said.

" 'H'm,' said Mr. Cheeseman. 'That's what the Sun says. You wouldn't buy on that?'

" 'I don't think so, sir. It's been done too much.'

" 'How about that globe?'

" 'Too like an Atlas, sir.'

" 'Aren't geography and travel interesting?'

" 'They are, sir, but somehow they aren't attractive.'

" 'Interesting but not attractive. H'm. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings. . . . So it's go-

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ing to be that labour chap there in the dawn. You'd buy that, eh?'

"'Is this going to be a magazine about inventions and discoveries and progress, sir?'

"'Exactly.'

"'Well, the Dawn's good, sir, but I don't think that sort of Labour Day Cartoon man is going to be very attractive. Looks rheumatic and heavy, sir. Why not cut him out and keep the dawn?'

"'Bit too like a slice of ham, Smith—thin pink streaks.'

"I was struck by an idea. 'Suppose, sir, you kept that dawn scene and made it a bit earlier in the year. Buds on the trees, sir. And perhaps snowy mountains, rather cold and far off. And then you put a hand right across it—just a big hand—pointing, sir.'

"'Pointing up?' said Mr. Cheeseman.

"'No, sir, pointing forward and just a little up. It would sort of make one curious.'

"'It would. A woman's hand.'

"'Just a hand I think, sir.'

"'You'd buy that?'

"'I'd jump at it, sir, if I had the money.'

"Mr. Cheeseman reflected for some moments, chewing his pencil serenely. Then he spat out small bits of pencil over his desk and spoke. 'What you say, Smith, is exactly what I've been thinking. Exactly. It's very curious.' He pressed a bell-push on his desk and a messenger-girl appeared. 'Ask Mr. Prelude to come here. . . . So you think you'd like to come into Thunderstone House, Smith. I'm told you know a little about science already. Learn more.

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Our public's moving up to science. I've got some books over there I want you to read and pick out anything you find interesting.'

" 'You'll be able to find me a job, sir?' I said.

" 'I've got to find you a job all right. Orders is orders. You'll be able to sit in that room there. . . .'

"We were interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Prelude. He was a tall, thin, cadaverous man with a melancholy expression.

" 'Mr. Prelude,' said Mr. Cheeseman, waving his arm at the cover sketches; 'this stuff won't do. It's —it's too banal. We want something fresher, something with a touch of imagination. What I want to see on the cover is—well, say a dawn—a very calm and simple scene, mostly colour, mountain range far away just flushed with sunrise, valley blue and still, high streamer clouds touched with pink. See? Trees perhaps in the foreground—just budding—spring *motif* and morning *motif*. See? All a little faint and backgroundy. Then a big hand and wrist across the page pointing at something, something high and far away. See?'

"He surveyed Mr. Prelude with the glow of creative enthusiasm on his face. Mr. Prelude looked disapproval. 'The Sun will like that,' he said.

" 'It's the goods,' said Mr. Cheeseman.

" 'Why not those flying-machines?'

" 'Why not midges?' asked Mr. Cheeseman.

"Mr. Prelude shrugged his shoulders. 'I've got no use for a magazine on progress without a flying-machine or a Zeppelin,' he said. 'Still—it's your affair.'

"Mr. Cheeseman looked a little dashed by his col-

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league's doubt, but he held to his idea. 'We'll get a sketch made,' he said. 'How about Wilkinson?'

"They discussed some unknown Wilkinson as a possible cover-designer. Then Mr. Cheeseman turned to me. 'By the by, here's a youngster we've got to make use of, Prelude. We don't know what he can do, but he seems intelligent. I thought we'd use him to sift some of those scientific books. What he likes, *they*'ll like. *I* can't read that stuff. I'm too busy.'

"Mr. Prelude surveyed me. 'You never know what you can do till you try,' he said. 'Do you know anything of science?'

" 'Not very much,' I said. 'But I've done some physiography and chemistry and a little geology. And read a lot.'

" 'You don't want to know very much,' said Mr. Prelude. 'You're better without it here. Makes you Highbrow. Highbrow goes to tens of thousands, but Crane & Newberry go to hundreds of thousands. Not that our brows aren't rising some in this establishment. Educational and improving, we're going to be. So far as is consistent with our profits. See that notice,—*We lead?* All the same, Cheeseman,' said Mr. Prelude, 'the thing that has sold, the thing that sells and the thing that's going to sell, is the magazine with a pretty girl on the cover—and the less costume the better. Consistent with decency. Now here's—what's your name?'

" 'Smith, sir.'

" 'Smith. And here's all these covers on the bookstall. And then I produce *this*. Which does he buy?'

"*This* was the cover of the summer number of Newberry's *Story Magazine*, on which two young

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ladies in skin-tight bathing-dresses disported themselves on a sandy beach.

" 'Smith goes for this,' said Mr. Prelude triumphantly.

"I shook my head.

" 'You mean to say that isn't attractive?' said Mr. Cheeseman, turning in his chair and pointing with his well-chewed pencil.

"I reflected.

" 'There's never anything about them inside,' I said.

" 'Got you there, Prelude!' said Mr. Cheeseman.

" 'Not a bit. He bought six or seven before he found that out. And most of 'em forgot about it when they read inside.' "

§ 10

"I found my introduction to Thunderstone House far less terrifying than I had anticipated. It was gratifying to have come so near to what Mr. Cheeseman had thought about the magazine cover, and there were presently other very reassuring coincidences of the same sort. I was immediately interested in the editorial and publishing work that was going on about me, and my mind took one of those forward strides that are characteristic of adolescence. I was still a boy when I left Mr. Humberg; I had not been with Crane & Newberry six weeks before I perceived that I was a capable and responsible young man. I began to form opinions rapidly, to write with confidence; even my handwriting suddenly grew up

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from a careless or overcareful boyish scrawl to a consistent and characteristic script. I began to think about the clothes I was wearing and of the impression I made upon other people.

"In quite a little time I was writing short contributions to some of our minor weeklies and monthlies and suggesting articles and 'features,' as we called them, to Mr. Cheeseman. The eighteen shillings a week at which I started went up in a series of jerks to three pounds, which was quite a big salary in those days for a youngster not yet eighteen. Fanny took the keenest interest in my work and displayed an extraordinary understanding of its conditions. She seemed to know all about Mr. Cheeseman and Mr. Prelude and the rest of my colleagues directly I mentioned them.

"One day I was working in the room next to Mr. Cheeseman's with another youngster called Wilkins at a rather odd little job. One of the authors our firm employed had written a long story for the *Story Reader's Paradise*, and it had been set up by the printers and passed for press before it was discovered that in a careless moment she had given her chief villain the name of a very prominent lawyer who unhappily also had a country house in a village almost identical in name with the corresponding village in the story. The prominent lawyer might see fit to consider this use of his name as libellous and make trouble for us. So Wilkins and I were going through two sets of proofs, one to check the other, and we were changing the name of the prominent lawyer to an entirely different one whenever it oc-

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curred. To brighten the task we had made a game of it. Each one raced down his galley-proof and called the name of 'Reginald Flake' whenever he found it and scored a point for every name he called first. I was some points up when I heard a voice in the passage that seemed oddly familiar to me. 'They're all spread out on my desk, sir, if you like to come into my room,' I heard Mr. Cheeseman say.

" 'Fay-nits,' said Wilkins. 'It's the Sun.'

"I turned round as the door opened and saw Mr. Cheeseman holding the door open for a good-looking youngish man, with rather handsome regular features and a sort of bang of brown hair over his forehead. He wore a pair of very round large spectacles with glasses tinted a faint yellow colour. He met my eyes and an expression of partial recognition came into his and faded again. Either he recognised me or he recognised a resemblance in me. He followed Mr. Cheeseman across the room. Then he turned sharply.

" 'Of course,' he said smiling and returning a step or two towards me. 'You must be young Smith. How are you getting on here?'

" 'I'm working for Mr. Cheeseman mostly,' I said standing up.

"He turned to Mr. Cheeseman.

" 'Very satisfactory, sir. Quick, interested; he'll do well here.'

" 'I'm glad to hear it—very glad. Every one has a chance here and there's no favours. No favours. The best man does the job. Glad to see you among the directors whenever you care to come up to us, Smith.'

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" 'I'll do my best, sir.'

"He hesitated, smiled again in a very friendly way and went into Mr. Cheeseman's room. . . .

" 'Where are we?' I said. 'Middle of galley 32? Score, 22–29.'

" 'How d'you know *'im?*' asked Wilkins in a fierce undertone.

" 'I don't know him,' I said, suddenly hot and flushed. 'I've never seen him before.'

" 'Well, he knew you.'

" 'He's heard about me.'

" 'Who from?'

" 'How the deuce should *I* know?' I asked with needless heat.

" 'Oh!' said Wilkins and reflected. 'But——'

"He glanced at my troubled face and said no more.

"But at the game of 'Reginald Flake' he overhauled me and beat me at the end of the book, 67–42."

§ 11

"I concealed altogether from my mother the share that Fanny had had in getting me my new job and all the opportunities it carried with it in Thunderstone House, and so it was possible for her to find some pride and satisfaction in my increasing prosperity. I was presently able to double and then still further to increase my contribution to the household expenses, and I exchanged my attic, which was handed over to Prue for her very own, for the room which had once sheltered the old Moggeridges. It

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was rearranged as a bed-sitting-room for me, and soon I had first one and then several shelves full of books and a writing-desk of my own.

"And also I concealed from my mother, for there was no use in distressing her, the frequency of my visits to Fanny. We began to make little excursions together, for Fanny, I discovered, was often very lonely. Newberry was a very busy man, and often he could not come near her for ten days or a fortnight, and although she had some women friends, and classes and lectures, there were gaps often of several days when she would have had no one to speak to but the servant who came in daily to her, if it had not been for me. But all this companioning of Fanny I tried to hide from my mother, though now and then her suspicions stabbed my falsehoods. Ernie and Prue, however, were able to follow the calls of love unhampered by the family shame, and presently they were both engaged and his young lady and her young man were brought to a Sunday tea-party in the drawing-room—through the kind permission of Mr. and Mrs. Milton who were as usual, 'away.' Ernie's Young Lady—I've completely forgotten her name—proved to be a well-dressed self-possessed young woman with a vast knowledge of people in what we used to call 'society'; she talked freely and fashionably, taking the larger share of the conversation, of Ascot and Monte Carlo and the Court. Prue's Mr. Pettigrew was of a more serious quality, and of the things he said I remember now only that he expressed a firm conviction that Messages from the Dead were Bound to Come in a few

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years' time. He was a chiropodist and very well thought of in chiropodological circles."

"Stop!" cried Radiant. "What is this? You are talking nonsense, Sarnac. What is chiropodological —hand—foot—scientific?"

"I thought you'd ask me that," said Sarnac smiling. "Chiropody was—corn-cutting."

"Corn-cutting—harvesting," said Starlight. "But where do the hands and feet come in? There were machines then, were there not?"

"No, this was a different sort of corn. Mr. Humberg's shop was full of corn-salves and corn-cures. Corns were painful and tiresome callosities produced on people's feet by the pressure of ill-fitting boots. We don't know of such things nowadays, but they darkened scores of lives in Pimlico."

"But why did they wear ill-fitting boots?" demanded Radiant. "Oh!—never mind. Never mind. I know. A mad world which made boots at hazard without looking at the feet that had to wear them! And wore boots that hurt it when no sane people would dream of wearing boots! Go on with your story."

"Let me see," said Sarnac. "I was talking of a tea-party, a family tea-party in the drawing-room—in which we talked of everything in the world but my sister Fanny. And quite a little while after that tea-party my mother fell ill and died.

"It was a swift and sudden illness. She caught a cold and would not go to bed. When she did go to bed, she got up after one day of it, because she couldn't bear to think of all that Prue might be doing or not

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doing in the housework down-stairs. And her cold turned to pneumonia, the same sort of inflammation that had carried off the Moggeridges, and she died in three days.

"Now when the fever came upon her she changed suddenly from something white and hard and unapproachable to something flushed and pitiful. Her face grew smaller and younger-looking, her eyes bright, and something came into them that reminded me of Fanny when Fanny was distressed. And all my habit of sullen resistance to my mother melted when I saw her struggling for breath on her tumbled pillow and realised that she might be near the end of all her hates and drudgeries. Matilda Good became again the old friend who had known her since she was a young woman, and they called each other 'Tilda' and 'Marty' instead of Matilda and Martha. Matilda for all her varicose veins was up and down stairs fifty times a day; and there was much sending out for expensive things, the more expensive the better, that Matilda thought my mother might 'fancy.' They stood appealingly untouched upon the table by her bedside. Once or twice towards the end my mother asked for me, and when I came in the evening and bent over her she whispered hoarsely, ''Arry boy—promise me! . . . Promise me! . . .'

"I sat down and took the hand she held out to me, and so holding to me, she dozed.

"What she wanted me to promise she never said; and whether it was some last vow she wanted to extract from me that would separate me from Fanny for ever, or whether her thoughts about Fanny had

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changed under the shadow of death and she had some new message for her, I cannot imagine to this day. Perhaps she herself did not know what I had to promise; a dying desire for predominance moved her. Will stirred in her and faded again to nothing. 'Promise me!' Fanny she never mentioned by name and we did not dare to bring my sister in to her. Ernest came and kissed her and knelt down by the bedside and suddenly, dreadfully wept aloud like the child he was and set us all weeping; he was her first-born and her dearest, he had known her before her final embitterment, he had always been a dutiful son to her.

"Presently she was lying there very straight and still, as hushed and still as my father's shop on Sundays, and the traffics and struggles and angers of life had done with her for ever. Her face was now neither young nor old, a marble face of peace. All her peevish resentment was smoothed and wiped away. It had never occurred to me before that she had or had not good looks, but now I saw that Fanny's fine regularity of feature came from her. She was like Fanny, like an immobile, unhumorous Fanny.

"I stood beside her still body oppressed by a grief too wide and deep for tears, an immense grief that was not so much for her as for all that distress of life she had embodied. For now I saw that there was not and there never had been anything hateful in her; I saw for the first time the devotion of her, the misguided passion for right, the mute, blundering, tormented and tormenting love in her heart.

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Even her love of Fanny was a love capsized and inverted; her fallen daughter had been to her a detested changeling for the pretty clever little girl who was to have been a paragon of feminine virtue. Except for Ernest how bitterly and repeatedly had we children offended her rigid and implacable standards, Fanny and I openly and rebelliously and Prue by discovery! For Prue—I will not tell you the details of Matilda's exposure—pilfered.

"Long before we children began to thwart my mother there must have been a still more monstrous disappointment for her. What sort of dreams of manly piety and decorum had she wrapped about my poor, maundering, ramshackle, loose-limbed father when he and she walked out together in their Sunday clothes, making the best and more than the best of themselves? He must have been a tall, good-looking, young man then, and reassuringly apt with pious reflections. What shocks had he, gross, clumsy, wayward, ignorant and incompetent as the dear man was, inflicted upon her set and limited expectations?

"And then think of my Uncle John Julip again, that wonderful and adored elder brother with the manners of a sporting baronet, who had slowly shrivelled down to the figure of a drunken thief! Everything had shrivelled for her,—poor soul! In our streets in those old days men were permitted to sell brightly coloured distended bladders to children, the most apt instruments for acute disappointment you can imagine; and the life God had given my mother was very like one of these bladders. It had burst and shrivelled down to a limp and empty resi-

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due that nothing could ever restore. She had faced her declining days, prematurely wrinkled, weary, laborious and unloved except by one dutiful son. . . .

"Yes, the thought of Ernest was a consolation to me. Surely his loyalty had meant happiness for her."

Sarnac paused. "I find it impossible," he said, "to disentangle my thoughts as I stood by my mother's death-bed from a thousand things that have come to me since about her. I have had to tell of her as an antagonist, as a hard uncharitable soul. That was her rôle in my story. But she was indeed just the creature and victim of that disordered age which had turned her natural tenacity to a blind intolerance and wasted her moral passion upon ugly and barren ends. If Fanny and Ernest and I had shown any stoutness against the disadvantages of our start in life, if we had won for ourselves any knowledge or respect, we inherited that much steadfastness from her; such honesty as we had was hers. If her moral harshness had overshadowed and embittered our adolescence, her passionate mothering had sheltered our childhood. Our father would have loved us, wondered at us and left us about. But early in her life, that fear, that terror-stricken hatred of sex that overshadowed the Christian centuries, that frantic resort to the suppressions, subjugations and disciplines of a stereotyped marriage in its harshest form, a marriage as easy to step into and as hard to leave as a steel trap with its teeth hidden by the most elaborate secrecies and misrepresentations, had set its pitiless grip upon my mother's imagination and blackened all the happier impulses in life for her. She was

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ready, if necessary, to pass all her children through the fires of that Moloch, if by so doing their souls might be saved. She did it the more bitterly because she was doing it against the deeper undeveloped things in her own nature.

"Such things, more dimly appreciated perhaps, passed through the mind of Harry Mortimer Smith, my former self, as he stood beside his dead mother. He was torn—I was torn—by a sense of irrational separation and by the haunting persuasion of lost opportunities. There were things I felt that I might have said, propitious moments I might have seized to make things better between us. I had differed from her so harshly; I might have been so much kinder to her and still have held my way. She lay there a feeble little old woman, thin, worn and prematurely aged. How often had I struck at her with all my rebel strength, blind to the fact that I could wound her as only a child can wound the mother who bore it. She had been darkened and I also had been darkened, and now—now it was all too late. The door had closed between us. And was closed for ever. For ever. . . ."

§ 12

"The year and a half that intervened between my mother's death and the beginning of the First World War—the War that came before the Poison-Gas War and the Great Desolation—were years of rapid growth for me, mental and physical alike. I remained with Matilda Good because I had come to love that

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clumsy, wise, friendly creature almost as if she was my second mother, but now I was prosperous enough to occupy the whole of the second floor and to have a sitting-room separate from my bedroom. I still came down to the underground breakfast-room for breakfast or supper or high tea because I liked talking with Matilda. Prue had married Mr. Pettigrew by that time, and in her stead two grey and sedulous women came in—they were sisters, one a spinster and the other the wife of a broken-down prize-fighter —to do the drudgeries Prue and my mother had done.

"My chief companion in those days was my sister Fanny. Our childhood's alliance was renewed and strengthened. We had a need for each other; we were able to help each other as no one else could help us. I found out very soon that Fanny's life was divided into two very unequal parts; that she had hours and sometimes days of excitement and happiness with Newberry, who loved her greatly and gave her all the time he could steal away for her and introduced her to such friends as he could trust to respect her and keep their secret, and also she had long stretches of uneventful solitude in which she was terribly left to herself. My sister Fanny was plucky and loyal and devoted, but before we two got together again I think she found those grey intervals of suspended animation dreary and dangerous and sometimes almost intolerable. Often she had nothing to live for at all, nothing bright and vital, but the almost daily note, a hasty word or so he scribbled to her. And the better he was, the worse it was for her. The fact that he was pleasant and delightful

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and deeply in love with her, the very brightness of being with him, made those great intervals seem darker and duller."

"Hadn't she work?" asked Sunray.

"And fellow workers, and other women?" asked Firefly.

"Not in her position. Not as an unmarried woman —of lowly origins—with a lover."

"But there were others in the same position? Surely there were many!"

"A scattered class, a class made to be ashamed of itself. Newberry and Fanny were lovers, such lovers as we are to-day; they got through with it and at last, I believe, they married according to the custom of the time. But they were the exceptional ones, they knew what they wanted and had stout hearts. Most of these irregular unions succumbed to the boredom in between and to the temptations of separation. Forgetfulness and jealousy played havoc with these insecure couples. The girls in their phases of loneliness picked up with other men and the first lover suspected their infidelities and strayed away. I have a lot to tell you yet about jealousy in the old world; it was not regarded as an ugly thing but as a rather high-spirited thing. People let it go and were proud of it. And the majority of these irregular unions were not even love unions in the first place, they were vice unions, dishonest on either side. Drugs and drink crept very easily into lives divided between overexcitement and tedium and darkened by a general disapproval. The defiant pose was the easiest pose. The unmarried lover was made a social

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outcast and driven towards other sorts of social outcasts, more evil and unhappy. . . . You see perhaps now why my sister Fanny was rather alone and aloof, for all that she belonged to a numerous class.

"I suppose," said Sarnac, "that the object of that rigid legal marriage of the old world was to keep lovers together. In countless cases it kept the wrong people together and lovers apart. But then you must remember that in those days children were supposed to be providential accidents; they were indeed accidents of cohabitation and that altered all the conditions of the question. There were no proper schools for children, no sort of refuge if the parents parted and tore the home asunder. We are so secure; it is hard to imagine now the chancy insecurity of the ancient days. It is hard to imagine the dangers that hung about an unprotected child. In our world nowadays we all seem to get paired; sooner or later each finds a mate and marriage is a natural and necessary relationship instead of a compulsory device. All the priests of all the religions that have ever been in the world could not bind me to Sunray more firmly than I am bound to-day. Does one get a book and an altar to marry the axe to its handle? . . .

"None of which does in the least degree affect the fact that my sister Fanny suffered dreadfully from loneliness before she rediscovered me.

"She was full of curiosities and enterprise, and she took possession of my leisure to explore all sorts of shows and resorts in and about old London, museums, picture-galleries, parks, gardens, and heaths, that I

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should otherwise never have visited. Indeed she might not have visited them either if I had not been available as her escort, because in that world of crazy suppressions, most of these places were haunted by furtive love-hunters and feeble-minded folk who might have been irritating and tiresome to a solitary girl so pretty as Fanny. They would have followed her about and accosted her when they got her alone, and thrust their disagreeable cravings between her and the beauty and sunshine.

"But together we went gaily to all sorts of interesting things. This old London I am describing to you had a large share of parks and gardens; there was a pleasing quaintness about all of them and much unpremeditated loveliness. There was a certain Richmond Park, to which we often resorted, with many fine old trees and grassy spaces and wildernesses of bracken, that got very yellow and gay in autumn, and a quantity of deer. You might have been transported from this age to Richmond Park two thousand years ago, and still fancied yourself in the northland parks of to-day. The great trees, like nearly all trees in those days, were, it is true, infested with fungus and partly decayed, but Fanny and I never noticed that. They seemed great healthy trees to us. And there was a view from a hillcrest of the winding Thames, a very delightful view. And then there were the oddest old gardens and flower spaces at Kew. I remember a quite good rock-garden and glass houses of flowers; the brightest flowers the old world imagined possible. And there were paths through a jungle of rhododendra, primitive small

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rhododendra, but bright coloured and a great delight to Fanny and me. There was a place where we had tea at little tables in the open air. In that frowsty old germ-saturated world with its dread of draughts and colds and coughs it gave one a bright sense of adventure to eat food in the open air.

"We went to museums and picture-galleries and talked about what the pictures meant and we talked of a thousand things together. There comes back to me one conversation we had at a place called Hampton Court, a queer old red brick palace with a great grapevine under glass and an ancient garden beside the Thames. There were flower-beds full of half-wild herbaceous flowers, and we walked beside them under trees until we came to a low wall that looked upon the river, and we sat down on a seat and there, after a silence, suddenly Fanny, like one who has been pent up beyond endurance, began talking of love.

"She began by asking questions about the girls I had met and the girls at Thunderstone House. I described one or two of them to her. My chief friend among them was Milly Kimpton from the counting-house; we had got to the pitch of taking teas together and suchlike friendly acts. 'That's not love,' said Fanny the wise, 'lending each other books. You don't begin to know what love is yet, Harry.

" 'But you will, Harry—you will.

" 'Don't you be too late about it, Harry. There's nothing in life like loving some one, Harry. People don't talk to you about it and lots of people don't know what they are missing. It's all the difference

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between being nothing or something. It's all the difference between being dead or alive. When you are really loving some one you're all right and nothing can harm you. And when you aren't, nothing is right, everything is wrong. But love is a queer thing, Harry, and about as dreadful as it is dear. It gets wrong. Sometimes it all goes wrong and it's awful; it slips from you somehow; it goes and you're left mean and little—ever so mean!—and you can't get back and it seems you hardly want to get back. You're dead and you're damned and done for, and then again it all comes back again like the sunrise—like being born afresh.'

"And then with a desperate shamelessness she began to talk of Newberry and how much she loved him. She told little irrelevant things about his 'ways.' 'He comes to me whenever he can,' she said, and repeated this presently. 'He's all my life,' she said. 'You don't know what he is to me. . . .'

"Then her constant dread of a separation crept up to the surface of her thoughts.

" 'Perhaps,' she said, 'it will always go on like this. . . . I don't care if it does, I don't care if I never marry him. I wouldn't care—not if at last I'm thrown aside. I'd go through it all again and count myself lucky even if I knew for certain I was to be dropped and cast aside.'

"Queer Fanny! Her face was flushed and her eyes shining with tears. I asked myself what had been happening.

" 'He'll never throw me aside, Harry. He'll never throw me aside. He can't. He can't. He's half as

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old again as I am and yet he comes to me in his trouble. Once— Once he cried to me. Men, all of you, are so strong, and yet so helpless. . . .

" 'You've got to have a woman to come to . . .

" 'Just a little while ago— Well— He was ill. He was very ill. He has pain in his eyes and sometimes he's afraid about them. This time, suddenly, he had frightful pains. And he thought he couldn't see. He came straight to me, Harry. He called a cab and came to me, and he came feeling his way up-stairs to me and fumbling at the door; and I nursed him in my darkened room until the pain had gone. He didn't go home, Harry, where there were servants and nurses to be got and attendants and everything; he came to me. It was me he came to. Me! He's my man. He knows I'd give my life for him. I would, Harry. I'd cut my body to pieces bit by bit, if it would make him happy.

" 'It wasn't so much the pain he had, Harry, as the fear. He's not the one to mind a bit of pain or be afraid of many things. But he was afraid and scared. He'd never been afraid before, but he was afraid of going blind—he was too afraid to go to the specialist. It was like a little child, Harry, and him so big and strong—afraid of the dark. He thought they'd get hold of him so that perhaps he'd not be able to come to me. He thought he wouldn't be able to see his beloved magazines and papers any more. And the pain just turned the screw on him. He clung to me.

" 'It was me made him go. I took him there. He wouldn't have gone if it hadn't been for me. He'd

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have just let things drift on and not a soul in the world, for all his money and power, to mother him. And then he might really have gone blind if it hadn't been taken in time. I pretended to be his secretary and I took him and waited in the waiting-room for him. I dreaded they'd hurt him. I was listening for something to happen all the time. I had to look at their old *Graphics* as if I didn't care a rap what they were doing to him. And then he came out smiling with a green shade on and I had to stand up stiff and cool and wait to hear what he had to say. I *was* scared by that shade, Harry. Scared! I held my breath. I thought it had come. "It isn't so bad as we fancied, Miss Smith," he said—offhand. "You kept the taxi? You'll have to take my arm I'm afraid." "Certainly, sir," I said, mimpsy-like. I was careful to be kind of awkward taking his arm. There were people there in the waiting-room and you never know. Acted respectful. Me!—that has had him in my arms a thousand times.

" 'But when we were in the taxi and safe he pushed up the shade and took me into his arms and he hugged me and he cried—he cried wet tears. And held me. Because he'd got me still and his sight still and the work he loves to do. Things would have to be done to his eyes but he'd keep his sight—and he has. There's been no trouble now. Not for months.'

"She sat looking away from me over the shining river.

" 'How could he ever leave me?' she said. 'After a time like that?'

"Stoutly she spoke, but even to my youthful eyes

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she seemed little and lonely, sitting there on the old red wall.

"I thought of the busy bustling man with the big tortoise-shell glasses away from her, and of one or two things I had heard whispered about him. It seemed to me then that no men were good enough for the women in the world.

" 'When he's tired or in trouble,' said Fanny, sure and still, 'he'll always come back to me.' "

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CHAPTER THE SIXTH

MARRIAGE IN WAR TIME

§ 1

"And now," said Sarnac, "comes a change of costume. You have been thinking of me, I suppose, as a gawky youth of seventeen or eighteen, dressed in those ill-fitting wholesale clothes we used to call 'ready-mades.' That youth wore a white collar round his neck and a black jacket and dark grey trousers of a confused furtive patterning and his hat was a black hemisphere with a little brim, called a Bowler. Now he changes into another sort of 'ready-mades,' even more ill-fitting—the khaki uniform of a young British soldier in the Great World War against Germany. In 1914 Anno Domini, a magic wand, the wand of political catastrophe, waved to and fro over Europe, and the aspect of that world changed, accumulation gave place to destruction and all the generation of young men I have described as being put together from such shops as those one saw in Cheapside, presently went into khaki and fell into ranks and tramped off to the lines of ditches and desolation that had extended themselves across Europe. It was a war of holes and barbed wire and bombs and big guns like no war that had ever happened before. It was a change of phase in the world muddle. It was like some liquid which has been growing hotter and hotter, suddenly beginning to boil and

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very swiftly boiling over. Or it was like a toboggan-track in the mountains, when after a long easy almost level run, one comes to a swift drop and a wild zigzag of downward curves. It was the same old downward run at a dramatic point.

"Change of costume there was and change of atmosphere. I can still recall the scared excitements of the August days when the war began and how incredulous we English were when we heard that our own little army was being driven back before the German hosts like a spluttering kitten pushed by a broom, and that the French lines were collapsing. Then came the rally of September. At the beginning we British youngsters had been excited spectators, but as the tale of our army's efforts and losses came home to us we crowded to the recruiting-offices, by thousands and scores of thousands, until at last our volunteers could be counted by the million. I went with the crowd.

"It may seem a curious thing to you that I lived through all the Great World War against Germany, that I was a soldier in it and fought and was wounded and went back and took part in the final offensive, that my brother Ernest became a sergeant and won a medal for gallantry and was killed within a few weeks of the concluding Armistice, that all the circumstances of my life were revolutionised by the war and that nevertheless it does not come into the story of my life as a thing of importance in itself to that story. As I think of it now, I think of the Great World War as a sort of geographical or atmospheric fact, like living ten miles from your working-place

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or being married in an April shower. One would have to travel the ten miles every day or put up an umbrella as one came out of church, but it wouldn't touch what one was intimately, or alter in any essential the living substance of one's life. Of course the World War killed and tortured millions of us, impoverished us all and dislocated the whole world. But that only meant that so many millions went out of life and that there was a fractional increase in every one's anxiety and disorder; it didn't change the nature and passions, the ignorances and bad habits of thought of the millions who remained. The World War arose out of these ignorances and misconceptions and it did nothing to alter them. After it was all over the world was a good deal rattled and much shabbier than before, but it was still the same old mean and haphazard world, acquisitive, divided, cantingly patriotic, idiotically prolific, dirty, diseased, spiteful, and conceited. It has taken two-score centuries of research and teaching, training, thought and work to make any great alteration in that.

"I admit the outbreak of the World War had a really tremendous air of being an end and a beginning. There were great days in it at first, and for us British as much as for any people. We apprehended the thing in splendid terms. We thought quite honestly—I speak of the common people—that the Imperialisms of Central Europe were wholly wrong and that we were wholly right; hundreds of thousands of us gave ourselves gladly in the sincere belief that a new world was to be won by victory. That spirit was

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not confined to Britain, nor to either side in this war. I am convinced that the years 1914, 1915, and 1916 saw finer crops of brave and generous deeds and noble sacrifices, of heroic toil and heroic patience, than any years that ever came before in the whole history of mankind or than any of the years that followed for many centuries. The young people were wonderful; death and honour reaped gloriously among them. And then the inherent unsoundness of the issue began to wear through and that false dawn faded out of men's hearts. By the end of 1917 the whole world was a disillusioned world, with but one hope left, the idealism of the United States of America and the still untested greatness of President Wilson. But of that and what it came to, you read about in the history books and I will not talk about it now. A God in that man's position might have unified the world in the twentieth century and saved it centuries of tragic struggle. President Wilson was not a God. . . .

"And I do not think I need tell you very much of the war itself as I saw it. It was a strange phase in human experience and it was described and painted and photographed and put on record very completely. Most of us have read quite a lot about it—except of course Firefly. You know how human life concentrated for four whole years upon the trenches that stretched across Europe on either front of Germany. You know how thousands of miles of land were turned into wildernesses of mud-holes and wire. Nowadays of course no body reads the books of the generals and admirals and politicians of that time, and all the

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official war histories sleep the eternal sleep in the vaults of the great libraries, but probably you have all read one or two such human books as Enid Bagnold's 'Diary without Dates' or Cogswell's 'Ermytage and the Curate' or Barbusse's 'Le Feu' or Arthur Green's 'Story of a Prisoner of War' or that curious anthology, 'The War Stories of Private Thomas Atkins,' and probably you have seen photographs and films and also pictures painted by such men as Nevinson and Orpen and Muirhead Bone and Will Rothenstein. All of them, I can certify now, are very true books and pictures. They tell of desolation passing like the shadow of an eclipse across the human scene.

"But the mind has the power of reducing and effacing every sort of impression that drags pain with it. I spent great parts out of two years in that noxious, gun-pocked land of haste and hiding, and that time now seems less than many days of my peacetime life. I killed two men with the bayonet in a trench, and it remains as though it was done by some one else and had no significance for me at all. I remember much more clearly that I felt very sick when afterwards I found my sleeve saturated with blood and blood on my hand, and how I tried to get it off by rubbing my arm in the sand because there was no water to be got. In the trenches life was hideously uncomfortable and tedious and while it lasted I was, I know, interminably bored by the drag of the hours, but all those hours are concentrated now into a record of the fact. I remember the shock of the first shell that burst near me and how slowly

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the smoke and dust unfolded, and how there was a redness in the smoke and how for a time it blotted out the light. That shell burst in a field of yellow-flowering weeds and stubble against the sun, but I do not recall what preceded it nor what followed it; shell-bursts rattled me more and more as the war went on, but they left weaker and weaker pictures.

"One of my most vivid memories of that time is the excitement of my first leave from the front, and how my party arrived at Victoria Station and were guided in a clattering throng to a sort of transport drain called the Underground Railway by elderly volunteers wearing brassards. I was still muddy from the trenches; there had been no time for a wash and a brush-up, and I was carrying my rifle and other gear; we crowded into a brightly lit first-class carriage in which were a number of people in evening dress who were going out to dinner and to the theatre. There could not have been a more vivid contrast if I had seen Firefly there in all her loveliness. There was one young man not much older than myself between two gorgeously dressed women. He had a little white bow under his pink chin and a silk neck-wrap, he had a black cloak with a cape and an opera-hat. I suppose he was an invalid but he looked as fit as I. I felt a momentary impulse to say something humiliating to him. I don't think I did. I do not remember that I did. But I looked at him and then at the brown stain on my sleeve and the wonder of life possessed me.

"No—I said nothing. I was in a state of intense exhilaration. The other fellows were gay and in-

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clined to be noisy, one or two were a little drunk but I was quietly exalted. I seemed to be hearing and seeing and perceiving with such an acuteness as I had never known before. Fanny I should see on the morrow, but that evening I hoped to see Hetty Marcus with whom I was in love. I was in love with her with an intensity that only soldier-boys who had been living in the mud of Flanders for half a year could understand."

§ 2

"How," asked Sarnac, "can I make you see Hetty Marcus, dark-eyed, warm-skinned, wayward, and fragile, who brought me to love and death two thousand years ago?

"In a way, she was like Sunray here. She was of her type. She had the same darkness in her eyes, the same still bearing. She was like Sunray's hungry sister. With a touch of fire in her blood.

"Yes—and she had those same stumpy little fingers. . . . *Look* at them!

"I met her on those very Downs I used to walk over with my father when I was a boy, to steal the produce from Lord Bramble's gardens. I had a short leave before I was drafted to France and I did not spend it in London with Matilda Good and Fanny as you may think I should have done, but I went with three other youngsters who had enough money to do so, to Cliffstone. I don't know whether I can make it clear to you why I went to Cliffstone. I was excited at the thought of going into the actual war-

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fare, I meant to do brave and wonderful things over there, but also I was terribly overshadowed by the thought that I might be killed. I did not think of wounds or suffering, I do not think I feared those things at all, but I had a profound dread and hatred of extinction before ever I had fully lived, before I had ever tasted many of the most alluring things in life. I had always promised myself love and great adventures with women, and I was passionately distressed at the possibility of being cheated of those intensities. All of us young innocents were in the same case. It was I who had thought of Cliffstone, near to our training-camp, with its band and promenade and its flitting glancing girls. There if anywhere, it seemed to me, we must snatch something from life before the great shells splashed us to pieces and the clay of Flanders devoured us. We sneaked off from our families with those fires of protesting romance in our brains and veins.

"You cannot imagine how many millions of lads there were in Europe then, pitifully eager not to miss altogether the secret and magic experiences of love before they died. I cannot tell you of the pothouses and prostitutes that lay in wait for us or of the gaunt moonlight on the beach. I cannot tell you of temptation and ignorance and disease. It is too ugly to tell you; such things are past and done with, and men suffer them no more. We groped in darkness where now men walk in the light. One of my mates had an ugly misadventure; all had ugly experiences, and I escaped by chance rather than any merit of my own from those slovenly snares. I was for a

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moment fastidious and I recoiled. And I had not drunken as the others had, because some streak of pride in me had made me habitually wary with drink.

"But I was in a storm of excitements and distresses. I was slipping into the pit though I hated it, and to escape it I set myself to revive my memories of the days when I was a boy. I went to Cherry Gardens to see the old home and then to my father's grave —it was neat and pretty with Fanny's money—and then I determined to walk over the Downs to recall, if I could, something of the wonder that I had felt when first I went over them to Chessing Hanger. And also, if you understand me, I felt love and romance would be there. I hadn't abandoned the quest that had brought me to Cliffstone; I had only jumped a foul ditch on my way. When I was a child I had supposed Heaven was over the Downs, and certainly the golden summer sunsets were. It seemed natural to turn my back on Cliffstone and go up into the only really lovely country I had ever known, if I wanted to find romance.

"And I found it.

"I was thrilled but not a bit surprised when I saw Hetty appear over the sky-line of the hill and come right over the brow and stand with her hands behind her back and the sun shining on her hair, looking out across the woods and corn-fields to Blythe and the distant marshes and the sea. She had taken her hat off and was holding it behind her. She wore an ivory-coloured silk blouse very open at the neck and it was just as though you could see her body through the flimsy stuff.

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"She dropped into a sitting position, now looking at her world and now plucking at the little dwarfish flowers in the Downland turf.

"I stood for a time agape at her. Then my whole being was filled with a tremulous resolve to talk to her. My path curved up the slope and carried me over the shoulder of the hill not very far from her. I followed it, stopping ever and again as if to look at the land and sea below, until it brought me as near to her as it could, and then I left it and with a clumsy affectation of carelessness strolled up to the summit until I stood beside her and about six yards away. I pretended not to observe her. I clinched my hands to keep my self-control. She had become aware of me and she was quite motionless now, sitting up and looking at me, but she did not seem in the least dismayed. Your fine face she had, Sunray, and your dark eyes, and I have never known any one, not even you, who could keep a face so still. Not rigid or hard or staring it was, but quietly, profoundly, still, like a face in some beautiful picture.

"I was all atremble, my heart was beating fast but I kept my wits about me.

" 'Was there ever a lovelier view?' I said. 'I suppose that bit of blue there that looks like a raft where the water shines, I suppose that is Denge Ness?'

"She did not answer for what seemed a long time. She surveyed me with an unfathomable expression. Then she spoke and as she spoke she smiled. 'You know that is Denge Ness as well as I do.'

"I smiled at her smile. Shy pretences were not for her. I came a step or so nearer with a conversa-

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tional air. 'I have known this view,' I said, 'since I was a boy of ten. But I did not know any one else set any value upon it.'

" 'Nor I,' she said. 'I came to look at it perhaps for the last time,' she vouchsafed. 'I'm going away.'

" 'I'm going away too.'

" 'Over there?' she asked, and nodded her head to where the land of France hung like a cloud in the sky.

" 'In a week or so.'

" 'I'll get to France too. But not so soon as a week or two. But I am going into the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps and I know I shall get over there at last. I join up to-morrow. How can one stay at home with all you boys out there, getting——'

"She was going to say getting '*killed.*' But she caught the word back and finished it with, 'Getting into all sorts of danger and trouble.'

" 'One has to go,' I said.

"She looked at me with her head a little on one side. 'Tell me,' she said. 'Do you *want* to go?'

" 'Not a bit. I hate the whole monstrous business. But there's no way out. The Germans have put it on us and we have to go through with it.'

"That was how we all saw it in England during the War. But I won't stop now to argue what really caused a war that ended two thousand years ago. 'The Germans put it on us. I hate going. I wanted to go on with the work I was doing. Now everything is upset.'

" 'Everything,' she said and thought for some moments. 'I hate going too,' she said.

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" 'It drags on week after week, month after month,' I complained. 'The boredom of it! The drills, the salutes, the silly little officers! If only they would take us and raffle us and kill us and have done with it so that we could either die or go home and do something sensible! My life is being wasted. I have been in the machine a year—and I've only got this far on my way to France! When I see a German soldier at last I shall want to kiss him I shall be so glad. But either I shall kill him or he will kill me—and that will be the end of the story.'

" 'And yet one can't keep out of it,' she said.

" 'And there is something tremendous about it,' she went on. 'Once or twice I have been up here when there were air-raids. I live quite close here. These air-raids get more and more frequent nowadays. I don't know what they are coming to. You see the search-lights now, every night, waving about like the arms of a drunken man. All over the sky. But before that you hear the pheasants in the woods, clucking and crying. They always hear it first. Other birds take it up. They cry and twitter. And then far away the guns begin rumbling. At first a little sound—"*pud-pud*," then like the whoof of a hoarse dog. And then one gun after another picks it up as the raid comes nearer. Sometimes you can catch the whirr of the engines of the Gothas. There's a great gun behind the farmhouse away there and you wait for that and when it fires it hits you on the chest. Hardly anything is to be seen except the search-lights. There's a little flicker in the sky—and star-shells. But the guns—riot. It's mad but

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it's immense. It takes you. Either you are wild with fright or you are wild with excitement. I can't sleep. I walk about my room and long to be out. Twice I've gone out into the night, into the moonlight—with everything aquiver. Gone for long walks. Once shrapnel fell in our orchard with a hiss like rain. It ripped the bark of the apple-trees and tore off twigs and branches and killed a hedgehog. I found the little wretch in the morning, nearly cut in two. Death haphazard! I don't mind the death and the danger so much. But it's the quiver in the world I can't endure. Even in the daytime sometimes, you can't quite hear them, but you can *feel* the guns, over beyond there. . . .

" 'Our old servant,' she said, 'believes it is the end of the world.'

" 'For us it may be,' I said.

"She made no answer.

"I looked at her face and my imagination rioted.

"I began to talk with a bare simplicity such as we rarely attained in that shy and entangled age. But my heart was beating fast. 'For years,' I said, 'I have dreamt of the love of a girl. It was to have been the crown of life. I have saved myself up for it. I have had a friend or so, but it wasn't love. And now I am near to going. Out there. It is only a few days before I go over there—to whatever is waiting for me. And when it seems beyond hope I come upon some one. . . . Don't think me mad, please. Don't think I'm lying. I am in love with you. Indeed I am. You seem altogether beautiful to me.

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Your voice, your eyes—everything. I could worship you. . . .'

"I couldn't say a word more for a moment or so. I rolled over on the turf and looked her in the face. 'I'm sorry,' I said. 'I'm a silly young Tommy suddenly in love—oh! desperately in love.'

"Her grave face regarded me. She did not look frightened or disconcerted. Perhaps her heart beat faster than I thought. But her voice when she spoke was constrained.

" 'Why are you talking like that? You've just met me. . . . How can you love me? It isn't possible people should love like this.'

" 'I've seen you long enough——'

"I could not talk. I met her eyes. Hers dropped before mine. The warm colour mounted to her cheeks. She bit her lips.

" 'You,' she said in a low voice, 'are just in love with love.'

" 'Anyhow, I am in love,' I said.

"She plucked a spray of minute flowers and forgot it in her hand.

" 'This is your last day?' she asked, and made my heart beat faster.

" 'It may be my last altogether for this sort of thing. Who can tell? . . . For a long time anyhow. Why should it hurt you to let me love you to-day? Why shouldn't you be kind to me? Civil to me—anyhow. I don't ask for so very much. If—suppose—we went for a walk together? Just a long walk. If we spent most of the day together? Somewhere we might get something to eat. . . .'

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"She sat considering me gravely.

" 'Suppose I did,' she said as if to herself. 'Suppose I did.'

" 'What harm could it do you?'

" 'What harm could it do?' she repeated with her eyes on mine.

"If I had been older and more experienced I might have known from her warm flushed face and her dark eyes that she too was in love with love that day, and that our encounter was as exciting for her as for me. Suddenly she smiled; she showed herself for an instant as ready as myself. Her constraint had vanished.

" 'I'll come,' she decided, and rose with an effortless ease to her feet, and then at my eager movement as I sprang up before her: 'But you'll have to be good, you know. It's just a walk—and a talk. . . . Why shouldn't we? . . . If we keep away from the village.' "

§ 3

"It would seem the queerest story in the world if I told you how we two youngsters spent that day, we who were such strangers that we did not know each other's names and yet who were already drawn so closely together. It was a day of kindly beauty and warmth and we rambled westward until we came to a ridge that dropped steeply to a silvery, tree-bordered canal, and along that ridge we went until we reached a village and a friendly inn, where there were biscuits and cheese and some apples to make a lunch upon. For a time a mood of shyness followed

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our first avowals, then Hetty talked of her home and of her place in the world. It was only after we had eaten together that we became easy and familiar with each other. It was only as the sun was sinking in the west and our day drew to its golden end that we embraced suddenly as we sat together on a felled tree in a wood, and that I learned from her what a sweet and wonderful delight the kiss of love may be."

§ 4

Sarnac paused.

"It happened two thousand years ago but it seems to me that it happened just six years from now. Once more I am back in that wood among the long warm shadows of the evening and all my dreams and imaginations awake to reality with Hetty's body in my arms and her lips to mine. I have been able to tell you my story hitherto with a sort of wonder and detachment, as though I showed it you through a telescope. But I have been telling you overmuch perhaps of Fanny and Matilda Good because I have had a sort of reluctance about Hetty. She is still so fresh in my mind that she seems as I name her to come even here and to be living still, a perplexity between Sunray, who is so like her and so unlike her, and myself. I love her again and hate her again as though I was still that assistant editor, that writer of rubbish, in lost and forgotten Thunderstone House in dead old London. . . .

"And I can't describe things now," said Sarnac, "as I have described them up to this. I seem no

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longer to look back into past things. My memories are living and suffering; they inflame and hurt. I loved Hetty; she was all the delight of love to me. I married her, I divorced her, I repented of the divorce, and I was killed for her sake.

"And it seems as if I was killed not a day ago. . . .

"I married while I was in England before I was passed for active service again after my wound. I was wounded in the arm——"

Sarnac stopped and felt his arm. Sunray looked sharply at it and ran her hand down it from shoulder to elbow as if to reassure herself. The others burst into laughter at her manifest anxiety and her expression of relief, the guest-master being particularly delighted.

"I *was* wounded nevertheless. I was a sitting-up case in the ambulance. I could tell you stories about the nurses and the hospital and how we had a panic about a submarine as we crossed to England. . . . I married Hetty before I went back because we were now altogether lovers and it was just possible she might have a child. And moreover there was a business about allowances if I got killed that was an added inducement to marry. In those days of haphazard death for the young there was a world-wide fever of love-making and countless such snatched marriages.

"She had never got to France as she had said she hoped to do. For most of the time she was driving a car for the Ministry of Supplies in London. We spent two days of wild endearment, the only honeymoon we could get, at her mother's farm at Payton

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Links, a little hamlet near Chessing Hanger. (I do not think I have told you that she was the only daughter of a farmer and that Mrs. Marcus, her mother, was a widow.) Hetty had been a clever girl, an elementary school-teacher and bookish and enterprising for a country place. She had never mentioned me to her mother until she had written to tell of her approaching marriage.

"When her mother had driven us from the station to the farm and I had helped her to put away the pony, the old lady's non-committal manner relaxed and she said: 'Well, it might have been worse. You've looks and fairish shoulders for one who's town-bred. You can kiss me, my boy, though Smith is a poor exchange for Marcus, and I can't see how any one can ever expect to get a living for man and wife at a fancy trade like publishing. I'd hoped at first she meant a publican. But publishing she says it is. Whether you're properly old enough for Hetty, Time will show.'

"Time did show very rapidly that I was not properly old enough for Hetty, though I resisted the demonstration with passionate vigour.

"In this world of ours we are by comparison very simple and direct. In that old world we should have seemed shockingly simple and direct. It's not only that they wrapped up and hid their bodies in all sorts of queer garments and wrappings but also that they wrapped up and distorted and hid their minds. And while we to-day have the same simple and clean ideas all over the world about sexual restraints and sexual freedoms, people in those days had the most various

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and complicated codes, half hidden and half confessed. And not merely half hidden but imperfectly realised, subconscious rather than thought out and settled. Few of these codes respected the freedom of other people or set any bounds to the most extravagant developments of jealousy. And while Hetty's thoughts about love and marriage had been nourished on a diet of countryside folk and then of novels and poetry devoured with avidity and had had tremendous releases in the lax atmosphere of war-time London, I, in spite of my love for and faith in Fanny, had almost unwittingly adopted the rigid standards of my mother. As we used to say in those days, Hetty's was a much more artistic temperament than mine. For my part I did not so much think as assume that the worship of a man for a woman gave place to mastery as soon as her love was won, that the problem of absolute fidelity for both lovers was to be facilitated on his side by an absolute submissiveness on hers. And about her, wherever she went, invisible but real, there had to be a sort of cloistered quality. It was implicit, moreover, that she had never thought of love before she met her predestined and triumphant lover. Ridiculous and impossible you will say! But Sunray has read the old novels and she can witness that that was the code."

Sunray nodded. "That is the spirit of them," she said.

"Well, in fact, Hetty was not only half a year older than I but ages beyond me in the business of love. She was my teacher. While I had been reading about atoms and Darwin and exploration and

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socialism, she had been sucking the honey of sensuous passion from hints and half-hints in old romances and poems from Shakespear and the old playwrights. And not only, I realise now, from books. She took me as one captures and tames an animal and made my senses and my imagination hers. Our honeymoon was magical and wonderful. She delighted in me and made me drunken with delights. And then we parted wonderfully with the taste of her salt tears on my lips, and I went off to the last five months of the War.

"I can see her now, slender as a tall boy in her khaki breeches and driver's uniform, waving to my train as it drew out of Chessing Hanger station.

"She wrote adorable and whimsical love-letters that made me ache to be with her again, and just when we were forcing the great German barrier of the Hindenburg line, came one to tell me we were to have a child. She had not told me of it before, she said, because she had not been quite sure of it. Now she was sure. Would I love her still, now that she would be no longer slim and graceful? Love her still! I was filled with monstrous pride.

"I wrote back to tell her how my job at Thunderstone House was being saved for me, how we would certainly get a little house, a 'dear little house,' in some London suburb, how I would worship and cherish her. Her answer was at once tender and unusual. She said I was too good to her, far too good; she repeated with extraordinary passion that she loved me, had never loved and could never love any one but me, that she hated my absence more

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than she could tell, and that I was to do everything I could, move heaven and earth to get my discharge and come home to her and be with her and never, never, *never* leave her again. She had never wanted my arms about her as she wanted them now. I read nothing between the lines of that outbreak. It seemed just a new mood amidst the variety of her moods.

"Thunderstone House wanted me back as soon as possible, and the War had done much to increase the power and influence of all magazine publishers and newspaper proprietors. I got out of the army within three months of the Armistice and came back to a very soft and tender and submissive Hetty, a new Hetty more wonderful even than the old. She was evidently more passionately in love with me than ever. We took some furnished rooms in a part of London called Richmond, near the Thames and a great park, and we sought vainly for that bright little house in which our child was to be born. But there were no bright little houses available.

"And slowly a dark shadow fell across the first brightness of our reunion. The seasonable days passed but Hetty's child was not born. It was not born indeed until it was nearly two months too late for it to be my child."

§ 5

"We are trained from earliest childhood in the world to be tolerant and understanding of others and to be wary and disciplined with our own wayward

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impulses, we are given from the first a clear knowledge of our entangled nature. It will be hard for you to understand how harsh and how disingenuous the old world was. You live in a world that is as we used to say 'better bred.' You will find it difficult to imagine the sudden storm of temptation and excitement and forgetfulness in Hetty's newly aroused being that had betrayed her into disloyalty, and still more difficult will you find the tangle of fear and desperate dishonesty that held her silent from any plain speech with me after my return. But had she spoken instead of leaving it to me to suspect, discover, and accuse, I doubt if she would have found any more mercy in me for her pitiful and abominable lapse.

"I see now that from the day I returned to Hetty she was trying to tell me of her disaster and failing to find a possible way of doing so. But the vague intimations in her words and manner dropped like seeds into my mind and germinated there. She was passionately excited and made happy by my coming back; our first week together was the happiest week of my old world life. Fanny came to see us once and we went and had a dinner at her flat, and something had happened to her too, I knew not what, to make her very happy. Fanny liked Hetty. When she kissed me good night after her dinner, she held me and whispered: 'She's a dear. I thought I'd be jealous of your wife, Harry, but I love her.'

"Yes, we were very happy for that week. We walked along together back to our rooms instead of taking a taxi, for it was better for Hetty to walk. A happy week it was that stretched almost to a happy

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fortnight. And then the shadows of suspicion gathered and deepened.

"It was in bed in the darkness of the night that I was at last moved to speak plainly to Hetty. I woke up and lay awake for a long time, very still and staring at my bleak realisation of what had happened to us. Then I turned over, sat up in bed and said, 'Hetty. This child is not mine.'

"She answered at once. It was plain she too had been awake. She answered in a muffled voice as though her face lay against the pillow. 'No.'

" 'You said, no?'

"She stirred, and her voice came clearer.

" 'I said no. Oh, Husbind-boy I wish I was dead! I wish to God I was dead.'

"I sat still and she said no more. We remained like two fear-stricken creatures in the jungle, motionless, in an immense silence and darkness.

"At last she moved. Her hand crept out towards me, seeking me, and at that advance I recoiled. I seemed to hang for a moment between two courses of action, and then I gave myself over to rage. 'You'd *touch* me!' I cried, and got out of bed and began to walk about the room.

" 'I knew it!' I shouted. 'I knew it! I felt it! And I have loved you! You cheat! You foul thing! You lying cheat!' "

§ 6

"I think I described to you earlier in the story how my family behaved when Fanny left us, how

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we all seemed to be acting and keeping up a noise of indignation as if we were afraid of some different and disturbing realisations coming through to us should that barrage of make-believe morality fail. And just as my father and my mother behaved in that down-stairs kitchen in Cherry Gardens so now I behaved in that desolating crisis between myself and Hetty. I stormed about the room, I hurled insults at her. I would not let the facts that she was a beaten and weeping thing, that she certainly loved me, and that her pain tortured me, prevail against my hard duty to my outraged pride.

"I lit the gas, I don't remember when, and the scene went on in that watery Victorian light. I began dressing, for never more was I to lie in bed with Hetty. I meant to dress and, having said my say, to go out of the house. So I had to be scornful and loudly indignant, but also I had to find my various garments, pull my shirt over my head and lace up my boots. So that there were interludes in the storm, when Hetty could say something that I had to hear.

" 'It all happened in an evening,' she said. 'It isn't as though I had planned to betray you. It was his last day before he left and he was wretched. It was the thought of you made me go with him. It was just kindness. There were two of our girls going to have dinner with their boys and they asked me to come and that was how I met him. Officers they were all three, and schoolfellows. Londoners. Three boys who were going over—just as you were. It seemed rotten not to make a party for them.'

"I was struggling with my collar and stud but I

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tried to achieve sarcasm. 'I see,' I said, 'under the circumstances mere politeness dictated—what you did. . . . Oh, my God!'

" 'Listen how it happened, Harry. Don't shout at me again for a minute. Afterwards he asked me to come to his rooms. He said the others were coming on. He seemed such a harmless sort!'

" 'Very!'

" 'He seemed the sort who'd surely get killed. And I was sorry for him. He was fair like you. Fairer. And it seemed all different that night. And then he got hold of me and kissed me and I struggled, but I didn't seem to have the strength to resist. I didn't realise somehow.'

" 'That's pretty evident. That I *can* believe.'

" 'You've got no pity, Harry. Perhaps it's just. I suppose I ought to have seen the risk. But we aren't all strong like you. Some of us are pulled this way and that. Some of us do the thing we hate. I did what I could. It was like waking up to realise what had happened. He wanted me to stay with him. I ran out from his rooms. I've never seen him since. He's written but I haven't answered.'

" 'He knew you were a soldier's wife.'

" 'He's rotten. He knew it. He planned it while we were at dinner. He prayed and promised and lied. He said he wanted just a kiss, just one kiss for kindness. He began with that kiss. I'd been drinking wine, and I'm not used to wine. Oh, Harry! Husbind-boy, if I could have died! But I'd kissed and played about with boys before I met you. It seemed so little—until it was too late.'

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" 'And here we are!' said I.

"I came and sat down on the bed and stared at Hetty's dishevelled distress. She was suddenly pitiful and pretty. 'I suppose I ought to go and kill this swine,' I said. 'I feel more like killing you.'

" 'Kill me,' she said. 'I wish you would.'

" 'What's his name? Where is he now?'

" '*He* doesn't matter a rap,' said Hetty. 'You may hang for me if you like, but you shan't hang for a thing like that. I tell you he doesn't matter. He's a dirty accident. He happened.'

" 'You're shielding him.'

" '*Him!*' she said. 'I'm shielding you.'

"I stared at her. Again came a moment when I seemed to hang undecided at the parting of two courses, and again I decided to explode into rage. 'My *God!*' I cried, and then louder and standing up, 'My *God!*' Then I ranted at her. 'I suppose I've only got myself to blame for all this. What did I know of what you were before I met you? I guess I wasn't the first and I guess *he* won't be the last. What do names matter? I guess you thanked Heaven for a green dud when you met me.' And so on. I paced about the room as I raved.

"She sat up on the bed, her hair disordered and her eyes tearful, regarding me with a still and mournful face. 'Oh, Harry!' she would say ever and again, or 'Oh, Boy!' while I let my clumsy fancy rove through a wilderness of coarse reproaches. Ever and again I would come up to her and stand over her. 'Tell me his name,' I would shout and she would shake her head.

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"At last I was dressed. I looked at my watch. 'Five.'

" 'What are you going to do?' she asked.

"I don't know. Go, I suppose. I can't stay here. I should be sick. I shall get most of my things together and go. I'll find a lodging somewhere. It's nearly dawn. I'll go before you need get up. Meanwhile I'll sit in the other room. I can lie on the sofa for a bit.

" 'But the fire's not lit!' she said, 'and it's cold. It's not even laid. And you'll need some coffee!'

"She stared at me with eyes full of solicitude.

"And forthwith she shuffled out of bed and slipped her feet into her bedroom-slippers and put on a gay dressing-gown that had been a great delight to us—ten days ago. She went meekly by me, moving her poor heavy body rather wearily, and found some firelighters in a cupboard and knelt by the fireplace and began to rake out the ashes of the overnight fire. I made no movement to prevent her. I began to collect together various books and small possessions I intended to take with me.

"She was only apprehending the situation very slowly. She turned to me in the middle of her firelighting. 'I suppose you'll leave me a little money to go on with?' she said.

"That gave me a base opportunity. 'I'll leave you money all right,' I sneered. 'I suppose I've got to keep you until we're free. Then it will be *his* job. Or the next man's.'

"She occupied herself with the fire. She filled a kettle and put it ready. Then she sat down in an

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armchair by the hearth. Her face was white and drawn but she shed no tears. I went to the window and pulled up the blind and stared at the street outside with its street-lamps still alight; everything was gaunt and bleak in the colourless cold horror of the earliest dawn.

" 'I shall go to mother,' she said, shivering and pulling her dressing-gown about her shoulders. 'It will be dreadful for her to know what has happened. But she's kind. She'll be kinder than any one. . . . I shall go to her.'

" 'You can do what you like,' I said.

" 'Harry!' she said. 'I've never loved any man but you. If I could kill this child— If it would please you if I killed this child——'

"She spoke with white lips. 'Yes. I tried all I knew. Some things I couldn't bring myself to do. And now it's a thing that's alive. . . .'

"We stared at one another in silence for some moments.

" 'No!' I said at last. 'I can't stand it. I can't endure it. Nothing can alter it now. You tell a tale. How do I know? You've cheated once and you can cheat again. You gave yourself to that swine. If I live to a hundred I'll never forgive that. You gave yourself. How do I know you didn't tempt him? You gave. You can go. Go where you gave yourself! They're things no decent man can forgive. Things that are dirty to forgive. He stole you and you let him steal you and he can have you. I wish— If you'd had the beginnings of a sense of honour you'd never have let me come back to you. To think of

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these last days here. And you—you with this secret next your heart! The filthiness of it! You—you, whom I've loved.'

"I was weeping."

Sarnac paused and stared into the fire. "Yes," he said, "I was weeping. And the tears I shed—it is wonderful—the tears I shed were tears of the purest self-pity.

"And all the time I saw the thing from my own standpoint alone, blind to the answering tragedy in Hetty's heart. And the most grotesque thing is that all the time she was getting me coffee and that when it was ready I drank her coffee! At the end she wanted to kiss me, to kiss me 'good-bye' she said, and I rebuffed her and struck her when she came near me. I meant only to thrust her back but my hand clinched at the opportunity. '*Harry!*' she whispered. She stood like a stunned thing watching me go, and then turned suddenly and swiftly and ran back to the bedroom.

"I slammed the outer door and went down-stairs into the empty morning Richmond streets; altogether empty of traffic they were, under the flush of dawn.

"I carried my bag towards the railway-station that would take me to London; my bag was heavy with the things I had brought away, and it dragged upon my arm, and I felt myself a tragically ill-used but honourably self-vindicated young man."

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§ 7

"Oh, poor little things!" cried Starlight. "Oh! poor little pitiful pitiless creatures! This story hurts me. I couldn't endure it, if it were anything more than a dream. Why were they all so hard upon each other and so deaf to the sorrow in each other?"

"We knew no better. This world now has a tempered air. In this world we breathe mercy with our first fluttering gasp. We are so taught and trained to think of others that their pain is ours. But two thousand years ago men and women were half-way back to crude Nature. Our motives took us unawares. We breathed infections. Our food was poisoned. Our passions were fevers. We were only beginning to learn the art of being human."

"But didn't Fanny—?" began Firefly.

"Yes," said Willow; "didn't Fanny, who was naturally so wise about love, didn't she take you in hand and send you back to forgive and help your wretched Hetty?"

"Fanny heard my version of our story first," said Sarnac. "She never realised the true values of the business until it was too late to stop the divorce. When I told her that Hetty had lived a life of depravity in London while I was in the trenches, she heard me with amazement but never doubted my word.

" 'And she seemed such a dear,' said Fanny. 'She seemed so in love with you. It's wonderful how different women are! There's women who seem to change into something else directly they get out of sight of you round a corner. I *liked* your Hetty,

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Harry. There was something sweet about her, be what she may. I never dreamt she'd deceive you and let you down. Fancy!—going about London picking up men! It's just as though she'd done it to me.'

"Matilda Good too was wonderfully sympathetic. 'No woman goes wrong only just once,' said Matilda. 'You're right to end it.' The Miltons were giving up her drawing-room floor, I could have it, if I cared to take it. I was only too glad to take it and return to my old home.

"Hetty, I suppose, packed up her own belongings as well as she could. She went down from Richmond to her mother's farm at Payton Links, and there it was her child was born.

"Now I want to tell you," said Sarnac, "what is, I believe, the most remarkable thing in all this story I am telling you. I do not remember in all that time right up to and including our divorce, that I felt any impulse of pity or kindliness, much less of love, towards Hetty. And yet in my dream I was very much the same sort of man as I am to-day. I was a man of the same type. But I was driven by a storm of amazed and outraged pride and sexual jealousy of the most frantic sort towards acts of spite that are almost inconceivable here and now. I was doing all I could to divorce Hetty in such a way as to force her into marriage with Sumner—for that was the man's name—because I had learned that he was a hopelessly bad character and because I believed he would make her miserable and mar her life altogether. I wanted to do that to punish her, to fill her with bitter regrets for her treatment of me. But at

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the same time it drove me to the verge of madness to think that he should ever possess her again. If my wishes could have been given creative force, Hetty would have gone to Sumner disfigured and diseased. They would have come together again amidst circumstances of horrible cruelty!"

"Sarnac!" cried Sunray, "that you should even *dream* such things!"

"Dream! It is as men were. It is as they are, except for the education and the free happiness that release us. For we are not fourscore generations from the Age of Confusion, and that was but a few thousands more from the hairy ape-men who bayed the moon in the primeval forests of Europe. Then it was the Old Man in lust and anger ruled his herd of women and children and begot us all. And in the Age of Confusion after the Great Wars man was, and he still is, the child of that hairy Old Ape-Man. Don't I shave myself daily? And don't we educate and legislate with our utmost skill and science to keep the old beast within bounds? But our schools in the days of Harry Mortimer Smith were still half-way back to the cave; our science was only beginning. We had no sexual education at all, only concealments and repressions. Our code was still the code of jealousy—thinly disguised. The pride and self-respect of a man was still bound up with the animal possession of women—the pride and self-respect of most women was by a sort of reflection bound up with the animal possession of a man. We felt that this possession was the keystone of life. Any failure in this central business involved a monstrous abasement, and against

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that our poor souls sought blindly for the most extravagant consolations. We hid things, we perverted and misrepresented things, we evaded the issue. Man is a creature which under nearly every sort of stress releases hate and malign action, and we were then still subjected to the extremest stresses.

"But I will not go on apologising for Harry Mortimer Smith. He was what the world made him and so are we. And in my dream I went about that old world, doing my work, controlling my outward behaviour and spending all the force of my wounded love for Hetty in scheming for her misery.

"And one thing in particular was of immense importance to my tormented being. It was that I should get another lover quickly, that I should dispel the magic of Hetty's embraces, lay the haunting ghost of my desire for her. I had to persuade myself that I had never really loved her and replace her in my heart by some one I could persuade myself was my own true love.

"So I sought the company of Milly Kimpton again. We had been close companions before the War, and it was not difficult to persuade myself that I had always been a little in love with her. Always she had been more than a little in love with me. I told her my story of my marriage and she was hurt for my sake and indignant beyond measure with the Hetty I presented to her.

"She married me within a week of the completion of my divorce."

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§ 8

"Milly was faithful and Milly was kind; she was a cooling refuge from the heat and distresses of my passion. She had a broad, candid face that never looked either angry or miserable; she held her countenance high, smiling towards heaven with a pleasant confidence and self-satisfaction; she was very fair and she was broad-shouldered for a woman. She was tender but not passionate; she was intelligently interested in things but without much whim or humour. She was nearly a year and a half older than I. She had, as people used to say, 'taken a great fancy' to me when first I came into the firm, a crude and inexperienced youngster. She had seen me rise very rapidly to Mr. Cheeseman's position on the editorial staff—he had been transferred to the printing side—and at times she had helped me greatly. We were both popular in Thunderstone House, and when we married there was a farewell dinner to Milly, who gave up her position then in the counting-house; there were speeches and a wonderful wedding-present of dinner-knives and silver forks and spoons in a brass-bound chest of oak with a flattering inscription on a silver plate. There had been a good deal of sympathy with Milly in Thunderstone House, especially among the girls, and a good deal of indignation at me when my first marriage occurred, and my belated recognition of my true destiny was considered a very romantic and satisfactory end to the story.

"We secured a convenient little house in a row of stucco houses all built together to have one architec-

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tural effect, called Chester Terrace, close to one of the inner parks of London known as Regent's Park. Milly, I discovered, had a little fortune of nearly two thousand pounds, and so she was able to furnish this house very prettily according to current taste, and in this house in due course she bore me a son. I rejoiced very greatly and conspicuously over this youngster's arrival. I think you will understand how essential it was to my obsession for defeating and obliterating Hetty that Milly should bear me a child.

"I worked very hard during that first year of married life and on the whole I was happy. But it was not a very rich nor a very deep sort of happiness. It was a happiness made up of rather hard and rather superficial satisfactions. In a sense I loved Milly very dearly; her value was above rubies, she was honest and sweet and complaisant. She liked me enormously, she was made happy by my attentions; she helped me, watched for my comfort, rejoiced at the freshness and vigour of my work. Yet we did not talk very freely and easily together. I could not let my mind run on before her; I had to shape what I said to her feelings and standards, and they were very different feelings and standards from my own. She was everything a wife should be except in one matter; she was not for me that particular dear companion for whom the heart of every human being craves, that dear companion with whom you are happy and free and safe. That dear companionship I had met—and I had thrust it from me. Does it come twice in a life to any one?"

"How should I know?" said Sunray.

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"We know better than to reject it," said Radiant.

"Perhaps after many years," said Willow, answering Sarnac's question, "after one has healed and grown and changed."

"Milly and I were close friends indeed, but we were never dear companions. I had told Hetty about my sister Fanny on the evening of our first day together when we walked over the hills, she was instantly sure that she would love Fanny, Fanny had seemed very brave and romantic to Hetty's imagination; but I did not tell Milly of Fanny until close upon our marriage. You will say that it was not Milly's fault that I was shy with her on Fanny's account, but assuredly it was a fault in our relationship. And it was clear that Milly accepted Fanny on my account and refrained from too searching a commentary because of me. Milly believed profoundly in the institution of marriage and in the obligation upon women of an unlimited chastity. 'It is a pity she cannot marry this man,' said Milly, anticipating perplexities. 'It must make everything so inconvenient for her—and every one who knows her. It must be so difficult to introduce her to people.'

" 'You needn't do that,' I said.

" 'My people are old-fashioned.'

" 'They needn't know,' I said.

" 'That would be the easier way for me, Harry.'

"I found my own declarations of affection for Fanny considerably chilled by the effort Milly made to be generous in the matter.

"I found it still more difficult to tell her that Fanny's lover was Newberry.

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"'Then is that how you got into Thunderstone House?' asked Milly when at last I got to that revelation.

"'It's how I got my chance there,' I admitted.

"'I didn't think it was like that. I thought you'd made your way in.'

"'I've made my way up. I've never been favoured.'

"'Yes—but— Do you think people know, Harry? They'd say all sorts of things.'

"You perceive that Milly was not a very clever woman and also that she was very jealous of my honour. 'I don't think any one knows who matters,' I said. 'Neither I nor Fanny advertise.'

"But it was clear Milly did not like the situation. She would have much preferred a world without sister Fanny. She had no curiosity to see this sister that I loved so dearly or to find any good in her. On various small but quite valid scores she put off going to see her for a whole week. And always I had to remind her of Fanny and speak of Fanny first before Fanny could be talked about. In all other matters Milly was charming and delightful to me, but as far as she could contrive it she banished Fanny from our world. She could not see how much of my affection went also into banishment.

"Their meeting when at last it came about was bright rather than warm. An invisible athermanous screen had fallen not only between Milly and Fanny but between Fanny and myself. Milly had come, resolved to be generous and agreeable in spite of Fanny's disadvantageous status, and I think she was

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a little disconcerted by Fanny's dress and furniture, for Milly was always very sensitive to furniture and her sensitiveness had been enhanced by our own efforts to equip a delightful home on a sufficient but not too extravagant expenditure. I had always thought Fanny's furnishings very pretty, but it had never occurred to me that they were as Milly put it, 'dreadfully good.' But there was a red lacquer cabinet that Milly said afterwards might be worth as much as a hundred pounds, and she added one of those sentences that came upon one like an unexpected thread of gossamer upon the face: 'It doesn't seem right somehow.'

"Fanny's simple dress I gathered was far too good also. Simple dresses were the costliest in those days of abundant material and insufficient skill.

"But these were subsequent revelations, and at the time I did not understand why there should be an obscure undertone of resentment in Milly's manner, nor why Fanny was displaying a sort of stiff sweetness quite foreign to my impression of her.

" 'It's wonderful to meet you at last,' said Fanny. 'He's talked about you for years. I can remember once long before—long before the War—and everything—at Hampton Court. I can remember sitting on those seats by the river and his talking about you.'

" 'I remember that,' I said, though it wasn't the part about Milly that had stuck in my memory.

" 'We used to go about together no end in those days,' said Fanny. 'He was the dearest of brothers.'

" 'I hope he'll still be,' said Milly very kindly.

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"'A son's a son till he gets a wife,' said Fanny, quoting an old-woman's proverb.

"'You mustn't say that,' said Milly. 'I hope you'll come to see us—quite often.'

"'I'd love to come,' said Fanny. 'You're lucky to get a house so easily, these days.'

"'It isn't quite ready yet,' said Milly. 'But as soon as ever it is we must find some day when you are free.'

"'I'm often free,' said Fanny.

"'We'll fix a day,' said Milly, obviously quite resolute to insure that we had no unexpected calls from Fanny when other people might be about.

"'It's nice your having been in the counting-house and understanding all about his work,' said Fanny.

"'My people didn't like my going into business at all,' said Milly. 'But it's lucky I did.'

"'Lucky for Harry,' said Fanny. 'Are your—people London people?'

"'Dorset,' said Milly. 'They didn't like my coming to London. They're just a little bit churchy and old-fashioned, you know. But it's college or business, I said, and you don't find me staying at home to dust and put out the flowers. One has to take a firm line with one's people at times. Didn't you find that so? There was a convenient aunt in Bedford Park to secure the proprieties and head off the otherwise inevitable latch-key, and it was business instead of college because my best uncle, Uncle Hereward—he's the Vicar of Peddlebourne—objects to the higher education of women. And there was also a question of finance.'

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"'It must be interesting for Harry to meet your people,' said Fanny.

"'He's completely conquered Aunt Rachel,' said Milly. 'Though she started hostile. Naturally, as I'm about the only Kimpton of three generations they pitched their expectations high. They'd like me to have a husband with a pedigree a yard long.'

"I felt Milly was rather overemphasising the county family side of the Kimptons—her father was a veterinary surgeon near Wimborne—but I did not appreciate the qualities in Fanny's bearing and furniture that were putting Milly into this self-assertive mood.

"They went on to talk with a certain flavour of unreality of the hygienic and social advantages of Regent's Park. 'It's easy to get to for one's friends,' said Milly. 'And quite a lot of interesting people, actors and critics and writers and all that sort of people, live round and about there. Of course Harry will want to know more and more of the artistic and literary world now. I expect we'll have to have a Day for them and give them tea and sandwiches. It's a bore, but it's necessary, you know. Harry's got to know people.'

"She smiled at me between pride and patronage.

"'Harry's going up in the world,' said my sister.

"'That's what makes it all so wonderful,' said Milly. 'He's a wonderful brother for you.'

"She began to praise the beauty of Fanny's flat, and Fanny offered to show her all over it. They were away some time and I went to the window, wishing

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stupidly after the manner of a man that they could somehow contrive to be a little different and a little warmer with each other. Didn't they both love me and shouldn't that be a bond of sisterhood between them?

"Then came tea, one of Fanny's wonderful teas, but I was no longer the indiscriminate devourer of teas that I had been. Milly praised it all like a visiting duchess.

" 'Well,' said Milly at last with the air of one who has many appointments, 'it's time to go I'm afraid. . . .'

"I had been watching Fanny very closely throughout this visit and contrasting her guarded and polished civilities with the natural warmth of her reception of Hetty, half a year before. I felt I could not wait for another occasion before I had a word or two with her. So I kissed her good-bye—even her kiss had changed—and she and Milly hesitated and kissed, and I went down past the landing with Milly and heard the door close above. 'I've left my gloves,' I said suddenly. 'You go on down. I won't be a moment.' And I darted back up-stairs.

"Fanny did not come to the door immediately.

" 'What is it, Harry?' she said, when she appeared.

" 'Gloves!' said I. 'No! Here they are in my pocket. Silly of me! . . . You *do* like her, Fanny? You think she's all right, don't you? She's a little shy with you, but she's a dear.'

"Fanny looked at me. I thought her eyes were hard. 'She's all right,' she said. 'Quite all right. You'll never have to divorce *her*, Harry.'

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"'I didn't know. I want you to—like her. I thought—you didn't seem quite warm.'

"'Silly old Harry!' said Fanny, with a sudden return to her old manner. And she took me and kissed me like a loving sister again.

"I went down two steps from the door and turned.

"'I'd hate it,' I said, 'if you didn't think she was all right.'

"'She's all right,' said Fanny. 'And it's Good Luck to you, Harry. It's— You see it's about Good-Bye for me. I shan't be seeing very much of you now with that clever wife of yours to take you about. Who's so *well*-connected. But Good Luck, old Brudder! Oh! *always* Good Luck!'

"Her eyes were brimming with tears.

"'God send you are happy, Harry dear—after your fashion. It's—it's different. . . .'

"She stopped short. She was weeping.

"She banged her door upon me, and I stood puzzled for a moment and then went down to Milly."

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CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

LOVE AND DEATH

§ 1

"In the two years that followed I learned to love and trust my stiff-spirited wife more and more. She was very brave in a conscious and deliberate way, very clear-headed, very honest. I saw her fight, and it was not an easy fight, to bring our son into the world, and that sort of crisis was a seal between man and woman in those days even as it is to-day. If she never got to any just intuitions about my thoughts and feelings I did presently arrive at a fairly clear sense of hers. I could feel for her ambitions and humiliations. She worked hard to make our home bright and efficient. She had a taste for sound and 'solid' things and temperate harmonies. In that old world, encumbered with possessions and with an extreme household autonomy, servants were a very important matter indeed and she managed ours with just that measured kindliness and just that avoidance of intimacy that was needed by the social traditions of the time. She had always been intelligently interested in the internal politics of Thunderstone House and she showed the keenest desire for my success there. 'I'll see you a director before ten years,' she said. And I worked very hard indeed and not merely for ambition's sake. I really understood and believed in the

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educational importance of that great slovenly business. Newberry came to recognise in me a response to his own ideas. He would consult me about new schemes and the modification of old procedure. He relied on me more and more and talked with me more and more frequently. And it is a queer thing to recall that by a sort of convention between us we never mentioned or alluded to my sister Fanny in any of our discussions.

"I changed a good deal during my first two and a half years of married life. I matured and hardened. I became a man of the world. I was put up for and elected a member of a good club, and developed my gift for talk. I met a widening variety of people, and some of them were quite distinguished people, and I found they did not overawe me. I possessed a gift for caustic commentary that gained me some reputation as a wit, and I felt a growing interest in the showy and sterile game of party politics. My ambitions grew. I was active; I was self-satisfied. I had largely forgotten my intense sexual humiliation. But I was not a very happy man. My life was like a handsome, well-appointed room with a north light; the bowls were full of cut flowers but the sunlight never came in."

§ 2

"For two years and a half I saw nothing of Hetty and it was not my fault that I ever saw her again. I did everything I could to eradicate her from my existence. I destroyed her photographs and every little vestige of her that might distress me by its

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memories. If I caught myself in a reverie in which she figured I forced my attention to other things. Sometimes when I made a new success I had a flash of desire that she should witness it. Ugly, I agree, but is it not what we still are—except for civilisation? She came back sometimes in dreams, but they were anger-soaked dreams. And I cultivated my pride and love for Milly. With increasing prosperity Milly's skill in dressing herself developed; she became a very handsome effective woman; she gave herself to me with a smiling sense of temperate and acceptable giving.

"In those days we had not learned to analyse our motives. We were much less observant of ourselves than men and women are to-day. I had set my mind upon loving Milly and I did not realise that the essential thing in loving is a thing beyond our wills. Fanny and Hetty I loved by nature and necessity, but my days were now far too completely apportioned between work and Milly for much companionship with Fanny to survive, and Hetty in my heart was like one of those poor shrivelled corpses of offending monks they walled up in the monasteries during the Age of Christendom in Europe. But I found now a curious liveliness in my interest in women in general. I did not ask what these wanderings of attention signified; I was ashamed of them but I gave way to them. Even when I was in Milly's company I would look at other women and find a vague excitement if the intent of my glances was returned.

"And I began to read novels in a new spirit, though I did not know why I was taking to novels; I was

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reading them, I see now, for the sake of the women I found in them. I do not know, Sunray, whether you realise how much the novels and plays of those days served to give men and women love-phantoms with whom they made imaginative excursions. We successful and respectable ones went our dignified and satisfied ways, assuaging the thin protests of our starved possibilities with such unsubstantial refreshment.

"But it was because of that wandering eye for women that I encountered Hetty again. It was in the springtime that I came upon her, either in March or very early April, in some public gardens quite near to Chester Terrace. These gardens were not in my direct way from the underground railway-station, which took me to and fro between home and business and my house, but I was in no hurry for Milly's tea-party and the warmth and sunlight drew me to this place of blossom and budding green. They were what we should call spring gardens nowadays, small but cleverly laid out for display with an abundant use of daffodil, narcissus, hyacinth, almond-blossom and the like, with hard paths and seats placed to command happy patches of colour. On one of these seats a woman was sitting alone with her back to me looking at a patch of scyllas. I was struck by the loveliness of her careless pose. Such discoveries of the dear beauty that hides in the world would stir me like a challenge and then stab me with pain. She was dressed very poorly and simply, but her dingy clothing was no more than the smoked glass one uses to see the brightness of the sun.

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"I slackened my pace as I went past and glanced back to see her face. And I saw the still face of Hetty, very grave and sorrowful, Hetty, no longer a girl but a woman, looking at the flowers and quite unheedful of my regard.

"Something greater than pride or jealousy seized me then. I went a few steps farther and stopped and turned, as though no other thing was possible.

"At that she became aware of me. She looked up, doubted, and recognised me.

"She watched me with that motionless face of hers as I came and sat down beside her. I spoke in a voice of astonishment on the edge of a storm of emotion. 'Hetty,' I said, 'I couldn't go past you!'

"She did not answer immediately. 'Are you—?' she began and stopped. 'I suppose we were bound to meet again,' she said, 'sooner or later. You look as if you had grown, Harry. You look well and prosperous.'

" 'Do you live in this part of London?' I asked.

" 'Camden Town just now,' she said. 'We move about.'

" 'You married—Sumner?'

" 'What did you expect me to do? What else was there to do? I've drunk my cup to the dregs, Harry.'

" 'But— You had the child?'

" 'It died—it died all right. Poor little mite. And my mother died a year ago.'

" 'Well, you've got Sumner.'

" 'I've got Sumner.'

"At any time before that meeting I should have exulted over the death of Sumner's child, but in the

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presence of Hetty's misery that old hatred would not come back for its gratification. I was looking at her face which was so familiar and so changed, and it was as if I woke up again to love for her after two years and a half of insensibility. What a beaten and unhappy thing she was—she whom I had loved and hated so bitterly?

" 'It seems a long way back now to Kent, Harry —and mother's farm,' she said.

" 'You've parted with it?'

" 'Farm and furniture—and mostly it's gone. Sumner bets. He's betted most of it away. It's hard, you see, to find a job but easy to fancy a winner. Which doesn't win. . . .'

" 'My father used to do that,' I said. 'I'd like to shoot every race-horse in England.'

" 'I hated selling the farm,' she said. 'I sold the farm and came into this dingy old London. Sumner dragged me here and he's dragging me down. It's not his fault; it's how he's made. But when a spring day comes like this— ! I think of Kent and the wind on the downs and the blackthorn in the hedges and the little yellow noses of the primroses and the first elder leaves coming out, until I want to cry and scream. But there's no getting out of it. Here I am. I've come to look at these flowers here. What's the good? They just hurt me.'

"She stared at the flowers.

" 'My God!' I said, 'but this hurts me too. I didn't expect——'

" 'What did you expect?' she asked, and turned that still face of hers to me and silenced me.

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"'I don't see that it should hurt you,' she said. 'I brought it on myself. You didn't do it. It happened to me. It was my fault. Though why God made me love beautiful things—and then set a trap for me and made me fool enough to fall into it——!'

"Silence fell between us.

"'Meeting you like this,' I began presently, 'makes me see things—so differently. You see—in those old days—in some ways you seemed so much stronger than I was. I didn't understand. . . . I see— This makes me feel— I ought to have taken better care of you.'

"'Or shown me mercy. I was dirty and shameful —yes. All that. But you were merciless, Harry. Men are merciless to women. I did—all through— I loved you, Harry. In a way I've always loved you and I love you now. When I looked up and saw it was you coming back to me— For a minute you were just like the old Harry. For a moment— It was like Spring coming real. . . . But it's no good talking like that now, Harry. It's too late.'

"'Yes,' I agreed. 'Too late. . . .'

"She watched my face through a long pause. I weighed my words when I spoke. 'Up to now,' I said, 'I've never forgiven. Now— Now I see you here I wish—I wish to God—I had forgiven you. And made a fight for it with you. We might— Suppose Hetty, suppose I had forgiven you——?'

"'Harry dear,' she said softly, 'you don't want to be seen here making a woman cry. We won't talk of that. Tell me about yourself. I've heard you married again. A beautiful woman. Sumner saw that

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I heard of that. Are you happy, Harry? You look prosperous, and every one isn't prosperous these post-war times.'

" 'That's all so-and-so, Hetty. I work hard. I've got ambitions. I'm still a publisher's assistant at the old place but I'm near to being a director. I'm high up. My wife— She's a dear and a great help to me. . . . Somehow meeting you . . . My God! Hetty, what a mess we made of things! It's all very well, but the second time of marrying isn't like the first. You and I— I'm a sort of blood-brother to you and nothing can change it. The wood—that little wood where you kissed me! Why did we smash it up, Hetty? Why did we do it? Two fools who'd got so precious a thing! That's all past. But hate is dead between us. That's past too. If there was anything I could do for you now I would do it.'

"A gleam of the old humour came. 'If you could kill Sumner,' she said, 'and smash the world and destroy the memories of three years . . . It's no good, Harry. I ought to have kept myself clean. And you —you might have been gentler with me.'

" 'I couldn't, Hetty.'

" 'I knew you couldn't. And I couldn't foresee that my blood would betray me one evening. And here we are! Like meeting after we are dead. Spring comes now but it comes for other people. All these little crocus trumpets—like a brass band it is—they are trumpeting up the next lot of lovers. Better luck to them!'

"We sat still for a time. In the background of my mind Milly and her assembled teacups became

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evident as a faint urgency. 'You're late,' she'd say.

" 'Where are you living, Hetty?' I asked. 'What is your address?'

"She shook her head after a moment's thought. 'Better you shouldn't know.'

" 'But somehow I might help.'

" 'It would only disturb us all. I've got my cup —of dirty water—to drink. I've got to stand what I'm in for. What could you do to help me?'

" 'Well,' said I, 'my address anyhow is easy to keep in mind. It's just what it was when we— In the days when we lived— Thunderstone House it is. Some day there might be something——'

" 'It's good of you.'

"We stood up face to face, and as we stood there a thousand circumstances vanished and nothing remained but our hurt and injured selves. 'Good-bye, Hetty,' I said. 'Good luck.'

"Our hands met. 'Good luck to you, Harry. It's no good, but I'm glad we met like this. And to find you forgive me a little at last.' "

§ 3

"That meeting had a profound effect upon me. It banished much aimless reverie from my mind; it unlocked the prison in which a whole multitude of forbidden thoughts had been confined. I thought enormously of Hetty. They were vague and impossible thoughts; they came in the night, on the way to business, even during slack moments in business

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hours; rehearsals of dramatised encounters, explanations, magic turns of circumstances that suddenly restored our lost world to us. I tried to suppress these cloudy imaginations but with little avail; they overspread my mental skies in spite of me. I can't tell you how many times I walked through those gardens in Regent's Park; that détour became my normal route from the station to my home. And I would even go out of my customary way along some side-path because I had caught a glimpse far off, between the tree-branches and the flower-beds, of a solitary woman. But Hetty never came back there.

"In my brooding over Hetty a jealousy and hatred of Sumner developed steadily. I do not think I had any desire for Hetty myself but I wanted intensely to get her away from him. This hostility to Sumner was the ugly undertow of my remorse and reawakened love of Hetty. He was the evil thing that had deprived me of Hetty. I did not reflect for a moment that it was I with my relentless insistence upon divorce that had forced her back to him.

"And all this dreaming and brooding and futile planning, all this body of desire for something more to happen between Hetty and myself, went on without my breathing a word of it to any living soul. It was on my conscience that it was disloyal to Milly, and I even made a half-hearted attempt to tell Milly that I had met Hetty and been shocked at her poverty and unhappiness. I wanted to bring her into my own state of mind and have her feel as I did. I threw out a remark one day—we had gone to Hampstead Heath for a walk one afternoon—that I had

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once walked along that ridge by the Round Pond with Hetty during my last leave. 'I wonder how she is living now,' I said.

"Milly did not answer immediately, and when I looked at her her face was flushed and hard. 'I hoped you had forgotten her,' she said in a suffocated voice.

" 'This brought it back to me.'

" 'I try never to think of her. You don't know what that woman meant to me—the humiliation.

" 'It was not only for myself,' she added. 'It was for you.'

"She said no more but it was manifest how terribly the mere name of Hetty had disturbed her."

"Poor little things!" cried Firefly. "How insanely jealous you all were!"

"And I did not go to Fanny and tell her about Hetty for a time. I had misrepresented Hetty to her as a figure of common depravity and I found it difficult to put that right. Nowadays I did not see so much of Fanny as I had formerly done. She was living half-way across London from me. Her relations with Newberry were now much more public than they had been and she had developed a circle of acquaintances who cared for her. But this publicity made Milly more stiff towards her because she feared that a scandal would be made about Fanny in relation to my position in the firm of Crane & Newberry. Near Pangbourne, Newberry had taken a bungalow and there Fanny would spend whole weeks at a time, quite out of our range.

"But presently a situation developed which sent me post-haste to Fanny for help and advice."

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§ 4

"Suddenly in July when I was beginning to think I should never hear from her again, Hetty appealed to me for help. Would I meet her one evening, she asked, by the fountain in the Park near the Zoological Gardens, and then we could get chairs and she would tell me what she had in mind. She did not want me to write her a letter, Sumner had become very jealous of her, and so would I put an advertisement in *The Daily Express* with the letters A B C D and giving the hour and date. I made an appointment for the earliest possible evening.

"Instead of the despondent and spiritless Hetty I had met in the spring I found a Hetty high-strung and excited. 'I want some place where we shan't be seen,' she said as I came up to her. She took my arm to turn me about, and led the way towards two green chairs standing apart a little away from the main walk that here traversed the Park. I noted that she was still wearing the same shabby dress she had had on our previous encounter. Her manner with me was quite different from the manner of our former meeting. There was something familiar and confident about her as though in between she had met me in imagination a multitude of times—as no doubt she had.

" 'You meant all you said, Harry, when we talked before?' she began.

" 'Everything.'

" 'You will help me if you can?'

" 'Everything I can.'

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" 'Suppose I asked you for some money?'

" 'Naturally.'

" 'I want to get away from Sumner. I have a chance. I could do it.'

" 'Tell me about it, Hetty. All I can do, I will.'

" 'Things have changed, Harry, since that day we met. I'd got into a sort of despairing state. I took whatever came. Seeing you changed me. I don't know why but it did. Perhaps I was going to change anyhow. But I can't stand being with Sumner any longer. And there's a chance now. I shall want a lot of money—sixty or seventy pounds.'

"I thought. 'That's quite possible, Hetty. If you can wait a week or so. Ten days say.'

" 'You see I have a friend, a girl who married a Canadian. She stayed here to have her child when he went home and now she goes out to him. She's been ill; she's not very strong and she doesn't want to face the voyage alone. It would be easy for me to get out there with her as her cousin and companion. If I had an outfit— We've discussed it all. She knows some one who could manage about a passport for me. In my maiden name. That's the scheme. I could have my outfit sent to her place. I could slip away.'

" 'You'd take another name? Begin again over there?'

" 'Yes. . . .'

"I sat considering this project. It pleased me. 'There need be no trouble about the money,' I said.

" 'I can't go on living with Sumner. You never saw him. You don't know what he's like.'

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"'I've heard he was good-looking.'

"'Don't I know that face—flushed and weak! He's a liar and a cheat. He has a conceit he can best every one. And he's begun drinking. God knows why I married him. It seemed the natural thing somehow since you had divorced me. The child had to have a father. . . . But he disgusts me, Harry. He disgusts me. I can't go on. I can't endure it. You can't imagine it—in those little lodgings—in the hot weather. To keep a maudlin drunken man away from one. . . . If I hadn't seen this way out something worse might have happened.'

"'Can't you come away from him at once?' I asked. 'Why should you ever go back to him?'

"'No. I must get clear away or there will be mischief. And you mustn't be in it. He'd think of you at once. If he had a hint it was you. That's what you have to do about the money and everything, letters or anything—get it to me without your being mixed up with it. You must get me money, not cheques. We mustn't be seen to meet. Even about here it's risky. He's got into a gang. He's been getting deeper and deeper into a rotten set. They blackmail the bookies. They go about with revolvers. They pass on things to one another. It grew out of betting and now they call it getting a bit of their own back. . . . If they spot you in it, they'll come for you.'

"'Trench warfare in London. I'll risk it.'

"'You needn't risk anything—if we are discreet. If there was some one I could see—who'd hand things on.'

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"I thought at once of my sister Fanny.

" 'That would be safe,' said Hetty. 'As safe as could be. And I'd love to see her again. I loved her when I met her. . . . But all this is awful good of you, Harry. I don't deserve a moment's kindness.'

" 'Nonsense! I pushed you into the dirt, Hetty.'

" 'I jumped into it.'

" 'Fell into it. It's nothing very much, Hetty, to give you a hand to get out of it again.'

§ 5

"I went the next day to my sister Fanny to prepare her for Hetty's call. Fanny sat in an armchair and listened and watched my face as I told my story, confessed how I had exaggerated Hetty's offence and asked for help. 'I ought to have seen her, Harry, before I took your word for it,' she said. 'Of course, even now, I can't imagine how a girl who loves one man could ever stand the kiss of another as she did, but then, as you say, she'd been drinking. We women aren't all made alike. There's all sorts make a world. Some girls—the backbone goes out of them when they feel a man's kisses. You and me, Harry, we aren't made like that. I've been thinking while you sat talking there, how like we both are to poor mother really—for all she quarrelled with me. We'll grow hard presently if we aren't careful. And your Hetty was young and she didn't know. Only once it was. And all her life's been spoiled by it! . . . I didn't know it was like that, Harry.'

"And my sister Fanny began to recall her im-

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pressions of Hetty. She recalled her fine animation and the living interest of her talk. 'When she left I said to myself, she's got wit; that's the first witty woman I've ever met. She's got poetry in her. Everything she says comes out a little different from the things most people say. She says things that come like flowers in a hedgerow. So she did. Does she still?'

"'I never thought of it like that before,' I said. 'I suppose she has a sort of poetry. Only the other day—when I met her first. What was it she said? Something.'

"'It's no good quoting, Harry. Witty things should bloom where they grow. They're no good as cut-flowers. But you and I are fairly quick and fairly clever, Harry, but we've never had any of that.'

"'I've always loved her talk,' I said.

"I began to explain the situation to Fanny more fully and to show how she could help in it. I was not to see Hetty again; Fanny was to see her, pay her the hundred pounds we could put together for her, communicate with the friends she was to accompany and get her away. Fanny listened gravely and agreed.

"Then she reflected.

"'Why don't you take her to Canada yourself, Harry?' she asked abruptly."

§ 6

"I did not answer Fanny for some moments. Then I said: 'I don't want to.'

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"'I can see you love Hetty still.'

"'Love. But I don't want that.'

"'You don't want to be with her?'

"'It's out of the question. Why ask a painful thing like that? All that is dead.'

"'Isn't a resurrection possible? Why is it out of the question? Pride?'

"'No.'

"'Why then?'

"'Milly.'

"'You don't love Milly.'

"'I won't have you discuss that, Fanny. I do love her.'

"'Not as you love Hetty.'

"'Quite differently. But Milly trusts me. She keeps faith with me. I'd as soon steal money—from a child's money-box—as go back on Milly.'

"'It's wonderful how fine men can be to the wives they don't love,' said Fanny bitterly.

"'Newberry's different,' I said. 'I've got my little son. I've got my work. And though you will never have it, I love Milly.'

"'In a way. Is she company for you? Is she fun?'

"'I trust and love her. And as for Hetty, you don't understand about Hetty. I love her. I love her enormously. But it's like two ghosts meeting by moonlight. We two are dead to each other and—sorrowful. It isn't as though it was anything like your case over again. I see Hetty in hell and I'd do nearly anything in life to get her out. I don't even want to meet her. I want to get her away out of this

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filth and stupidity to where she can begin again. That's all I want and that's all she wants. How could she and I ever come together again? How could we kiss again as lovers kiss? Poor defiled things we are! And all my cruelty. You're thinking of something else, Fanny. You're not thinking of Hetty and me.'

"'Maybe I am,' said Fanny. 'Yes, I think I am. And so she is to go to Canada and begin again—till her health comes back and her courage comes back. It isn't natural for a woman of her temperament to live without a man to love her, Harry.'

"'Let her live and love,' said I. 'She'll have changed her name. Her friends will stand by her. They won't give her away. Let her forget. Let her begin again.'

"'With another man?'

"'It may be.'

"'You don't mind the thought of that?'

"I was stung but I kept my temper. 'Have I any right to mind the thought of that now?'

"'But you will. And you will go on living with this wife you trust and respect. Who's dull-spirited—dull as ditch-water.'

"'No. Who's my son's mother. Who is trustworthy. Whom I'm pledged to. And I've got my work. It may seem nothing to you. It's good enough for me to give myself to it. Can't I love Hetty, can't I help her out of the net she's in, and yet not want to go back to impossible things?'

"'Grey Monday mornings,' said Fanny.

"'As if all life wasn't grey,' I said.

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"And then," said Sarnac, "I remember that I made a prophecy. I made it—when did I make it? Two thousand years ago? Or two weeks ago? I sat in Fanny's little sitting-room, an old-world creature amidst her old-world furnishings, and I said that men and women would not always suffer as we were suffering then. I said that we were still poor savages, living only in the bleak dawn of civilisation, and that we suffered because we were underbred, undertrained and darkly ignorant of ourselves, that the mere fact that we knew our own unhappiness was the promise of better things and that a day would come when charity and understanding would light the world so that men and women would no longer hurt themselves and one another as they were doing now everywhere, universally, in law and in restriction and in jealousy and in hate, all round and about the earth.

" 'It is still too dark for us,' I said, 'to see clearly where we are going, and every one of us blunders and stumbles and does wrong. Every one. It is idle for me to ask now what is the right thing for me to do? Whatever I do now will be wrong. I ought to go with Hetty and be her lover again—easily I could do that and why should I deny it?—and I ought to stick to Milly and the work I have found in the world. Right road or left road, both lead to sorrow and remorse, but there is scarcely a soul in all this dark world, Fanny, who has not had to make or who will not presently have to make a choice as hard. I will not pull the skies down upon Milly, I *cannot* because she has put her faith in me. You are my dear sister Fanny and I love you and we have loved each other.

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Do you remember how you used to take me round to school and hold my hand at the crossings? Don't make things too hard for me now. Just help me to help Hetty. Don't tear me to pieces. She is still alive and young and—Hetty. Out there—she at least can begin again.' "

§ 7

"Nevertheless, I did see Hetty again before she left England. There came a letter for me at Thunderstone House in which she proposed a meeting.

" 'You have been so kind to me,' she wrote. 'It is the next best thing to your never having left me. You have been a generous dear. You've given back happiness to me. I feel excited already at the thought of the great liner and the ocean, and full of hope. We've got a sort of picture of the ship; it is like a great hotel; with our cabin marked in it exactly where it is. Canada will be wonderful; Our Lady of the Snows; and we are going by way of New York, New York like nothing else on earth, cliffs and crags of windows, towering up to the sky. And it's wonderful to have new things again. I sneak off to Fanny's just to finger them over. I'm excited—yes, and grateful—yes, and full of hope—yes. And Harry, Harry, my heart aches and aches. I want to see you again. I don't deserve to but I want to see you again. We began with a walk and why shouldn't we end with a walk? Thursday and Friday all the gang will be at Leeds. I could get away the whole day either day and it would be a miracle if any one knew. I

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wish we could have that same old walk again. I suppose it's too far and impossible. We'll save that, Harry, until we're both quite dead and then we'll be two little swirls of breeze in the grass or two bits of thistledown going side by side. But there was that other walk we had when we went to Shere and right over the North Downs to Leatherhead. We looked across the Weald and saw our own South Downs far, far away. Pinewood and heather there was; hills beyond hills. And the smoke of rubbish-burning.'

"I was to write to Fanny's address.

"Of course we had that walk, we two half-resuscitated lovers. We did not make love at all though we kissed when we met and meant to kiss when we parted. We talked as I suppose dead souls might talk of the world that had once been real. We talked of a hundred different things—even of Sumner. Now that she was so near escape from him her dread and hatred had evaporated. She said Sumner had a passionate desire for her and a real need of her and that it was not fair to him and very bad for him that she despised him. It wounded his self-respect. It made him violent and defiant. A woman who cared for him, who would take the pains to watch him and care for him as a woman should do for a man, might have made something of him. 'But I've never cared for him, Harry; though I've tried. But I can see where things hurt him. I can see they hurt him frightfully at times. It doesn't hurt him any the less because he does ugly things.' He was vain, too, and ashamed of his incapacity to get a sufficient living. He was drifting very rapidly to a criminal

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life and she had no power over him to hold him back.

"I can still see Hetty and hear her voice, as we walked along a broad bridle-path between great rhododendron bushes, and she talked, grave and balanced and kind she was, of this rogue who had cheated her and outraged her and beaten her. It was a new aspect of Hetty and yet at the same time it was the old dear Hetty I had loved and wasted and lost, clear-minded and swift, with an understanding better than her will.

"We sat for a long time on the crest of the Downs above Shere where the view was at its widest and best, and we recalled the old days of happiness in Kent and talked of the distances before us and of crossing the sea and of France and so of the whole wide world. 'I feel,' she said, 'as I used to when I was a child, at the end of the school quarter. I'm going away to new things. Put on your frock, put on your hat; the big ship is waiting. I am a little frightened about it and rather happy. . . . I wish— But never mind that.'

" 'You wish——?'

" 'What else could I wish?'

" 'You mean——?'

" 'It's no good wishing.'

" 'I've got to stick the job I've taken. I've got to see it through. But if you care to know it, Hetty, I wish so too. My God!—if wishes could release one!'

" 'You've got your job here. I wouldn't take you away, Harry, if I could. Sturdy you are, Harry, and you'll go through with it and do the work you're

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made to do—and I'll take what comes to me. Over there I guess I'll forget a lot about Sumner and the things that have happened in between—and think a lot about you and the South Downs and this—how we sat side by side here.

" 'Perhaps,' said Hetty, 'heaven is a place like this. A great hillside to which you come at last, after all the tugging and pushing and the hoping and the disappointments and the spurring and the hungers and the cruel jealousies are done with and finished for ever. Then here you sit down and rest. And you aren't alone. Your lover is here and he sits beside you and you just touch shoulder to shoulder, very close and very still, and your sins are forgiven you; your blunders and misunderstandings they matter no longer; and the beauty takes you and you dissolve into it, you dissolve into it side by side and together you forget and fade until at last nothing remains of all the distresses and anger and sorrow, nothing remains of you at all but the breeze upon the great hillside and sunshine and everlasting peace. . . .

" 'All of which,' said Hetty, rising abruptly to her feet and standing over me, 'is just empty nothingness. Oh Harry! Harry! One feels things and when one tries to say them it is just words and nonsense. We've hardly started on our way to Leatherhead and you'll have to be back by seven. So get up, old Harry. Get up and come on. You are the dearest person alive and it has been sweet of you to come with me to-day. I was half afraid you'd think it wasn't wise. . . .'

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"In the late afternoon we got to a place called Little Bookham and there we had tea. About a mile farther on was a railway-station and we found a train for London; it came in as we got on to the platform.

"Everything had gone well so far and then came the first gleam of disaster. At Leatherhead we sat looking out on the station platform and a little ruddy man came trotting along to get into the compartment next to us, a little common fellow like an ostler with a cigar under his Hebrew nose, and as he was about to get in he glanced up at us. Doubt and then recognition came into his eyes and at the sight of him Hetty recoiled.

" 'Get in,' said the guard, blowing his whistle, and the little man was hustled out of sight.

"Hetty was very white. 'I know that man,' she said, 'and he knows me. He's named Barnado. What shall I do?'

" 'Nothing. Does he know you very well?'

" 'He's been to our rooms—three or four times.'

" 'He may not have been sure it was you.'

" 'I think he was. Suppose he were to come to the window at the next station to make certain. Could I pretend not to be myself? Refuse to recognise him or answer to my name?'

" 'But if he was convinced it was you in spite of your bluff that would instantly make him suspicious and off he'd go to your husband! If on the other hand you took it all quite casually—said I was your cousin or your brother-in-law—he might think nothing of it and never even mention it to Sumner. But

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making him suspicious would send him off to Sumner right away. Anyhow, you go to Liverpool tomorrow. I don't see that his recognition of you matters.'

" 'I'm thinking of you,' she said.

" 'But he doesn't know who I am. So far as I know none of that lot has seen me. . . .'

"The train slowed down at the next station. Mr. Barnado appeared, cigar and all, bright-eyed and curious.

" 'Blest if I didn't say to myself that's Hetty Sumner!' said Mr. Barnado. 'Wonderful 'ow one meets people!'

" 'My brother-in-law, Mr. Dyson,' said Hetty, introducing me. 'We've been down to see his little daughter.'

" 'I didn't know you 'ad a sister, Mrs. Sumner.'

" 'I haven't,' said Hetty, with a note of pain in her voice. 'Mr. Dyson is a widower.'

" 'Sorry,' said Mr. Barnado. 'Stupid of me. And what age might the little girl be, Mr. Dyson?'

"I found myself under the necessity of creating, explaining and discussing an orphan daughter. Mr. Barnado had three and was uncomfortably expert about children and their phases of development. He was evidently a model father. I did as well as I could, I drew out Mr. Barnado's family pride rather than indulged my own, but I was immensely relieved when Mr. Barnado exclaimed, 'Gawd! 'Ere's Epsom already! Glad to 'ave met you, Mr. ——'

" 'Damn!' I said to myself. I had forgotten.

" 'Dixon,' said Hetty hastily, and Mr. Barnado,

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after effusive farewells, proceeded to remove himself from the carriage.

"'Thank Heaven!' said Hetty, 'he didn't come on to London. You're the poorest liar, Harry, I've ever known. As it is—no harm's been done.'

"'No harm's been done,' said I, but two or three times before we reached the London station where we were to part for ever, we recurred to the encounter and repeated the reassuring formula that no harm had been done.

"We parted at Victoria Station with very little emotion. Mr. Barnado had brought us back, as it were, to an every-day and incidental atmosphere. We did not kiss each other again. The world about us had become full now of observant eyes. My last words to Hetty were 'Everything's all right!' in a businesslike, reassuring tone, and the next day she slipped off to join her friends at Liverpool and passed out of my life for ever."

§ 8

"For three or four days I did not feel this second separation from Hetty very greatly. My mind was still busy with the details of her departure. On the third day she sent me a wireless message, as we used to call it, to Thunderstone House. 'Well away,' she said. 'Fine weather. Endless love and gratitude.' Then slowly as the days passed my sense of loss grew upon me, the intimations of an immense loneliness gathered and spread until they became a cloud that

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darkened all my mental sky. I was persuaded now that there was no human being who could make me altogether happy but Hetty, and that for the second time I was rejecting the possibility of companionship with her. I had wanted love, I perceived, without sacrifice, and in that old world, it seems to me now, love was only possible at an exorbitant price, sacrifice of honour, sacrifice of one's proper work in the world, humiliations and distresses. I had shirked the price of Hetty and she was going from me, taking out of my life for ever all those sweet untellable things that were the essence of love, the little names, the trivial careless caresses, the exquisite gestures of mind and body, the moments of laughter and pride and perfect understanding. Day by day love went westward from me. Day and night I was haunted by a more and more vivid realisation of a great steamship, throbbing and heaving its way across the crests and swelling waves of the Atlantic welter. The rolling black coal-smoke from its towering funnels poured before the wind. Now I would see that big ocean-going fabric in the daylight; now lit brightly from stem to stern, under the stars.

"I was full of unappeasable regret, I indulged in endless reveries of a flight across the Atlantic in pursuit of Hetty, of a sudden dramatic appearance before her;—'Hetty, I can't stand it. I've come'—and all the time I stuck steadfastly to the course I had chosen. I worked hard and late at Thunderstone House; I did my best to shunt my imagination into new channels by planning two new quasi-educational publications, and I set myself to take Milly out to

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restaurants to dinner and to the theatre and to interesting shows. And in the midst of some picture-show perhaps I would find my rebel mind speculating what sort of thing Hetty would have said of it, had she been there. There was a little show of landscapes at the Alpine Gallery and several were pictures of Downland scenery and one showed a sunlit hillside under drowsy white clouds. It was almost like seeing Hetty.

"It was exactly a week after Hetty's landing in New York that I first encountered Sumner. It was my usual time of arrival and I was just turning out of Tottenham Court Road into the side-street that led to the yard of Thunderstone House. There was a small public house in this byway and two men were standing outside it in attitudes of expectation. One of them stepped out to accost me. He was a little flushed Jewish man, and for the moment I did not recognise him at all.

" 'Mr. Smith?' said he, and scrutinised me queerly.

" 'At your service,' said I.

" 'Not by any chance Mr. Dyson or Dixon, eh?' he asked with a leer.

" 'Barnado!' cried my memory and placed him. My instant recognition must have betrayed itself in my face. Our eyes met and there were no secrets between them. 'No, Mr. Barnado,' I said with incredible stupidity; 'my name's just plain Smith.'

" 'Don't mention it, Mr. Smith, don't mention it,' said Mr. Barnado with extreme politeness. 'I had a sort of fancy I might have met you before.' And turning to his companion and raising his voice a

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little, he said: 'That's him all right, Sumner—sure as eggs are eggs.'

"Sumner! I glanced at this man who had given my life so disastrous a turn. He was very much my own height and build, fair with a blotched complexion and wearing a checked grey suit and an experienced-looking grey felt hat. He might have been my unsuccessful half-brother. Our eyes met in curiosity and antagonism. 'I'm afraid I'm not the man you want,' I said to Barnado and went on my way. I didn't see any advantage in an immediate discussion in that place. I perceived that an encounter was inevitable, but I meant it to happen amidst circumstances of my own choice and after I had had time to consider the situation properly. I heard something happen behind me and Barnado said: 'Shut up, you fool! You've found out what you want to know.' I went through the passages and rooms of Thunderstone House to my office and there, when I was alone, I sat down in my armchair and swore very heartily. Every day since the departure of Hetty I had been feeling more and more sure that this at least was not going to happen. I had thought that Sumner was very easily and safely and completely out of the story.

"I took my writing-pad and began to sketch out the situation. '*Ends to be secured,*' I wrote.

" '*No.* 1. *Hetty must not be traced.*

" '*No.* 2. *Milly must hear nothing of this.*

" '*No.* 3. *No blackmailing.*'

"I considered. '*But if a lump payment,*' I began. This I scratched out again.

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"I had to scheme out the essential facts. '*What does S. know? What evidence exists? Of what? No clew to lead to Fanny? There is nothing but that journey in the train. He will have a moral certainty but will it convince any one else?*'

"I wrote a new heading: '*How to handle them?*'

"I began to sketch grotesques and arabesques over my paper as I plotted. Finally I tore it up into very small fragments and dropped it into my waste-paper basket. A messenger-girl rapped and came in with a paper slip, bearing the names of Fred Sumner and Arthur Barnado.

" 'They've not put the business they want to talk about,' I remarked.

" 'They said you'd know, sir.'

" 'No excuse. I want everybody to fill in that,' I said. 'Just say I'm too busy to see strangers who don't state their business. And ask them to complete the form.'

"Back came the form: 'Inquiry about Mr. Sumner's missing wife.'

"I considered it calmly. 'I don't believe we ever had the manuscript. Say I'm engaged up to half past twelve. Then I could have a talk of ten minutes with Mr. Sumner alone. Make that clear. I don't see where Mr. Barnado comes in. Make it clear it's a privilege to see me.'

"My messenger did not reappear. I resumed my meditations on the situation. There was time for a lot of aggressive energy to evaporate before half past twelve. Probably both of the men had come in from the outskirts and would have nowhere to wait but

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the streets or a public house. Mr. Barnado might want to be back upon his own business at Epsom. He'd played his part in identifying me. Anyhow, I didn't intend to have any talk with Sumner before a witness. If he reappeared with Barnado I should refuse to see them. For Barnado alone I had a plan and for Sumner I had a plan, but not for the two of them together.

"My delaying policy was a good one. At half past twelve Sumner came alone and was shown up to me.

" 'Sit down there,' I said abruptly and leaned back in my chair and stared at his face and waited in silence for him to begin.

"For some moments he did not speak. He had evidently expected me to open with some sort of question and he had come ready loaded with a reply. To be plumped into a chair and looked at, put him off his game. He tried to glare at me and I looked at his face as if I was looking at a map. As I did so I found my hatred for him shrinking and changing. It wasn't a case for hatred. He had such a poor, mean, silly face, a weak arrangement of plausibly handsome features. Every now and then it was convulsed by a nervous twitch. His straw-coloured moustache was clipped back more on one side than the other, and his rather frayed necktie had slipped down to display his collar-stud and the grubbiness of his collar. He had pulled his mouth a little askew and thrust his face forward in an attempt at fierceness, and his rather watery blue eyes were as open and as protruded as he could manage.

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" 'Where's my wife, Smith?' he said at last.

" 'Out of my reach, Mr. Sumner, and out of yours.'

" 'Where've you hid her?'

" 'She's gone,' I said. 'It's no work of mine.'

" 'She's come back to you.'

"I shook my head.

" 'You know where she is?'

" 'She's gone clear, Sumner. You let her go.'

" 'Let her go! *You* let her go, but I'm not going to. I'm not that sort. Here's this girl you marry and mess about with, and when she comes across a man who's a bit more of a man than you are and handles her as a woman ought to be handled, you go and chuck her out and divorce her, divorce her with her child coming, and then start planning and plotting to get her away from the man she's given her love to——'

"He stopped for want of words or breath. He wanted to exasperate me and start a shouting match. I said nothing.

" 'I want Hetty back,' he said. 'She's my wife and I want her back. She's mine and the sooner this foolery stops the better.'

"I sat up to the desk and put my elbows on it.

" 'You won't get her back,' I said very quietly. 'What are you going to do about it?'

" 'By God! I'll have her back—if I swing for it.'

" 'Exactly. And what are you going to do?'

" 'What *can't* I do? I'm her husband.'

" 'Well?'

" 'You've got her.'

" 'Not a scrap of her.'

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" 'She's missing. I can go to the police.'

" 'Go to them. What will they do?'

" 'I can put them on to you.'

" 'Not a bit of it. They won't bother about me. If your wife's missing and you go to the police, they'll clear up all your gang with their inquiries. They'll be only too glad of the chance. Trouble *me!* They'll dig up the cellars in *your* house and in your previous house to find the body. They'll search you and ransack you. And what they don't do to you, your pals will.'

"Sumner leaned forward and grimaced like a gargoyle to give his words greater emphasis. '*Yew* were the last man seen with her,' he said.

" 'Not a scrap of evidence.'

"Sumner cursed vigorously. 'He *saw* you.'

" 'I can deny that absolutely. Frowsty little witness your friend Barnado. Don't be too sure he'll stick it. Nasty business if a woman disappears and you find yourself trying to fix something that won't hold water on to some one her husband dislikes. If I were you, Sumner, I wouldn't take that line. Even if he backs you up, what does it prove? You know of nobody else who pretends to have seen me with Hetty. You won't be able to find anybody. . . .'

"Mr. Sumner extended his hand towards my table. He was too far away to bang it properly, so he pulled his chair up closer. The bang when it came was ineffective. 'Look 'ere,' he said and moistened his lips. 'I want my Hetty back and I'm going to have her back. You're precious cool and cucumberish and all that just now, but by God! I'll warm you up before

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I've done with you. You think you can get her away and bluff me off. Never made such a mistake in your life. Suppose I *don't* go to the police. Suppose I go for direct action. Suppose I come round to your place, and make a fuss with your wife.'

" 'That will be a nuisance,' I said.

"He followed up his advantage. 'A masterpiece of a nuisance.'

"I considered the forced fierceness of his face.

" 'I shall say I know nothing about your wife's disappearance and that you are a blackmailing liar. People will believe me. My wife will certainly believe me. She'd make herself do so if your story was ten times as possible. Your friend Barnado and you will make a pretty couple of accusers. I shall say you are a crazy jealous fool, and if you keep the game up I shall have you run in. I'd not be altogether sorry to have you run in. There's one or two little things I don't like you for. I'd not be so very sorry to get quits.'

"I had the better of him. He was baffled and angry but I saw now plainly that he had no real fight in him.

" 'And you know where she is?' he said.

"I was too full of the spirit of conflict now to be discreet. 'I know where she is. And you don't get her—whatever you do. And as I said before, What can you do about it?'

" 'My God!' he said. 'My own wife.'

"I leaned back with the air of a man who had finished an interview. I looked at my wrist-watch.

"He stood up.

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"I looked up at him brightly. 'Well?' I said.

" 'Look here!' he spluttered. 'I don't stand this. By God! I tell you I want Hetty. I want her. I want her and I'll do what I like with her. D'you think I'll take *this?* Me? She's mine, you dirty thief!'

"I took up a drawing for an illustration and held it in my hand, regarding him with an expression of mild patience that maddened him.

" 'Didn't I marry her—when I needn't have? If you wanted her, why the devil didn't you keep her when you had her? I tell you I won't stand it.'

" 'My dear Sumner, as I said before, What can you do about it?'

"He leaned over the desk, shook a finger as though it was a pistol-barrel in my face. 'I'll let daylight through you,' he said. 'I'll let daylight through you.'

" 'I'll take my chance of that,' I said.

"He expressed his opinion of me for a bit.

" 'I won't argue your points,' I said. 'I guess we're about through with this interview. Don't shock my clerk, please, when she comes in.' And I rang the bell on my desk.

"His parting shot was feeble. 'You've not heard the last of me. I mean what I told you.'

" 'Mind the step,' said I.

"The door closed and left me strung up and trembling with excitement but triumphant. I felt I had beaten him and that I could go on beating him. It might be he would shoot. He'd probably got a revolver. But it was ten to one he'd take the trouble to get a fair chance at me and screw himself up to

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shooting pitch. And with his loose twitching face and shaky hand it was ten to one against his hitting me. He'd aim anyhow. He'd shoot too soon. And if he shot me it was ten to one he only wounded me slightly. Then I'd carry through my story against him. Milly might be shaken for a time, but I'd get the thing right again with her.

"I sat for a long time turning over the possibilities of the case. The more I considered it the more satisfied I was with my position. It was two o'clock and long past my usual lunch-time when I went off to my club. I treated myself to the unusual luxury of a half-bottle of champagne."

§ 9

"I never believed Sumner would shoot me until I was actually shot.

"He waylaid me in the passageway to the yard of Thunderstone House as I was returning from lunch just a week after our first encounter and when I was beginning to hope he had accepted his defeat. He had been drinking, and as soon as I saw his flushed face, half angry and half scared, I had an intimation of what might befall. I remember that I thought then that if anything happened he must get away because otherwise he might be left to tell his tale after I was dead. But I didn't really believe he was man enough to shoot and even now I do not believe that. He fired through sheer lack of nervous and muscular co-ordination.

"He did not produce his pistol until I was close up

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to him. 'Now then,' said he, 'you're for it. Where's my wife?' and out came the pistol a yard from me.

"I forget my answer. I probably said, 'Put that away' or something of that sort. And then I may have seemed about to snatch it. The report of the pistol, which sounded very loud to me, came at once, and a feeling as though I'd been kicked in the small of the back. The pistol was one of those that go on firing automatically as long as the trigger is gripped. It fired two other shots, and one got my knee and smashed it. 'Damn the thing!' he screamed and threw it down as though it had stung him. 'Get out, you fool. Run!' I said as I lurched towards him, and then as I fell I came within a foot of his terrified face as he dashed past me towards the main thoroughfare. He thrust me back with his hand as I reeled upon him.

"I think I rolled over on to my back into a sitting position after I fell, because I have a clear impression of him vanishing like the tail of a bolting rabbit into Tottenham Court Road. I saw a van and an omnibus pass across the space at the end of the street, heedless altogether of the pistol-shots that had sounded so terrible in my ears. A girl and a man passed with equal indifference. He was clear. Poor little beast! I'd stolen his Hetty. And now——

"I was very clear-headed. A little numbed where I had been hit but not in pain. I was chiefly aware of my smashed knee, which looked very silly with its mixture of torn trouser and red stuff and a little splintered pink thing that I supposed was an end of bone.

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"People from nowhere were standing about me and saying things to me. They had come out of the yard or from the public house. I made a swift decision. 'Pistol went off in my hand,' I said, and shut my eyes.

"Then a fear of a hospital came upon me. 'My home quite handy,' I said. 'Eight Chester Terrace, Regent's Park. Get me there, please.'

"I heard them repeating the address and I recognised the voice of Crane & Newberry's door-porter. 'That's right,' he was saying. 'It's Mr. Mortimer Smith. Anything I can do for you, Mr. Smith?'

"I do not remember much of the details of what followed. When they moved me there was pain. I seem to have been holding on to what I meant to say and do, and my memory does not seem to have recorded anything else properly. I may have fainted once or twice. Newberry was in it somehow. I think he took me home in his car. 'How did it happen?' he asked. That I remember quite clearly.

" 'The thing went off in my hand,' I said.

"One thing I was very certain about. Whatever happened they were not going to hang that poor silly hunted cheat Sumner. Whatever happened, the story of Hetty must not come out. If it did, Milly would think only one thing: that I had been unfaithful to her and that Sumner had killed me on that account. Hetty was all right now. I needn't bother about Hetty any more. I had to think of Milly—and Sumner. It is queer, but I seem to have known I was mortally wounded from the very instant I was shot.

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"Milly appeared, full of solicitude.

" 'Accident,' I said to her with all my strength. 'Went off in my hand.'

"My own bed.

"Clothes being cut away. Round my knee the cloth had stuck. The new grey suit which I'd meant should last the whole summer.

"Then two strangers became conspicuous, doctors I suppose, whispering, and one of them had his sleeves up and showed a pair of fat pink arms. Sponges and a tinkle of water dripping into a basin. They prodded me about. Damn! That *hurt!* Then stinging stuff. What was the good of it? I was in the body they were prodding, and I knew all about it and I was sure that I was a dead man.

"Milly again.

" 'My dear,' I whispered. 'Dear!' and her poor, tearful face beamed love upon me.

"Valiant Milly! Things had never been fair to her.

"Fanny? Had Newberry gone to fetch her? Anyhow he had vanished.

"She'd say nothing about Hetty. She was as safe as—safe as what?—what did one say?—anything safe.

"Poor dears! What a fuss they were all in. It seemed almost shameful of me to be glad that I was going out of it all. But I was glad. This pistol-shot had come like the smashing of a window in a stuffy room. My chief desire was to leave kind and comforting impressions on those poor survivors who might still have to stay on in the world of muddle

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for years and years. Life! What a muddle and a blundering it had been! I'd never have to grow old now anyhow. . . .

"There was an irruption. People coming in from the dressing-room. One was a police inspector in uniform. The other showed policeman through his plain clothes. Now was the time for it! I was quite clear-headed—quite. I must be careful what I said. If I didn't want to say anything I could just close my eyes.

" 'Bleeding internally,' said some one.

"Then the police inspector sat down on the bed. What a whale he was!—and asked me questions. I wondered if any one had caught a glimpse of Sumner. Sumner, bolting like a rabbit. I must risk that.

" 'It went off in my hand,' I said.

"What was he saying? How long had I had that revolver?

" 'Bought it this lunch-time,' I said.

"Did he ask why? He did. 'Keep up my shooting.'

"Where? He wanted to know where. 'Highbury.'

" 'What part of Highbury?' They wanted to trace the pistol. That wouldn't do. Give Mr. Inspector a paper chase. '*Near* Highbury.'

" 'Not in Highbury?'

"I decided to be faint and stupid. 'That way,' I said faintly.

" 'A pawn-shop?'

"Best not to answer. Then as if by an effort, 'Lil' shop.'

" 'Unredeemed pledges?'

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"I said nothing to that. I was thinking of another touch to the picture I was painting.

"I spoke with weak indignation. 'I didn't think it was loaded. How was I to know it was loaded? It ought not to have been sold—loaded like that. I was just looking at it——'

"I stopped short and shammed exhaustion. Then I felt that I was not shamming exhaustion. I was exhausted. Gods! but the stuffing was out of me! I was sinking, sinking, out of the bedroom, out from among this group of people. They were getting little and faint and flimsy. Was there anything more to say? Too late if there was. I was falling asleep, falling into a sleep, so profound, so fathomless. . . .

"Far away now was the little roomful of people, and infinitely small.

" 'He's going!' somebody said in a minute voice.

"I seemed to come back for an instant.

"I heard the rustle of Milly's dress as she came across the room to me. . . .

"And then, then I heard Hetty's voice again and opened my eyes and saw Hetty bending down over me—in that lovely place upon this mountainside. Only Hetty had become my dear Sunray who is mistress of my life. And the sunshine was on us and on her face, and I stretched because my back was a little stiff and one of my knees was twisted."

" 'Wake up!' I said," said Sunray. "'Wake up,' and I shook you."

"And then we came and laughed at you," said Radiant. "Firefly and I."

"And you said. 'Then there *is* another life,' said

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Firefly. "And the tale is only a dream! It has been a good tale, Sarnac, and somehow you have made me think it was true."

"As it is," said Sarnac. "For I am as certain I was Henry Mortimer Smith yesterday as I am that I am Sarnac here and now."

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CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

EPILOGUE

§ 1

THE guest-master poked the sinking fire into a last effort. "So am I," he said, and then with profound conviction, "*That tale is true.*"

"But how could it be true?" asked Willow.

"I should be readier to believe it true if Sarnac had not brought in Sunray as Hetty," said Radiant. "It was very dream-like, the way Hetty grew more and more like his dear lady and at last dissolved altogether into her."

"But if Smith was a sort of anticipation of Sarnac," said Starlight, "then it was natural for him to choose as his love a sort of anticipation of Sunray."

"But are there any other anticipations in the story?" asked Willow. "Did you recognise any other people who are intimate with you both? Is there a Fanny in this world? Is there a Matilda Good or a brother Ernest? Was Sarnac's mother like Martha Smith?"

"That tale," said the guest-master, stoutly, "was no dream. It was a memory floating up out of the deep darkness of forgotten things into a living brain —a kindred brain."

Sarnac thought. "What is a personality but a memory? If the memory of Harry Mortimer Smith

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is in my brain, then I am Smith. I feel as sure that I was Smith two thousand years ago as that I was Sarnac this morning. Sometimes before this in my dreams I have had a feeling that I lived again forgotten lives. Have none of you felt that?"

"I dreamt the other day," said Radiant, "that I was a panther that haunted a village of huts in which lived naked children and some very toothsome dogs. And how I was hunted for three years and shot at five times before I was killed. I can remember how I killed an old woman gathering sticks and hid part of her body under the roots of a tree to finish it on the morrow. It was a very vivid dream. And as I dreamt it by no means horrible. But it was not a clear and continuous dream like yours. A panther's mind is not clear and continuous, but passes from flashes of interest to interludes of apathy and utter forgetfulness."

"When children have dreams of terror, of being in the wild with prowling beasts, of long pursuits and hairbreadth escapes, perhaps it is the memory of some dead creature that lives again in them?" asked Starlight. "What do we know of the stuff of memory that lies on the other side of matter? What do we know of the relations of consciousness to matter and energy? For four thousand years men have speculated about these things, and we know no more to-day than they did in Athens when Plato taught and Aristotle studied. Science increases and the power of man grows but only inside the limits of life's conditions. We may conquer space and time, but we shall never conquer the mystery of what we

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are, and why we can be matter that feels and wills. My brother and I have much to do with animals and more and more do I perceive that what they are I am. They are instruments with twenty strings while we have ten thousand, but they are instruments like ourselves; what plays upon them plays upon us, and what kills them kills us. Life and death alike are within the crystal sphere that limits us for ever. Life cannot penetrate and death will not penetrate that limitation. What memories are we cannot tell. If I choose to believe that they float away like gossamer nets when we die, and that they float I know not where, and that they can come back presently into touch with other such gossamer nets, who can contradict me? Maybe life from its very beginning has been spinning threads and webs of memories. Not a thing in the past, it may be, that has not left its memories about us. Some day we may learn to gather in that forgotten gossamer, we may learn to weave its strands together again, until the whole past is restored to us and life becomes one. Then perhaps the crystal sphere will break. And however that may be, and however these things may be explained, I can well believe without any miracles that Sarnac has touched down to the real memory of a human life that lived and suffered two thousand years ago. And I believe that, because of the reality of the story he told. I have felt all along that whatever interrupting question we chose to ask, had we asked what buttons he wore on his jacket or how deep the gutters were at the pavement edge or what was the price he had paid for his cigarettes, he would have been ready

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with an answer, more exact and sure than any historian could have given."

"And I too believe that," said Sunray. "I have no memory of being Hetty, but in everything he said and did, even in his harshest and hardest acts, Smith and Sarnac were one character. I do not question for a moment that Sarnac lived that life."

§ 2

"But the hardness of it!" cried Firefly; "the cruelty! The universal heartache!"

"It could have been only a dream," persisted Willow.

"It is not the barbarism I think of," said Firefly; "not the wars and diseases, the shortened, crippled lives, the ugly towns, the narrow countryside, but worse than that the sorrow of the heart, the universal unkindness, the universal failure to understand or care for the thwarted desires and needs of others. As I think of Sarnac's story I cannot think of any one creature in it who was happy—as we are happy. It is all a story of love crossed, imaginations like flies that have fallen into gum, things withheld and things forbidden. And all for nothing. All for pride and spite. Not all that world had a giver who gave with both hands. . . . Poor Milly! Do you think she did not know how coldly you loved her, Sarnac? Do you think her jealousy was not born of a certainty and a fear? . . . A lifetime, a whole young man's lifetime, a quarter of a century, and this poor Harry Smith never once met a happy soul and came only

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once within sight of happiness! And he was just one of scores and hundreds of millions! They went heavily and clumsily and painfully, oppressing and obstructing each other, from the cradle to the grave."

This was too much for the guest-master, who almost wailed aloud. "But surely there was happiness! Surely there were moods at least of happiness!"

"In gleams and flashes," said Sarnac. "But I verily believe that what Firefly says is true. In all my world there were no happy lives."

"Not even children?"

"Lives, I said, not parts of lives. Children would laugh and dance for a while if they were born in Hell."

"And out of that darkness," said Radiant; "in twenty short centuries our race has come to the light and tolerance, the sweet freedoms and charities of our lives to-day."

"Which is no sort of comfort to me," said Firefly, "when I think of the lives that *have* been."

"Unless this is the solution," the guest-master cried, "that every one is presently to dream back the lives that have gone. Unless the poor memory-ghosts of all those sad lives that have been are to be brought into the consolation of our happiness. Here, poor souls, for your comfort is the land of heart's desire and all your hopes come true. Here you live again in your ampler selves. Here lovers are not parted for loving and your loves are not your torment. . . . Now I see why men must be immortal, for otherwise the story of man's martyrdom is too pitiful to tell. Many good men there were like

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me, jolly men with a certain plumpness, men with an excellent taste for wine and cookery, who loved men almost as much as they loved the food and drink that made men, and they could not do the jolly work I do and make comfort and happiness every day for fresh couples of holiday friends. Surely presently I shall find the memories of the poor licensed innkeeper I was in those ancient days, the poor, overruled, ill-paid publican, handing out bad stuff in wrath and shame, I shall find all his troubles welling up again in me. Consoled in this good inn. If it was I who suffered in those days, I am content; but if it was some other good fellow who died and never came to this, then there is no justice in the heart of God. So I swear by immortality now and henceforth—not for greed of the future but in the name of the wasted dead.

"Look!" the guest-master continued. "Morning comes and the cracks at the edge of the door-curtain grow brighter than the light within. Go all of you and watch the mountain glow. I will mix you a bowl of warm drink and then we will sleep for an hour or so before you breakfast and go your way."

§ 3

"It was a life," said Sarnac, "and it was a dream, a dream within this life; and this life too is a dream. Dreams within dreams, dreams containing dreams, until we come at last, maybe, to the Dreamer of all dreams, the Being who is all beings. Nothing is too wonderful for life and nothing is too beautiful."

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He got up and thrust back the great curtain of the guest-house room. "All night we have been talking and living in the dark Ages of Confusion and now the sunrise is close at hand."

He went out upon the portico of the guest-house and stood still, surveying the great mountains that rose out of cloud and haze, dark blue and mysterious in their recesses and soaring up at last into the flush of dawn.

He stood quite still and all the world seemed still, except that, far away and far below, a mist of sounds beneath the mountain mists, a confusion of birds was singing.

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